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Chapter 11
Puzzling Social Protection across Several Countries: Opportunistic Strategy or Risky Compensation?

Polina Palash and Virginie Baby-Collin

11.1 Introduction

While research on social protection in transnational families mainly focuses on arrangements between the origin and receiving countries, few studies address how this occurs across multiple countries. In an era of increasing mobility and transnationalisation, flows of people and resources are not limited to bipolar movements between origin and destination but also entail complex, fluid and circular patterns (Baldassar and Merla 2014; Cortes and Faret 2009; Fréguin-Gresh et al. 2015) with onward and multiple moves (Toma et al. 2015). The 2008 global recession left a clear mark on some of these mobility configurations (Mas Giralt 2016; Ramos 2018), with readjustments and reversibility of flows (Moreno-Márquez and Álvarez-Román 2017), resulting in more complex transnational social-protection (TSP) arrangements.

It is possible to identify at least two reasons for the limited number of studies on TSP arrangements across multiple countries. First, this kind of study is quite demanding in terms of time, means and energy, as a comprehensive understanding of TSP practices requires both a fine multi-sited ethnography and the awareness of contextual specificities (Palash and Serra Mingot 2019; Toma et al. 2015). Secondly, the analytical process is challenging because it requires tracing and capturing more complex and dynamic provision flows in their various directionalities and intensities,

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while also being able to assess their different nature, levels and temporal readjustments (Fréguin-Gresh et al. 2015; Schier 2016).

Among the few studies on the management of an extended TSP space by transnational families, the main framing seems to apply to its optimisation and profitability (Bryceson 2019; Ma Mung 1999; Ong 1999; Trémon 2011). This framing appears to echo the assumptions of the 'welfare magnet hypothesis' or 'welfare tourism', implying the opportunistic use of different welfare systems by migrants (Borjas 1999; Fernandes 2016). Other studies, however, show that families enlarge their TSP space to address basic social-protection concerns in times of crisis. Yet, they also show that migrants, rather than accumulating resources, are exposed to job precariousness (Fréguin-Gresh et al. 2015; Mas Giralt 2016; McIlwaine and Bunge 2019; Ramos 2018) and a more challenging organisation of social-protection concerns across borders (Schier 2016; Serra Mingot and Mazzucato 2019).

Ecuadorian transnational families have recently experienced a reconfiguration of their TSP arrangements between Europe and their origin country as a consequence of the 2008 recession (Mas Giralt 2016; Moreno-Márquez and Álvarez-Román 2017; Palash and Baby-Collin 2018; Ramos 2018). Since the beginning of the sustained outmigration from their country of origin at the end of the 1990s, pushed by the financial default linked to the dollarisation in Ecuador, Spain became the main destination for some 479,117 Ecuadorian citizens as of 2009, the greater part of whom naturalised as Spanish citizens (Iglesias Martínez et al. 2015). Apart from favourable naturalisation schemes in Spain, Ecuadorians – like other Latin Americans – can also benefit from an Agreement on Social Security, guaranteeing the portability of their pension rights between Spain and their country of origin (OISS 2019). Although many Ecuadorian migrants managed to reunite with their kin in Spain, many have also experienced downward social mobility and gendered employment segmentation, concentrating mainly in construction, agriculture and hotel and domestic services (Iglesias Martínez et al. 2015).

After 2008, however, the global recession destabilised their life in Spain, due to soaring structural unemployment and the burst of the real-estate bubble. This implied a reconfiguration of their migration projects, with some deciding to return to Ecuador (Moreno-Márquez and Álvarez-Román 2017) while others choosing to migrate to other destinations, making use of their newly acquired EU citizenship (Iglesias Martínez et al. 2015). Accordingly, the number of Ecuadorians in Spain dropped by 14% to 411,897 individuals by 2019 (INE 2019).

Estimates on the return migration from Spain to Ecuador range between 65,000 and 85,000 individuals overall, which is perhaps not as high as one would expect, given the incentives of return schemes of both sending and receiving governments (Moreno-Márquez and Álvarez-Román 2017). Despite improvements in social policy over recent decades, Ecuador still presents important challenges, with low pensions and welfare benefits with respect to the cost of living and inefficiencies of the public healthcare system (Naranjo Bonilla 2014). For these reasons, a fundamental source for ensuring social-protection needs in Ecuador is migrants' financial transfers from abroad, which are often deployed to pay for private, more efficient services (e.g. Palash and Serra Mingot 2019).

England has become one of the main destinations for the secondary migration of Ecuadorians from Spain. Although Ecuadorians have been present in the UK since the 1970s, many of them have been invisible in the statistics due to their undocumented status. Established ethnic networks and the more-stable labour market served as the main incentives for this onward movement. However, as it turned out, Ecuadorians in the UK are subject to an even greater downward mobility than in Spain, with both men and women mostly relegated to the precarious cleaning sector (McIlwaine and Bunge 2019).

In terms of formal social protection, the liberal Anglo-Saxon welfare system contrasts with the Spanish Southern European familist one (Hemerijck et al. 2013), and there are no social security agreements between the UK and Ecuador. Although not as severely as it occurred in Spain, the British welfare provision has been subject to austerity measures, resulting in the inhospitable and exclusionary Brexit context (e.g. Mas Giralt 2016). Secondary migration from Spain to the UK has therefore implied a reconfiguration of TSP arrangements among Ecuadorian families, encompassing at least three countries with their specific social-protection systems. Therefore, this contribution seeks to fill the gap in the literature regarding the management of social protection by transnational families across multiple countries. How do Ecuadorian families organise their TSP arrangements across multiple countries? Does this management of TSP mainly imply opportunities or constraints for families facing recurrent contextual destabilisation? In order to account for both the individual and family perspectives, as well as their interactions with the specific contexts, we integrate a socio-spatial approach and a circulation framework, applying the concepts of care circulation (Baldassar and Merla 2014) and circulatory capability (Fréguin-Gresh et al. 2015).

We draw on two emblematic cases out of 36 transnational families in which TSP arrangements are managed across several countries. After outlining the theoretical framework, we describe our research methods in more detail. This is then followed by a presentation of the case studies and their discussion. We end our argument with several concluding remarks.

11.2 Managing an Enlarged Transnational Social-Protection Space

In an increasingly mobile and interconnected world, concerns over social protection have increasingly extended across national borders. Transnational social protection (TSP) refers to ‘the policies, programmes, people, organizations, and institutions which provide for and protect individuals […] in a transnational manner’ (Levitt et al. 2017, 6). Despite living in different countries, transnational families – who represent an increasing social reality – often pursue welfare and social-protection goals which stretch beyond borders (Bryceson 2019; Bryceson and Vuorela 2002). Their TSP arrangements ‘from below’ relate to cross-border strategies sustained by

network members living across different countries to cope with risks and cover needs related to areas such as income and livelihood, health, care, education and housing (Amelina et al. 2012; Palash and Baby-Collin 2018).

Although the migration literature mainly focuses on migrants' economic transfers addressed to secure the social-protection needs of their families back home, scholars using a transnational lens have recently acknowledged the role of 'reverse remittances' (Mazzucato 2011). These mainly relate to services, such as those linked to the care of migrants' children left behind, to properties and, to a lesser extent, to goods and money. In effect, in the context of the recent global recession, evidence shows that precarious migrants in Europe may rely on 'reverse economic flows'. These include economic remittances from migrants' families back home and migrants' own financial means transferred from their origin countries in order to ensure their social-protection needs (Palash and Baby-Collin 2018).

Thus, TSP provisions are not limited to economic unidirectional transfers but imply a care circulation, as the 'reciprocal, multidirectional and asymmetrical exchange of *care* [that] fluctuates over the life course within transnational family networks subject to the political, economic, cultural and social contexts of both sending and receiving societies' (Baldassar and Merla 2014, 22). This encompasses extended family networks bound in mutual engagements and responsibilities shaped by social norms and working over large timeframes (Palash and Baby-Collin 2018; Palash and Serra Mingot 2019; Serra Mingot and Mazzucato 2019).

Transnational families combine diverse means from their multi-localised 'resource environments', originating from diverse sources such as the family and other informal networks, the state, the market and the third sector (Levitt et al. 2017). However, these social-protection environments may also imply constraints – linked to national migration, welfare and employment regimes and conditions – which often motivate cross-border arrangements (Fernandes 2016; Trémon 2011). Moving forward with the conceptualisation of resource environments by Peggy Levitt and her colleagues (Levitt et al. 2017) and considering space as '*socially produced'(*Massey 2005*),* we propose the concept of 'transnational social-protection space'. This refers to *the space of* interactions between the *actors engaged in social-protection practices and related social-protection* environments. We intend such space to be anchored in specific places which shape and are shaped by the practices of its actors, thus territorialised (Baldassar and Merla 2014) and implying negotiations of belonging, exclusion, appropriation, conflicts or cooperation. This may relate to welfare and social-protection concerns (Rosignoli 2019; Serra Mingot and Mazzucato 2019), depending on diverse factors such as socio-economic and legal status, age and gender (Levitt et al. 2017).

Moreover, TSP arrangements are not limited to the 'classic' TSP space between the origin country and one destination country only but sometimes span across several countries. This is shown in only a few focused studies, such as those on Sudanese families between their origin country, the Netherlands, and the UK (Serra Mingot and Mazzucato 2019), and on Nicaraguan families between Nicaragua, Costa Rica, the United States and Panama (Fréguin-Gresh et al. 2015). As both studies highlight, this involves a complex coordination between network members

and more composite and multi-directional flows of people and resources linked to multidimensional social-protection areas. This shows that, in the globalisation era, flows of people and resources are more complex, circular and fluid (Cortes and Faret 2009). Navigating a TSP space depends on different 'circulatory capabilities' (Fréguin-Gresh et al. 2015), shaped by both the external contextual conditions and the inner family needs and logics (Palash and Serra Mingot 2019).

Research on the management of an extended TSP space by transnational families tends to frame it as profitable. For example, Bryceson (2019) distinguishes between 'multi-transnational' families (spanning over more than two countries) which, in comparison to 'bi-transnational' families (involving only two countries) are advantaged through their skills and education, providing transnational socio-economic opportunities. Several empirical studies on Chinese transnational families are in line with this perspective, assuming a more strategic use of an enlarged TSP space. Among these, Ma Mung (1999) points out their optimisation of spatial resources through geographic dispersion. Trémon (2011) and Ong (1999) elaborate respectively on 'flexible parenthood' and 'flexible citizenship', understood as migrants' opportunistic strategies to secure resources in other countries through an advantageous naturalisation. Such framings appear to echo the assumptions of the 'welfare magnet hypothesis' or 'welfare tourism' (Borjas 1999; Fernandes 2016) about migrants' use of welfare-related resources in Western countries, although sometimes challenged by evidence (Fernandes 2016; Giulietti 2014).

Several other studies, however, contradict the framing of the successful and profit-seeking behaviour of transnational families dispersed across multiple countries. For example, members of Nicaraguan families originating from poor rural areas, who migrate to several destinations to improve their situation, experience job precariousness and informality (Fréguin-Gresh et al. 2015). McIlwaine and Bunge (2019) elaborate on the 'onward precarity' of post-crisis moves by Latin American migrants from Spain to the UK who, in their trajectories and despite the privileges of holding Spanish citizenship, instead accumulate vulnerabilities (see also Ramos 2018). Even German middle-class families face difficulties in the organisation of their transnational life in and outside the EU with respect to national regulations and welfare (Schier 2016). This contribution builds on and expands these discussions, using the specific case of the TSP space of Ecuadorian families spread across Ecuador, Spain and the UK.

11.3 Research Methods

We draw on a multi-sited fieldwork ethnography conducted over 14 months between 2015 and 2016 with Ecuadorian families in Spain (Barcelona), England (London), and Ecuador (including Quito, Guayaquil, Milagro, Cuenca, Baños, Ambato and Santo Domingo). The management of TSP has been studied among 63 families whose members were living in Ecuador and at least one European country (Spain or the UK). These TSP practices appeared to be spanning over at least three countries

(Ecuador, Spain, the UK and/or other countries) in 36 families out of these 63. We base our analysis on two emblematic cases, whose members have been interviewed both in Europe and Ecuador, through a matched sample technique.

Research participants were recruited in Europe through multiple gatekeepers and snowball sampling with diverse starting-points, including associations of Ecuadorians, community events, places frequented by the community members in Barcelona and London and personal contacts. The sample included mainly working-age migrants, both men and women, aged 20–60 years old, encompassing both low socio-economic-status migrants (employed in unskilled jobs, often due to downward social mobility) and, to a lesser extent, professionals in high-skilled jobs. Most of them had a legal status in Europe, holding Ecuadorian-Spanish dual citizenship. In terms of family structure, the sample included couples, with or without children and, to a lesser extent, single parents or single-member households.

The families' socio-economic status is considered globally, including the situation of family members in both Ecuador and Europe, since these are often interrelated. This is observable over time, for example for migrants with economically self-sufficient families in Ecuador who better resisted downward social mobility in Europe, accumulating more assets (e.g. property) over time and reflecting better social protection conditions overall. Likewise, the socio-economic status of families in Ecuador evolved over time – related, for example, to migrants' implications in eventual support from abroad. Thus, we distinguish between two main socio-economic status categories: lower and higher socio-economic-status families. The first and most numerous group included migrants employed in low-skilled jobs in Europe, with dependent family members in Ecuador. On the other hand, a smaller group included migrants who were better integrated socio-economically in Europe and who better resisted downward mobility, often working in qualified jobs (at least up to the 2008 recession). They generally had self-sufficient families in Ecuador and were distinguished by the availability and use of reverse economic flows from Ecuador.

Interviews were conducted by the first author (Polina Palash) in Spanish in respondents' homes, neighbourhoods, bars and, more rarely, at job sites in informal settings. They lasted between one and several hours and were partly recorded, partly registered by note-taking during or after the meetings. Discussions encompassed, on the one hand, TSP practices between migrants and their scattered family members and, on the other, their access to extra-familial resources of social protection (state, market, third sector or other social networks). Interviews with families were supplemented by participant observation of various duration made during community events, in respondents' homes or, more rarely, at their workplaces.

11.4 Balancing TSP Between Here, There and Beyond

The complex management of social protection concerns across multiple countries is differently managed by the two types of families defined above, as Juan's and Ramon's cases illustrate.

11.4.1 Juan's Family

I first met Juan (61) at an NGO at which I was volunteering in London and afterwards we also met several times in bars and a restaurant in the Elephant and Castle shopping centre area, known as one of the most popular gathering places for Latino migrants in London. 'They call me the eternal traveller', Juan told me. In Quito, where he completed a university degree in business administration, Juan was a department head in a multinational enterprise, while his wife Luisa was a professor at a prestigious college. Due to the crisis in Ecuador and before moving to Spain with his family, he also worked for a period in the US in the late 1990s.

They migrated to Spain in 1998, where Juan found work as a breeder, while Luisa created an informal kindergarten for the children of workers living in their neighbourhood. After some years, they reunified with their two children, previously cared for by Juan's in-laws. In 2008, both children returned to Ecuador for study and personal reasons. Juan and Luisa remained in Spain, supporting their children's private university studies in Quito, while coping with a worsened labour situation in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis.

Because they also suffered emotionally from the separation from their children, the couple decided to return 'back home' in 2011. At their age (over 55), starting a life anew in Quito proved to be difficult, since they could not find a job. Moreover, Luisa had a health issue and the medication she needed was expensive in Ecuador. Fortunately, they were helped by their siblings who sent them more affordable medicines from Spain. Although their adult children had jobs, their salary, amounting to about US$ 400 a month, was not enough to afford the cost of living in Quito.[1]

In response to these hardships, Juan decided to return to Spain, this time alone, where he soon found out that the labour situation had even become worse. His children could not move with him because they did not hold Spanish citizenship, while his wife could not join him because of her illness.

Having family ties in London, he decided to move there in 2011, helped by a cousin who found him a job as a cleaner. Although this income made it possible for Juan to support his family in Quito, his job situation was challenging. Having to combine several partial jobs in the cleaning sector, he was busy the whole time

[1] The basic food basket in Ecuador has recently been estimated to be around US$ 700, while the basic salary in 2018 was US$ 386. See http://www.ecuadorencifras.gob.ec/canasta/; http://www.trabajo.gob.ec/ministerio-del-trabajo-establece-salario-basico-unificado-2018/

going from one job location to the next, often in neighbourhoods located far apart. He lived in an overcrowded flat with 11 strangers and found this exhausting at his age. Juan had lived in these conditions for 3 years before he returned for another period to Quito in 2014.

However, it proved hard to earn a living for him and his children in Ecuador so, when he ran out of money, Juan returned to Europe. Resettling again in London, where I met him in 2016, proved to be difficult. He combined several flexible jobs in the cleaning sector, including working at night and at the crack of dawn. Regarding housing, he was initially allowed to stay in his cousin's house but soon had to find a place of his own while being on a very tight budget. Moreover, in order to receive his salary in his British bank account, he needed to have proof of residence, which was hard to obtain when living in shared flats. His salary was blocked by the bank and, due to all these problems, he became homeless and slept on London buses, which was how I met him at the NGO. Juan's fragmented work schedule was exhausting and sometimes he simply fell asleep at work at the end of a shift, which was not allowed and risked him losing his job. As he explained:

> I am living on the street… I have nowhere to live. Now I also have the problem that if I don't have proof of residence, how can the enterprise pay me?

He sometimes had a shower and a meal at the home of his cousin where he also stored his belongings but he could only be there occasionally, as she was sharing her place with several other people. Contacting several organisations for homeless people in London proved useless, as they were overcrowded. Juan was not used to asking for support for such basic needs:

> I have worked my whole life since the age of 12. I never, in any country where I have been, received any support, apart from unemployment benefits in Spain, which was money that I was due.

In England, housing benefits were mainly provided to families with children and, more generally in times of Brexit, welfare entitlements were increasingly restrained even for EU citizens. Amidst his misfortune, some money was sent from Spain to Juan by his brother, despite the latter's own economic difficulties. Moreover, his family in Spain also continued to support Luisa in Quito by sending her medication. Like other respondents in the UK, Juan was dissatisfied with the public healthcare services in London so, when his economic situation improved slightly, he preferred to travel and consult his usual doctor in Spain. As the Spanish healthcare provision is formally conditional on permanent residence, his brother helped to keep Juan's residence registration in his house in Spain. The downside of this was that, as he explained, it meant that his brother could no longer receive child benefits. Nevertheless, the two brothers managed to organise this arrangement for a period and, in return, Juan helped his brother by hosting him and his older son, who periodically worked in London. As it turned out, they found it hard to adapt to London life in such precarious and costly conditions and preferred to live more permanently in Spain regardless of its depressed economy.

Some months later, I met Juan's family in Quito. His wife talked about him with tears in her eyes, worried about his problems. Their present financial situation was insecure, while their retirement plans in terms of their pension entitlements were uncertain. Although over time Juan had put in many years of contributions (18 in Ecuador, nine in Spain, and four in the UK), it was unclear how or whether they would be able to gain access to them on retirement. Juan was short by just a couple of working years of the 30 years of contributions required to retire in either Ecuador or Spain. If he retired in Ecuador, where the retirement age was 60, the low pension of less than US$ 400 would not cover his monthly expenditure, estimated to be almost double that amount. In Spain, the pension would be higher but still modest with respect to the basic cost of living. In any case, he would still have to work until the age of 67, whether in Spain or in Ecuador, in order to be entitled to the total sum of his contributions through the existing social-security agreement between the two countries. Nonetheless, he had difficulty finding work in either Spain or Ecuador, whereas working in the UK implied wasting his old-age contributions. Indeed, because of the lack of any social-security agreement between these two countries, his pension contributions were not transferrable to Ecuador. Moreover, in the context of the Brexit negotiations, he ran the risk of losing even their portability to Spain. To address this, Juan was thinking about getting his Ecuadorian pension at the age of 60, which was just a few years away. This would mean travelling to Ecuador to sign the required document confirming his supposed presence, as pension benefits are conditional on local residence. Nevertheless, he also knew that it would not be enough and this is why he would prefer to reunite his family in London. However, because his children did not have EU citizenship, this was not possible. Another solution proposed by his wife was to pay voluntary contributions out of his own pocket into the Ecuadorian social-security system[2] while working in Europe, until he reached the Spanish minimum pension age. If things were to get better in Spain, he might then be able to export these Ecuadorian contributions to Spain. This situation was a brainteaser for Juan. Certainly, the whole family would find it easier to have all the resources and members gathered in one place.

11.4.2 Ramón's Family

Although with a similar background in Quito, the situation of Ramón was less desperate. I came into contact with him through another respondent whom I had met in Spain and who had a similar socio-economically privileged profile. We met in the city centre and another time in his house in Barcelona. Before migrating to Spain in

[2] This scheme allows migrants to accumulate working contributions through monthly payments to the Ecuadorian social-security system, which can later give access to a retirement pension. Thanks to the Social Security Agreement with Spain, these contributions can be exported and totalised in Spain. However, payments to this scheme, about US$ 78 a month, represents a burden for migrants (Herrera and Paredes Grijalva 2017).

2001, Ramón was a general director of a multinational company in Quito. In Barcelona, he worked as a specialised workman for the same company and, before the crisis, he managed a tourist campsite in a large city in the Catalonia region, also investing in a property in Barcelona, where he lived with his wife and two teenage children.

Nevertheless, the crisis destabilised the quite successful integration of his family in Spain and, due to financial difficulties, his spouse returned with their two children to Quito and their marriage broke up. Before their return, he occasionally paid for his father's private healthcare treatment in Ecuador; this latter was lucky enough to be entitled to a retirement pension of US$ 320 which, however, was not enough to afford local living costs, which were twice as high. Now he also had to think about how to ensure the living expenses of his nuclear family, including the education of his two children in Quito. Although his children were in Ecuador, it was not an option for Ramón to return there since, at his age, it would be hard to adapt to the Ecuadorian job market and his future pension would be as low as his father's. Still, in contrast to other Ecuadorians who faced more labour informality in Ecuador and Europe, Ramón had a good situation as far as his future pension was concerned, with about 13 years of working contributions in Spain and seven in Ecuador. Thanks to the existing agreement between these two countries, his working years could be added together in one of these two countries in order for him to access his pension.

However, Ramón struggled with periods of unemployment and precarious flexible jobs –he was self-employed as an Uber driver in Barcelona at the time of the interview. Meanwhile, he also had the burden of paying the mortgage on the property he had invested in before the crisis.

In Quito, Ramón owned two properties which were rented out and which, contrary to the Spanish real-estate trend, had benefited from a rise in value in recent years. Although he would prefer to avoid using this money which ensured the financial support of his family in Ecuador, his situation obliged him to transfer this money to Spain. At the time of the interview, he was waiting for US$ 6000 to be brought by his father, a 2-year rental income, in order to avoid being expropriated by the bank because of his insolvency in Barcelona. Nevertheless, partly transferring this income, which also ensured the needs of his family in Quito, created tension in his transnational family, with Ramon's sense of guilt linked to his support duties.

Another solution to cope with the stagnant labour situation in Spain was spending periods of time working abroad, which was made possible thanks to his Spanish citizenship. In 2014, he spent some months working in the UK, where he had his extended family. With the help of a relative, who was a manager in the cleaning sector, Ramón worked for a period in this field. However, this kind of work even implied stronger downward social mobility for Ramón and the little money he earned in cleaning was not enough to pay for his living costs in London. As he put it, 'So what's the point of going there to work and spend all you earn and have nothing left?'

The salaries and quality of life of his compatriots in the UK were degrading and he himself was no longer young enough to easily adapt to such conditions. He argued:

> I rather would seek to have the chance to work and have savings for the future, otherwise I don't see any sense. I prefer to remain in this country [Spain], where I know I have made contributions to the social security [system], I have my guarantees and Spanish nationality and I hope that things will change. But this waiting [for a job] causes me to despair because I am one of those people who are very active and dynamic.

Nevertheless, earning a living in Barcelona while having the pressure of paying his mortgage was hard and, apart from moving money from Ecuador, Ramón had to think of other solutions. He travelled to the US to explore the labour situation in Miami, where he had friends and where he believed that more opportunities were available in better-paid customer care jobs. However, this necessitated speaking English, which Ramón did not do, as well as investing substantial financial means in order to settle in the US. Furthermore, Ramón realised that the healthcare system there was not as inclusive as that in Spain, when he had an emergency and was asked to pay US$ 700 to be attended to.

In effect, despite the effects of the crisis, the Spanish healthcare system and the fact that he could combine his working years in Ecuador and those Spain, still represented important resources for Ramón's social-protection issues. However, he had to cope with the economic and real-estate crisis in Spain. Unfortunately, he could not save his property which he was forced to return to the bank, losing all the money invested in it. Still, Ramón could rely on the income from his properties in Ecuador, shared with his family in Quito, which provided an economic basis allowing him to look for other options.

11.5 The (Im)Mobility of People and Provisions in a TSP Space

These two cases illustrate stories of migrants who were affected twice by economic downturns – first in their home country and later in Spain – and whose migratory and social mobility trajectories turned out to be less successful and profitable than those reported in studies on a profitable management of TSP across several countries (Ma Mung 1999; Ong 1999; Trémon 2011; see also Bryceson 2019). For most families in this study, the motivation for extending their TSP space was prompted by a second crisis which they faced in Spain. More than being strategic and premeditated, their *onward move to the UK served as a coping strategy motivated by contextual constraints in the previous country of residence.* Today, the inhospitable Brexit context entails further insecurities for such migrants, in addition to the age-related vulnerability they face. As such, they struggle to address the risks of coping with new difficulties. For these reasons, the expansion of migrants' TSP space reflects a compensatory adaptation to constraining environments marked by repeated contextual destabilisation.

11.5.1 Differential Circulatory Capabilities

A useful conceptualisation for the analysis of extended TSP space management is Sandrine Fréguin-Gresh and her colleagues' (Fréguin-Gresh et al. 2015, 19) notion of 'circulatory capability', which has three dimensions: 'the capacity, knowledge and will of circulating and making circulating resources in a family mobility space'.

First, the *capacity* to circulate and make resources circulate is strongly influenced by migrants' and their families' socio-economic status and specific environments. However, in a TSP space encompassing multiple countries, this is more complex, involving particular challenges to migrants' capacity to ensure support for their scattered family members. Vulnerable families have to engage in a balancing act of allocating limited resources. In fact, when their limited resources are stretched across an extended TSP space, actors may fall short in supporting dependent family members across several countries, as occurs for Juan, who is obliged to periodically suspend support. This is different for privileged migrants like Ramón, who can rely on his financial means in Ecuador and whose scattered family members are less vulnerable.

Apart from ensuring the needs of their family members, migrants' capacity relates to their own social-protection needs as well, particularly the issue of old age. Managing social-protection issues across several countries, which do not always include social security agreements, implies a fragmentation and possible loss of entitlements, as experienced by Juan (see also Palash and Serra Mingot 2019). By contrast, Ramón can rely on economic resources in his origin country to maintain his situation in Europe (Palash and Baby-Collin 2018) and he has more freedom of choice with respect to managing his present and future social-protection concerns.

Migrants' capacity to manage TSP also depends on their legal status and citizenship. For example, holding EU (Spanish) citizenship influences Juan and Ramon's spatial mobility and transnational family life, as we saw earlier. Juan's children, who returned to Ecuador, could not join him in the UK, as they did not have Spanish citizenship. However, his case also demonstrates that, when migrants are stuck for economic reasons, as was Juan in England, having EU citizenship may lose its value as a resource. This can be the case when migrants facing precariousness cannot ensure their basic social-protection concerns through state provisions (e.g. Mas Giralt 2016).

Furthermore, migrants' age and life course also shape their capacity to manage social-protection issues. In fact, it is even more challenging for elderly migrants to adapt to foreign contexts, in particular with respect to their labour integration. Juan's predicament, ending up as homeless, sleeping on London buses and facing even more fragility in his social-protection situation due to his age, is telling.

Secondly, the dimension of *knowledge* can be linked to actors' migratory experience and the knowledge acquired through multiple migrations (Ramos 2018), in terms of the mobilisation of social networks, coping practices, integration and the environmental specificities. Having acquired knowledge, however, may not be enough for migrants to manage their TSP space when again, like Juan, migrants'

capacity to earn a decent living is affected. Although he considers the healthcare system in Spain to be better, he is stuck in the UK because of his precarious job situation and, therefore, cannot travel to access healthcare in Spain. The access to mobility allowed by his citizenship is strongly affected by the financial constraints required to move.

Migrants' awareness of the quality of particular resources in specific welfare systems is often intentionally linked to 'welfare magnet' and 'welfare tourism' framings (Borjas 1999; Fernandes 2016). For respondents in this study, however, it is not so much the knowledge of welfare resources in the UK which can be accessed thanks to the Spanish citizenship which motivates their onward moves but the hope of ensuring their employment and the chance of relying on family networks in London (see also Fernandes 2016; McIlwaine and Bunge 2019). Nevertheless, employment is not the same as 'opportunity', as Ramón acknowledges: the high living expenses have to be subtracted from the low wages of low-skilled jobs in London, while working contributions may not always be exportable in an enlarged TSP space. Concerning welfare provision, in the context of Brexit and austerity measures it presents shortcomings for migrants such as Juan, who consider public healthcare in England inefficient and who ensure that their medical needs are met travel back to Spain (see also Serra Mingot and Mazzucato 2019). Moreover, access to social benefits can sometimes be restricted in the destination country (see also Mas Giralt 2016) and instead reserved for families with children. As the onward migrants in our study are mostly either those with adult children or those who migrated without their children to the UK, they do not fall into this category.

Finally, another component of circulatory capability is *will*. Because the will of migrants is challenged by their capacity to be involved in providing support to scattered family members, this gives rise to negotiations on which family members or social-protection domains should be given priority. In this respect, domains like healthcare and basic income are often regarded as a priority, while stronger TSP ties tend to develop between nuclear family members, as well as between migrants and their elderly parents. However, in an enlarged TSP space the will to be engaged in support may be put to the test even more for precarious migrants. In fact, the options of Juan, during his periods of extreme precariousness in London, are limited, no matter how hard he wants to provide for his relatives. By contrast, Ramón has more options to support himself and his relatives. Still, the fact that he has to transfer money from Ecuador to Europe, money which, at the same time, ensures the welfare of his nuclear family in Quito, involves tensions in his family. Clearly, this also occurs in low-income families, affecting their relationships as well as their expectations and future reciprocity.

11.5.2 The Diffuse Circulation of Support as a Compensatory Adaptation to Constraining Environments

To understand family systems in an extended TSP space, Baldassar and Merla (2014) formulated the useful concept of the 'care circulation framework, which pertains to circular complementary reciprocity mechanisms shaped by time. Borrowing this perspective, we observe in our study a diffuse circulation of support (e.g., Palash and Baby-Collin 2018). Such a mechanism is extended in terms of the family members involved (without following direct reciprocity logics), timeframes and multiple countries over which indirect reciprocity takes place. In such TSP systems, flows of people and resources circulate multi-directionally and provisions are influenced by contextual circumstances, such as economic destabilisation and family members' needs shaped by their lifecourse. They adopt flexible readjustments with the passing on of support responsibilities and the reversal of varied provisions, as a form of social reproduction across space and time. Their flexibility is more adaptive than strategic because it is meant to compensate for constraints and risks, rather than implying an accumulation of resources (Trémon 2011). This cross-border socio-spatial adaptation also secures families' social-protection concerns. This relates both to their precarious integration in the labour market in the countries where they are located and to the challenge of having adequate welfare coverage in Europe and in their origin country.

Inequalities mark the management of social protection across borders (Lafleur and Vivas Romero 2018) and, when the TSP space is enlarged, these become even more significant. In this respect, the two sections that follow provide a comparative analysis of the distinct situations, logics and ways of managing TSP across several countries by families with different socio-economic statuses, in their complexity of spatial and temporal readjustments. These directly influence migrants' social mobility trajectories, the interaction between families and their environments, the intra-familial support and relational interplay and the perspective on TSP management as a whole.

11.5.3 Low Socio-Economic-Status Families: Thick Reciprocity and (Inter-)Dependence

For migrants whose families have been severely affected by recurring crises, managing TSP across several countries is largely a forced decision. It is motivated by the scarcity of resources in the usual TSP space and by urgent family needs such as a basic income or unexpected expenses to cover (e.g. healthcare, housing issues). As Juan's case illustrates, this may imply an accumulation of vulnerabilities and result in downward social mobility – a specific kind of 'onward precarity' (McIlwaine and Bunge 2019). Families of this type are more in need of state provisions which, in the austerity era in Europe, are compromised while, in Ecuador,

they are still quite limited. These families are more often obliged to find work on the informal market, which penalises their social security rights, while the 2008 crisis also caused major losses for those who had invested in the pre-crisis real-estate market in Spain.

At the intra-familiar level, these families are marked by great (inter-)dependence and intense and generalised reciprocity ties, marked by thick density and branching of the diffuse circulation of support encompassing the diverse and extended family members. Although the available resources are not abundant, families combine and adjust them in synergic functioning, in multi-directional resource flows requiring complex coordination (Fréguin-Gresh et al. 2015; Palash and Serra Mingot 2019; Serra Mingot and Mazzucato 2019). This is illustrated by Juan's family, whose members across the three countries try to combine a range of resources to ensure their diverse needs. Diverse provision by family members in the different countries encourages other provision at other points in time.

Nevertheless, such symbiosis implies a delicate balance. In other low-income families with mostly dependent family members, migrants experience even greater pressures, which affect their protective and relational ties. In fact, when needs and constraints are predominant with respect to resources to be distributed and if, for diverse reasons, there is a low degree of collaboration between scattered family members, TSP ties have to be interrupted, due to their unsustainability. Migrants are obliged to establish priorities within their TSP space, often having to restrict it to its previous configuration between two countries and to focus on closer family members for whom they have stronger moral responsibilities – specifically their children and parents.

Overall, the management of TSP across several countries is barely affordable for this type of family and, sometimes, this even involves a risky game, with both their present and their future blurred by uncertainties.

11.5.4 High Socio-Economic-Status Families: Thin Reciprocity and Autonomy

For privileged families, managing TSP across several countries is different. They may more freely decide to enlarge their TSP space in order to sustain or accumulate resources linked to social protection – either for a period or in a more durable way. In fact, Ramón decided to extend his TSP space in order to preserve or increase his key resources linked to income and housing. Migrants in this category better resist downward social mobility, because they have managed to accumulate capital to uphold their economic situation, despite having had to face two economic recessions. Their family members also have less need for support, which helps them to consolidate assets in both the origin and the receiving countries. They manage to cope better with the risks produced by the recession in Europe through their ownership of properties in Ecuador, the value

of which has increased while the job situation in Spain has worsened. This is reassuring for Ramón, who receives an income from his rented properties in Ecuador. Moreover, owning a property in the country of origin represents a security net for the future, as prospective state pensions might only cover part of one's living expenses. This is different for migrants of lower socio-economic status engaged in property construction back home. In fact, in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis, many have had to pursue their investment projects slowly or to suspend them due to other more urgent priorities (Palash and Serra Mingot 2019). Instead, migrants who have better access to an international supply of specific resources linked to social protection are less dependent on state provisions and have greater freedom to choose a particular standard of living in the countries concerned.

Their greater independence and autonomy can also be observed at the intra-familiar level. TSP ties have generally been rather thin over the lifecourse and mainly draw on organisational provision or reverse remittances from Ecuador to Europe. Migrants' involvement focuses mainly on occasional financial support for their elderly parents back home, motivated by filial moral obligation rather than by serious risk. Such is the case for Ramón, whose father in Ecuador is part of the privileged segment of the population who is entitled to a retirement pension. Accordingly, the circulation of support in these families is less diffuse, with fewer reciprocity ties and multi-directional resource flows than for underprivileged families. The greater autonomy of members of these more privileged transnational family networks also appears to imply less relational tension with respect to expectations and responsibilities of support. However, as experienced by Ramón, moving money from 'back home' is never a glorious act for migrants (Palash and Baby-Collin 2018).

Overall, their management of an enlarged TSP space implies fewer risks and constraints but, in the context of recurrent crises, remains more often adaptive than fully strategic. This seems to apply to Ramón, whose better economic situation enables him to manage his TSP between the two main countries (Spain and Ecuador), which prevents the dispersal of the social-welfare contributions he has made – which would have otherwise occurred had he moved to another country. In sum, unlike vulnerable families, privileged families can better manage their present and, at the same time, make plans for the future.

11.6 Conclusions

The results of this study contribute empirically, theoretically and conceptually to the literature on migration, transnational families and TSP in a number of ways. First, social protection arrangements in transnational families may encompass multiple countries, going beyond the conventional bipolar consideration of the dynamics involved between the country of origin and country of destination. Migrants' spatial trajectories often involve multiple migrations mainly motivated by income scarcities

linked to repeated economic crises, giving rise to more complex transnational ties and their organisation. Moving forward with the conceptualisation of resource environments by Levitt and her colleagues (Levitt et al. 2017), and considering space as '*socially produced' (*Massey 2005*)*, we conceptualise the TSP space, encompassing actors' practices to ensure social protection needs in specific environments and involving resources and constraints, as being subject to transformation over time. In contrast to studies which frame transnational families as extending their usual TSP space to take advantage of resources in other countries and accumulate assets, we show that the realities for families hit by recurring contextual destabilisation may be quite different. Rather than reflecting an opportunistic strategy, enlarging their TSP space actually represents a compensatory reactive adaptation to constraining environments. In fact, most of our informants who expanded their TSP space by migrating to the UK appear to have experienced progressive downward social mobility, involving the accumulation of vulnerabilities, risks and constraints. Secondly, integrating a circulation framework to the application of a socio-spatial approach o their TSP arrangements in transnational families and understanding the related logics and (im)mobilities, we identify a mechanism of diffuse circulation of support. Such a TSP system *from below* is extended in terms of the family members involved, not necessarily following a direct reciprocity logic, the timeframes over which such indirect reciprocity takes place and an enlarged TSP space encompassing multiple countries. Families dynamically adjust their resources and constraints through flexible socio-spatial adaptations, resulting in multi-directional financial, material and organisational provision in order to ensure intertwined areas of social protection. This implies the passing on of support responsibilities and the reversal of varied provisions as a form of social reproduction across space and time. This is shaped by external conditions linked to specific environments and internal family dynamics related to emerging needs along the lifecourse and the relational ties of the people involved. Such a coping flexibility mechanism is more adaptive than strategic, as it compensates for constraints and risks in their usual environment rather than implying an accumulation of resources.

Families manage their TSP space differently, according to their socio-economic status. In the greater majority of vulnerable families there is a thick reciprocity, a more complex synergy of multi-directional flows of resources between extended family members and their greater (inter-)dependence. However, this implies a delicate balance between scarce scattered resources and significant risks. This obliges family actors to prioritise certain social-protection areas and the family members in need or to suspend TSP ties if they become unfeasible, which may negatively affect their family relationships. In contrast, in the smaller group of more privileged families with a more secure situation, there tends to be a thinner reciprocity and greater autonomy both among family members and with respect to state provision. Last but not least, by addressing welfare concerns, this study has shown that migrants' social security rights linked to their old age are compromised across several countries, due to the fragmentation of the portability of their working contributions, leading to their immobilisation. Moreover, our findings demystify the assumptions of both the welfare-magnet hypothesis and welfare

tourism. More than being motivated by British welfare-state provisions, migrants' onward move to England is mainly related to better employment integration, as well as to the economic and real-estate crisis in Spain and the presence of migrants' own family networks. For these dual EU Spanish-Ecuadorian citizens facing austerity measures in Europe, family resources appear to be more crucial than welfare provision.

Although studies on TSP across several countries are complex, both in their realisation and in their analytical process, more evidence is needed, considering the current transnationalisation dynamics and recurring contextual destabilisation worldwide. In the post-crisis austerity era, even native EU citizens face more and more obstacles in accessing and maintaining circulating welfare entitlements across borders (Fernandes 2016; Lafleur and Mescoli 2018). When it comes to multiple receiving contexts and to subaltern citizens, going around in circles seems to imply even more risks, due to greater exclusions, marginality and uprooting. This may affect their territoriality ties and their claiming of social rights.

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