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The closing circle of migrations: the case of Ecuadorian women going to and coming back from Spain

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Extended abstract

Questo lavoro si concentra sull'analisi del caso della migrazione femminile ecuadoriana. Questo è infatti un caso cruciale che permette di fare una chiara analisi dei fenomeni migratori: i migranti ecuadoriani sono in infatti la perfetta rappresentazione della concezione della migrazione intesa come dinamica e non come fenomeno statico, attraverso i due flussi che dal 1990 si sono concentrati verso e, successivamente, dalla Spagna.

In questo fenomeno, particolare attenzione è rivolta alle donne che hanno partecipato come pioniere nella migrazione verso il paese dell'Europa meridionale, e che una volta lì sono riuscite ad ottenere maggior successo, entrando rapidamente ed efficacemente nel mercato del lavoro ed inserendosi nella società spagnola in misura maggiore e in maniera più efficace rispetto agli uomini; nella fase di migrazione di ritorno, inoltre, il caso delle donne ecuadoriane è particolarmente interessante perché il numero di donne che decidono di rimpatriare è relativamente basso, ma questo non favorisce in alcun modo il loro reinserimento a livello sociale ed occupazionale. Per questo motivo, Spagna ed Ecuador si sono impegnati nella creazione di programmi di sviluppo e sostegno in favore dei migranti, ponendo come tema centrale proprio quello della migrazione femminile.

L'obiettivo della tesi è di analizzare il ruolo della donna nei fenomeni migratori, e di verificare la possibile influenza esercitata dalla famiglia in tutte le fasi del processo migratorio, in particolare per quanto riguarda la decisione di emigrare (o ri-migrare), la decisione di fermarsi in un certo Stato (in questo caso, la Spagna) e la possibilità di ottenere un qualche aiuto nella fase di reinserimento nella società nel caso di migranti di ritorno dall'Ecuador. Ciò avviene attraverso un'analisi della letteratura esistente, in particolare concentrandosi sul concetto di famiglia transnazionale e femminizzazione della migrazione, soprattutto attraverso il lavoro di Laura Oso e Gioconda Herrera, e

aggiungendo a quanto già prodotto una prospettiva sul ruolo chiave che la famiglia può svolgere in ogni fase del processo migratorio, dal momento della partenza fino al momento della reintegrazione effettiva nella società di provenienza.

L'ipotesi di partenza è che la famiglia abbia una grande capacità di influenzare (sia positivamente che negativamente) i migranti nella decisione di migrare. Per quanto riguarda la questione delle donne ecuadoriane migranti di ritorno, l'ipotesi è che la famiglia abbia un ruolo cruciale nella decisione di tornare, sia in maniera positiva (in cui la donna decide spontaneamente di tornare a riconnettersi e stringere rapporti con la propria famiglia), sia in modo negativo (cioè attraverso tattiche che peggiorano il senso di colpa delle donne per aver rinunciato al loro ruolo di cura ed assistenza nel paese d'origine), avendo un forte condizionamento dall'esterno da parte della società prettamente maschile e patriarcale del contesto latino-americano. Inoltre, una volta che le donne tornano a casa, spesso sono influenzate negativamente dalla famiglia, che le vedrebbe di nuovo come relegate al lavoro domestico, un ruolo che è difficile da accettare dopo aver goduto della libertà e dell'indipendenza vissute nell'esperienza europea.

Nel primo capitolo sono stati analizzati i fondamenti teorici che formano la base di partenza di questa tesi, mostrando come la globalizzazione sia alla base del fenomeno migratorio, e in tempi più recenti si sia anche resa creatrice del fenomeno della femminizzazione delle migrazioni, concetti alla base della ricerca. Il caso studio viene poi brevemente presentato: le donne ecuadoriane sono un perfetto esempio di quanto anticipato. Queste sono infatti le prime ad essere arrivate in Spagna, quelle che nel tempo hanno saputo meglio adattarsi e integrarsi nella società di arrivo, e quindi quelle per le quali la migrazione ha avuto risultati maggiormente positivi. Interessante è anche il loro coinvolgimento nella migrazione di ritorno, e soprattutto nel processo che dovrebbe portarle a reinserirsi nella propria famiglia, nel mondo del lavoro e nella società ecuadoriana, cosa che risulta difficile per la maggior parte di loro.

L'eccezionalità particolare di questo caso è che le donne non sono state solo le pioniere in questo flusso, ma che in questo caso la migrazione è stata guidata ed animata da donne di mezza età, che hanno lasciato le loro famiglie e i loro figli in Ecuador; sono inoltre diventate le "capofamiglia" a tutti gli effetti, garantendo il funzionamento del

gruppo domestico attraverso le connessioni sociali in Ecuador e l'invio costante ed elevato di denaro alla loro famiglia.

Nel secondo capitolo è stato analizzato il flusso di partenza. Innanzitutto è stata analizzata la storia migratoria dell'Ecuador, abbastanza recente, che ha portato gli ecuadoriani prima negli Stati Uniti e poi in un Paese ben più accogliente (in particolare per quanto riguarda la questione legale, perlomeno all'inizio del flusso migratorio) e culturalmente affine come la Spagna. In questo contesto, è stata analizzata anche l'importanza delle politiche statali nella definizione dei flussi migratori. Inoltre, il caso della migrazione delle donne ecuadoriane è stato ulteriormente analizzato, arrivando al risultato secondo il quale i flussi migratori di queste donne hanno alla base molte ragioni diverse, principalmente il crollo socio-economico e politico dell'Ecuador, ma di solito sono ulteriormente influenzate dalla famiglia natale, quindi la possibilità di aiutarli è ciò che le spinge di più a migrare per cercar fortuna e migliori garanzie. Nella seconda parte del capitolo ci si è poi concentrati su come le donne ecuadoriane sono state in grado di stabilirsi in Spagna. Molte di loro hanno ben presto trovato un lavoro nel campo domestico e di cura, anche se alcune di loro sono finite nell'ambito del lavoro sessuale. Queste categorie lavorative mettono a rischio le lavoratrici migranti, poiché nella maggior parte dei casi non vengono loro offerti contratti e non sono quindi in grado di stabilizzare la loro posizione legale: ciò si traduce in un aumento del rischio di sfruttamento e di abusi, soprattutto perché la maggior parte di queste donne vivono nello stesso ambiente del loro datore di lavoro, e lasciare la loro unica fonte di reddito può essere estremamente problematico. Inoltre, molte di loro hanno sperimentato discriminazione a causa del loro genere, della loro nazionalità e del colore della loro pelle: essere *"Blanquita"* permette loro di trovare un lavoro più facilmente rispetto alle donne con la pelle più scura. Sono anche discriminate in maniera più subdola, sfavorendole nel processo di trovare una casa ed addirittura escluse (a causa del loro status di migranti illegali o irregolari) dall'assistenza sanitaria. É stata inoltre discussa la delicata questione dello stato di salute fisica e mentale di queste migranti, che in molti casi è caratterizzato da stress, patologie croniche e disturbi legati alla depressione. Infine, è stato analizzato il ruolo delle famiglie transnazionali sia nella decisione di lasciare l'Ecuador che nella decisione di rimanere in Spagna: migliori possibilità

economiche per la famiglia, la minore necessità di lavoro minorile e le migliori condizioni nelle famigerate possibilità di accesso a cibo, assistenza sanitaria e servizi, ma anche la loro maggiore possibilità di entrare nel mercato del lavoro sono i principali fattori che influenzano la decisione di queste donne di rimanere in Europa. Tuttavia, le donne migranti avvertono il crescente bisogno di essere legate all'Ecuador per preservare i loro legami con la loro patria e la famiglia: questo è ottenibile attraverso l'uso delle tecnologie e delle connessioni Internet, ma anche attraverso l'invio di denaro e, per coloro che hanno ottenuto la legalizzazione del loro status, a visite occasionali alla loro famiglia in Ecuador. L'intera situazione è stata influenzata dalla pandemia di Covid-19, che ha reso più difficili sia gli spostamenti che il mantenimento del lavoro, e quindi ha ridotto le loro possibilità di inviare denaro a casa.

Il terzo capitolo si concentra sul flusso opposto, quello delle donne ecuadoriane che ritornano dalla Spagna. Dopo una breve introduzione sui fattori coinvolti nella decisione di "tornare indietro", viene posto l'accento sul ruolo delle famiglie transnazionali in questo processo: infatti, come sottolineato da Vega Solís e Martínez-Buján la ragione principale per cui le donne tendono a tornare a casa non è per la conclusione della crisi socio-economica, o per un miglioramento ottenuto a livello sociale ed economico, quanto invece per prendersi cura della propria famiglia, dei propri figli e della propria casa.

Ancora una volta, dopo una breve introduzione sui fattori coinvolti nella decisione di rientrare (come l'età, il livello di istruzione, il capitale sociale, le opportunità economiche e le politiche migratorie esistenti), ci si è concentrati sul ruolo delle famiglie transnazionali in questo processo. Si è anche indagato riguardo il ruolo degli Stati in questa seconda parte del processo migratorio, analizzando le politiche e i programmi di migrazione spagnoli ed ecuadoriani dedicati alle migranti di ritorno. Si è inoltre discusso del problema del reinserimento: dopo una breve analisi sulla letteratura riguardante il significato del reinserimento, sono state valutate le questioni relative al reinserimento sociale ed economico delle donne ecuadoriane di ritorno dalla Spagna.

Tutto questo lavoro è stato fatto con l'obiettivo di trovare una risposta alla questione dell'importanza del ruolo della famiglia nella questione della migrazione internazionale, dal suo inizio alla sua (anche se temporanea) fine. Il risultato principale è che le

famiglie hanno effettivamente un ruolo. Prima di tutto, le donne ecuadoriane sono spesso scelte proprio dalle loro stesse famiglie come la persona designata a compiere il processo migratorio; tuttavia se il migrante che decide in autonomia di partire è una madre e una moglie, come abbiamo visto accade nella maggior parte dei casi, cercano di persuaderla a non andarsene. Inoltre, quando la donna decide di partire (con o senza il consenso familiare), la famiglia assume il suo ruolo nella cura della casa, dei figli e del marito. Successivamente, quando arrivano in Spagna, i legami familiari stretti in precedenza dalla migrante stessa o da qualcuno in famiglia hanno la capacità di influenzare positivamente la capacità di queste donne di integrarsi nel contesto sociale e lavorativo della sua nuova città, dandole consigli e persino un aiuto concreto nella ricerca della casa e del lavoro. Inoltre, svolgono un ruolo anche nella decisione di rimanere: nonostante le difficoltà, la discriminazione e le conseguenze sulla loro salute, Le donne migranti ecuadoriane tendono a trascorrere più tempo di quanto si aspettassero in Spagna per aiutare le loro famiglie assicurando loro migliori possibilità economiche, minore necessità di lavoro minorile e migliori condizioni nelle possibilità familiari di accesso a cibo, assistenza sanitaria e servizi. Inoltre, analizzando il flusso di ritorno di queste donne, i doveri familiari hanno un ruolo nella loro decisione di tornare: spesso le famiglie fanno pressione sulle lavoratrici migranti poiché non stanno svolgendo il loro ruolo di madri, instillando in loro un forte senso di disagio, di colpa, di auto-disprezzo. Per evitare di perdere le loro famiglie, per essere sollevate dalla pressione sociale e per cercare di essere presenti per i loro mariti e figli, spesso decidono di tornare, anche se questa decisione ha implicazioni molto gravi per loro, come una perdita di autonomia e di possibilità economiche. Inoltre, le famiglie possono svolgere un ruolo di mediazione tra il migrante rimpatriato e la società: entrambi sono cambiate nel tempo, e avere qualcuno che può aiutare in qualsiasi modo è sicuramente utile. Molti migranti rimangono con i loro genitori per lunghi periodi di tempo, altri ricevono aiuto da loro nella ricerca di un lavoro, o nella ricerca di una casa. Di conseguenza, è possibile affermare che le famiglie svolgono un ruolo importante sia nella decisione di migrare che a livello pratico nella migrazione delle donne Ecuadoriane.

1. Introduction

In the field of migration, Latin America has always played a central role. However, as underlined in the work by Gioconda Herrera (2022) especially in recent times, the whole area has experienced political, economic, and social transformations, which changed the dynamics of migration as a whole. First, there has been an increase in migration to Europe, which allowed migrants to have access to regularisation and nationalisation processes, which granted them social rights and protection. Second, there has been a growth in the intranational migration processes, especially from States under socio-economical crisis, such as Venezuela and Colombia, or the Caribbean region. Finally, as Herrera and Sørensen (2017) have pointed out, the growth of indigenous migrations is part of this new migration scenario. Third, this scenario involves new dynamics, which include transit and circular migrations, forced flows and a strong relationship with exploitation of migrants. The economic recession that South America is experiencing, which began in 2015, is harming the social and labour circumstances of the whole population in a variety of ways, according to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC 2021). Poverty, inequality, and the job market all got worse after that year. With the onset of the pandemic, the trend of expanding poor and severe poverty quickened.

This is the scenario in which the case of Ecuador stands out. Ecuador's two major international outflows which occurred in the 1980s and late 1990s into the early 2000s sent 10 to 15 percent of the country's total population abroad (Jokisch 2014): the first flow was directed to North America, in particular to the U.S., while in the second one people travelled mostly to Spain. This second flow was characterised by a strong feminisation of migration, by an important role played by families, and was severely hit by the 2008 financial and economic crisis. Programs to assist Ecuadorians in returning to their home country have been developed over time. The "Plan Bienvenid@s a Casa"

of the Ecuadorian government in 2008 aided in the reintegration of returning migrants. The program complemented Spanish policies that aided both legal and unauthorised immigrants in returning home. These initiatives covered the cost of returning migrants' travel expenses. According to a government survey, one in four Ecuadorians who left their country between 2001 and 2010 came back. The number of Ecuadorians living abroad is still rather big, although the outflows that made Ecuador a country that sent migrants have slowed down in recent years. On the other hand, Ecuador has become a migrant host and transit nation, becoming the largest refugee host in Latin America and the Caribbean. Obviously, this has been making its migration profile more and more complex.

This work focuses on the analysis of the case of Ecuadorian female migration. This is a crucial case that allows a clear analysis of migratory phenomena: Ecuadorian migrants are in fact the perfect representation of the conception of migration understood as a dynamic process and not as a static phenomenon, through the two flows that since 1990 have been concentrated to and from Spain.

In this phenomenon, particular attention is paid to women, who have taken part as pioneers of migration to the Southern European country, and who once there have tended to be more successful, managing to quickly and effectively enter the labour market and Spanish society if compared to men; in the phase of return migration, moreover, the case of Ecuadorian women is particularly interesting because the number of returnees is relatively low, but this in no way favours their reintegration at the socio-occupational level. For this reason, Spain and Ecuador have committed themselves to programmes of development and support for migrants, placing as a central theme precisely that of female migration.

The aim of the thesis is to analyse the feminisation of migration regarding Ecuadorian migration in particular, looking at the role of the family in all the phases of the migration process, in particular with regard to the decision to emigrate (or re-emigrate), the decision to stop in a certain state (in this case, Spain) and the possibility of obtaining this help in the reintegration phase in the society in the case of migrants returning to Ecuador.

This is carried out through an analysis of existing literature, in particular focusing on the concept of transnational family and feminization of migration, especially through the work of Laura Oso and Gioconda Herrera, and adding to what already exists a perspective on the key role that the family can play in every phase of the migration process, from the moment of departure to the total, complete and effective return to the starting society.

The starting hypothesis is that the family has a great capacity to influence (both positively and negatively) female migrants in the decision to leave. Regarding the issue of Ecuadorian migrant women, the hypothesis is that the family has a crucial role in the decision to return, both in a positive way (in which the woman spontaneously decides to return to reconnect and tighten relations with her family), both in a negative way (that is, through tactics that worsen the guilt of women for having given up their role of care in the native country)which have a strong conditioning from outside by the purely masculinist and patriarchal society of the Latin American context.

In addition, once women return home, they often have a negative influence on the family, which would see them again as being relegated to domestic work, a role that is difficult to accept after enjoying European freedom and independence.

The first chapter provides an overview of the key issues that will be addressed in the following chapters, starting from the issue of globalisation as a producer of migratory phenomena and the feminization of migration, and then it goes on to analyse the history of Ecuadorian migration, whose different phases and the role that transnational families have had in each of these are analysed. Finally, the case study is briefly presented and will be extended in the following two chapters.

The second chapter focuses on the initial migration flows of Ecuadorian women. The social, economic and psychological impact of these migrations on women is analysed, trying to establish the role of families both in the decision to leave and in the decision to stay in Spain.

In the third and last chapter the opposite flow is analysed, that of return to Ecuador. Also in this case will be presented the socio-economic impact of the return, but also the difficulties (especially the socio-cultural ones) encountered in particular by women returning to the country. Their possibilities of socio-economic reintegration will be

analysed, but also the impact that the return can have at a psychological and identity level. In addition, the role of the family in the decision to return home, and in helping the (and especially the) returning migrants to reintegrate into the world of work and society will be analysed.

Chapter 1: Globalisation as the framing background of the feminisation of migration and the global care chain system

The process of globalisation has brought many secondary effects, including socio-economic ones, and affected migration as well as social orders.

This has led to the birth, among many others, of two new, very interesting and relevant concepts. The first of these is the feminisation of migration: we can describe this social phenomenon as the increase in percentage of women in international migration. In fact, despite women have always had a part (even if rather small) in migration flows, since the last decades of the nineteenth century this research field has started to develop, leading to an increase in the academic and political attention given to this issue.

Studying gendered migration, Laura Oso and Natalia Ribas-Mateos stated that also work was increasingly becoming gendered: they are among the first scholars to talk about the highly gendered care economic sector, which is going to be at the centre of the second part of this chapter. The international division of reproductive labour is the second phenomenon to be analysed, in particular about the "global care chains" as defined by Arlie Russel Hochschild and Rhacel Parreñas. If in the traditional economies "social reproductive" works were accomplished by unpaid female family members, due to the economic and social changes linked to globalisation, these are now commodified and left to the most vulnerable and stigmatised workers, migrant women. The case of Ecuadorian women can be emblematic of the presented issues. According to Brian Gratton, a change was registered in the migration of Ecuadorians from 1996 on: the flow, from that moment, became highly gendered. Before 1995 only one out of five migrants from Ecuador were women, but after that the parity among genders was

reached in less than 10 years. Moreover, he registers another crucial switch: the decline of the USA as the main receiving country, and Spain taking its place.
In 1997, 58% of all people migrating from Ecuador to Spain were women, usually not only young unmarried ones, but also (and for a large part) women in their middle age, who left their families "behind". This will be the base for what is going to be analysed in the two following chapters: the flow of women leaving Ecuador for Spain and then those who are coming back, focusing on the socio-economic and laboral aspects of their lives in both contexts.

1.1. The globalisation of migration

Migration has been part of human history from its beginning. Looking at the last centuries, however, it is easy to recognise a change in the whole migration process. This, according to many scholars, is strictly linked to the issue of globalisation.

1.1.1 Globalisation and its socio-economic impact

Globalisation is a process which can be defined as the "widening, deepening and speeding up of the global connections" (Held et al 2003), and that can be understood through the analysis of its four socio-spatial dimensions:

- intensity, which refers to the intensification of interconnectedness, patterns of interaction and flows;
- extensity, indicating the stretching of social, political and economic activities across borders;
- velocity, which points out the speeding up of global interactions and processes;
- impact, specifying the way in which local events may affect distant lands, if not the globe as a whole.[1]

Moreover, this interconnectedness can be analysed looking at:

[1] Hatziprokopiou, P. and Triandafyllidou, A. (2013), *Governing irregular migration at the age of globalisation: States, actors and intermediaries,* IRMA Research Project, Concept Paper.

- its key indicators, which are transnational flows and movements of people, activities, goods, services, but also of international problems (as that of pollution);
- its key organising structures, that are transnational networks of all kinds, going from NGOs and governments to religious and cultural communities; and
- its main tool, which is the now very advanced Information and Communication Technology (ICT) (Triandafyllidou 2018).

Obviously, the phenomenon of globalisation has affected the world in many different ways, and has had implications regarding a vast majority of the aspects of modern life, as stated by many scholars, such as Anna Triandafyllidou (2017), Mathias Czaika and Hein De Haas (2015)

It has political implications, that include the loss of power by States, which now surrender to the control of supranational and international actors. States had also to face many challenges linked to globalisation, as those linked to their territory, whose borders have been more easy to permeate, or to the social aspects of social life, democracy and government's legitimacy (Saskia Sassen 1996).

Looking at the economic implications of globalisation, it is clear that States have less control on that as well; it has led to the fact that the control of national economic instruments (like, for example, policies regarding interest rates or monetary issues) is usually left to International Organisations and institutions. Moreover, it has had economic implications for industries and people as well, fueling phenomena such as that of multinational corporations, decentralisation and delocalisation of industrial production, and a restructuring of the international division of labour, which resulted in an even more exploited global South (Castles 2010; Triandafyllidou 2017).

For what concerns the cultural implications, we can think of globalisation as a tool thanks to which time and space have become relativised, almost “shrunk”; moreover, the deep interconnectedness has led to a sort of cultural homogenisation. In this context, differences and diversities have become part of the identity process and are strongly revendicated (Appadurai 1996).

The most important effects of globalisation, however, are the socio-economic ones. There have been important changes on the economic production level, leading

developing countries to focus on an export-oriented economy, which gave them the illusion of being competitive, but actually made those States poorer. This has led to an increase in the levels of inequalities in the countries of the Global South, in particular regarding income distribution.

All of this has led to an increase in the unemployment rates, a more fragmented and unjust labour segmentation and favoured the switch to informal and less secure jobs (Schrover et al. 2007; Triandafyllidou 2017)

1.1.2 Migration and globalisation

Globalisation has brought with it many social and economic dynamics that are now defined in terms of globalising trends: among these we definitely can think of international migration. However it is legitimate to question the exact relationship among globalisation and migration. For many scholars, international migration has become global through the increased circulation of goods, people and capital and also a greater speed in world politics (Czaika 2014; Dokos 2017). Furthermore, globalisation has triggered greater mobility, and there are qualitative changes in migration dynamics affecting both the diversity of regions and the people involved in the migration process. Migration as we know it is therefore a part and product of globalisation (Čiarnienė and Kumpikaitė 2008).

The reasons to migrate are always the same: economic security, war, economic issues; but now this phenomenon is fueled by various and different reasons. Migration is now perceived as a process linked to rising inequalities, growing interdependence and interconnectedness. Better interconnectedness and reduced spaces have, as stated by Triandafyllidou (2013), allowed people on one hand to be aware of their relative deprivation, pushing them towards migration as a possible solution, and on the other one to build and preserve family connections once they leave their country.

According to the data provided by the International Organization for Migration, the current global estimate is that there were around 281 million international migrants in the world in 2020, which equates to 3.6 per cent of the global population: of these, the 48% is represented by women, and over 60% are labour migrants. IOM itself confronted its 2022 Report with the 2000 one: more than 100 million people have been moving in

these 22 years, and even the recent Covid-19 pandemic has had only a rather small impact on the number of people moving, reducing the current report estimates of around 2 million people.[2] These numbers are at the base of the racist and xenophobic discourses at the base of many political discourses that have arisen in the past decades in the Global North (Talani 2022). However, it should be kept in mind that, even if the present social and political narrative offers a quite different view, immobility is still an issue, and one of the main factors affecting it, is once again the socio-economic inequality: only the less poors among the poors are able to leave, and even when someone achieves to leave, these journeys are not safe nor "free" as they are depicted (Triandafyllidou, 2018). International migration processes are embedded in an integrated and unequal world, where development and underdevelopment are connected. Migration is now perceived as a product of development, and moreover, as a tool to help in overcoming the inequality of the modern world. However, not all scholars agree with this position: although various parts of the world are more connected than ever, in many different ways, the world has become less "flat" through rising income inequality between and particularly within countries (Stiglitz, 2006)

Moreover, globalisation has emerged, according to Leila Simona Talani (2022), as a process ridden with contradictions, whose consequences increase social discrepancies and geographical marginalisation. This is mainly linked to four consequences of globalisation:

- the loss of political control of international migration;
- the 'irregularisation' of international migration and the criminalisation of migrants;
- the paradox of securitisation and increasing insecurity;
- populism and the rise of anti-migrant parties.

This is the reason behind Talani's discourse around a "dark side" of globalisation.

As it will be presented in the next chapter, the migratory process implies a high level of risk for people on the move, from the starting point throughout all their life outside

[2] McAuliffe, M. and Triandafyllidou, A. (2021). *World Migration Report 2022*. International Organization for Migration (IOM). Geneva. Pp. 2-4.

their home country; however, even when (and if) migrant people decide to return back home, their life is not as easy.

What can be certainly said is that migration has been and still is deeply affected by globalisation, intended both as a social and economical phenomenon, and due to globalisation itself has become more complex in many ways, and has been well analysed in the work of Czaika and de Haas. In their work they state that migration has been more intense in number, with higher numbers of people travelling long distances, has affected more countries, allowing an even higher rate of diversification. Citing, they state that current migrations levels of complexity have been achieved "through an increasing geographical diversity and scope of migratory pathways". This highly complex and differentiated context has been the fertile soil in which the core issue of the feminisation of migration has arisen.

1.2. The feminisation of migration

The feminisation of migration has been a core study in the migration field in recent years.

In fact, even though women participation in migration has always been noticeable, only in the last decades it has started to be seen as a particular migratory phenomenon, with some peculiar characteristics and involvements.

1.2.1 The historical development of gender and migration studies

The study of feminine migration is quite new, as outlined by Sabrina Marchetti (2018).

One of the first scholars to focus on Migration and Gender was Mirjana Morokvasic, who in 1984 analysed the experience of migrant women, looking at their living conditions and attempting to focus on their level of engagement in the labour market. One among her most famous publications stated that "birds of passage are also women"[3]; up to that moment, the feminisation of migration had never been studied, nor

[3] Morokvasic M. (1984). Women in migration. *The International migration review*, *18*. Special Issue: Women in Migration (Winter, 1984), pp. 886-907

even looked at with particular attention.

That of feminine migration has been an almost hidden phenomenon until the late 1990s (Lutz 1997). The level of awareness and recognition, especially in the Northern American areas, rised also thanks to an encounter between migration theories and feminist and black theories of oppression, as presented by Laura Oso and Natalia Ribas-Mateos (2013). The number of research on domestic labour, the prevalence of female employment, and the position of women in developing nations increased as a result in the years that followed.

In the 1990s, a new interest, mainly linked to the post-Cold War large-scale migration of women from Eastern to Western Europe, arose also in the "Old World". These women were mainly employed in domestic, care and sex work, and were part of one of the first and biggest Gendered Global Diasporas. Moreover, as the awareness on the issue increased, so did the academic interest, leading to the publication of many articles and papers on the theme (Marchetti 2018).

In the following decade, it is noticeable an incredible increase in the number of scholars interested in the phenomenon. However, the 2000s mark a new era of studies in the field, since two opposite tendencies emerged. On the one hand, we can see the genuine mainstreaming of both issues: gender and migration leave their specialised sectors and gain increasing attention from academics and researchers, becoming also part of the intersectional studies field; on the other one, some researchers, particularly those who were the first to devote themselves to the subject, show a less proactive attitude, as they believe that, despite the great effort of the research, the results achieved so far are rather poor, and that now scholars almost tend to talk "too much" about feminism, gender and migration (Triandafylloidou, 2018).

1.2.2. The outcomes of research on feminine migration

To properly speak of the outcomes of the presented research on migrating women, we must look at it distinguishing two levels of analysis, as presented in the work by Roberto Marinucci (2007) and Marchetti (2018).

The first one is the quantitative level. It analyses how many women have been migrating, comparing this number to that of men, and looks at the overall change over

time.

In these terms, we speak of feminisation of migration to describe the increase in the percentage of women in international migration (Martinez 2003). Women are now, in fact, moving in significant numbers, mainly from rural to urban areas, with some regions more interested in this process. The most interesting novelty however is that now women tend to migrate alone, taking part in long-distance migrations and usually tend to become the breadwinners: all of this was priorly strictly linked to masculine migration.

The second one is the qualitative level, through which it is possible to analyse all non-quantifiable information. In this case, what is more interesting is to look at the social changes linked to migration. Most scholars, as Monica Boyd and Elizabeth M. Grieco (2003) focused on two questions. The first is to understand what is women's role in society. The usual answer is that most women were dependent wives, whereas the males were considered the "breadwinners"; this idea connotated a very strong social construction of gender roles. The second, which is the most interesting to analyse feminine migration, is to understand if and in which ways migration is able to change such gender roles, and whether gender expectation may affect migrants' experience (Marchetti, 2018).

These two questions can be put under an umbrella question, "is migration good for women?". Scholars are divided on the issue. Some argue that migration can indeed be good for women, since through it they can escape oppressive marriages, gain economic independence and improve their social position; moreover, they can gain freedom of expression, of will and of speech, achieving the possibility of truly expressing themselves (Boyd 2006). However, many other scholars argue that migration is not as good for women, mainly because of two reasons: the first is that migration can be a source of vulnerability for women, putting them into high danger; the second is that, since migrant women are in some ways more deeply linked to their home country, they are never truly free, nor psychologically nor economically, due to the remittances they tend to send home in very high numbers (Donato *et al*. 2006).

It can be said that feminine migration has been looked at as a potentially positive feature (since it can allow women to be more free and independent), but vulnerability, dangers and violence must be taken into account as well.

1.2.3 Factors influencing feminine migration

People tend to migrate as a result of inadequate economic and social opportunity, which are scarcer in the country of origin and allegedly superior in the area of immigration.

The participation of women in migration flows depends on factors regarding both the sending and the receiving country, such as women's role in society, their autonomy, the access they have to resources and gender stratification. Women as well as men migrate with the hope for better living conditions, to support their children, to escape political chaos etc. Moreover, impoverishment and the necessity to support family needs give a very strong reason to migrate, to both men and women. Economic and social upheaval can also provide the impetus to leave. Other non-economic reasons for female migration include the desire for equal chances, leaving an unhappy or violent marriage, escaping domestic abuse, and patriarchal customs that restrict opportunity and freedom. Some other "contributory" factors that are typically taken into account when considering migration are women's age, their status as the head of the household, their stage in life (whether they are leaving children behind or not), the household's ability to function without them, and the existence of other women who can take over their domestic responsibilities.[4]

As underlined by Boyd and Grieco (2003), most of the factors can be divided into three macro categories:

1) gender relations and hierarchies: gender hierarchies are a strong part of societies, able to affect not only women's status, but also their capacity to find an occupation, to access education, and in this case, to migrate;

[4] The Feminisation of Migration: Dreams and Realities of Migrant Women in Four Latin American Countries, By Cecilia Lipszyc Sociologist, Professor, Researcher, President of the Asociación de Especialistas Universitarias en Estudios de la Mujer (Association of University Specialists in Women's Studies, or ADEUEM), Montevideo, 13, 14 and 15 April 2004 p.11

2) status and roles, which end up influencing and stating a "migration probability" for women, according to their individual, social and familial status; and
3) structural characteristics of the country of origin: some characteristics, such as labour market conditions and social infrastructures, can have an impact on how men and women interact, as well as how women are perceived in the sending community.

By giving migratory women an income and status, autonomy, independence, and the self-esteem that comes with employment, migration may support gender equality and women's empowerment[5]. Additionally, it may help them achieve greater equality in the nation of their birth.

1.2.4. Feminine migration and labour market

Oso and Ribas-Mateos (2013) have clearly highlighted the two most important aspects of work linked to female migration. The first one is the segregation of the labour market: women are more often than men engaged in "dangerous, dirty, demeaning" jobs, such as agricultural work. The second one is the increasing participation of women in sectors that demand cheap and flexible labour. This category includes domestic service, catering, personal and sex work", commonly defined as "social reproduction tasks". While in traditional economies women are usually accomplishing these tasks on their own, globalisation and a higher women employment rate led to an increase in the number of such activities left to "care workers" (Lutz 2008). These people are part of a "care economy", which is characterised by uncertainty and a strong gender bias. In fact, people who usually are involved in the domestic and care sector are women, especially migrating ones (Oso and Ribas Mateos 2013). As underlined in the work of Marlou Schrover (*et al.* 2007), ethnicity and gender play a central role in the creation of inequalities and social hierarchies- and domestic work "could be labelled as a 'classic immigrant women's niche'" (Green, 1997). This niche could be looked at as the result of the role of networks and agency in the life of migrants: however, in most cases the

[5] UNFPA, IOM (2006). *Female Migrants: Bridging the Gaps Throughout the Life Cycle*. P. 31

segregation of the labour market is linked to systematic discrimination and sexist theories.

Many immigrant women take advantage of the domestic sector's chances. Brian Gratton, and Jose C. Moya both demonstrate how the unregulated, informal sector of domestic employment provides options for undocumented immigrant women that are not available in other more formal and controlled industries. The domestic industry can be considered an immigrant specialty to some extent, especially in certain sub-sectors like live-in child-carers (Gratton 2005). The ethnicisation of domestic employment has expanded the niche-like nature of domestic work. Some of them are employed in agriculture (where they are more exploited and less paid than men, both in formal and informal work), but, following the presented pattern, most female workers migrating from Southern and Central American countries are engaged in domestic work (Fleury, 2016). They are given a substantial amount of inferior compensation, as well as less prospects and advantages, in this sector. They frequently experience abuse of every kind, including economic, physical, verbal, and sexual, as well as violence and prejudice. Additionally, because they are not eligible for social security, domestic workers are unable to receive a variety of possible advantages and protections. Additionally, getting a formal work permit or legal residency requires the support of the employer, and many of them do not even care about legal registration, which results in less rights and greater risks (Lutz and Palenga-Möllenbeck 2012).

Sex work is another form of gendered work for migrant women. Also in this field, the number of abuses is disturbing: 73% of these women has faced sexual or gender-based abuse at least one in their lives. As if it wasn’t worrying enough, 70% of sex workers are undocumented (UN Women Report 2015). Being undocumented and without legal protection as a sex worker might expose these women to additional abuse from their employers, the community, and officials. Sex workers who lack paperwork may struggle to obtain good healthcare treatment and, given the nature of their profession, may be exposed to significant issues for their health (Garofalo Geymonat and Macioti 2016).

Service workers, and in particular domestic and care workers are one of the categories that are exposed at higher risks of abuse and exploitation, due majorly to the

limited supervision and the private and isolated environment they work in (UNFPA 2006). The millions of migrating women working in this sector in order to obtain a better life and dignity are actually among the most exploited and abused workers in the world. In recent years, domestic worker abuse has drawn more and more attention. Physical, psychological, and sexual assault; forced detention in the workplace; non-payment of salaries; and extremely long working hours with no rest days are among the many abuses perpetrated by employers and labor agencies, according to a Report issued in 2006 by Human Rights Watch. According to the report presented by DIILM and issued by ILO in 2020, estimates of the total number of women and girl domestic workers at the national and international levels are hampered by a number of obstacles. Domestic employment is classified as "informal labour" by most governments, which means it is exempt from regulation and oversight. Domestic employees may go uncounted and unregistered in private families, making them virtually invisible. Estimating the prevalence of abuse is also difficult given the lack of reporting mechanisms, the private nature of work, the lack of legal protections, and restrictions on freedom of movement of domestic workers (HRW 2006). Sex workers are obviously very vulnerable to gender based abuses and sexual violence, and they are not protected by any law (Garofalo Geymonat and Macioti 2016)

All jobs considered as "feminine" are those in which the greatest gaps regarding the safety and protection of the worker are encountered. clearly, not having documentation and legal protection, exposes women to the risk of abuse by employers and society, making access to healthcare difficult if not impossible. This situation has clearly worsened with the Covid-19 pandemic, which caused many people to lose their jobs, making the social inequalities arise. The mainly affected categories were migrants, asylum seekers, and marginalised people. Obviously, undocumented migrant women doing already high-risk jobs were severely hit by the whole situation.

1.2.5 Migrant women and legal framework

Globalisation led to an increase in the number of people needed in the Global North to work. As it was presented, this has led to a decreasing regulation of the labour market, a growth in the informal sector, and to the emergence of new forms of exploitation,

affecting in particular migrant women. Amid this trend, many governments are now tightening immigration controls. This interplay of competing incentives sets the stage for the exploitation of the most vulnerable categories. Human rights for migrants are at jeopardy in their countries of origin, transit, and final destination. When considered collectively, existing UN and ILO Conventions offer extensive protection for women migrants, but they function in a disorganised and dispersed manner. In addition, when the focus is placed solely on the variable of "migration status," it is not always clear that these Conventions could be successfully applied to women migrants (Caritas 2012).

The feminization of migration and the unique vulnerabilities of female migrants in some occupations, such domestic work, are not included in either of the ILO's migrant worker-specific Conventions (Nos. 97 and 143). Nevertheless, a variety of ILO Conventions, such as those relating to compensation (Nos. 95, 100, and 131), discrimination (No. 111), occupational health and safety (No. 155), and freedom of association and the right to organise had an important impact on various aspects of migrant women's lives (Caritas Internationalis 2012). The impacts of migration on migrant women are conditioned by gender relations and hierarchies as well as laws or practices that promote gender inequality in the countries of destination. The experiences of migratory women and the effects of their movement on the countries of destination are also significantly influenced by their legal status, the gender norms implied in admission requirements, and general views toward migrants. Migrant women are at a significant risk of vulnerability as a result of this circumstance (Martin 2005).

Depending on the nation they end up in, they might not have any protection or options if they are mistreated. The lack of gender equality in the society of destination has an impact on immigrant women as well. Because of gender-based labour market segmentation and the concentration of women in traditionally feminine jobs (such as nursing, secretarial work, working in the apparel sector, etc.), migrant women frequently earn less than migrant males who are concentrated in higher-paying jobs. As a result, there is still a wage gap between migrant men and women at their final destinations (Land 1980).

Women's unique demands and rights could also be unmet. Certain measures result in the complete exclusion of female migrants. Other policies, which are frequently

well-intended and designed to provide job prospects, neglect the conflicting demands of work, family, and community life. In the lack of childcare and extended family networks, women may be unable to take advantage of the many educational and training possibilities available to migrants. As presented in the paper "The Female Face of Migration" issued by Caritas Internationalis (2012), policies that temporarily let immigrants into certain sectors to fill labour shortages have historically favoured jobs with a male predominance.

Moreover, when destination countries prefer skilled candidates, migrant women are more likely to wind up toiling in informal, irregular and seasonal jobs, with fewer possibilities to obtain work permits or citizenship entitlements. Entry for skilled workers can also be based on criteria, such as proof of years of uninterrupted work, language or of income and educational level. These unintentionally discriminate against women. On the other hand, the demand for skilled labour can also open up opportunities for better-educated women to migrate[6]. Governments sometimes restrict female migration in order to "protect" women. These, needless to note, only increase the likelihood that women will resort to irregular methods. Additionally, industries like domestic work and the entertainment sector—where women migrants predominate—tend to be excluded by labour rules. Due to this, many female migrant workers are now dependent on their employers for their legal standing, basic requirements like food and accommodation, and the payment of their just wages, which they may arbitrarily withhold in order to guarantee compliance (UN Women 2015). In addition, many women are restricted from changing jobs due to government efforts to restrict immigration and limit it to temporary, short-term contracts. This may force them into abusive situations that are hidden from view and frequently outside the scope of public policies[7].

Therefore, as concluded in the UN Women Policy Brief No. 4: Making GenderResponsive Migration Laws, "it is critical that migration governance is

[6] State of World Population, 2006: *A Passage of Hope: Women and International Migration*, 2006. United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), New York. p. 32.

[7] State of World Population, 2006: A Passage of Hope. pp. 33-34.

gender-responsive to ensure that the labour and human rights of migrant women are promoted and protected at all stages of migration".

1.3. Global Care Chains and Transnational Families

Along with the studies on the feminisation of migration, during the 1990s awareness grew on some major issues linked to it. Globalisation had been sending female workers away from home, seeking a job, which often was in the sector of care and domestic work, while leaving their families behind. This led to the birth of two new phenomena: global care chains and transnational families.

1.3.1. Global care chains

The term "care chain" was coined in 2000 by Arlie R. Hochschild to describe a situation in which migrant women took care of children and elderly people elsewhere, leaving behind a gap with regard to their own care responsibilities at home. Care work in the First World was starting to be commercialised and outsourced to mainly female migrants from poorer countries, who had left their families home. Hochshild (2000) observed that a care gain in the receiving country implied a care drain in the sending one. That of "global care chain", according to Lutz and Palenga (2012) is a concept that captures a process in which several phenomena such as capitalism, globalisation and the feminisation of migration interact with gender relations, care and emotional work. Some academics, like Romero (2018), also discuss transnational care circuits in reference to feminised migration flows towards the global South-North, which have increased since the last quarter of the 20th century in order to make up for the lack of free family care benefits in households in destination countries. Even while in industrialised nations today, men and women who are the heads of homes engage in the labour markets practically equally, the allocation of caring obligations on a personal level is still skewed in favour of women (Benerìa 1979). In order to meet the growing social demand for care services, these flows were made possible by the migration policies of countries in the Global North. In some cases, attempts were made to statically respond with subsidies that were insufficient to cover the cost of such services in their domestic

markets. All these socio-economical modifications, which Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2003) refer to as a "care leak" from the localities and emitting nations, will ultimately result in a crisis of this activity in these regions, resulting in not only the formation of a sizable flow of social reproduction on a global scale but also a reshaping of these tasks in an increasing number of regions of the world as well as the expansion of new realities, such as transnational families.

The study of care networks demonstrates how processes of unequal economic growth integrate gendered divides of labour. The "new domestic world order," "new international division of reproductive labour," or "transnational economy of domestic labour" (Oso and Ribas Mateos, 2013) have all been used to describe the relationship between migrant care employment, globalisation, and the commercialization of social reproduction. On the demand side, the rise in women's labour force involvement, declining fertility rates, rising life expectancy, changes in family structure, shortages of public care, and the growing commoditization of care in the North all contribute to the engagement of women in migration.

Migration not only affects policies intended to balance caring obligations and paid jobs in both host and home countries, but it also has starkly opposing effects. As previously said, hiring migrant women to conduct care labour in the North's recipient nations is a private, individual solution to the larger issue of balancing paid employment with unpaid caregiving.

As stated by Benería (2003) “the employment of migrant women from the South might contribute to a vicious circle in the host country, in which private solutions delay collective efforts to search for appropriate public policies”. If there is a redistributive conflict in formal paid work outside the home over the expectation of greater participation of employees in the national wealth, there is also an ongoing redistributive conflict in unpaid family care work that takes place mostly in households and lasts longer than employment. Due to unequal distribution of care responsibilities within households, insufficient public support infrastructure, regressive changes in labour markets, and the problem's invisibility in the area of corporate social responsibility, western societies are currently experiencing a demographic transition that is most acutely affecting them (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003). One of the main causes of the

political and economic obscurity surrounding the global care crisis is the lack of categories, theoretical definitions, and methodological frameworks for measuring global care chains that take into account far more than just migration and the rise in women's labour market participation. This opacity is particularly problematic in Latin America, a region that typically exports caregiving services to the Global North and where, in contrast to other parts of the globe, the majority of Economic Active Population workers are women, according to the reports issued by the International Labour Organisation (2013).

As underlined by Silvia Lilian Ferro (2020), the worldwide market for care services is facing enormous obstacles, which makes prospects challenging. On the supply side, it is evident that they will need to reorganise again due to the abrupt loss of economic welfare of significant social sectors since the ideological turn back to neoliberalism since 2015 in South American countries, among others in Latin America. This is true even though the effects of the reorganisation on the migratory flows of care at the intra regional level are still being felt. On the demand side, since the 2008 global financial crisis and the refugee crisis provide additional concerns because of the extensive border closures and the anticipated economic collapse in many western nations as a result of the ongoing worldwide epidemic of Covid-19.

It could be said that the research resulting from the global care chains has a propensity to divide care into two categories: providing and receiving. While households and other institutions of care can gain from a care gain due to the migration of labour to the global North, households in the South must deal with issues related to a care deficit and the redistribution of caregiving among family members and other non-household caregivers (Kofman, 2012). In fact, assigning reproductive tasks to specific groups of individuals across the locations is a matter that has to be addressed in current processes of global restructuring (Bakker and Silvey, 2008). As outlined by Sorensen (2014), the idea of a global care network has gained interest not just in academic circles but also in policy debates. The persistent rights-based lobbying activities of feminist researchers and women's organizations, which have widened the policy discussion tables over the past ten years, are partly responsible for this unique response to conceptualizations of the global care chain. Nicola Yeates presented the idea

and its applicability to the Global Commission on International Migration in 2005 (Yeates 2005). Global Care Chains: Towards a Rights-based Global Care Regime, published in 2010, followed UN-2008 INSTRAW's suggestion that the development of global care chains embodies the larger process of globalisation of care and offers a useful vantage point from which to examine the interrelationship between migration and development (Orozco 2011). Transnational families were specifically mentioned at the fourth Global Forum for Migration and Development conference, which was held in Mexico in 2010. It was also stressed that "Global Care Chains are a 21st century development challenge with important implications for gender and family." The European Commission-funded ILO Global Action Programme on Migrant Domestic Workers and Their Families (2013–2016) is a final illustration of policy interest in the global care chain idea, since its main scope is "developing and strengthening national labour laws, migration policies, and recruitment regulations and practices that are oriented towards achieving decent work for migrant domestic workers across global care chains"[8].

1.3.2. Transnational families

The phenomenon of transnational families is deeply linked to that of global care chains. Since women tend to migrate to "fill up" the care voids in other countries, they end up caring for people other than her family, which is often left in their home country. Families play a crucial part in all the phases of migration: from the decision for one or more people to migrate is usually linkable to the need to be able to provide for family members, while on the other hand family itself can function as an emotional support during the hardest phases of migration. Moreover, family-based conflicts and family-induced violence can be a reasonable reason for people's movement (Sørensen and Vammen, 2014). Since 2006, the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD) and the two High Level Dialogues (HLDs) have kept the issue of migrant families at the forefront of global policy discussions. A Working Group on Human Rights, Gender and Migration was established, as well, under the Global Migration group (GMD) in late 2012. Even if, as we saw, migration has the ability to benefit

[8] ILO (2013). Global Action Programme on Migrant Domestic Workers and their Families.

migrants and their family (remittances help people and families escape poverty, migration can result in higher female employment involvement and, by extension, women's empowerment and altered (gender) relations), disconnections have to be highlighted at the other end of the spectrum: family separation has the potential to cause family disruption, as well as emotional, psychological, and social costs for children, spouses, and elderly family members. It also disrupts family care routines and contributes to a wide range of social issues, from teenage pregnancies and school dropouts to societal decay and the breakdown of social norms (Baldassar and Merla 2014).

According to international studies, migrating parents "may leave children and other dependents behind" in a physical sense, but frequently, migration is driven by a person's sense of duty to their family. Most people try to maintain their familial relationship status, for example, by taking on new roles such as father or mother. Methods that go against traditional ideas of family life as characterised by closeness to one another. The family separation has costs and advantages that are not constant; rather, they change depending on the micro- and macro-level situations in which they take place (Zentgraf and Chinchilla 2012).

The academic literature on transnational families discusses the complex and asymmetric nature of family ties and how physical isolation causes these relationships to change.

Continuity in social family networks across borders is frequently seen in transnational family research as being favourable to human development and serving as the foundation for the establishment of transnational institutions that can promote economic development in the countries of origin (Oso and Ribas- Mateos 2013). On the opposite end of the spectrum, there are case studies that highlight the severe emotional toll that family disintegration and subsequent societal collapse on entire local communities may have on individual family members. These studies will often demonstrate detrimental effects of migration on development (UNICEF 2007). Transnational family literature analysed different positions of transnational families: motherhood, fatherhood and childhood (Lutz and Palenga-Möllenbeck, 2012; Sørensen and Vammen, 2014).

1.3.2.1 Transnational motherhood

Migrant women have been studied for more than two decades, and their behaviour toward transnational parenting has drawn attention since the end of the 1990s (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997). In particular, what impressed scholars was the many ways in which women imaginatively reconfigured and rebuilt themselves as moms to fit being physically and emotionally apart from their kids. These new cross-border care relationships were referred to as "transnational motherhood" by them, a phrase that was widely used in later literature (Sørensen and Vammen 2014). In fact, being a physically present mother is just one of many various ways to care for and love your children. Transnational mothering is another viable pattern (Lutz and Palenga-Möllenbeck 2012). Mothering at a distance seems to need a delicate balancing act between absence and proximity, the kind of interaction, and the control of emotions. The latest informational technology is one instrument for this. Low-cost software for internet communication is a further evolution of this sort of communication.

texting, talking, and skyping can become a part of the social fabric of transnational parenting, and a sense of improved co-presence is established under some circumstances, this may not stop migrant moms from feeling inadequate, guilty, and troubled (Parrenas 2010). Additionally, it's critical to remember that improved communication may exacerbate family discord, grudges, insults, disputes, and avoidance in addition to strengthening it (De Bruijn *et al* 2013).

1.3.2.2 Transnational fatherhood

A small, but growing, body of literature has focused on the migration processes seen from the father perspective, focusing on both options regarding them. Sørensen and Vammen (2014) focus on fathers who leave, speaking about the concept of "parental abandonment." Parental abandonment might result from disadvantageous socio-economic and legal situations, such unemployment or improper documentation. Even when the labour situation of these fathers is stable, they might have little time left, and this provides a challenge to maintain regular contact with their children. Furthermore, despite the fact that male migrants often have access to better-paying

employment than women, it is widely believed that women remit a bigger percentage of their salary as well as more regularly and consistently than males (Sorensen, 2005). This, as underlined in the work by Ross D. Parke (2020), can lead to problems with the family left in the country of origin, who receives less than the emotional costs of having a parent, or a husband, living away from home; moreover, a lot of "father-away" transnational families struggle to make ends meet because male migrants spend more of their wages on personal demands since they are not as constrained by normative standards of self-sacrifice.

On the other hand, Lutz and Palenga-Möllenbeck (2012) focus on the “fathers left behind”. They identify three major patterns followed by men in this situation: care-sharing, withdrawal from caring and caring as a single father. Usually, the most practised among these is care sharing: it this case, Since grandmothers and other relatives are viewed as the most ideal female replacements for the migrant mother, their caregiving responsibilities frequently do not change significantly when their partners go; on the other hand, caring as a single father is the least common option. The authors state that one of the reasons behind this can be the “fathers’ awareness that they are supposed to replace the absent mother, but many feel at a loss and have few resources and coping strategies at hand”[9]. The concept of a "crisis of male identity" is one of the most crucial aspects of father care substitution that has to be further examined. The role of the caring mother is linked to a loss of status rather than a gain in social prestige, a development that applies, despite many differences, to the cultural coding of both sending and receiving societies. “When fathers lose their breadwinner or principal earner function, they have little to gain by taking on that care and ‘reproductive’ role” (Lutz and Palenga-Möllenbeck 2012).

1.3.2.3 Transnational childhood

Children are impacted by parental transnational migration behaviours. Children actively participate in forming and sustaining transnational family configurations, whether they stay with a parent or other caretaker in the country of origin, rejoin with family

[9] Lutz, Helms and Palenga-Möllenbeck, EWA (2012). "Care Workers, Care Drain, and Care Chains: Reflections on Care, Migrations and Citizenship" in Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society. Volume 19, Number 1, p. 21

members at the migration destination, or migrate on their own to assist their families (Uehling 2008).

Age seems to be a significant variable when considering how children are affected by migration, since it is also crucial to look at how migrant children are treated on the socio-political level. Migrating parents occasionally discuss the challenges of migration while their children stay behind. This might result in misunderstandings and irrational expectations, leaving people perpetually torn between abandonment and accepting their separation (Sørensen and Vammen, 2014). Children can gain economically from their parents' emigration and have greater access to healthcare and education, which has a variety of positive developmental consequences. Better family economic circumstances may not always result in children developing more fully as people (Parrenas, 2010), as emotional strain can have a detrimental influence on one's health and academic achievement (Kandel and Massey 2002).

1.3.2.4. Other actors involved

As underlined in the paper “Care Workers, Care Drain, and Care Chains: Reflections on Care, Migration, and Citizenship” by Lutz and Palenga (2012), the role of care in transnational families in which the migrant is (not necessarily only) the mother, it is quite commonly left to other women. This is strictly linked to the issue of global care chains: migrant women cover the gap left by working women in developed countries in their care roles; in turn, they leave gaps in their home countries, which in the vast majority of cases are filled by other women

These women are usually the grandmothers, since they are regarded as the most trustworthy caregivers and most loyal to mothers abroad. In a minority of families, the mother's female friends or other family members stepped in to provide care. However, these circumstances were frequently perceived as unstable because of the caregivers' own family duties. Moreover, this role can be very stressful due to lack of control and legitimation over children.

Additionally, there were other instances where siblings looked after one another, if only temporarily. The parent-child hierarchy is missing or at least hazy in these situations, and children, often teens, must adjust to their new duties as "substitute parents."

They have to deal with financial and educational concerns, which leaves them with little free time. The focus on transnational motherhood, fatherhood, or childhood alone obscures other key caregivers in transnational family arrangements and ignores the crucial part the state plays in the lives of transnational families, it is necessary to stress.

Global care networks and transnational families are complicated phenomena that require in-depth analysis since they include several levels, multiple actors, and multiple dimensions.

1.4. The case of Ecuadorian women

The case of Ecuadorian women can be emblematic of the presented issues: in fact, in the case of Ecuadorians living abroad, scholars found out that in the most recent wave of migration, which started at the end of 1990s, most people moving to Europe were women.

As a matter of fact, scholars, such as Brad Jokisch and David Kyle (2005), underlined the presence of two very different waves of migration. The first one, which happened in between 1960s and the end of 1990s, was characterised by a decrease in the economic status of the country, which led many Ecuadorians to leave the country, looking for the realisation of the "American dream": the main country of destination was the United States, and people moving there were mainly young men. The second one was quite different in many ways: the number of people emigrating was higher, characterised by the presence of people from higher classes (and not just the middle one), and moving from bigger cities, not just rural areas as happened before.

According to Gratton, other two major changes were registered in the migration of Ecuadorians from 1996 on: the flow, from that moment, became highly gendered. Before 1995 only one out of five migrants from Ecuador were women, but after that the parity among genders was reached in less than 10 years. In 1997, 58% of all people migrating from Ecuador to Spain were women, while according to the Instituto Nacional de Estatistica, among the 11.310 Ecuadorians who arrived in Spain in 2021, 5747 were women, representing a percentage around 51%. Moreover, Gratton registers another crucial switch: the decline of the USA as the main receiving country, and Spain

taking its place. As presented by Jokisch in his chapter, published in "*La migración ecuatoriana. transnacionalismo, redes e identidades*" (Herrera *et al.* 2005), just a few Ecuadorians were living in Spain in 1998. However, in 2002 they were 200.000, and in 2005 the number had doubled in size.

Another exceptional element of Ecuadorian women migrating to Spain, presented by Gratton, is that the women migrating are usually not only young unmarried ones, or women who migrate as part of family migrations, but also (and actually for a large part, around 40 and 50%) women who migrate alone, in their middle age, who left their husbands and children "behind". Moreover, they are also the ones who "maintain their family in Ecuador and ensure the functioning of the domestic group during their absence" (Pedone 2006), especially through the remittances they send home (thanks to which they keep not only the economic, but also the social connections with their families) and the help of other carers, as underlined by Gioconda Herrera (2017)

According to Herrera's "*Lejos de tus pupilas*" (2013), Ecuadorian women were among the first to migrate to Europe (in particular, to Spain), those who better achieved in inserting in the labour market and the ones forming the first social networks in the country. These women were also the first who focused on creating a strong network, who was bound to become one of the most advanced models of transnational families (Herrera, 2013).

Furthermore, fitting perfectly in what was anticipated in the chapter, most of these women ended up working in the care workfield: according to the data provided by Gloria Camacho (2006), more than 80% of Ecuadorian women work in the social reproduction field at their arrival in Spain. As presented by Vega Solis (2009), Moreno Egas (2006) and Martínez (2004), Spanish labour market was lacking people to take charge of care labour; additionally, Spain has continued to maintain a migration strategy that prioritises issuing work permits for domestic labour, confirming what had already been affirmed regarding the role of the State and its policies in the feminisation of migration process.

However, it is possible to notice in the data published in "*Encuesta a inmigrantes ecuatorianas en España*" (Camacho 2006) that more than 90% of women find themselves in a dependent position by their employers; it is also possible to put

emphasis on the working degradation of these women, who in most cases have middle-level education or that used to be chiefs at their jobs in Ecuador, or who occupied apical positions back in their home country.

These women have to deal with the Spanish labour market request for flexibility, but also with the high vulnerability and instability resulting from it. They usually tend to find many different jobs throughout the years, in many different fields, but most of them are usually characterised, again, by instability and difficulties, mainly due to low wages, bad working conditions and very little protections. Moreover, they have to face prejudices, discriminations, exploitation and abuse (Camacho 2006).

This will be the base for what is going to be analysed in the two following chapters: the flow of women leaving Ecuador for Spain and then those who are coming back, focusing on the socio-economic and laboral aspects of their lives in both contexts. To sum up, this chapter has been written to allow the reader to have all the necessary information about the main topics that will be addressed in the following chapters. In the second chapter, it will be analysed the process through which women leave Ecuador and arrive in Spain. The focus will be on their access to the labour market, the socio-economic consequences of their migration and the role played by transnational families. Moreover, in the last part of it, a focus will be put on the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic on these women. In the third one, the opposite flow, that of "women coming back" will be put under analysis. In this section, the focus will be on the factors influencing the decision of coming back, and in particular in the role of transnational families and care work on this issue. Moreover, their laboural, social and psychological status after the closure of their migratory process will be the core of the presented analysis.

Chapter 2: Women leaving: the case of Ecuadorian female migrants in Spain

In this second chapter, after briefly introducing the main factors involved in the growth of this flow, my aim is to analyse the flow of women migrating to Spain from Ecuador.

The number of women is quite high in comparison to men: the aim here is to talk about female migrants looking at two main aspects of their lives.

The first one is labour: Ecuadorian women are the highest number of people involved in domestic work. The aim is to analyse the labour niche they fit in (in most cases, the domestic and care one), the consequences they suffer from and the vulnerability and risks these women undergo because of their jobs. Moreover, the social impact of this flow will be analysed. In particular, attention will be given to the psychological aspects of the long-distance relationship with their families these women tend to experience during their stay in Spain. The last part of this paragraph will focus on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on this social group. This is particularly interesting, since Ecuadorian women living and working in Spain have been, during this crisis, the main (if not only) breadwinners, and therefore the ones sending home the highest, if not again the only, remittances.

The end of this chapter will analyse the role transnational families play in the decision to leave and in that of staying despite the complicated situation Ecuadorian women have to face throughout their stay in Spain.

2.1. Feminine Ecuadorian emigration

Many people have been migrating from Ecuador in the last century.
The process of emigration from the country went through three phases, which are going to be analysed as the first thing in this paragraph, mainly as a result of the socio-political and economic turbulences Ecuador went through in the last 100 years. Last, the social, economic and individual characteristics of people migrating from Ecuador will be looked at, posing a particular attention to the case of women.

2.1.1. The phases of Ecuadorian Migration

Ecuadorians have been migrating from the last decades of the 19th century, but this process was mainly intra-state or (less frequently) an intra-regional phenomenon, with people migrating from the internal areas of the country to the coastal ones, or to the neighbouring country of Colombia. International movements were reserved to the higher classes of society, including entrepreneurs and academics, which travelled in most cases to Europe, due to working or cultural reasons (Camacho 2010). This used to happen because of the high and often impossible to bear costs of travelling. However, with the speeding up of transport and the spread of steamboats and trains began a new phase, in which it was also possible for people of lower social classes to move internationally, looking for work and better living conditions through temporal migration (Gratton 2005).

Then, this entire process took a significant turn starting in the 1950s. The migration process may be divided into two major phases, according to Brian Gratton (2005). The first covers the years 1960 through 1995 and the second, 1996 through the year the article was published. Later writings refer to this phase as the one we are currently observing.

The first phase of Ecuadorian emigration fully coincides with the previously presented model. Driven by the decline of the Panama hat market, young people began to seek work outside the country and the region (Kyle 2000). The preferred destination was represented by the U.S., and mainly to its bigger cities, like New York, Chicago and Los Angeles (Jokisch and Kyle 2005), because these big cities were the ones offering the best working opportunities since they were in a moment of big development, and working force at a low price was very much needed. There was a

significant migration of young women from rural areas to the cities (Radcliffe 1999), but international emigration was almost entirely male-based, since they were still considered as the main (and only) breadwinner, so they were the ones who had to look for better opportunities to support their families. Women migrated in a second moment due to family reunification, once the male situation was stable.

In this phase, people were moving especially from the Southern regions of Azuay and Cañar.

After impressive growth in the 1970s and 1980s, emigration to the North has reached a more or less stable level in the 1990s, with 250,000 emigrants each year.

During this phase, Ecuadorian economy went through some peaks, but also through some throughs. In the first years of this phase, many people, especially women, migrated to the coastal region to work in *bananeros* (bananas plantations), but soon after there was a slowdown in the exportation of this fruit; therefore, many people, also due to the process of industrialisation of the country, moved to urban areas (Camacho 2010). In the 1970s there was another peak, given by the oil boom, which led to an important socioeconomic development of the country. However, this period of wealth did not last much, since Ecuador went through a huge debt crisis (1982), had to deal with a crash in the price of raw materials, with the consequences of 1982's El Niño and 1987's heartquake. This put Ecuador's economy under a huge pressure, which led the various governments that succeeded in the following period to accept the conditions imposed by the International Monetary Fund and banks: this led to a period of austerity, in which less and less funds were invested in socio-political measures to diminish inequalities and poverty (Jokisch and Pribilsky 2002). In this period, social inequality, poverty, ethnic and regional inequality increased: a huge social asymmetry was created, also recorded by the increase of the Gini Index. The context led to a sharp increase in international migration: it is counted that between 1980 and 1995 there were about 350 thousand regular migrants, and there is obviously no data on irregular migrants (Camacho 2010).

This whole situation crumbled in 1995, opening a new phase in the international emigration from Ecuador. Due to the failure of the measures implemented, such as the 1994 financial reform and the conflict between Ecuador and Peru, which caused

significant losses and the exodus of foreign capital, the economy of Ecuador collapsed. Social inequality rose organically along with the poverty rate. In addition, there were also other factors at play. For example, the 1997 South-East Asian financial crisis had a significant impact on the whole Latin American area. Furthermore, Ecuador had another severe El Nino in 1998. The biggest economic and social catastrophe in Ecuadorian history occurred as a result in 1999 (Jokisch and Pribilsky 2002). The state attempted to salvage the banks as this crisis quickly spread to the financial sector, but by the following year, half were already in government control (Camacho 2010). Wilma Salgado estimated that the crisis cost 4 billion dollars. The effects of this crisis were much worse for the lower middle class; there was a staggering rise in poverty (70%) and public debt, businesses lost their competitive edge, and there was a loss of both political and economic credibility on the global stage. In just five years, five different governments came to power. The huge movement of individuals, which started in 1998 and peaked in numbers between 1999 and 2000, reaching 378 thousand in less than three years (*Censo de Población y Vivienda* 2001), was one of this panorama's significant repercussions.

As delineated by Gratton (2005), some elements deserve special attention in the new migration:

- economic impact triggered mass emigration: the collapse of Latina American countries economies caused "the most accelerated impoverishment in the history of Latin America" (ILDIS 2002), making migration an attractive opportunity for a growing number of Ecuadorians. As noted by Gratton "Emigration evolved in perfect harmony with the economic collapse" (2005). Just in the year 2000, over 560.000 people left Ecuador, around 4% of the total of Ecuador's population (INEC 2003).

- the origins of emigration moved to cities and changed classes: if in the first phase young men were migrating abroad from the less developed and rich countryside of Ecuador, in the second one more and more people were migrating from urban areas. This group of people had a higher level of education than those participating in the first mass migration, had more working experience and a good knowledge of the world.

- decline of the United States as a duty station, while Spain suddenly became the main destination of choice: reaching the U.S. was becoming more and more difficult,

because of the higher prices of getting into the country. Camacho (2010) also underlines the role played by the increasing restrictiveness of the immigration policies of United States. Therefore, Spain became the first choice of emigrating Ecuadorians, since it was possible for them to easily getting into the country (since there was no visa requirement), the costs were much lower if compared to the trip to United States, and it was also quite easy to find jobs here, since Spain economy was flourishing and low-cost work was very much needed to support this process. At the end of 1999, only around 13.000 Ecuadorians were living in Spain; this number raised to 140.000 in 2001 (INE 2001) and to 390.000 in 2003 (INE 2003).

- women are at the forefront of emigration: before 1995, the vast majority of people leaving Ecuador were men: women tended to migrate only in cases of family reunification, or to follow the males of her family. However, just a few years later, migration from bigger cities (like Quito y Guyaquil) was female-led, and in 1997, 58% of Ecuadorians migrating to Spain were female. An interesting phenomenon to look at is that, contrary to what generally happens in the course of female migration, in which more young and unmarried women take part, in the case of Ecuador the women who migrated were often married, had children and husbands they had left in their home country.

2.1.2. Factors influencing Ecuadorian Migration

As outlined in the previous pages, the main factors involved in Ecuadorians migration are social, economic and political issues.

According to the previously presented data, it is possible to state that the majority of people migrating from Ecuador did this because of the economic problems in the country (Paladines Paredes 2018). The first economic cause had been the 1930s crisis of the Panama Hat, followed by the 1960s crisis in the banana market and the 1970s oil crisis. Moreover, the useless attempts to save the country's economy through nationalisation first, and liberalisation and dollarisation then, led the country to a huge crisis (Larrea 2004). Because of these manoeuvres, many people either lost their jobs, had their bank balances frozen, or were unable to make enough money to sustain their family (Jokisch and Kyle 2005). Moreover, as underlined by Antonieta Barrón and

Ronny Correa (2010), the Gross National Product fell by 50%, and unemployment doubled between 1995 and 1998.

Another important factor were the social consequences of this economic débâcle: people were severely impoverished, especially in the middle class, and migrated as a result of the complete lack of opportunities for the near and the far future. Due to their inability to bear the financial burden of migrating, those who were able to travel the least were those who experienced the most poverty (Herrera et al 2006). The migration of a part of the population left this category of people to experience the worst part of the economic recession, which exacerbated inequalities and social differences.

Beyond the socio-economic issue, some studies point to political responsibilities in the international migration drama. Ecuador in the last decade of the 20th century experienced high levels of political instability, changing various governments between 1992 and the first years of 2000s, all of them having different ideas and positions on how to improve Ecuador's economy (Paladines Paredes 2018). All these attempts were extremely unsuccessful, and in a brief time all the Presidents were in some ways taken away the power over the county: the worst case was that of Jamil Mahuad, against whom it was organised a *coup d'état*. The last decade of the 1990s was also difficult from the foreign politics point of view: Ecuador went through a war with Perù (known as the Cenepa War) in the first months of 1995 (Camacho 2010). This political turmoil led Ecuador to a loss of international credibility, which further worsened its economic conditions (Paladines Paredes 2018).

This complex situation led to an increase in the total migration of people, so that the second wave of Ecuadorian international migration, directed to Spain, was considered as a "mass migration", which has involved, from 1995 on, over a million people.

2.1.3. Characteristics of people migrating from Ecuador in recent times

Given the two quite different phases of ecuadorian migration, it is quite easy to imagine that also involved people had different characteristics among the two waves.

Gloria Camacho in her "*Mujeres migrantes*" (2010) delineates a profile of the emigrating Ecuadorian population, underlining how the categories more affected by the

socio-economic and political crisis were the middle-income class, women and young people in general.

From the socio-demographic point of view, she outlines three major characteristics:

1) Migrating people are not coming only (or for the largest part) from the Southern Corner of Ecuador, but the State is involved as a whole
2) People living in urban areas started to migrate more and more (reaching the 73% of the total), while people living in rural areas are kind of left out because they have scarcer economic possibilities to leave
3) The gender gap is nearly completely closed among migrants from metropolitan regions, although males still predominate in agricultural areas (this is due to worse economic conditions and *machism* that still prevails in these areas of the country). The gender gap also regards the country of destination. In the case of people leaving for the U.S., the ratio of Ecuadorian men and women is 1:1.3, and in that of people migrating on the intra-regional level, men outnumber women in some Latin American destinations such as Chile and Colombia ; in all the other countries, equality is fully reached (Herrera *et al* 2012).

   Moreover, Camacho outlines some other characteristics of people leaving Ecuador.

From the age point of view, most people leaving Ecuador are very young people: 57% of them are less than 30 years old ; this happens because the unemployment rate in this age group is very high, around 40% (Censo 2001).

From the perspective of education, she presents a 2005 research, issued by the Encuesta Nacional de Empleo, Desempleo y Subempleo (ENEMDU): it shows that,particularly among women, migrants have relatively high levels of education. As a result, Ecuador suffers a loss of human capital. Furthermore, because they are frequently working in low-paying, high-precarious jobs, their capabilities frequently go untapped.

In the "*Perfil Migratorio del Ecuador 2011*" issued by IOM and written by Gioconda Herrera Mosquera, María Isabel Moncayo and Alexandra Escobar García it is also presented a focus on the civil status of migrating people: the majority of people leaving

Ecuador in recent years don't have a family in their home country, contrary to what happened in the previous years, in which more than 50% of migrating people had a wife or a husband waiting for them at home (Fernández Suárez and Pérez Caramés 2017).

2.1.4. The case of Ecuadorian women

The crucial political and economic climate in Ecuador in the last years of the 20th century was the perfect storm for the broadening and diversification of the migration phenomena. Migrants are intergenerational, from all social strata, and mostly female. Due to the crisis's impacts and specific instances of abuse and marginalisation, women have been encouraged to look for employment outside of the nation. Beyond its positive aspects—remittances for the family left behind, personal success in the host country, and the possibility of family reunion—feminization of the phenomenon of migration puts migrants in precarious situations, breaks up families, and endangers children's safety by depriving them of the maternal role that mothers play in their upbringing (Moreno Egas 2006). The significant integration of women into the workforce in first-world nations as a result of the feminization of the workplace on a worldwide scale is one of the most noticeable developments in today's society worldwide. Ecuadorian women are no exception to this phenomenon.

Herrera (2005) states that women leaving Ecuador can do it for personal reasons, like economic reasons, family conflicts, domestic violence, ethnic discrimination or sexual orientation. However, he also underlines a new tendency among young women, who tend to migrate not just as a family decision but also for the individual's desire to extend their horizons in life. An exception to the feminine migration phenomenon is that Ecuadorian women tend to migrate alone, or at least as pioneers in the arriving country (Gratton 2005): this leads those women to focus on ways to gain as much money as possible to maintain the family in the place of origin and/or to achieve family reunification by involving the husband, sons and daughters in the migration process, or at least to try and "maintain their family in Ecuador and ensure the functioning of the domestic group during their absence" (Pedone 2006). Hence, it is possible to understand the main role played by the family in the decision of these women to migrate. Moreover, through the possibility of communication given by technology, the remittances and the

attempt to be as present as possible, these women try to avoid the risk of family rupture and to create a transnational family.

On the other hand, women are trying to cope better with the migration situation, which presents them with many risks. The first is a financial one: the voyage frequently forces them into debt, leaving them unsure of their ability to secure a steady employment, locate a secure home, avoid the risk of abuse and violence, not to mention the numerous legal issues they must deal with. In many situations, this complex circumstance puts women under stress and emotional instability due to the guilt of "child abandonment," as well as issues with social inclusion and an uncharted labour market. They frequently receive assistance from their friends and family networks in doing this, enabling the women to have assistance in obtaining employment in the new country and a trustworthy person to take over the responsibility of caring for their children in Ecuador (Meñaca 2005).

To conclude, women have experienced different outcomes as a result of this process; on the one hand, they have encountered high emotional costs, discrimination, and increased vulnerability; on the other, they have also been able to access paid employment, achieving economic independence and contributing to the household economy, and in the end gaining a much needed freedom.

2.2 Ecuadorian women immigration to Spain

2.2.1 Immigration in Spain: from a sending country to a receiving one

Since the end of World War II, many European nations have experienced a process of economic and social development in which immigrants have also played a significant part. These individuals arrived full of optimism and in pursuit of a brighter future. Spain has experienced these occurrences as well, but it wasn't until the 1990s that it started to be a State with a substantial flow of immigration (Muñoz De Bustillo and Antón 2010)

When Spain joined the European Community in 1985, many Member States were clamouring for a single migration legislation, but this was dismissed as being too far from Spanish reality for the State to have formed an immigration strategy. Beginning in

that year, Spain was thrust into a situation it had never experienced before: immigration, primarily from South America and Africa (owing to geographic proximity and shared origins and cultures), increased significantly between 1992 and 2000, with an average yearly rise of 214% (Pinyol 2010). In 1985, a first immigration law (Law No. 7 of July 1, 1985) was passed, but its scope was to merely reassure the other European Community members.

In January 2000, the first actual immigration law (Law 4/2000) was passed; for the first time in Spain, it addressed the rights and freedoms of foreigners living in Spain as well as their social integration. Four times between 2000 and 2004, the immigration rules were changed, each time introducing a new procedure for the legalisation of immigrants.

The State attempted to organise the status of undocumented immigrants working in Spain with the enormous regularisation of 2005, which was also significant in reducing the social risk of the situation. The rest of Europe fiercely opposed this approach since it was perceived as a "call" for inhabitants of nations with challenging socioeconomic conditions to enter Europe (Mazza 2022).

Due to Spain's relatively morbid immigration regulations, the number of immigrants increased up to the beginning of the economic crisis in 2008, when they made up 13% of the population. According to the data provided by the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística,* 4,715,757 immigrants were registered in Spain in 2009, however as a result of the economic downturn, migratory flows drastically decreased in both volume and number in the years that followed. Many countries' economic market conditions significantly deteriorated, which resulted in a steady drop in the number of jobs available and the actual working conditions. The volume of migration movements to Spain naturally decreased as a result, although they are still far from stopping. In the past 10 years, about one million migrants have returned to their place of origin; however, since 2015, as economic and social conditions have improved, the flow of migrants to Spain has grown once again, reaching more than 500,000 entries in the nation in 2018 alone (INE 2019).

The law that is currently in effect, Organic Law 2/2009, is a fusion of Laws 4/2000 and 8/2000. Its main features include controlled programming of flows, the presence of

State intervention in the labour market to protect immigrant rights, the immediate expulsion of illegal immigrants, and the granting of "permanent resident" status to foreigners who are socially equated with citizens (Mazza 2022).

With about 30% of all foreign residents in Spain being from Latin America, they are the largest cultural minority in that nation. Although the educational level of Latin Americans in Spain is equal to that of Spaniards, in one every two cases, the labour they have access to is often underpaid and only temporary. Women and young people make up a significant portion of this group. Ecuadorians, in addition to being one of the largest groups of migrants in Spain, had in some ways a role in Spain's creation of migration's law.

Ecuadorians migration to Spain happened mainly because of two reasons: on one hand, the cost of travelling to Spain was much more affordable if compared to the United States; on the other one, it was easier also on the legal way, since Ecuadorians were able to enter Spain as tourists for 90 days without needing a visa. So it was overall easier for them to get into the country, secretly looking for a job and then getting a formal working permit (Jokisch 2001). So, when border police controls became stricter, they found another way to get into Spain (and in some cases, Italy): through the Netherlands, who had a less strict control, and made a perfect starting point, thanks to the freedom of movement produced by the Schengen Agreement (1985) (Jokisch and Kyle 2002).

Ecuadorian people then, because of timing and a political change in Spain, got involved in a sort of "legal experiment", well presented in Brad Jokisch and Jason Pribilsky's work (2002). The legislation of 2000 "gave 'illegal' immigrants extensive rights including a guarantee to education, medical care, the right to free assembly and protest, family reunification, and to join unions" (Jokisch and Pribilsky 2002), but when the conservative Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar's Popular Party won a majority in the legislature in March 2000 and passed a new Immigration Law, many immigrants lost the rights they were previously granted. Moreover, this law forced Spanish government to make bilateral agreements with source countries: in the case of Ecuador, the first agreement was signed on 31 January 2001, to reduce trafficking and protect Ecuadorian workers, and granted an amnesty to Ecuadorian workers illegally living in Spain prior to

the beginning of 2001, if they returned voluntarily to Quito and then legally came back to Spain. Almost 25 thousand Ecuadorians applied for Amnesty in less than one month.

Another important role in the decision of emigrating to Spain was taken by the language and cultural closeness of Ecuadorians and Spanish people: this made Ecuadorians (and Latin American people in general) perceived as 'desirable' within a context of ethnic segmentation of the Spanish labour market, as if the concept of "otherness" was easily erasable for people of this provenience. The fact that Spanish was spoken in both Spain and Ecuador made migration easier and facilitated the adjustment of Ecuadorian migrants to life abroad. With the help of economic incentives and the ability to communicate with Spanish speakers, Ecuadorians migrated to Spain in large numbers (Hall 2008). As stated by Emma Martín Díaz, Francisco Cuberos Gallardo and Simone Castellani (2012) "typifying these people as preferable migrants, based on their supposed cultural compatibility with the autochthonous population, has been a determining factor in the political and economic management of these migratory currents".

Finally, yet importantly, a relevant role in the decision of migrants from Ecuador in their migration to Spain is played by family and networks, established by pioneer migrants in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Jokisch and Pribilsky 2002). Due to the significant number of Ecuadorians residing in Spain, newly arrived migrants were able to network with citizens of their own country to locate employment possibilities and learn more about their new residence (Dudley 2013).

2.2.2 Ecuadorian Migrants in Spain

Ecuadorian migrants living in Spain have some peculiar characteristics, especially if compared to Ecuadorians living in the United States or to other nationalities living in Spain.

A first characteristic to be outlined is the education level of Ecuadorian migrants. As presented in the work of Gloria Camacho (2010), the migrating Ecuadorians have a relatively higher level of education, especially among women. This leads Ecuador to a loss of human capital, which is even more impacting if it is considered the fact that often those capacities are left unused in the Spanish labour market. According to Nieto

Gómez-Guillamón (2001), many Ecuadorians are accepting occupations in Spain that were beneath them in their own country. Migrants from Ecuador were preferred, for example, to Moroccan ones since most of them demonstrated a higher level of education with respect to the second group.

A second trait that is interesting to look at is that of age. From the beginning of the migration flow from Ecuador to Spain, it was characterised by a young average age among migrants. As reported by Gabrielli (2015) 62% of Ecuadorians who were listed in municipal registrations at the beginning of 2001 were between the ages of 15 and 34. 10% of Ecuadorians living in Spain in the beginning of 2001 were under the age of 18, indicating that some of those migrant movements were family-based. As presented by Herrera et al (2012), the quantity of Ecuadorian people immigrating to Spain in a younger age between 2001 and 2010: however, we can observe that in the same period of time, reunification processes, involving both children under 18 years old and people over 61, increase in volume, underlining the importance of families in the whole migration process.

A third feature to be discussed is that of gender. According to Lorenzo Gabrielli (2015), in terms of gender distribution, the bulk of the stock at the start of Ecuadorian immigration to Spain consisted of women (65% in 1998 and 1999 and 55% in 2000). Despite a new majority of women in 2005 (51.2%), gender began to balance itself out starting in 2000. The migratory pathways taken by Ecuadorian men and women were parallel and tied to various access patterns to the Spanish labour market (Colectivo IOÉ 2007). According to data as of January 1, 2010, women make up 50% of all Ecuadorian migrants, indicating that the initial feminization of the stock has balanced the proportion weight of the two sexes (INE 2010). In short, the tendency since 2001 is that, regardless of the destination they select, women are today, even more than before, significant protagonists of the country's migratory processes (Herrera et al. 2012).

The issue of gender in the migration of Ecuadorians in Spain has been widely studied, since it was quite new to see women migrating alone, and moreover, doing so leaving their families at home, and converting in the key of family's survival. Ecuadorian's migration towards Spain was characterised by a larger percentage of women leaving the country in the first years, but in the following period of time

equality has been more or less achieved between genders. However, it was way easier for women to find a job in the gendered labour niches of Spain, in particular in the care sector: these men's migration therefore has been seen as a migration of reunification with their partners (Camacho and Hernandez 2005).

According to Camacho, the main reasons for Ecuadorian women to migrate to Spain are:

- The high demand of women workforce in Southern Europe countries, offering jobs in domestic services, agriculture, care services and tourism;
- The need to have somebody who takes women's place in the social reproduction jobs;
- The ageing of the population in Europe and the resulting need for caregivers for the ill and elderly.

Ecuadorian women appear to migrate in larger parts from the urban areas of the Sierra and the Costa zone, in which their unemployment rate is higher than in the other areas of the country, leading them to migrate to avoid impoverishment and a worsening in their living conditions. In terms of their marital status, 46% of these women resided in Ecuador with a long-term spouse. 15.5% of these women were divorced or widowed at the time of migration, with the remainder being single (INEC-SIEH 2005). The majority of these women are between the ages of 20 and 39, and after a few years in Spain, the majority of them have met up with their family (partners and children) (Camacho 2006). Regarding their socio-economic situation in the country of departure, it is possible to state that the majority of them belonged to the middle/upper-middle class. Thanks to the fact that so many of these women started out from urban areas and were part of the middle and upper-middle levels of society, many of them have a very high educational level (Camacho 2010).

2.3 Migrant women settling in Spain: socio-economic analysis and personal implications

According to an article published by Esther Cuesta in 2007, Ecuadorian migrants make up around 70% of the total migrant population in Spain, forming a heterogeneous group

including people having different ethnic origins, different starting economic and social position, coming from different areas of Ecuador. Among them, around 1 in 2 are women, who migrated without their families, and ended up finding temporary jobs as domestic, touristic and care workers. Most Ecuadorian men and women decided to live in Spain rather than in Ecuador, despite the numerous risks this exposes them to: hard working conditions, discriminations, difficult living conditions outside work, social issues. Very often, immigrants labour in professions that are insecure and unattractive to Spaniards, offer less security from their employers and the state, and pay less. Examples of these employment include those in domestic work, agriculture, construction, hotels, and restaurants (Arango 2000). Numerous Ecuadorian women believe that moving abroad is the only way to secure a job that is largely stable, earn a respectable wage, have access to social security, live in a place with less crime and violence, and feel like they are contributing to the wellbeing of their families (García 2004). Spain has represented a great opportunity for them, even if the working conditions and their social status were often far from good. Migrant women are only permitted to work as domestic helpers in the private sector due to the existing gendered labour stratification in Spain (Solé and Parella 2003), but this can result in them facinging difficulties in getting their working permit: moreover, if they're able to get one (in many cases, thanks to the family they work for), this secures them only for a limited period of time. This results in Ecuadorian migrant women experiencing high rates of discriminations and difficulties in climbing up the socioeconomic ladder in Spain. However, on the other hand, migration offers them a series of advantages, like independence and the possibility to express themselves; moreover, in many cases women feel like they are more protected by the law, especially in cases of domestic and gender violence (Cuesta 2007). In the following pages, the laboural possibilities, the issue of discrimination and migrant women's health are going to be analysed.

2.3.1 Ecuadorian Female Migrants in Spanish Labour Market

One of the main reasons behind Ecuadorian women's decision to leave their country, as we saw, is strictly linked to low wages and even lower opportunities for them in the Ecuadorian labour market. Women's work in Ecuador itself had been growing up when

mass migration flow started, in particular in urban areas. As presented by Gloria Camacho (2010), they usually tended to work in informal areas, both in the modernised and agricultural sector. Some of them (around 10%, according to INEC's research published in 2003) worked in the domestic sector, in which they had low salaries, little to no stability and security. When the crisis of 1999 arose, "there were 2.2 unemployed women for every man in the same situation" (Larrea and Sanchez 2002).

Many women then decided to leave Ecuador for Spain: Ecuadorian female migrants' earnings in Spain were able to raise their economic position thanks to the fact they were gaining more than what could have been possible to obtain in Ecuador (Gratton 2007). On the other hand, this improvement in the economy suggests that these immigrants frequently experience downward occupational mobility, since they take employment in Spain that are below their level of expertise (Dudley 2013). In fact, 15% of Ecuadorian women have finished college degrees or professional training programs, making them overqualified for low-skilled service jobs (Gratton 2007), but in some cases they "gained documents, connections and income in a form of exchange required by the kind of life they had adopted in migration" (Aguirre Vidal 2019). The massive participation of women in Spanish labour market allows us to talk about a labour kind of migration, which allows women that were forced not to work (due to the issue linked to the high levels of *machismo* in the country) or which, despite their work, were not independent, to gain freedom and autonomy from their partners (both if they stayed in Ecuador of if they migrated as well) (Camacho 2010). Their flexibility and helpfulness, combined with the needs of Spanish society, allowed Ecuadorian women to easily enter the Spanish labour market. This was possible also thanks to the migrant societies and networks, to many NGOs and religious groups, which have been helping Ecuadorians since their first arrivals in the Iberian Continent.

At their arrival in Spain, most Ecuadorian women usually found themselves in care employment, and this led to the data presented by Brian Gratton in 2007, where he specifies that "nine in ten Ecuadorian women were domestic workers", and they were concentrated in "the least prestigious and worst paid domestic-work sectors". The Ecuadorian's position as a domestic worker deeply links employment with issues of race and gender. Spanish people typically equate domestic work with migrant labour and see

it as a low-status position in the occupational hierarchy. It is possible to notice a huge difference among women who used to work in the domestic field in Ecuador (less than 10%) and the much higher percentage of those doing it in Spain, which according to the "*Encuesta a inmigrantes ecuatorianas en España*" published by Camacho in 2006, represented the 81.4%. Moreover, as suggested by Gladis Aguirre Vidal (2019) the Spanish Law on Migration had encouraged the migrant's dependence on the people hiring them, creating a deep bond, which could end up in them becoming part of the family, or in disappointments and conflicts. To become a domestic worker is often one of the few opportunities Ecuadorian migrant women find at their arrival in Spain: through these jobs, they can obtain the recognition of a legal status, a work, and some very useful connections (Wolf 2001). Moreover, the data presented by Camacho (2006) are a clear proof of how difficult it is for women to obtain a better working status and break the glass ceiling all women have to go through: the intersectionality between being migrant and being a woman, worsens these women's possibilities. After years in Spain, the percentage of women working in the reproductive services sectors lowers to 60.8%, but most women continue working in services (such as communications, 6.2%, or tourism, 16.5%); only a few of them achieve to get into the social services works, like education or health (only the 4.1%). Around the same percentage of women work in the manufacturing sector, in which these women are usually exploited, given little to no stability and safety, and are mostly informal jobs. Therefore, it can be concluded that, although if immigrant women occasionally succeed in advancing their social status, the majority of Ecuadorian women in Spain continue to work in low-skilled, poorly compensated professions in the service industry, where the Spanish community holds them in low regard. This has led to the creation of what is known as a "labour niche": Ecuadorian migrant women tend to fill the reproductive labour in the Spanish labour market.

Another sector in which Ecuadorian women can end up in is that of sexual labour: even if in Spain it is not illegal, it is not possible to formally work in this sector. Being an unregulated field in which to work, it does not give the possibility to women of getting a working permit or a residence one. These working offers come in larger numbers to younger migrants, especially in the moment of their arrival, in which they

are more vulnerable and seen as "willing to do anything" to have money with which to repay their debt and be able to support the family at home.

The Covid-19 pandemic deeply affected Ecuadorian workers in Spain. However, it is possible to distinguish between male and female work during this pandemic. Since most men worked in the agriculture or construction field, many of them lost their jobs, becoming suddenly unable to provide for their families both in Spain and in Ecuador. On the other hand, women, who for the most part worked in the service sector, were less touched by the economic side effects of the pandemic, continuing to work throughout the various waves. It led to two main consequences: the first one is that women became the actual breadwinners for their families, being the only ones able to work during this time; the second is that, since there was no work for the male population, many men decided to go back to Ecuador. In this second event, couples who migrated together ended up with two different solutions: the first one, which is going to be analysed in the third chapter, is that both the man and the women went back to the home country, but in many cases women decided to stay in Spain, alone but free, autonomous and able to provide for their whole family alone.

Gioconda Herrera, Maria Cristina Carrillo Espinosa and Ruth Lara-Reyes published an article in 2021, focusing in particular on the issues rising from the Covid-19 pandemic in the Ecuadorian migrants community in Europe. During the first half of 2020, both Spain and Ecuador were severely hit by the pandemic. Many cities, like Quito and Guayaquil were severely affected by the crisis, to the point where both the health system and funeral services collapsed: hospitals ran out of safety equipments, of life supply machines and of medications, which were sold in the black market. Information regarding this critical situation was soon spread to the Ecuadorian migrants in Spain: they experienced the pandemic both locally and transnationally. Most Ecuadorians in Spain worked in frontline occupations in the food and care industries that required them to be physically present, increasing their risk of contracting the virus; others lost their jobs. The general climate was that of fear and uncertainty, since those who were not working in formal sectors were not able to access the government compensation programmes. This situation, mixed to the precarious situation that was already existing in Ecuador, and the terrible news arriving from there, worried

Ecuadorian migrants abroad. Due to the catastrophic circumstances in their home countries, migrants' sense of belonging to the same national drama was revived. As a result, transnational behaviours to support their relatives and communities were organised. In addition, the dismal image of Ecuador during the time of the pandemic's first height triggered memories of the nation's problems and was used to support their original choice to leave, despite the precarious circumstances that many of them are still in after 20 years of migration. Multiple transnational protection systems were triggered in both directions by migrants and their families. These interactions allowed friends and relatives to provide one another with emotional support. Different channels for care were used, including the exchange of information, financial support and digital co-presence. In particular, despite the difficult situation migrants were facing in Europe, which had led to a forecast of a degrowth in the remittances sent in the last years, these actually grew, reaching the important number of around 3.5 billion dollars. This shows that immigrants provided their families with additional resources to help them deal with the pandemic crisis and that they were a crucial support system in the absence of social safety measures.

2.3.2. Ecuadorian female migrants' discrimination experiences

Spain only recently started to attract immigrants. Few and isolated incidents of racism and xenophobia were reported in the beginning of the migratory flows to the Iberian Peninsula's, but, as was stated in the "*Informe*" presented by the *Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado* (CEAR) in 2016, these types of incidents are continuously expanding. More than 500 hate crimes were reported in Spain in 2015. However, in addition to attacks of this nature, migrants—and particularly migrating women—are also the target of subtler types of prejudice that affect many facets of their life.

2.3.2.1. Discriminations against migrants in Spain

There are many factors that led Spanish people to start discriminating against migrants. One of the most important, as underlined by Solè and Parella (2003) is that "discrimination originates from and is based on the economic and social interests of the dominant classes". Migrant workers are extremely useful to employers, since they allow

them to spend less money, accepting lower wages and accepting to work in terrible conditions (for instance, having no regular contract or accepting to work for long and exhausting turns) in return for a more or less stable job. This has led the autochthonous workers to develop a sense of competition with them, perceived as “those who steal jobs” and the main root of their working problems: this has led them also to perceive migrants as a threat in all the other situations in life, developing and deepening xenophobic ideas. They view immigrants as "intruders" who put pressure on employers to lower salaries and create poorer working conditions. Another important factor is that of institutions: migration policies are able to influence immigrant labour markets in certain ways. Separation between immigrants from the EU and those from outside the EU is a hallmark of the policy that controls migration flows and settlement in Spain. These later countries are subject to a tight immigration policy that was established by the Schengen accords and represents the mindset of much of Europe, which appears to view immigration primarily as a danger (Solè and Parella 2003). A third factor which plays a central role in the worsening of the perception Spanish people have of migrants is that of the media: in fact, as presented by Jesús Calzas Millán (2015), they deepened the idea of the existence of a huge gap between Spanish citizens and Ecuadorian migrants, generating a feeling of suspect rather than empathy for the second group.

Migrants of all origins experience discrimination of various types, as presented in the Report by CEAR (2016). Among them there are:

- Labour discrimination: according to a study published in 2007 by the Grupo de Estudios sobre Tendencias Sociales (GETS), being “foreigner” has an important role in characterising the working conditions of migrant workers, making it difficult to find a job for one person out of three in this group. As outlined by the 2016 Report issued by SOS Racismo, the majority of these people work in the informal economic sector, characterised by exploitation and instability, just to survive. The largest part of discrimination ends up in the domestic service sector, populated by women: a report issued by IOM in 2015, stated that “social situation, gender and ethnicity are factors that affect significantly in situations of social, domestic and labour inequality and vulnerability”. Moreover, there is an important gap regarding the gap, both between autochthonous population and

migrant one, and between males and females, with a difference of around eight thousand euros among Spanish and Ecuadorian male workers (25.675,17€ against 17.325€), and around six thousand euros concerning women of both groups (19.514,58€ against 13.520€) (INE 2015);

- Housing access: a report issued by Human Rights Watch in 2014 stated that one of the demographic groups most impacted by the mortgage crisis is that of immigrants. Moreover, people tend to leave their houses when the percentage of migrants in their area starts to rise, creating a sort of ghettoization which ends up in a degradation of the whole area and in a discrimination of the people living there;
- Healthcare exclusion: in May 2016, the *Comité para la Eliminación de la Discriminación Racial* defined itself as "worried" regarding the fact that "Decree-Law 16/2012 restricted access to universal health care for migrants in an irregular situation", defining it as a source of negative outcomes regarding migrants' health. These people, living in a state of vulnerability, These people do not always have access to basic services and medical care even though they live in a vulnerable environment. NGOs and nonprofit organisations are therefore working to ensure that migrants' rights are recognized in this case. Both the 2008 financial crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic crisis, both of which brought on growing social inequality and budget cuts to health care, had a detrimental effect on this element of migrants' lives.

2.3.2.2. Discriminations regarding Ecuadorian women in Spain

Migrant women in Spain are often subjected to prejudices and poorly judged from the environment they grew up in and "ran away from". However, women who were migrants or refugees frequently experienced racial or ethnic prejudice in addition to gender discrimination in their host societies. We cannot disregard the social exclusion elements that are produced by all of this, such as the salary difference and the challenges single women face in finding homes. Many women are forced to involve their careers to find a job, ending up in unskilled working fields, for the larger part the social reproduction one: however, many of them are still in a situation of irregularity,

which prevents them to be granted any right, including that to health (CEAR 2016). In many cases, migrant women's health is seen as an irrelevant issue, despite the largest part of HIV-positive people in 2014 were migrant women (*Alianza por la Solidaridad, Asociación de Investigación y Especialización sobre Temas Iberoamericanos* 2016) : these people are being left out even from primary health-care. In many cases these women are victims of sexual and gender based violence.

The case of Ecuadorian women is not different from what has been presented so far. Only a third of these women are included in the social security system, they have temporary jobs which forces them into instability and insecurity, and leaves them in an irregular legal status. Camacho (2010) presents many data, regarding in particular the discrimination these women face in the labour market. Among the women she interviewed, around 61% of them declared to have been exploited during their stay in Spain, in particular through very low salaries and the unrecognition of their rights by their employers. Since most of them are undocumented migrants, many employers felt like they could abuse them, since they could not report their behaviour to anyone and therefore could not receive any protection. Moreover, around 23% of them declared to have experienced racist and xenophobic attacks due to their origins and their condition of migrants, using degradation and offensive words to offend them, coming both from their co-workers, their employees or their clients. Ecuadorian migrants, however, according to a publication by the Colectivo Ioé (2002) are the group most prone to denounce abuses and discrimination with respect to any other nationality.

These Ecuadorian immigrants in Spain experience psychological suffering due to racial discrimination. The effects of discrimination may be increased for people who are struggling financially and for those who lack financial support (A Llácer *et al.* 2009).

2.3.3. Ecuadorian migrant women's health

Minority discrimination experiences can be unpleasant and have an adverse effect on one's health. Stressful situations for minority immigrants include being denied suitable housing, having unstable or dangerous employment, and encountering delays or obstacles when trying to get services. Discrimination can have an indirect impact on mental health by creating social exclusion and other economic and social issues, which in turn raise the likelihood of health risk exposure, disease susceptibility, and access to healthcare services. Depending on the scale item taken into account, these immigrants from Ecuador report experiencing racial discrimination on a regular basis, with a sizable percentage describing it as an occasional occurrence. One fifth of the immigrants from Ecuador living in Spain said they were subjected to persistent discrimination, mainly due to their poverty and racial origin.

2.3.3.1 Migrants' physical health

Due to cultural barriers, social degradation, guilt, and the resulting alienation from her surroundings, the person experiences constant trauma throughout the migration process; these traumas can increase a subject's psychophysical vulnerability, making already dangerous situations worse or even leading to the development of new ones (Sundquist et al. 1995; Gonzalez et al. 1999). Due to poor living conditions or a higher prevalence of the disease in the nation or region from which they come, migrants may be more susceptible to infectious diseases like TB, tuberculosis, SARS, and STDs. Due to the low access to social and health care, lifestyle-related diseases also exhibit worse conditions as they frequently go undiagnosed and deteriorate over time. It is crucial to include immigrants in health programs because it will help them integrate and lessen the stress and discrimination they constantly experience. Although stress certainly plays a significant role, your symptoms are typically psychological rather than physical, and when they are physical, they frequently somatize the underlying issue (Achotegui, 2009).

2.3.3.2. Migrants' mental health

The migration process is usually demanding, and this is why it can result in the development of illnesses related to the psychological stress that migrants experience

(Achotegui 2008). However, the circumstances under which they immigrated were not the same as those of today: Joseba Achotegui provides a compelling illustration of the deterioration in his first book on Ulysses syndrome. Achotegui teaches the three qualities that set us apart from migrations of the 20th and 21st centuries in the same book:

- the division of families;
- complete alienation from the host society and a severe lack of prospects;
- governments' criminalization of migration.

For these reasons, the scientific community has started to examine in greater detail the effects of this unfavourable shift in attitude and, subsequently, in the manner that migration is managed, showing an interest in the migrant population's psychological well-being. Joseba Achotegui, who initially discussed Ulysses syndrome in 2002, is one of the issues.

This syndrome, also known as "migratory stress" or "grief," is a manifestation of the negative aspects of migration. It affects the migrant's identity and creates a divide between "those who stay" and "those who leave" in society. (Achotegui 2019).

In the last two decades migrants have been exposed, as most of the population, to various challenges: the financial crisis of 2008, which hit in a sensible way the Spanish economy and its labour market, and the Covid-19 crisis. The multiple stressors they were already exposed to were amplified by these situations, leading them to a crossroad: stay or go? This issue is going to be at the centre of the first part of the next chapter.

2.4 The role of transnational families

The family, which can be understood as narrow or broad, as the one of birth or the one that each person creates, serves as the conduit between the individual and the outside world. The family thus shapes the individual, defining his rights and obligations, instilling values, and providing more or less stable economic opportunities. According to this concept, these problems could be what prompts people to migrate (Lagomarsino and Torre, 2005).

A minimum of one kid under the age of 18 was abandoned in Ecuador by 34.7% of migrant women and 38.8% of males, according to the ENEMDU study conducted in Ecuador in 2007. 36.8% of Ecuadorian women in Spain have left behind children or minors.

2.4.1. The role of families in the decision to migrate

Families, as underlined in the work by Francesca Lagomarsino and Andrea Torre (2005) can be understood as characterised by different factors.

One of those is that families are in a strict relationship with the society and culture that surrounds them. In the patriarchal culture of Ecuador, in the economic scarcity of the country, in the social and gender inequalities by which it is crossed, Ecuadorian families root their ideas regarding migration, which translates in more or less opportunities for the members of the family to leave the country.

Another important role is that played by the quantity and, even more, the quality of the relationships among the family members: if one has weak ties with its family, and therefore with the society with whom it mediates, it is easier to leave (as in the case of younger people). On the other hand, if one has strong ties with its family, this can have a negative impact on migration, leading him or her to dismiss the idea of emigrating, or even if they migrate, they do it with a lot of bad feelings, such as sadness and guilt.

However, families can be also one of the main pushing factors to leave, especially considering women migration: through the migration process, women can gain freedom, independence, start a new life with themselves at the centre and not focused only on other people's needs, wants and desires, freeing themselves also of the socio-cultural norms that characterise their life in *machistas* countries, such as Ecuador.

As outlined in the job of Linsday Dudley (2013), migration is sometimes perceived by both the family and the migrating person as an economic plan to boost the total income of the household. Families decide which of their members will move because they have the best chance of earning the most money with the least amount of danger (Massey et al. 2003). Because of this, when it comes to Ecuadorian migration to Spain, many families decide to designate as the migrating person a women, because of their relatively easier access to the Spanish labour market, as we saw before.

When a member of a family decides to migrate, the family itself has to change, focusing on itself, changing its characteristics, the role of each one of the members and its expectations towards the migrating person. The family's capacity to negotiate migration is frequently determined by the woman's age and marital status. Young unmarried women are more mobile since they have less ties to their families back home. Women without spouses, children, or both frequently have less domestic duties to perform. Some families actively urge their daughters to immigrate, especially childless, unmarried daughters (Dudley 2013). However, when a woman with a husband and/or children decides to migrate, the family is usually not as happy with her decision. The majority of the time, migrant women discuss their choice to move among their immediate and extended families. When mothers leave their children behind in Ecuador, the denial process involves choosing a substitute caretaker. If both the mother and father are on board, the father will take care of the kids while the mother is away. However, female migrants frequently choose having a grandma or an aunt take care of the kids instead of a man. Wives and mothers relocate to better the standard of living for their family. To ensure household economic stability, female migrants in Ecuador make the sacrifice to leave their homeland.

2.4.2 The role of families in the decision to stay

Families also play a crucial role in the settlement decisions, and in longer-term integration of migrants. The integrity of family life, the ability to form the family and to sustain it can be an important part in the integration process in the receiving country. However, the OECD has stated that compared to economic migrants who arrive and remain on their own, family migrants "tend to face more integration challenges and have usually less favourable outcomes" (OECD 2017). Additionally, how a migrant engages and the consequences they encounter may alter depending on changes in their own lives, the lives of their families, and the nation and community in which they dwell. Poor integration results can be caused by social injustices and obstacles, such as prejudice, as much as or more than by the traits or deeds of a single immigrant or immigrant family (Charsley 2011).

The procedures of immigration, integration, and settlement can be particularly difficult and complicated for immigrant families with children. There is compelling evidence that the main driver of family migration may be parents' hopes for the employment and prosperity of their children in the future (COFACE 2012). Families may decide to remain longer and relocate permanently when children adjust into a new setting, especially when their parents believe they have been successfully assimilated into the educational system (Ryan and Sales 2013; Kay and Trevena 2018). However, kids frequently need a certain amount of specialised help and guidance to adjust to a new school setting, make friends, and improve their English (Sime and Fox 2015). Additionally, primary migrants sometimes find it difficult or impossible to relocate with their children or to rejoin with them shortly after their relocation due to immigration laws and fees. As a result, children might not be allowed to move and live with their parents until they are sufficiently financially stable or have satisfied any other immigration-related requirements for accommodations. Even after family reunion, this can lead to difficult relationships between partners and their children (Sime 2018; Bonizzoni 2009).

Moreover, as outlined by Sylvie Démurger (2015), families “left behind” often have many benefits with the migration of a family member, which may include

- Better economic possibilities, obtained through the remittances (which, for what concerns our case, are sent in higher number and with more money from women rather than man);
- Reduced need for child labour, so children of immigrant parents can go to school for longer period of time: in the case of Ecuadorian women, one of the main reasons behind their high remittances is exactly that of sending their children to the best schools for as long as possible, giving them the opportunity to scale the social ladder in their future;
- Better conditions in the family possibilities of accessing food, healthcare and sanity, but also concerning their working possibilities, giving them the chance to invest and become entrepreneurs at home.

The combination of all these really positive outcomes is what brings Ecuadorian women to decide to stay in Spain and work there for a long period of time, gaining money and helping their families in Ecuador.

2.4.3 Transnational families: how Ecuadorian women in Spain manage their ties?

As outlined by Arlie Russell Hochschild, care is not simply a commodity that travels from one place to another, creating 'deficits and surpluses' (Hochschild 2003), but it may be seen in light of practical and ethical obligations for the perpetuation of wellbeing and for the development of social dynamics that increase life opportunities (Aguirre Vidal 2019).

Many authors define care as "being present and attending to another person's needs"; however, for migrant mothers, it is indeed impossible to be physically present for their children. The dilemma then becomes how to manage this attentive universe, full of activities and responsibilities, with all the everyday administration it necessitates, including domestic aid and the commitment to others from a distance.

If the most practical issues are impossible for them to fulfil, forcing them to leave these primary care activities to other people, being thousands of kilometres away, Ecuadorian migrant women still try to be as present as possible through various acts. Gladis Aguirre Vidal (2019) presented various cases of Ecuadorian women living in Spain: what most of them did to be in some ways "present" was to leave their children to a close relative, like a sister or their own mother, while sending money, visiting them as much as possible and keeping in contact with them thanks to technology. Many women, therefore, focus on remitting values, sending money and various types of goods to their families at home.

Many women rely on what Aguirre Vidal defines as "caring through promises": many promise to come back, or to take their families with them "when everything will be sorted out"; however, due to legal restrictions, insecurity, lack of stability, the current and past economic crisis, it has been quite difficult for them to actually reunite with their families. It is indeed easier for them to care through "the material house": a house that is not only the actual home, but which includes an idea, a project through which the family can seek and pursue a sort of continuity, can feel like it is going to be "their place

from where to start their new life", as well as all the laboural, *amigueras*, familial relationships and ties. For sure, one of the primary methods to demonstrate care and participation is to build, enhance, or rebuild a home, and this symbolism is made much more clear in the context of migration. The procedure serves as a standard by which people assess migrants' devotion to those left behind.

Moreover, as anticipated, women tend to migrate with a sense of guilt, which undoubtedly leads them to feel a strong sense of commitment with respect to people at home, with whom they feel "in debt". Families and social life are built on a foundation of debt, debt-related sentiments, and societal expectations. As outlined by Aguirre Vidal, families, friends, and clients are all a part of an intense life of commitments and attentiveness, which involves them in strong social networks that may offer favours, information, and returns. However, this needs significant effort and emotional labour, which may or may not match expectations. Women's responsibilities and lifestyles of constant attention are so heavy that their efforts are sometimes referred to as sacrifices, called "*compromisos*".

A crucial role in maintaining Spain-Ecuador families ties is that of ICT. As ICTs give auditory and visible opportunities for remaining in contact and of "being together" in spite of distance, they may in fact promote connection, lower barriers, and close the gap in long-distance social engagement. However, under such a perspective, virtual and physical connectedness could be given too much weight, leading to a tendency to neglect some of the impacts of distance. This technological means are more frequently used in the first phases of migration, when the sense of loneliness and homesickness are higher, and the economic and legal possibilities of visiting one's family are fewer. This has been made easier for Latin-American migrants and especially Ecuadorians, since most of the *locutorios* (internet points) are owned by latinos (Tymczuk and Leifsen 2012).

However, when the legal situation of migrants is stabilised, they try to visit their families at home as much as possible (obviously, these trips are quite expensive, especially for the underpaid and exploited migrants). This achieved stability allows migrant Ecuadorian women to send higher remittances, to be more present by adding return visits to the "normal" means of remittances and ICT-based communication.

Intense physical labour and mental control are needed among women, both those who remain and those who migrate to other nations, to share care. Women can struggle to balance their aspirations of family life, taking care of a partner spouse or their many responsibilities, and enjoying the anticipated benefits and respite that come with caring for other women. There are instances when the nuclear family structure and the ideal of the "unified family" collide, although these are often high-pressure situations (Aguirre Vidal 2019). To conclude, relational closeness is achievable also in transnational, long-distance social interaction; virtual communication, and the connections that money and other circulated valuables and consumer goods produce are “real” enough (Tymczuk and Leifsen 2012).

Chapter 3: Women coming back: the case of Ecuadorian female migrants returning from Spain

In this last chapter the author will analyse the opposite flow, that of women coming back from Spain to Ecuador, closing the "migration process", as defined by Herrera.

Again, after a brief introduction on the factors involved in the decision of "going back", a focus will be put on the role of transnational families in this process: in fact, as underlined by Vega Solís and Martínez-Buján the main reason why women tend to go back home is not to be found in a socio-economic crisis, but to take care of their children, family and home.

Later, their laboural status will be analysed: taken that the majority of women migrating from Ecuador is not young, but already in the middle age, and that they are usually unable to come out of the social reproductive labour niche, once they come back they are usually older and without any additional competence, so it is not easy for them to fit back into the Ecuadorian labour market. Last, we will look again deeper on the psychological and social impact "going back home" has on these women.

The aim of this chapter is to focus on the "coming back" that, in most cases, is implied in migration, that in the author's view has to be looked at not as an event, but as a perpetual and circular process.the author will analyse the opposite flow, that of women coming back from Spain to Ecuador, closing the "migration process", as defined by Herrera.

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3.1 The migration of return of Ecuadorian women

Ecuadorian women have been the pioneers in the migration to Spain in the last decade of the 20th century, and as we saw, compone the majority of Ecuadorians in the country. When the 2008 economic and financial crisis arose, they were the ones who stayed there the most, in comparison to men, who due to a more severe impact on their jobs have been the first and the most to leave, and to come back to Ecuador. However, the phenomenon of return migration has had an impact on women as well, as will be presented in the next pages.

3.1.1 Theories of return migration

Upon the phenomenon of returning migration, there are various schools of thought, which have developed many theories regarding what could be the most important factors influencing the decision to come back to one's country. The most important of them are well described in the work of Juan Iglesias (2017).

According to the Neoclassical perspective, the cost-benefit analysis of salary differential between home and host countries, as well as the likelihood of attaining the higher predicted wages in the latter, is the basis for migrants' decisions to stay or return to their home country. The return is therefore a consequence of an initial miscalculation

of the benefits that could have been achievable through migration (Correa-Quezada and Tituaña Castillo 2017).

For what concerns the New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) theory, the choices of whether to remain or return are influenced by household plans to circumvent the limitations of the local economy and reduce the dangers of unemployment and poverty through a diversification of sources of income (Massey, 1999). Whether migrants have accomplished their household migration goals determines whether they will remain or return.

Looking at the premises made by the Structuralist approach, it explains why immigrants make their decisions depending on the large-scale events that take place in both their countries of origin and their countries of destination (Massey, 1999), and in particular, whether such events have grown substantial enough to become strong pull factors for emigration (Cassarino, 2004). The structuralism viewpoint considers political, institutional, and social variables in addition to economic ones to explain why immigrants choose to remain or leave.

The last theory analysed by Iglesias is the transnational one, which is centred on the premise that immigrants keep close relationships and social customs with their communities of origin while also assimilating into the new community. Examples of these social customs include regular communication, remittances, investments, etc (Massey, 1999). Analysis of the data gathered in both situations is used to make decisions about whether to stay or return (Cassarino, 2004).

Moreover, Ronny Correa-Quezada and María del Cisne Tituaña Castillo (2017) present other interesting theories regarding the factors involved in migration.

The Human Capital Theory considers return displacements as the result of a process of negative selectivity in the face of the immigrant's inability to flourish in the country of destination and overcome the challenges of migration; skills and education acquired in the country of origin are frequently difficult to transfer and will therefore be better compensated in the country of origin than in the country of destination, which implies a selection of return migration with respect to the immigrant's ability to overcome the challenges of migration.

Other theories presented by them focus on the unfavourable conditions migrants have found in the arriving country (Theory of Deception); one of the most interesting ones however is that of Social Networks, according to which migration can be not only supported but also caused by giving information, economic help and support. Therefore, social networks are a component of social capital and, in the same way that they encourage migration, they also affect the likelihood of return by disseminating information on cases or accumulated experiences of return in the family, community, and country of origin. This explains why there are accumulated outflows of migrants from a country of origin to the same destination.

However, the crucial theory for the upcoming work is the transnational one, which is centred on the premise that immigrants keep close relationships and social customs with their communities of origin while also assimilating into the new community. Examples of these social customs include regular communication, remittances, investments, etc (Massey, 1999). Analysis of the data gathered in both situations is used to make decisions about whether to stay or return (Cassarino, 2004). Since they enable the migrant to plan his or her return through ongoing contacts, sporadic visits, remittances, and other methods, the constant interchange of information and knowledge serve as the facilitators of the returnee's integration into his or her community of origin.

However, as underlined in the work by Cristina Vega Solís and Raquel Martínez-Buján (2016), it is important to remember that gender has been analysed as part of the issue since very little time, not by all the theoretical frameworks perspective and was given very little attention in the study of the field. It is therefore important to highlight the experiences of female migrants and the part played by women as active participants in displacement.

3.1.2 Factors involved in the Ecuadorian return migration

What we see is that some migrants voluntarily returned to their countries. From the point of view of the migrants, they returned to their country because they were unemployed, without housing in many cases and without any social protection (Joseph 2020).

Most of the factors involved in the Ecuadorian return migration have to do with the personal characteristics of migrants, the conditions of the host and the home country. Taka Demetradze *et al* (2018) perfectly described all of these factors.

- Age: it has an important role in return migration processes; most people decide not to return migrate in their productive years, in which they have higher possibilities of economic gains. However, some can decide to return during this period because of the decision of starting a family. On the other hand, at retirement age, elderly people go back home to find comfort in their native state after taking use of overseas work markets' benefits.
- Education level: regarding its role in returning migrants, the education element is up for debate. Others claim that people with higher levels of education are more likely to stay in the host country rather than return-migrate because they are more likely to be dissatisfied with life back home, where they are unlikely to use their degrees. Some authors claim that higher education positively influences the decision to return home. Education helps in the formation of the human capital, in which other factors, such as religion and social class, take part.
- Social capital in home and host states: Bonds and connections to people in their home state and the host state, such as friends and family members, have been noted by many academics as significant factors in returning migrants' decisions to return home or continue their movement.
- Economic development of the origin country: Many scholars suggest that one possible motivation to persuade migrants to return is the economic growth of the state of origin. Many scholars suggest that one possible motivation to persuade migrants to return is the economic growth of the state of origin.
- Employment opportunities: multiple authors have noted that employment plays a large role in the decision to either come back to the country of origin or not. If the lack of work opportunities is itself one of the main causes behind migration, the possibility of having a good-paid job, close to home and family can be a more convenient choice on the emotional cost level.
- Host country migration policies: since many migrants struggle to obtain legal recognition, their chances of ever going home are practically nonexistent under

draconian immigration laws. Additionally, many states attempt to implement border control measures, although they sometimes are insufficient to completely stop immigration into the nation.

- Origin country policies regarding return migration:many governments aim to prompt return migration by implementing policies designed to create a hospitable and desirable environment for migrants to return to. The lack of such policies in the state of origin can negatively affect the decision to return-migrate, but if the country of origin implements policies that aim to ensure ease of adaptation of returning migrants to the labour market in the state of origin, the migrants are more likely to return.

The new focus on gender allowed scholars to believe that women and men weigh and dynamically prioritise various parts of their lives in migration, and that decision-making reasons are not necessarily rooted to the classical factors of employment and money (Rivera 2011). Many women are experiencing controversial feelings about "coming back home": some of them fear that this will imply a loss in their hard-gained autonomy, others have a strong perception of what their duties as mothers are, and therefore see their emigration to their origin country as a way to fulfil their maternal role. This, according to Vega Solís and Martínez-Buján (2016), helps women in relativising the weight of the economic and financial crisis of our times in their return migration process.

Ronny Correa-Quezada and María del Cisne Tituaña Castillo 2017 analyse the impact of all different factors in the case of Ecuadorian migrants, in particular gender, education, income, working position and opportunities, and age. In this case, age and education are not seen as relevant in influencing migratory processes. Regarding gender they found out that it is more common for men to return to Ecuador rather than women (the probability is 2.6 times higher): this is probably due to the scarce possibilities the Spanish labour market has for males in times of crisis, while the domestic and care sector in which women work are less touched by such crises. For what concerns income, they state that people gaining less than a thousand euros per month have a 3.5 times higher possibility of trying to come back to Ecuador. Their findings show that criteria like age, education, and having family members who have returned are not

crucial for determining whether someone would successfully return to Ecuador or remain in Spain following the crisis.

3.1.3 The case of Ecuador

Many Ecuadorians escaped the financial crisis in the 1990s by moving to Spain. These migrants are currently among those who are most severely impacted by both the Covid-19 pandemic's consequences and the global financial crisis. Relocation has become a desirable alternative for many migrants as a result of the consequences of the crises as well as the remigration plans of the Spanish and Ecuadorian states: before that, few Ecuadorian migrants really made the decision to return to their home country because it was a topic that was mostly talked or fantasised about.

3.1.3.1 Spanish and Ecuadorian migration policies

Just before the 2008 financial crisis, Ecuador and Spain agreed on a common policy of return. Both countries had good reasons to promote this policy: Spain aimed at reducing the number of migrants coming from Ecuador through the family reunification processes, while Ecuador wanted to try and stop the outflow of human capital linked to migration and the processes of family disgregation, which ended up impoverishing the country through time. When the 2008 financial crisis emerged, this improved the expected effects of such policy: for the first time since the end of 1990s, the number of Ecuadorians migrating to Spain was radically reduced, also thanks to the fewer job opportunities and the higher unemployment rates Spain was facing. Moreover, there was an overturning of the phenomenon: the crisis led Ecuadorians in Spain to start thinking of coming back to Ecuador as an actual possibility. This was helped by the two plans presented by the involved countries.

The Ecuadorian Remigration Plan, also known as “Bienvenidos a casa” started in 2008 with the change of the Ecuadorian constitution, through which the State “shall promote their ties with Ecuador, facilitate family reunification and encourage their voluntary return” (*Constitucion de la Republica del Ecuador* 2008). The plan, which is coordinated by various (non-governmental) organisations, includes a number of initiatives, projects, and funds, including the abolition of taxes on household goods and

vehicles, funding for microbusinesses (the "*El Cucayo*" Fund), housing subsidies (the "*Bono de vivienda para personas migrantes*"), and counselling. Reintegration into the educational and healthcare systems is part of the plan, and a specialised bank, called the Banco del Migrante will be established to invest migrants' financial assets in a "productive" manner. Demand for the plan was quite low when it was introduced in 2008, and both the general public and academic opinion were unfavourable to the political project. However, the number of immigrants applying for the programs covered by the plan has steadily increased since the start of the global economic crisis (Schurr and Stolz 2010). According to the Ecuadorian government, over 5000 families have been supported by the Ecuadorian Plan.

Another crucial part in this migratory flow was that of the Spanish government Plan, known as the "*Plan de Retorno Voluntario*", issued by Spain in 2008, which addressed migrants from 20 different States and promoted their return to the origin country. Most of the immigrant grant applicants for the program are from Morocco, Ecuador, and Colombia. The program gives legal immigrants who have successfully assimilated into the formal Spanish labour market the option of receiving all of their unemployment benefits in two instalments when they voluntarily return to their home countries: 40% of their total benefits are paid at the time of departure, and the remaining 60% are paid one month later. This signifies that the immigrant (and everyone else listed on his or her residence visa) must leave the country within 30 days and are prohibited from working for at least three years in Spain. This plan however did not have the expected success: after one year, of the 100.000 eligible people, only around 6000 had applied to the return program (Schurr and Stolz 2010).

Both these plans were faced with criticisms: the Ecuadorian one was perceived as potentially ineffective and "a rhetoric exercise" (especially for the low funds invested and the impossibility of incrementing such investments), while the Spanish one was attacked due to its characteristic of being extremely strict and taking away the possibility of a future job and a future life in Spain to those who decided to leave (Schurr and Stolz 2010). On the other hand however, many scholars perceived them, especially the Ecuadorian one as a positive possibility. Herrera (2008) stated that "Correa has positioned the migration issue in a more serious way than any previous

president". Moreover, Spain has been sending funds to many of the sending countries to finance development projects (AECIECUADOR 2009).

Since 2009, the Ecuadorian population has been exposed to political discourse from both Ecuador and Spain that encourages them to return, either because of the crisis in Spain or because Ecuador is portrayed as a country of opportunities.

3.1.3.2. Types of “return”

As we saw, many Ecuadorians living in Spain decided to return to Ecuador. However, the return process encompasses a variety of behaviours of return and re-migration to third countries rather than a definitive return (King and Christou, 2011). As outlined by Juan Iglesias (2017) we can outline x types of return migration.

A first type of practise is one in which a prior, firm choice to return has been expedited by the crisis: in this case, the temporality of the migration process was already clear before the crisis outbreak, and the main aim was that to gain as much as possible before coming back to the *madrepatria*. This is the case in which probably the migratory project had reached its end or in which the involved person acknowledges that the same possibility of reaching one’s objectives will no longer be possible given the new crisis scenario. Due to the prior planning, the existence of assets and ongoing relationships with friends and family in the country of origin, as well as the preparatory process, this sort of return typically brings certain guarantees of successful reintegration (Cassarino, 2004).

Another return pattern is one in which the crisis' unfavourable effects on migration plans in Spain have rendered them unviable, resulting in migrants' permanent return to Ecuador (Cassarino 2004). The concept of remaining usually quickly changes to the thought of returning in this sort of return pattern, which suggests that the immigrant is not well prepared for the return as the little resources gained have typically all been invested in sustaining settlement in Spain. The migrant involved in this pattern is therefore usually full of fear and anxiety regarding their life plans in Ecuador and their reintegration processes, plus a sense of frustration and failure.

A third type of return pattern is one of temporary return. In this practise we can find the migrants who “are waiting for the storm to pass” to then go back to Spain; those

who are trying to “leave the crisis behind and try their luck in Ecuador for a while”;and those who go back temporarily to Ecuador to try and restructure the family unit. All these projects have in common the temporality, the lack of desire to stay in Ecuador and the perspective of “going somewhere else” (Iglesias 2017).

However, even if for a limited period of time, this re-emigration back at home has some implications, especially if those coming back are Ecuadorian women, who, as we saw, had left their families behind.

3.1.3.3. Ecuadorian women coming back

It can indeed be highlighted that gender-specific decision-making processes exist for both migration and remigration. In the cases of the women interviewed by Schurr and Stolz (2010), most of them stated that their migratory experience had not been neither positive nor negative, but very complex and ambivalent. This is the root question under their difficulty in the decision regarding their future: to stay or to go? Most women’s ultimate decision is influenced by economic, emotional and cultural reasons: if on one hand they think of the economic and labour difficulties they face in Spain and of the sacrifice they have to make regarding their children and family, on the other one most of them fear that coming back would equate losing their freedom, their autonomy and their independence from their authoritarian families, whose thoughts are deeply rooted in the patriarchal and machista way of thinking typical of Latin American countries.

This man-focused way of thinking is the root of many problems for many migrants: in fact, just after their decision to leave Ecuador, they often experience what is known as “guilt-tripping” by their families: if they leave, they allegedly do not care enough for their children or are too egoistic and greedy. Women are often the object of familial behaviours that make them feel extremely guilty and almost ashamed of their decision to leave their nation (Cortés and Oso 2017). Then, further pressure was put on these women to go back to Ecuador as a result of the onset of the economic crisis and the development of impromptu measures to encourage their return. Many of the Ecuadorian women who immigrated to Spain made the decision to go back because they wanted to fulfil their commitments as "absent moms" who had left their home, husband, and kids behind. In many cases the goodness of Ecuadorian female migrants had been

questioned, challenging their ability to fulfil their parental duties given the amount of time they had been absent. Therefore, some women choose to come home after a long absence in order to regain their lost status and to take care of their family.

In the case of Ecuadorian women coming back from Spain, Gioconda Herrera (2016) analyses how in reality, in most cases women return to Ecuador just temporarily. Their return, which in many cases is strictly linked to family and caring issues: coming back is therefore possible through the presence of economic, cultural and emotional bonds with the homeland. Social capital, keeping significant networks with their communities of origin throughout the migration project, and the ability to move between countries as a result of obtaining Spanish nationality or permanent residency are all factors that make it possible for people to return (Herrera 2016). Feminine return migration is quite expensive on the emotional cost side: first of all, many women are forced to leave their hard-earned autonomy, they have to renegotiate expectations regarding their gender roles in the family and communities related to social reproduction and care; moreover, women usually face adverse structural conditions in relation to the labour market and experience situations of loss of economic independence. Moreover, many of them have a hard time trying to integrate back into their sending society and into their family. For all these reasons, plus the fact that many of these women preserve their ties to Spain, with both friends and employers, are among the factors that can favour their decision to leave again (Herrera 2016).

3.2 The reintegration of Ecuadorian women returning from Spain

An increasing number of people are returning to their countries of origin for short or extended stays, which is frequently followed by back-and-forth travel between two or more countries or migration to new destinations. Migration is therefore not to be considered as a linear phenomenon that begins with emigration and ends with permanent settlement in a new country. As a result, reintegration into the societies and communities that absorb migrants and their return to their home countries or third nations are crucial aspects of global mobility.

3.2.1 What is reintegration?

According to the definition provided by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in their report "Effective return and reintegration of migrant workers" issues in 2019, there is no univocal and universal definition of migration. However, according to the idea of Jean-Pierre Cassarino (2014) it can be defined as the "Process through which a return migrant participates in the social, cultural, economic and political life of the country of origin". Therefore reintegration can be seen as a multilevel and multidimensional project, which involves the returning migrants in all the aspects of their lives, both public and private. Moreover, according to the definition provided by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 2004, the apex of the reintegration process can be seen as the "universal enjoyment of full political, civil, economic, social and cultural rights".

The ultimate aim of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) is that everybody should be guaranteed the possibility of a sustainable and effective reintegration in the sending society. In both policy and practise, the idea of sustainable return has grown in acceptance. It can be taken literally to mean a circumstance in which migratory workers remain in their country of origin over a protracted length of time without making an effort to emigrate again. However, it is still unclear if complete lack of cross-border mobility may serve as a sign of sustained return and reintegration. When returnees have attained levels of economic independence, social stability in their communities, and mental health that enable them to manage the factors that drive migration, reintegration can be deemed to be sustainable. After achieving sustainable reintegration, returnees might choose to migrate in the future rather than having to do so out of need (IOM, 2017).

Another crucial aspect of returning migration is that it has to be effective, meaning that migrants are able to reintegrate into their families, communities, the economy, and society constitutes effective reintegration. Effective return, from the perspective of a nation of origin, implies that its migrant employees return in a secure and respectable way after fulfilling their migration goals abroad. To achieve that, emitting and receiving countries should cooperate to facilitate the safe and dignified return of migrant workers,

also by creating programs which might facilitate their reintegration in the returning society (ILO, 2019).

3.2.1.1 Why are State programs so important for reintegration?

As we saw in the previous chapter, States have an important role in shaping migration processes, in particular through the creation of migration policies and creating opportunities in their labour market. This is the case for return migration as well: State programs have a central role in defining the migration flows.

Many among the people returning to their home country are experiencing high levels of stress, and experiencing a number of challenges which can affect the migrant's possibility of reintegration into the society, the labour market and to start again with their life (ILO 2019). Moreover, returning migrants have diverse needs, depending on the outcome and the process of their migration journey, but also on the possibilities they have once back home: migrant workers encounter challenges upon returning, including psychosocial concerns, unemployment, inadequate pay, and a lack of money. Therefore, through a State intervention, it would be easier for these people to reintegrate successfully in Ecuadorian society.

Another way in which State programs can impact migration of return and reintegration is by fueling the development potential of the country: returning migrants can have a role in improving the development of the country, since they may also bring back financial capital in addition to remittances previously sent and may encourage investments in new businesses. enable the transfer of skills and values learned abroad for the benefit of the local economy (Cassarino 2014).

However, it is important that, to be effective, these programs respect some basic rules. They must cover all return migrant workers throughout the whole return migration process, guaranteeing their dignity at all times; they ought to safeguard and respect the migrant workers' human and labour rights; they should be based on evidences which highlighted what groups are the ones more in need, and regarding to which sectors work must be done, especially focusing on the issue of gender and all the possible vulnerabilities of migrants, guaranteeing forms of active participation, social protection coverage and international protection.

These initiatives should support the evaluation of migrant workers' needs in terms of the economic, social, psychosocial, and cultural aspects of reintegration support. While some returnees would simply require little assistance, often in the form of information, vulnerable workers, such as coerced and premature returns, abused migrant workers, deportees, and trafficking victims, require more focused involvement. To sum up, it is possible to say that in order to be actually effective, safe and sustainable, governmental programs regarding migration should face all the issues arising from the returning migration process and the reintegration of returning migrants.

3.2.1.2 Issues concerning reintegration

In order to encourage sustainable return and sustainable reintegration, several governments and stakeholders must overcome numerous obstacles.

A first issue to be analysed is the actual data on returnees and their patterns of reintegration in the society: without having to possibility to know the numbers we are talking about, is very hard for States to decide on policies and funding to be assigned to this theme.

Another major issue is that of the economic situation in the home country. If the underlying economic issues, unemployment, poverty, and conflicts that initially promoted outmigration have not materially altered, migrant workers and the diaspora may have less reason to return, and the national labour market may not be able to accommodate returning migrant workers. The general economic, political, and social conditions of the nation of origin have a significant impact on reintegration policies and a person's reintegration process. In the case of Ecuador, even if the economic and financial conditions were stabler than at the end of 1990s, and the economy was generally better off, there was still a huge disparity with what the migrants returning from Spain had experienced there. Linked to this, Ecuador has also experienced a constraint in the available resources for the country.

Another significant problem is the absence of social infrastructure, which frequently leaves migrants on their own due to insufficient and ineffective job assistance, a lack of knowledge about available services and programmes, and inadequate social protection coverage.

Regarding the social side of the issue, the stigmatisation of migrants has to be addressed. Because of their unsuccessful migration attempt, loss of family assets upon return owing to debt, and forced return or deportation from target countries, returnees may encounter shame and prejudice in their own communities and families. These migrant workers may need psychiatric counselling and help to confront and deal with their experiences. Migrant women may endure added stigma when their movement may be linked to sexual work and abuse (ILO 2019).

3.2.2. Addressing different types of reintegration

As it was already addressed, reintegration is a dynamic and multidimensional process. As a result, there are several forms of reintegration, including identificational, economic, social, cultural, and political. In the case of Ecuadorian returning migrants, the two most relevant issues regarding reintegration regard their social and economic situation.

Economic reintegration can be defined as "the way returned migrants try to form part again of Ecuador's economy, mainly through employment opportunities or credit facilities", while social integration is linked to the relationships returning migrants establish with family members, housing, education, and general social involvement, also through the means of dedicated organisations (Verlinden 2014).

3.2.2.1. Economic reintegration

Economic reintegration involves different issues, such as employment and savings. Concerning savings, many Ecuadorians leave Spain without important amounts of money, that will allow them to help their family only for a limited period of time.

Regarding employment, many returned Ecuadorians find it difficult to reenter the workforce, making it so that it often takes them up to a year to obtain employment (Verlinden 2014). Many migrants come back around 35 years old, without any proof of their working experience abroad since most Ecuadorians in Spain work informally for long periods of time. Moreover, employees are hesitant to employ returnees, and when they do so, they only offer the minimum salary, leaving migrants often unsatisfied and worried about their financial situation (Schurr and Stolz 2010). The study by Mercier et

al. (2016) suggests moreover the existence of a transnational unemployment trap, as well as more challenges for elderly and female returnees to swiftly obtain employment. The latter outcome does not appear to be particular to return migrants, but rather is consistent with the overall stresses of the labour market in Ecuador, despite the fact that women and older persons already have more difficulty finding jobs.

Many returnees decide to create small enterprises due to the difficulties they faced during the employment hunt and the skills they believe they developed during their time abroad. However, as was previously said, they don't return to Ecuador with a great savings; as a result, they would require a loan to start their business. However, due of the requirements state and private banks place (to apply for a loan, a credit history of at least a year is required), getting a loan is almost impossible in the initial years. This implies that in order to establish credit, returnees must wait at least a year and have a source of income throughout that time. As an alternative, they need to provide a guarantee or find a guarantor who will stand in for them (Verlinden 2014).

According to Hernández Basante et al. (2012), returnees experience deception and frustration as a result of their inability to get credit or work. Some returnees can be influenced to re-emigrate by these feelings.

3.2.2.2. Social reintegration

When they return home, Ecuadorian migrants face more than just economic difficulties; they may also find it challenging to adjust to culture differences between Ecuador and their new nation or everyday aspects of life in Ecuador. When Ecuadorian migrants arrive back home, they arrive in a country they do not recognise anymore (Verlinden 2014): the country has indeed changed since they left it, as many of the migrants interviewed by Heleen Verlinden recognise, through infrastructure improvements, better services and a more secure environment. However, not only the country has changed: upon return “one feels like a stranger in one’s own country. After so much time abroad, your identity changes.” (Verlinden 2014). Many migrants have adopted different values, different ideas and different habits during their voyage, and this has an influence on how they perceive the home country, and obviously, the people in the society.

Returnees need to re-acclimate to specific Ecuadorian norms and behaviours in order to feel socially integrated. Many returning citizens struggle to adapt to certain fundamental changes, including those in hygienic conditions, cuisine, and how people dress and speak. Different cultural gender standards can be a further barrier for female returns. According to Dudley (2013), conventional patriarchal practices and machista views in Ecuador force many Ecuadorian women who had gained more freedom within their families while living abroad to lose this empowerment once returning home. Ecuadorian returnees require emotional and financial help in order to overcome all the social and practical obstacles they encounter and to feel reintegrated into Ecuadorian society. Family members are more likely to give them this, although societal connections also play a part.

Overall, the social benefits of returning to Ecuador—the most significant of which is being surrounded by family—outweigh the drawbacks they experience for the vast majority of returnees.

Gioconda Herrera and Lucia Perez's (2018) study investigates the experience of return as a social process in order to understand the social reintegration of the returnee community. In the research, the social reintegration of returnees is examined in terms of their migration and employment patterns, as well as the various acquired social, cultural, and economic capitals and how these change over time in certain socio-historical circumstances. Their findings imply that social and cultural assets acquired before to leaving Ecuador rather than those acquired during the migration journey have a deeper relationship with the processes of return and integration. This runs counter to one of the premises made in the literature on migration and return, which claims that the experience of moving necessary implies benefits for the reintegration of returnees. The financial and economic aspects of migration were shown to be significant in this case, but they must be understood in the context of the structural inequality that these migrants have inserted themselves into both before and after migration. Indeed, the amount of capital that can be built throughout this experience is limited due to the highly segmented and segregated placement of the migrant population in particular low-skilled sectors; In addition, the crisis' experience not only made an unfavourable job market worse, but in numerous cases it also led to the loss of the little

assets people managed to accumulate when their mortgages became difficult to pay. Many of the returnees gave their homes to the banks as a result, losing their invested funds. Therefore, the assets obtained in Ecuador were the only thing that could be guaranteed in this scenario. Finally, the social reunification of these individuals with their original group and social surroundings is uncertain and linked to processes of labour insertion.

Moreover, the work by Herrera (2021) outlines the impact that Covid-19 pandemic has had on Latin American countries, such as Ecuador, underlining how this has led to an exacerbation of the already existing inequalities (in particular, socio-economic and gender-related ones). The whole continent had been experiencing violent processes of social precarisation, working issues and instability, already previously to this crisis. In this context, the covid-19 pandemic is exacerbating social inequalities in a migrant population that has already been subjected to processes of precarious social reproduction in recent years. This includes the migrants returning from European countries and the United States, for whom the social and the laboural reintegration have been deeply affected by the crisis, leaving them in unstable and difficult situations.

3.2.3. The Ecuadorian reintegration programs

As was seen before, the Ecuadorian Government has been addressing the topic of migration for many years now. Ecuador has an official policy for facilitating the reintegration of returning Ecuadorians: two of the most important ones were the Plan “Bienvenid@s a casa” and the Program “Returning Migrant, Ecuador is with You". By establishing three permanent sectoral task groups to undertake social, economic, and organisational programmes and to address the prevention of dangerous migration in accordance with the Organic Law on Human Mobility, the Foreign Ministry is trying to strengthen the reintegration of returnees.

3.2.3.1 The plan “Bienvenidos a casa” (2007)

The National Migrant Secretary (Secretaria Nacional del Migrante, SENAMI), which runs the "Welcome Home" pilot programme, was founded by Rafael Correa, the

president of Ecuador, in 2007. (Bienvenidos a Casa). By providing one-way plane tickets, duty-free storage for their possessions, and other transitional support in the form of aid, this initiative has encouraged families to migrate back home. Through strong programme marketing, the initiative constituted "a substantial change from past administrations in focusing on the diaspora". Furthermore, it supported immigrants' start-up ideas and assisted them in their job hunt to aid in their reintegration process. The small business awards are a component of Fondo el Cucayo (Cucayo Fund), which allows retuned migrants to submit a business plan and receive up to $15,000 in assistance to launch a microenterprise in Ecuador. El Banco del Migrante (Migrant's Bank), where returning migrants can apply for up to $20,000 to fund a household renovation project, a microenterprise project, or a company, is another way that SENAMI connects returned migrants with credit and lending options.

For migrant workers who have returned home, SENAMI still provides support services.

However, compared to the total number of returned migrants in Ecuador, the participation rate of returned migrants in SENAMI programmes is rather low. Since SENAMI's founding, "around 8,870 expatriates have been assisted in returning home," according to statistics from 2010. However, just 540 of these returnees had cases with "productive incentives" (Boccagni and Lagomarsino 2011). The SENAMI recipients make up a minor portion of the 64,000 migratory workers that returned to Ecuador between 2005 and 2010. (International Organization for Migration 2012).

3.2.3.2. The Program “Migrante retornado: Ecuador Està Contigo”

This plan regarding returning migrants was issued to improve the reintegration of returnees. The programme "Returning Migrant, Ecuador is with You" ("Migrante Retornado, Ecuador está Contigo") issues a returning migrant certificate that confers entitlement to certain benefits under the law. Once obtained the “Migrante Retornado” certificate, returning migrants can apply to a savings and credit union (COAC) for the financing they need to stabilise in Ecuador, or to open a business, for which the migrant is assessed for the delivery of resources. CONAFIPS is responsible for funding the cooperative so that it has enough resources and suitable conditions to meet the demand

of returning migrants, as well as for issuing the necessary guarantees for the loan to be approved, issued through the guarantee fund (FOGEPS). Moreover, Ecuador allows returned citizens to improve their education, through free courses to implement their working possibilities, or through the access to higher education (Cancillería Ecuador, 2020)

3.2.3.3 Other important national initiatives

The Institutional Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility as well as the National Equality Agenda for Human Mobility 2013-2017 were both published in 2013. Since then, the legal environment for immigration has been continuously expanding. The government enacted the Organic Law on Human Mobility in 2017 and is actively working to strengthen the infrastructure needed to support it at all levels and ministries of the government. The legal framework lays forth a clear connection between development and migration. The National Development Plan 2017–2021, "A Lifetime," mainstreams migration.. Additionally, the National Human Mobility Plan, which is now being created, will be connected to both the Foreign Policy Agenda 2017-2021 and the National Development Plan 2017-2021 "A Lifetime." The responsibility for managing initiatives to strengthen ties with Ecuadorians abroad through plans, programmes, projects, and services falls to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Human Mobility.

For the purpose of easing the reintegration of returning Ecuadorians, Ecuador maintains a formal policy. Moreover, in accordance with the Organic Law on Human Mobility, the Foreign Ministry has also established three permanent sectoral task groups to undertake social, economic, and organisational programmes and to address the prevention of dangerous migration.

3.2.2.4. The role of Migrants associations and NGOs

Apart from the State intervention, some migrants associations and NGOs work in the territory of Ecuador to help returned migrants in their reintegration process. The reason behind this is that there were tremendous sentiments of disappointment and powerlessness among the returnees who have sought to take part in government

programmes without experiencing any success. They banded together to assert their rights when faced with broken government promises on easy access to loans, career possibilities, or the Ecuadorian educational system for their children (Verlinden 2014).

The Red Nacional de Migrantes Retornados al Ecuador's mission is to educate, guide, support, and assist Ecuadorian migrants and their families both inside and outside of the nation with their integration back into society (Verlinden 2014).

The economic difficulties that reintegrated migrants have are well known to organisations of returning migrants, and they work to address them. Despite their concerns about these programmes' efficacy, they frequently have little choice but to direct their members to the current government programmes. They can also significantly contribute to the social reintegration of their members in three different ways: through their social contact and support functions; through their awareness-creating and contact-establishing functions with regard to the larger Ecuadorian society; and by informing members of government initiatives for housing and providing access to education for their children (Verlinden 2014).

Associations and NGOs have a significant role to play in addressing the intersectional problems that come with being a woman and a migrant in a patriarchal society.

The Fundación Esperanza is one organisation that focuses on educating girls and women about the benefits and difficulties of migrating as well as the perils of human trafficking and sexual slavery. Regarding returning migrants, the Hope Foundation assists women who were the victims of human trafficking or sexual exploitation when they return to Ecuador, offers counselling and legal support, and finally assists women in leaving dangerous and abusive family circumstances (Dudley 2013).

The Ecuadorian Center for Female Advancement and Action (CEPAM), an NGO that offers legal and psychological help to women, is another such. CEPAM specifically helps women with problems related to domestic abuse, divorce, and troubled kids. CEPAM helps migrant women who have been repatriated with family reunion during the reintegration process (Dudley 2013)

3.2.4 Ecuadorian women reintegration; challenges and opportunities

Women migrants from Ecuador who have returned have faced various obstacles and possibilities. Within their families, communities, and the larger Ecuadorian culture, they have had to come to terms with and redefine their roles and identities. However, once they return to Ecuador, the gendering of activities and roles (especially in the home and in the family) are once again being negotiated, which puts the women in an awkward position. In fact, the majority of Ecuadorian migrant women in Spain are able to reshape their identities, which frequently leads to a subsequent change in their level of personal autonomy, making them more independent. However, some women are able to be "actors of change" by upholding their new, independent identity because of the new identity and attitude they acquired in Spain. Women desire to work outside the house, have more control over family decision-making, and have more independence in order to attain this continuous empowerment. In any case, they have to face many challenges.

The first one is that of “feeling a foreigner at home” (Verlinden 2014): With regard to their sense of national identity, returned migrant women in Ecuador are in a limbo. Women's connections to Ecuador are altered after years of living in Spain, which might cause uneasy sentiments due to a greater degree of unfamiliarity with their native country.

The second one is linked to both their ability to reintegrate economically and the independence they derived from it in Spain. In Ecuador, men are expected to provide for the family financially and to earn the majority of the household income, while women are in charge of the home and the family. For the majority of women, returning home means losing their control over money, having a more constrained budget to meet family demands, and ultimately losing their hard-won freedom. Because of this, women experience several identity reconfigurations throughout the migration process that are correlated with levels of economic autonomy (Verlinden 2014). Additionally, when they return, women learn about the disparity in living standards and wages in Ecuador and Spain. Renegotiating power dynamics between men and women (not just with their husband but also with other family members) in respect to money matters is therefore necessary after returning home (Schurr and Stolz 2010)

The third one is related to the reorganisation of household duties. The repatriated migrant women from Ecuador also mentioned a greater sharing of household duties

while living in Spain. Overseas, migrant women had more control and freedom over their households. However, when the women went back to their home countries, they took on roles that supported patriarchal norms that confined women to the home and diminished their total independence and power over family decisions (Bastia and Busse 2011).

The fourth one is that Carolin Schurr and Miriam Stolz (2010) defined as the "emotional shock". 'Coming home' for most of the returnees means reunification with their family. However, it also entails bidding farewell to friends and perhaps family members who are still in Spain. With Spanish friends, coworkers, and countrymen, new emotional links have been formed. Even if they go back to their relatives and friends, the downside of their homecoming quickly becomes apparent: in many cases, the long-awaited reunion with their children and family in Ecuador is difficult and filled with sadness. Little-known and not respected as an authority, children turn to their aunts or grandmothers for assistance instead of their mother. Family life is not as peaceful as returning citizens might have thought or recalled. Family relations therefore be re-negotiated and re-defined in a hard and painful process.

The fifth one, also presented by Schurr and Stolz is the cultural shock. It develops as a result of the migrant's idealisation and modification of their home country while they are away. After returning migrants rediscover their home country, especially when they have been absent for a long period, new advancements and cultural change can cause disappointment at the time. Re-migration is similar to a fresh migration, therefore the experience of moving seems to be cyclical.

Women face difficulties in redefining their gendered identities and gender roles as they work to reintegrate into the "foreign" land they call home.

From the economic reintegration point of view, the time spent overseas and the things they did there helped them grow personally. Most of them developed some skills while living overseas that improved their personal lives but may not necessarily contribute to economic growth. They also bring back ideas for businesses or professional skills, although frequently these cannot be used in Ecuadorian circumstances: Although it is reasonable to believe that highly skilled migrants' knowledge will have an influence on growth at home, the bulk of migrants who work in

the care industries, such as Ecuadorian women, do not return with 'new' information or skills. Women, in particular, rarely bring huge wealth or expert knowledge home.

3.3. The role of family in the return and reintegration of re-emigrating Ecuadorian women

The examination of the remigration experience exposes the social, psychological, and cultural challenges that return migrants face when they come back home. Returning home may sound simple, but it may be challenging, if not difficult, for most migrants. Family support is crucial for helping migrants who have decided to return home integrate back into society on both an emotional and material level.

3.3.1. The role of family in the decision to return

Family, as we saw, has a role in the whole migration process, from its beginning to its ending, so obviously it has an important role in the decision of "coming back home" as well.

Christian Schramm (2011) presents a model in which he individuates three different types of migrants, and each of them is differently influenced by the family.

The first type of migrants, "*los constantes*", return is the obvious outcome of an ongoing migration endeavour throughout which there has always been a strong desire to go back to Ecuador. They value their goals as having been partially achieved since they have personal resources like financial or human capital. Additionally, they anticipate a smooth professional transition upon return and the continued support of the network they built while living in Spain. The ability to make decisions with a high degree of personal autonomy enables them to get ready for the return. At the meso level, a small transnational network with solid ties that inspires confidence in not failing upon return and expectations of access to social capital—available in the form of financial assistance to make up for unmet needs during the stay in Spain, all the way up to the satisfaction of emotional needs—stands out.

The second type of migrants, "los fracasados", due to the lack of stability, wealth, and opportunities in the society of arrival, decide to return. The possibility of adequate

return and reintegration preparation is worsened since the migrant hasn't met the goals he or she had previously established. Therefore, the choice must be made in a setting where there is less personal agency. Similar to the preceding category, expectations set also have a significant impact. They are founded on incorrect perceptions of the home society in this instance. Above all, it is a matter of expectations for and idealisations of social interactions. Costs and benefits are also given weight, although the latter are overvalued.

The third type is that of "*los buscadores*", who did not plan to come back. Because of outside pressures that make the return appear inevitable, he or she has a low level of individual liberty, which is not the product of a failed immigration initiative. The three levels of meso, micro, and macro are where these external pressures may be found. The objectives could not be achieved under these conditions, where there was no desire to return, therefore the return could not be well prepared. This causes him to feel unsatisfied and leaves him with the impression that something is still there in his consciousness, which has an impact on how the reintegration phase progresses.

This differentiation among these different "categories" of migrants makes it easier to state that, while the group of the constant ones is less prone to be influenced by the ideas and expectancies of the family, for the groups of the unsuccessful and the searching ones, their scarce capacity to integrate and have a "successful migration" is fertile soil for the families to gain space and importance in their lives. Migration projects of people from these two categories are the ones which are more prone to be affected (positively or negatively) by external decisions, those of the family. Families can push them to come back, thanks to the scarce possibilities in Spain, or, on the other hand, can be a shoulder to lean on when they come back, leading them to experience a loss of both responsibilities' weight and autonomy.

Moreover, Yeim Castro (2020) tries to understand what kind of influence can families have on the decision to return, based on theories of macroanalysis.

According to the historic-structural focus, the return can be seen as a mechanism to transfer economic resources from industrialised regions to less developed ones, although the less privileged social strata would theoretically return less since they wouldn't find adequate financial support from their families to do so, among other

reasons. In summary, this analytical approach suggests that class membership appears to be a determinant of return movements, leading to the conclusion that, depending on where a family's house is situated in the social structure, the family's economic circumstances either encourage or discourage a return (Singer 1975)

Looking at the Theory of global systems, migration return flows might be inferred to be a component of the numerous links and interdependencies that result from world economic activities. From this vantage point, it makes sense to assume that the system's response to the global market may settle, modify, or affect people's and families' decisions on their return (Wallerstein 2005).

However, Castro presented also some other, more modern theories, which give the family a more important role in the migration process.

The New Economic of Migration expects that the goals of migration are followed as a "planned strategy" from home, and that a successful experience abroad will lead to a return. According to this theory, the size and direction of the flows are influenced by family networks, household features, and member characteristics.

The Institutionalist Theory claims that Return is an essential component of that strategy because it signifies the final establishment in the receiving society, breaks with circularity, and may have a disruptive effect on family formation in the places of origin where migration is seen as a generational financing strategy driven by the family.

The Transnationalist Theory is however the most interesting for the presented case, since in this theory the family is viewed as an articulating axis directly implicated in the dynamism and circularity of return movements, while offering a more systematic understanding of some of the consequences that the global setting imprints on the relationships within families that have the presence of returnees.

3.3.2 The role of family in the reintegration process

Again, following the pattern proposed by Christian Schramm (2011), we can differentiate the actions undertaken by migrants upon their arrival in Ecuador.

The characteristics of the constants include a reintegration with expectations that are extremely adjusted to the reality that will be discovered, being able to satisfy their demands in one way or another. The success of the growth of reintegration is primarily

due to the relationships that were kept there throughout the time spent outside. It is feasible to reintegrate into society because of the continuity in the social network's idea (i.e., the lack of major disputes that result in ruptures).

The failures have a severe sense of disappointment upon their return due to his inaccurate evaluation and idealisation of the social and economic situation in Ecuador. However, erroneous expectations are also set up for returnees, such as the idea of the prosperous immigrant who purportedly returns with enough financial resources. The traditional social network with its strong connections may fall apart, preventing people from accessing resources and social capital. Representatives of this kind do, however, attain some economic stability that, although not reaching Spain's level, outweighs the advantages of a fresh, expensive exodus.

Since the seekers never intended to return but rather desired to identify with and assimilate into the orientations of the community of arrival, reintegration is equally challenging for them. They struggle to adjust to a lesser level of life and less personal freedom, so they waver between wanting to go back to Spain and accepting their new situation in Ecuador. A separation from the previous social network can also be seen in terms of social relationships, particularly when pre-migration issues are involved. The source of this distance might also be personal changes that have occurred, leading to a rejection of Ecuadorian culture and a questioning of behavioural habits.

This aids in better understanding the requirements of immigrants and their families. The critical point is in the post-physical return phase, when the reintegration process starts, even though there is the desire to return and it is feasible to prepare for return. At this point, returnees must deal with a variety of unforeseen challenges that may impact everyone in the same way. The most significant issues arise in relationships, particularly in families. Remittances and gifts sent to Ecuador during the first few months of their absence take care of the basic needs of the spouses and children for whom migration began, but as time goes on, there is an emotional distance and questions start to surface about the migratory project and the common life project. The weekly discussions cannot replace the actual presence, it is difficult to maintain the emotive connection, and the lack of communication can cause despair on both sides.The rejection of their children at home is a circumstance that many parents do not anticipate and which necessitates for

them a protracted and challenging process of reconquest, which is not always successful. Regular visits from immigrants who have already made their homes overseas partially offset the impacts of emotional separation.

Conflicts frequently end quickly when people get along, but misconceptions about the family situation and the shared migratory enterprise persist. The obligation to assume the same position that was held in the family before emigration, something that the other members no longer accept, might add to disappointments. As a result, there may be several levels of conflict within a family.

Moreover, as presented in the work by Gillespie et al. (2021) on return migration and labour market possibilities, the significance of family was linked to a greater risk of both improvement and deterioration. It's possible that family in the place of origin might assist offset income loss or that people feel that being close to family makes up for lower labour market performance. As a social resource, family and their networks may help to improve things by lowering barriers to employment. Moreover, they looked at whether and how returning for family-related reasons was connected to labour market outcomes given the significance of family for return migration. As a result, return migration when family is prioritised highly is at least tangentially linked to improvements in the job market. This provides some evidence in favour of our speculative statement that for people returning to family, the drawbacks of return migration may be offset by the family's ability to reduce problems such as unemployment (Gillespie *et al.* 2021).

As outlined by the work of Herrera and Perez (2018) the social reunification of these individuals with their original group and social surroundings is uncertain and linked to processes of labour insertion.

Conclusions

This study aimed at analysing the role of families in international migration, especially focusing on female migration from Ecuador to Spain and vice versa. The research included a study of the existing literature, allowing the analysis of the various phenomena analysed. As outlined in the introduction, Ecuador can be seen as an emblematic case for analysing both the issues regarding the Latin American context and the characteristics of the new dynamics in migration, in particular the feminisation of migration and the role of transnational families in migration.

In the first chapter, the theoretical foundations of the starting point were analysed, showing how globalisation is the basis of the phenomenon of migration, and in more recent times has also made itself the creator of the phenomenon of the feminization of migration, concepts underlying the research. The case study was then briefly presented: Ecuadorian women are a perfect example of what was anticipated. These are in fact the first to have arrived in Spain, those that over time have been better able to adapt and integrate into the arrival society, and therefore those for which migration has had more positive results. Also interesting is their involvement in the return migration, and especially in the process that should lead them to reintegrate into their own family, the world of work and Ecuadorian society, which makes them struggle a lot.

The particular exceptionality of this case is that women were not only the pioneers in this flux, but that in this case the feminised migration was led by women in their middle age, who left their families and children in Ecuador; they are also the “breadwinners” in their family, ensuring the functioning of the domestic group through the social connections at home and the high remittances they sent to their family.

In the second chapter, the starting flux has been analysed. First of all, the migration history of Ecuador, quite recent, which led the Ecuadorians first to the United States and then to the more welcoming (in particular regarding the legal framework, at least at the beginning of the migration flux) and culturally related Spain was analysed. In this

context, the importance of state policies in shaping migration flows has also been analysed. Moreover, the case of Ecuadorian women migration was further analysed, getting to the result that migration flows for them have at the base many different reasons, mainly the socio-economic and political collapse of Ecuador, but that they usually are influenced by the family and therefore the possibility of helping them is what is pushing them the most. The second part of the chapter focused on how Ecuadorian women were able to settle in Spain. Many of them found a job there quite soon in the domestic and care work field, even though some of them ended up in the sexual labour one. These categories put these migrant workers in risk, since in most cases they do not have legal contracts and therefore are not able to stabilise their legal status: this results in an increased risk of exploitment and abuses, mainly because most of these women live with their employer, and leaving their only source of income is extremely problematic. Moreover, many of them experienced discrimination due to their gender, their nationality and the colour of their skin: being "blanquita" allows them to find a job more easily than those with darker skin. They are also discriminated against in the process of finding a house and excluded (because of their illegal or irregular status) from healthcare assistance.

Therefore, the delicate issue of physical and mental health status of these migrants was discussed. At last, the role of transnational families in both the decision to leave Ecuador and the decision to remain in Spain was looked at: the better economic possibilities for the family, the reduced need for child labour and the better conditions in the family possibilities of accessing food, healthcare and services, but also their increased possibility of getting into the labour market are the main factors influencing their decision to stay. To do so, however, migrant women feel the need to be increasingly connected to Ecuador to preserve their ties to their homeland: this is obtained through the use of ICT and internet connections, but also through the sending of remittances and, for those who achieved in legalising their status, to occasional visits to their family in Ecuador. The whole situation was impacted by the Covi-19 pandemic, which made it more difficult to

The third chapter focused on the opposite flow, that of Ecuadorian women coming back home from Spain. After a brief introduction on the factors involved in the decision

of “going back”, a focus will be put on the role of transnational families in this process: in fact, as underlined by Vega Solís and Martínez-Buján the main reason why women tend to go back home is not to be found in a socio-economic crisis, but to take care of their children, family and home. Again, after a brief introduction on the factors involved in the decision of “going back” (such as age, educational level, social capital, economic opportunities and the existing migration policies) , a focus will be put on the role of transnational families in this process.

The role of States will be discussed in this second part of the migration process as well, analysing the Spanish and Ecuadorian migration policies and programs dedicated to returning migrants. The problem of reintegration will also be discussed: after a brief analysis on the literature regarding the meaning of reintegration, the issues regarding the social and economic reintegration of Ecuadorian women returning from Spain will be assessed.

All this work has been done with the aim of finding an answer to the issue of the importance of the role of the family in the issue of international migration, from its beginning to its (even if temporary) ending. The main outcome is that families indeed have a role.

First of all, female Ecuadorian women are often chosen by their own families as the person designated to fulfil the migratory process they have; on the other hand, if the migrant is a mother and a wife, as we saw in the majority of cases, they try to persuade her not to leave. However, when the woman decides to leave (with or without her family consent), the family takes her role in the care of the house, the children and the husband. Then, when they arrive in Spain, the family connections previously made by the migrant herself or by someone in the family, can positively impact the capacity of the women to integrate in the social and labour context of her new city, giving her advices and even concrete help. Moreover, they play a role also in the decision to stay: despite the difficulties, the discrimination and the consequences on their health, Ecuadorian female migrants tend to spend more time than they expected to in Spain to help their families by securing them with better economic possibilities, reduced need for child labour and improved conditions in the family possibilities of accessing food, healthcare and services.

Then, analysing the returning flow of these women, familial duties have a role on their decision to come back: often families put pressure on working female migrants since they are not accomplishing their role of mothers, instilling in them a strong sense of unease, of guilt, of self-deprecation. To avoid losing their families, to be relieved from the pressure and to try and be present for their husbands and children, they often decide to come back, even if it has very severe implications for them, such as a loss of autonomy and of economic possibilities. Moreover, families can play a role in mediating between the returned migrant and the society: both of them have changed through time, and having someone who can help in any way is surely helpful. Many migrants stay with their parents for long periods of time, others receive help from them in finding a job, or in searching for a house.

As a result, it is possible to say that families play an important role both in the decision and practical levels of migration.

The research however presents some limits.

The first is that, despite becoming a topic in the migration and gender studies, the feminisation of migration is usually not included in the general studies of migration, but it is still linked only to the gender field.

Moreover, speaking of transnational families, the focus is still on men migrating and "left-behind wives": as in this research, females can as well be the pioneers and become the breadwinners providing for the family needs. Gender is a main issue also focusing on the social roles given to each parent: it has been not so easy to find researches providing informations on women working abroad, as if women were still recluded to the social reproduction and unpaid labour market.

The possible future outcomes for the research are that the gendering of migration and related issues, such as feminine insertion in labour markets (both in home and abroad), or as female migrants leaving on their own could become important and crucial issues to be profusely studied in the next decades.

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