Social Protection on the Move

A Transnational Exploration of Nicaraguan Migrant Women's Engagement with Social Protection in Spain and Nicaragua

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Contents

List of Tables

List of Maps

List of Acronyms

ACC	Association Atarraya-Centroamérica
EU	European Union
ILO	International Labor Organization
ISS	Institute of Social Studies
INSS	Nicaraguan Institute of Social Security
PNDH	Nicaraguan National Plan for Human Development
SRHE	Social Security Regime of Household Employees
TSP	Transnational Social Protection

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'La historia del mundo es la historia de las y los inmigrantes, por lo tanto, esta historia también podría ser la tuya'

César Meléndez

Abstract

In a context of widespread migration, the arrangement and provision of social protection often takes place not within but across the borders of nation states. *Social protection on the move*, or transnational social protection, can then be considered a product of the interaction between different systems: the social protection policies in the host country, the social protection policies in the country of origin, and migrants' own practices and support systems. This research examines Nicaraguan migrant women's engagement with transnational social protection in Spain and Nicaragua from a gender and intersectional approach to better understand how, in a transnational context, migrants mobilize resources and create strategies to access and provide social protection for themselves and their families across borders.

Relevance to Development Studies

Social protection has gained widespread attention in development discussions at the national, international and transnational levels. However, not much is known about the ways in which migrants, particularly women, navigate welfare systems and mobilize resources transnationally through their personal networks and communities to access and provide social protection, both for themselves and their households, in their countries of origin and host countries. If we are committed to an inclusive and just development at the national, international and transnational levels attention must be paid in order to such initiatives.

Keywords

Transnational Migration, Social Protection, Migrant Women, Gender, Nicaragua, Spain

Chapter 1 - Introduction: Setting the Case for Social Protection on the Move

Karla is a Nicaraguan migrant woman. She has lived outside the borders of her country for seventeen years. In 2001, she embarked on her first migration, headed to El Salvador. She lived there for four years as an undocumented migrant, juggling between informal jobs. During her time in El Salvador Karla had no access to formal social protection (that provided by states and organizations) due to her irregular status. Every month, she diligently sent remittances back to Nicaragua. In this process, Karla became the main breadwinner in her transnational household and a provider of informal social provision (that provided by personal networks) for her mom Lucía, and her two children who were now under the care of their grandmother. At the same time, the childcare provided by Lucía was a form of informal social protection, both for Karla and her young son and daughter in Nicaragua.

In 2005, Karla returned to Nicaragua because El Salvador was becoming too violent and unsafe. However, she only spent two weeks in Nicaragua until immigrating again, this time to Zaragoza, Spain to work as a live-in domestic worker,[1] or *interna*.[2] Contrary to her experience in El Salvador, this time, even as an undocumented migrant, Karla had access to formal social protection in the area of healthcare. This is because Spanish legislation grants access to the public healthcare system to all residents in the country, irrespective of immigration status. Whilst living in Zaragoza she continued to send remittances to her family regularly.

After two years, Karla got her temporary residence permit[3]. Since then, she has been able to renew her permit without issue. However, even with a regular status, her access to formal social protection is not guaranteed. As a migrant domestic worker, Karla faces challenges in accessing social protection, particularly in the form of social security. In addition to engaging with formal social protection in the forms of public healthcare and social security in Zaragoza, Karla has also been able to access informal social protection mainly through faith-based organizations and her involvement with Association Atarraya-Centroamérica, a local Nicaraguan migrant organization. Moreover, she is also planning for her protection in the future, and has enrolled as a contributor to the Nicaraguan Institute of Social Security (INSS) through a voluntary insurance scheme that will allow her to access a pension in Nicaragua when she retires.

This small glimpse of Karla's migratory trajectory illustrates how, in a context of widespread migration, the arrangement and provision of social protection often takes place not within but across the borders of nation states. *Social protection on*

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[1] In Spanish law and policy there is no distinction between domestic and care work. Hence, in my research I used domestic work to indicate paid work that takes place in and for a private household with no distinction between care work and other domestic tasks. Often times, domestic and care work overlap, as migrant women engage in domestic chores while also taking carers of elderly people or children.

[2] *Interna* [fem] is the word used in Spain to denote a live-in domestic worker.

[3] In Spain a distinction does not exist between residence and work permit. A residence permit also allows a migrant to work.

the move or transnational social protection (TSP henceforth) can then be considered a product of the interaction between different systems: the social protection policies in the host country, the social protection policies in the country of origin, and migrants' own practices and support systems (Boccagni 2010). Karla's vignette also evidences that social protection is "an assemblage of informal and formal elements" (Bilecen and Barglowski 2015:204), as it comprises of provisions implemented by states and organizations as well as migrants' bottom-up strategies and practice. Moreover, these social protection assemblages involve a variety of transnational actors, including migrants and their non-migrant family members, as demonstrated by the transnational interactions between Karla and her mother.

At the same time, Karla's vignette reveals the complex dynamics of migrants' engagement with TSP. Her experience highlights the fact that the search for social protection take migrants to different places and as such that organization of social protection is achieved through mobilizing resources and strategies across borders, and not only within the borders one country. Furthermore, these arrangements underline how a person's mobility, gender, nationality, employment and immigration status affect and shape her engagement in social protection across borders.

In particular, my research builds on theoretical perspectives on TSP, the migration-development nexus and gender. Moreover, I privilege the lens of 'social protection from below', the process through which migrants mobilize resources to create a system of social protection for themselves and their families (Faist 2013; Grabska 2017; Paul 2017). The empirical data in this work draws on research with Nicaraguan migrant women. I examine how they develop and engage in 'assemblages' of social protection (Bilecen & Barglowski 2015) through their everyday practices, to provide welfare for themselves and their transnational families in Spain and Nicaragua.

The case of Nicaraguan female migration to Spain is relevant for two reasons. Nicaraguan migration to Europe, and especially to Spain, has not been a focus of migration research. Second, this case can help elucidate the implications of migrant women's engagement with transnational social protection from a gender and intersectional perspective, an aspect which has neither been prioritized in academic debates.

Given that is problem which is transnational and in motion in nature I propose a multi-sited and intersectional research strategy which "privileges transborder processes" (Levitt & Glick-Schiller 2004:1012). To build a more comprehensive understanding of how migrants' engagement with transnational social protection take place in a context of cross-border migration, I include research participants in both research sites: Nicaraguan migrant women living in Zaragoza, Spain, as well as their non-migrant family members in Nicaragua.

Moreover, my research tries to go beyond the narrow perspectives of migration which look at migrant women mainly as victims. Instead, I adopt a feminist approach to emphasize the agency of women, viewing them as "strategic agents" (Vives 2015:74) of their migratory projects. I believe that privileging migrant women's experiences, knowledge and agency can contribute to building a more holistic understanding of transnational social protection from a gender perspective.

Structure of the Research

This paper is divided into eight chapters. This chapter serve as the introduction. In Chapter 2 I provide the contextual background for the case of Nicaraguan women's migration to Spain. Chapter 3 reflects on theoretical discussions and relevant concepts for the study of transnational social protection. To inform my research strategy and analysis of finding I propose a framework with three relevant lenses: a transnational angle, the migration-social protection nexus and gender. Approached together they can provide a more holistic understanding of Nicaraguan migrant women's engagement with transnational forms of social protection in Spain and Nicaraguan. In Chapter 4 I give a description and justification for employing a multi-sited and intersectional research methodology in the study. Chapter 5, 6 and 7 I present the findings. In Chapter 5 I provide an analysis of the migratory trajectories of women, and review how women's interactions and positions in Spain and Nicaragua shape their engagement with social protection. Chapter 6 addresses the second and third sub-questions which deal with how Nicaraguan migrant women *access* and *provide* social protection in Spain and Nicaragua. Chapter 7 discusses the effects of these women's engagement in social protection, in terms of *viability* and *reconfiguration of gender relations*. Lastly, chapter 8 looks back at the proposed theoretical framework and include my contributions to the wider debate of transnational social protection in a context of migration.

1.1 Research Questions and Sub-questions

In order to better address the given research problem I have formulated the following question:

> *How do Nicaraguan migrant women engage with transnational forms of social protection in Spain and Nicaragua?*

I intend to operationalize my main research question through the following sub-questions:

1. How do Nicaraguan migrant women access social protection in Spain and Nicaragua?

2. How do Nicaraguan migrant women provide social protection for their families and households in Spain and Nicaragua?

3. What are the effects of engagement with transnational social protection for Nicaragua migrant women, in terms of viability and gender relations (re)configuration?

Chapter 2 - The Transnational Field that Expands Across and Within Spain and Nicaragua: Contextualizing the Research Problem

In this chapter I present the contextual background of the case of women's migration between Spain and Nicaragua and situate my research within this transnational field. In addition, I provide an overview of state social protection provisioning for Nicaraguan migrants in these two countries.

2.1 In the Search of New Horizons: Nicaraguan Female Migration to Spain

Since the early 2000s Spain has become the third most prominent migrant destination for Nicaraguans, after Costa Rica and the United States (UNICEF 2013). As of January 2018, there were 31,220 Nicaraguans registered at different municipalities located nationwide (INE 2018).[4] Nicaraguan migration to Spain has a female face. With 77.11% (24, 074) of Nicaraguan migrants being women, they conform to what Oso and Catarino (2013:627) refer as a "feminized migrant community", given that women represent 60 percent or more of its population.

The feminization of migration, however, has implications beyond the debate of whether women are now migrating in higher numbers. More than that, the feminization of migration means understanding that migrant women are generally "the first link of the migratory chains, the main people responsible to provide economic resources to transnational families, and the leaders of family reunifications" (Pedone et al. 2012:543). Therefore, attention should be paid not only to whether women are the majority in these flows but also to the changes that migration led by women generate in gender and social relations both in their countries of origin and destination.

There are diverse factors which have influenced the feminization of Nicaraguan migration to Spain. These do not emerge or exist in isolation but often in confluence with each other. Economic constraints, such as high levels of unemployment, lack of state support, and poverty drive Nicaraguan women to migrate to Spain in the search of a 'better future' (González 2011; Moré 2017). This is coupled with the possibility of earning higher incomes in Spain, compared to other popular migration destinations for Nicaraguans such as Costa Rica, El Salvador and Panama. This is also associated with migrants' perception of Spain's better quality of life as a country located in the 'Global North' (González 2011). Demand for female labor in the Spanish labor market in service sectors, particularly domestic work has become another significant factor (IOM 2013). For migrant

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[4] It is important to note that it is hard to estimate the exact number of Nicaraguan immigrants living in Spain given that many of them have an irregular status and thus are not projected in official statistics. Estimates suggest that a more realistic number of Nicaraguans in Spain would amount to 80,000 (Cimacnoticias 2014).

women in Spain, domestic work represents the primary source of employment (Oso & Catarino 2013; Hierro 2016). In the case of Nicaraguan migrant women, it is estimated that 90 percent are employed as domestic workers.[5]

Another significant element influencing Nicaraguan emigration to Spain the 'perceived' shared cultural background including colonial ties between Nicaragua and Spain (González 2011). Such links facilitate migrants' integration in Spanish society due in large part to the shared language. Also, social and migratory networks established by Nicaraguan pioneering migrants since the early 2000s have been key in establishing a *cultura de migración'*, a 'culture of migration' from Nicaragua to Spain. Last but not least are the permissive visa procedures for entering Spain, and the privilege legal status granted to Latin Americans which facilitates their path to Spanish citizenship (Ibid).

I would like to emphasize, nonetheless, that in the context of my research I understand that these migratory dynamics originate beyond the 'push and pull factors'. Instead, I recognize Nicaraguan migrant women's identities also represent an important element in shaping their mobility (Boyle 2002). By this I mean that while many of their "motives for migration are economic, [they] cannot be understood separately from the social and cultural expectations of women" (Basa et al. 2011:14). Hence, the decision to migrate is not only based on 'cost-benefit calculations' but are also grounded in other aspirations that women have. This will be further explored in Chapter 5.

Zaragoza: 'The Nicaraguan Capital of Spain'

Among Nicaraguan migrants, Zaragoza has come to be known as 'the Nicaraguan capital of Spain' (Heraldo 2011). In the past fifteen years, Zaragoza has become home to 5,470 Nicaraguans (INE 2018), making it the city with the largest Nicaraguan population in the country. After Romanians and Moroccans, Nicaraguans are the third largest migrant community in Zaragoza, with 6.7% of the total migrant population (INE 2018).

Women constitute 74% of the Nicaraguan population in the city and almost all work in the domestic work sector. Nicaraguan men usually worked in the local markets, in the construction sector or in domestic work, but to a very lesser extent compared to women. In addition, most Nicaraguan migrants found in this city come from Chinandega, a city located on the northwest region of Nicaragua. Nicaraguan emigration to Zaragoza happens at a particular junction between female labor demand in domestic work, transnational networks and an established migration culture between Nicaraguan and Spain, and specifically between Chinandega and Zaragoza.

2.2 The Spanish Migration Regime: 'A Hybrid Model'

Since the mid-1980s, Spain has evolved rapidly from being a classic labor exporter country to a labor importer country (Hierro 2016). Spain is now the second state in the EU with the highest migrant population, after Germany (Fuentes & Callejo 2011). Compared to other EU countries, in the last decades Spain has had a 'flexible' legislation towards migrants. Evidence of this is found in the

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[5] Personal interview with Javier Arce, July 2018, Zaragoza

multiple regularization campaigns which were pushed forward between 1986-2005 to grant amnesty to undocumented migrants (Fuentes 2007).

Today, migration to Spain is mainly irregular (Hierro 2016). There are various factors for this. The high levels of informality in the Spanish economy fuels demand for low-skilled, irregular, migrant labor, creating highly stratified labor markets and niches along ethnic and gender lines. Other significant elements are the somewhat lenient Spanish entry visa requirements, which do not require entry visas for certain countries, including Nicaragua. Hence, this has become "an easy channel of legal entry for some immigrants" (Ibid.) who enter the country on a regular status and then overstay their visas and become undocumented.

In Spanish immigration legislation there are certain exceptional circumstances under which undocumented migrants can regularize their status. Such residence authorizations can be granted to foreigners who are in an irregular situation and comply with any of the following specifications established in immigration regulations: *arraigo* (rootedness), international protection, humanitarian reasons, collaboration with public authorities or matters of national security/public interest (Izquierdo 2006). Most undocumented migrants regularize their status through *arraigos*, or 'rootedness' procedures. There are three different types of *arraigos* based on employment, social ties with Spain or family ties with Spanish citizens (Hierro 2016). These links are used as proof of the applicant's interest in residing in Spain and determine the prevalence of such particular interest for the granting of the requested temporary residence permit.[6]

Yet, although these procedures might seem as a viable option to regularize undocumented migrants' status, "a paradox arises from the additional observation that the acquisition of legal status is only partially resolved through the above mentioned regularization processes" (Hierro 2016:69). In reality, many migrants find it difficult to renew their residence permits and fall back into an irregular situation. Given these contradictory dynamics, the Spanish migration regime can be considered a 'hybrid model' characterized by both permissive and restrictive policies (Hierro 2016; Laubenthal 2007).

[6] Personal interview with Erika López, July 2018, Zaragoza

2.3 Social Protection for Nicaraguan Migrants in Nicaraguan and Spanish Policy

In Nicaragua

> *"No government in Nicaragua has ever been sensitized with the realities of migrants, the focus has always been on the remittances"* (Javier Arce, July 2018, Zaragoza)

Nicaraguan policy and macroeconomic development discourses envision Nicaraguan migrants envisioned as 'development actors'. Policy documents, such as Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and National Plans for Human Development underline increasing remittances as a strategy to achieve higher levels of development and reduce poverty and inequality (World Bank 2005; PNDH 2008; PNDH 2012). To achieve this, Nicaraguan governments has tried to "guarantee remittances as a key element for 'reactivating' the economy and reducing poverty" (PNDH 2008:32) by facilitating the infrastructure needed for receiving remittances, such as allowing local banks to manage the money transfers. The economic contributions of Nicaraguan migrants are relevant for the Nicaraguan state; however, their social protection is not. Although fifteen percent of the country's population are migrants (OIM 2013), there is no evident political motivation from the state to provide migrants' with social protection.

Nicaragua is characterized by presenting a residual provisioning system. This means that formal social protection from the state is very weak, and most people rely on their personal networks to ensure social protection. Migrants significantly contribute to filling the formal welfare provision gap as they "frequently become social protection providers for families and sending communities" (Paul 2017:39). They usually do so by engaging in informal social protection arrangements, mainly through remittances, to ensure the that needs and welfare of their families back in Nicaragua are covered.

On average, half of Nicaraguan migrants' remittances is directed to cover families' welfare expenses such as medical, educational and housing costs (Franzoni &Voorend 2011). Consequently, Nicaraguan migrants' economic and social contributions represent a relevant feature in the country's social provisioning system. What this creates however, is a private protection system where the burden of social protection relies not on the state, but on families and community networks, and therefore generates "a dangerous substitute for a public welfare system" (Krozer & Lo Vuolo 2013:118).

In Spain

> *"When it comes to social rights what obligations do states have towards non-citizens present in their territory?"* (Paul 2017:33)

The exponential migration process in Spain has led to a large-scale social and demographic transformation, with important implications for social policies, particularly those of social protection encompassed under the welfare state. With migrant populations, new social needs have emerged, related not only to the increase in the demand of social services but also to its diversification (Fuentes 2007). In January 2000, 'Ley Orgánica 4/2000' (Organic Law 4/2000), came into force. This law "represented a paradigmatic reorientation of Spanish immigration policy" (Laubenthal 2007:114) given that it expanded significant social rights to immigrants (Hierro 2016). A major change was the universalization of access to the public healthcare system, including coverage for undocumented migrants.

Another important legislation for contextualizing this research is that related to social protection of domestic workers, as in the case of Karla, most of the women participants in this research and the ones migrating to Spain work in the domestic work sector. The Spanish government does not have an explicit policy on import of domestic workers or a bilateral agreement with Nicaragua. Moreover, the country has not yet ratified the International Labor Organization Convention on Domestic Workers (ILO 189). In 2011, after years of significant efforts from domestic workers' organizations, the Spanish government advanced a reform in the Social Security Regime of Household Employees (SRHE). SRHE adhered to the ILO Convention on Domestic Workers (ILO 189), and thus was seen as "a positive step toward improving the conditions of care work in private households" (Ibáñez & León 2014:111).

The positive effects of this legislation, nevertheless, have been very limited (see Pavlou 2016; Ibáñez & León 2014). On the one hand, despite efforts to formalize and regulate domestic work employment in private households, this sector remains highly unregulated, and thus domestic workers are still highly vulnerable to face abuses and precarity in their work. On the other hand, a significant amount of domestic work remains informal and unreported by both employers and employees (Ibáñez and León 2014). Furthermore, even under this new reform, domestic workers remain excluded from unemployment benefits. A final consideration which might be obvious yet important to highlight is that SRHE only covers documented migrants, leaving excluded those who are in most need of protection.

Chapter 3 – Building a Framework for Approaching the Study of Transnational Social Protection

In this chapter I provide a review of relevant literature on the theorization of transnational social protection. The first section considers the emergence of transnational social protection as a recent research agenda and analytical concepts for its study. Then I turn to a discussion of the migration-social protection nexus. Two views are displayed: one that considers migration as a social protection strategy. And the second, which underlines migration as a process that can increase risks and vulnerabilities of migrants, demanding new types of social protection. Relevant attention is given to the concept of precarity to understand migrants-specific risks and vulnerabilities as a social condition that affects their engagement in social protection. In the third subsection I approach a discussion of gender within a context of transnational migration and transnational social protection. The chapter concludes with proposing a conceptual framework that adopts these three lenses to approach the study of transnational social protection: a transnational angle, the migrations-social protection nexus and gender.

3.1 Transnational Social Protection: Current Debates and Analytical Concepts

Scholars define transnational migration as "the processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement" (Glick-Schiller et al. 1991; Mahler 1999). This approach challenges 'bipolar models' of migration which assume that migrants in host societies "settle, assimilate, and ultimately forsake ties to their homeland" (Mahler 1999:691). Instead, it views migrants as agents who maintain strong ties with their country of origin. A transnational perspective does not dismiss the national or local level, but embraces the different cross-border dynamics that take place within the national territories and societies where migrants are 'simultaneous embedded', and the ways in which they are interconnected and related (Levitt & Glick-Schiller 2004; Glick-Schiller & Faist 2009; Levitt 2012; Mazzucato 2011; Grabska 2017). This "transnational way of being" (Levitt & Glick-Schiller 2004:1001) shapes migrants access and use of social protection (Faist et al. 2015) in transnational social spaces.

The theorization and academic consideration of TSP for migrants, however, is a fairly recent development. Previous studies focus on social protection based on citizenship and assume that individuals remain in one country throughout their lives (Bilecen and Barglowski 2015). As such, they suffer from what Wimmer and Glick-Schiller (2002:302) label "as *methodological nationalism*, the assumption that the nation/state/society is the natural social and political form of the modern world". In recent years, nonetheless, TSP has emerged as a relevant agenda in transnational migration research challenging this assumption, motivated by the fact that transnational lives that migrants lead call for "different forms of organization of social protection" (Bilecen & Barglowski 2015:204). Authors emphasize "the hallmark of a transnational approach" (Faist 2013:7) in relation

to the study of how social protection is organized across borders, and that such a perspective can encompass the mobility and complex realities of migrants (Bilecen & Barglowski 2015; Boccagni 2011; Faist 2013; Levitt et al. 2017). Accordingly, TSP has emerged as a *transnational social question* (Faist 2009; Faist 2014).

Levitt et al. (2017:8) propose a research agenda, where they propose a conceptualization of TSP and define it as

> "the policies, programs, people, organizations, and institutions that provide for and protect individuals' across national borders in the categories of old age, survivors, incapacity, healthcare, family benefits, active labor market programmes, unemployment, and housing assistance".

Another definition comes from Lafleur et al. (2018:n.p) who approach TSP as "migrants' cross border strategies to cope with social risk in areas such as health, pensions, unemployment, etc. that combine entitlements to host and home state-based public welfare policies and market and community based practices". Hence, TSP is understood beyond the approach that social protection is only a transaction between individuals and states. It considers the ways in which migrants create strategies and mobilize resources to engage with social protection across borders.

Authors introduce various concepts beyond the definition of TSP to understand the ways in which migrants organize these strategies and resources. For instance, Levitt et al. (2017:6) introduce the term of 'resource environment', which refers to the "the combination of all the possible protections available to them from four potential sources", states, markets, third sector actors and individuals' social networks. As migrants move across borders, migration regimes and welfare states their resource environments are prone to change. The concept of 'resource environment' is a "tool to map and analyze variations in TSP over time, through space, and across individuals" (Ibid.:3).

Another important concept comes from Bilecen and Barglowski (2015), who suggest that migrants negotiate and combine 'assemblages' of formal and informal types of social protection. These assemblages intermingle state and non-state actors which "interact in addressing social risks and social inequalities" (Faist 2013:10). While formal social protection is provided by states and organizations, informal social protection emerges from by migrants' personal networks and community initiatives (Bilecen and Barglowski 2015:203). Mingo and Mazzucato (2015) provide a typology of transnational social protection which includes semi-formal types of social protection. Nonetheless, "this distinction is merely analytical" (Boccagni 2011:169) and migrants' strategies to engage with social protection include a sources, suggesting there is a blurred line between formal and informal social provisioning. Thinking of social protection as 'assemblages' implies that provisioning schemes "may be cross-cutting the borders of nation states" (Bilecen and Barglowski 2015:208). We could think, for instance, of portability of benefits across borders or transnational care arrangements as examples. Consequently, the term 'assemblages' lays out a "dynamic concept of social protection" (Ibid.) which is suitable for understanding how migrants engage with social protection in a context of cross-border migration.

In addition, authors examine how migrants' use of social protection in related to the meanings they attach to different types of provisioning. Speroni (2007) indicates that strategies of transnational social protection do not only depend on

availability but are also directly linked to subjective meanings that guide migrants' use and engagement in those strategies. This also relates to the viability of transnational social protection. Bilecen and Barglowski (2015) indicate that even when having access to formal social protection some migrants will choose not to access this type of social protection as informal social protection might seem not only more desirable but also more viable. Additionally, authors have also brought attention to how the organization of transnational social protection reproduces existing social inequalities or create new ones (Faist 2014; Faist et al. 2015; Lafleur & Vivas Romero 2018). Further, others have paid attention to the resources and services that non-migrant kin facilitate to migrants. Mazzucato (2009) refer to this as 'reverse remittances' a notes that flow of resources in migration contexts does not only follow a unilateral trend (usually North-South), but can also occurred the other way around.

TSP Through a 'Social Protection from Below' Lens

In the context of mobility, migrants have to "think of their social protection" (Bilecen & Barglowski 2015:204) and the ways they can ensure welfare for their families across borders. Often, people on the move develop 'bottom-up' strategies in order to compensate for the welfare gap of weak formal social protection systems in the countries of origin and destination. These strategies could be understood as 'social protection from below', the process through which migrants mobilize resources to create a system of social protection for themselves and their families (Bilecen 2013; Faist 2013; Boccagni 2015; Boccagni 2017; Grabska 2017).

These grassroots ways of support have "an important role in securing migrants' livelihoods and realizations of life chances" (Bilecen & Barglowski 2015:208). Boccagni (2017:174) points out that examining social protection from below renders attention to the informal support migrants provide to their families, which is "the less visible but more substantive side of migrant social protection". A 'social protection from below' lens does not only visibilize migrants' efforts but also highlights their agency in these processes. It is relevant, nonetheless, to situate and understand migrants' 'bottom-up' strategies in relation with 'top-down', "macro-political scenarios" (Ibid.:170).

3.2 The Migration-Social Protection Nexus

The link between migration and social protection has been well established (Avato et al. 2010; Sabates-Wheeler & MacAuslan 2007; Swemmer 2013). Some authors have noted that "[M]igration is arguably the most important social risk management instrument available to mankind" (Sabates-Wheeler & MacAuslan 2007:27). When public provisioning of social protection in sending countries is weak; migration can help in providing safety nets and resources to migrants and their families (Swemmer 2013:10). In this regard, significant attention has been paid to the role of remittances and their impact in the development of sending countries and as well as their potential for poverty reduction. What is interesting is that in policy discourses, migrants have come to be celebrated as 'heroes/heroines', 'agents of development' and key 'providers of social protection' (Faist 2013:10; Sørensen 2012:62), both in sending and receiving societies. Rarely, however, are the migrants' well-being and their security a focus of attention (Boccagni 2014).

Although migration can be a strategy for migrants to manage risks and ensure the welfare of their families, it can also increase migrants' vulnerabilities and

risks, which increases the demand for diverse forms of social protection (Boc-cagni 2017; Sabates-Wheeler 2007; Swemmer 2013). Some migrant-specific risks are exclusion of welfare systems, legal status, lack of personal networks and in-formation, discrimination, and poor working conditions (Boccagni 2011; Swem-mer 2013). Further, it is not only risks but also precarity that many migrants face due to migration. The concept of precarity "captures both atypical and insecure employment and has implications beyond employment pointing to an associated weakening of social relations" (Anderson 2010:303). This is relevant for com-prehending not only the structure of vulnerability but also the source of the vul-nerability of migrants (Sabates-Wheeler & MacAuslan 2007).

3.3 Bringing Gender In

> "*Gender matters. To incorporate gender in migration research is not to 'privilege' it but accord it the explanatory power it merits*" (Mahler & Pessar 2006:51).

3.3.1 Engendering Transnational Migration

Today, women represent almost half of the 244 million international migrants (UN Women 2015). However, for a long time, migration research was gender-biased, and largely overlooked migrant women's experiences. The only times they were featured in migration studies were as passive, dependent migrants. The development of a thorough gender analysis in human mobility issues came about in the 1970s and 1980s when migrant women begun to be considered "subjects of scholarly inquiry" (Mahler 1999:693). Still, most of this scholarship under-stood gender only in terms of incorporating sex as a variable, and did not con-sidered it a key principle organizing migration processes (Ibid.). Nonetheless, extensive literature on migration exists today which highlights the importance of 'bringing gender in' (Pessar 2003) to migration research[7], and which advocates that migration research ought to consider a "relational understanding of gender" (Donato et al. 2006:5), rather than only seen it as a "a dichotomous tool to ana-lyze society" (Elliot 2016:75).

Hence, there seems to be a consensus now that gender matters in migration, and that migration itself is a *gendered* phenomenon (Grasmuck & Pessar, 1991; Hon-dagneu-Sotelo 1994; Mahler & Pessar 2001; Boyle 2002; Pessar 2003; Sørensen 2005; Donato et al. 2006; Mahler & Pessar 2006; Padilla 2008; Lutz 2010; Vives 2015). Gender represents constitutive, organizing element of migration (Ibid.), which also influences migrants' lives, choices and strategies in their immigration contexts (Lutz 2010:1651). Consequently, migration processes cannot be fully understood without a gender analysis, as there are many relevant aspects of hu-man mobility which are clearly affected and shaped by gender, such as labor markets and immigration policies (Padilla 2013:4).

Mahler and Pessar are the main scholars theorizing on gender in transnational migration. They suggest that "there are innumerable transnational sites where gender matters" (2006:45), and hence the need to analyze transnational migra-tion from a gender lens. Moreover, the manifold transnational spaces that have emerged as a result of current global economic, social and cultural dynamics are

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[7] For an exhaustive literature review on the incorporation of gender in migration studies see Donato at al. (2006)

not gender neutral (Dannecker 2005). The high demand for female labor in gendered and segregated labor markets is an example of the gendered dimensions of these processes. Therefore, a migration analysis from a transnational perspective that brings in gender can elucidate the various gender ideologies and power hierarchies that are specific to migrants' countries of origin and destination, and which are historically contingent in the case of migrant women (Padilla 2013:4).

The concept of Gendered Geographies of Power (GGP) proposed by Mahler and Pessar (2001) provides a helpful framework to understand the scope and dimensions of these cross-border dynamics. GGP helps capturing the multiple dimensions: *geographies*, *social locations* and *power hierarchies*, where gender operates in migration processes. In a transnational context, the social locations migrants occupy in their countries of origin might vary from those they occupy in the host societies. And, often, if not always, gender organizes and regulates those social locations (Mahler & Pessar 2001). Thus, GGP becomes a valuable and suitable analytical tool in transnational migration research insofar as it captures the ways in which "gender operates simultaneously in multiple social scales across transnational terrains" (Mahler and Pessar 2001:445). By doing so it highlights the dynamics and power relations that are produced, reproduced or resisted on a transnational level.

3.3.2 Transnational Social Protection and Gender

Different studies examine how transnational migration changes or reconfigures gender relations, as well as its effects on the social reproduction in transnational spheres (See Mahler 1999; Dannecker 2005; Bastia & Busse 2011). There is not much scholarship, however, which approaches transnational social protection from a gender perspective. Yet, transnational social protection is a site where gender *certainly* matters. Throughout their migratory trajectories, women face many challenges, among which are is lack access of social protection (IMRC 2018) or limitations to provide social protection for themselves and their families across borders. At the same time, migrant women act upon these limitations, navigating different social protection systems, to ensure provision of transnational welfare.

Most of the research on transnational social protection which incorporates gender in the analysis focuses on social protection and care in the context of gender relations and emphasizes the role of migrants as both social protection givers and receivers (IMISCOE 2018). Merla (2017) stresses that migrant domestic workers in Belgium sit at the interface of care and social protection system in their countries of origin and host societies. Boccagni (2013) examines the needs of Ecuadorian migrant care workers. His research highlights that while they rely on residual support from sending or receiving societies, Ecuadorian migrant women are also key providers (often the main providers) for the significant others left behind. He suggests however, that little is known about these women's needs as 'transnational mothers' or about the types of social provision and support available to them on a transnational level (Ibid. 2013). Along these lines, there are studies which examine the ways in which informal strategies of social protection such as transnational care arrangements and remittances are gendered practices (Boccagni 2011; Wong 2006).

Also, authors have brought attention to the ways in which migrant women access and provide social protection for themselves and their families and this is

shaped by their gender, and the social and cultural contexts in which they are embedded. Zontini (2014) notes that it is predominantly women who negotiate the provisions of social protection for their families in various welfare systems "across the transnational social field to which they [are] entitled" (Ibid:1118). In 'Adolescent Girls' Migration in The Global South', Kasia et al. (2018) provide a detailed account of how migrant and refugee young girls from Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Sudan provide social protection for themselves and their households. The authors underline that these girls' engagement with social protection is embedded in their gendered adolescence and that their role as providers of social protection intersects with their roles as daughters, wives or sisters.

3.4 Toward a conceptual framework for transnational social protection

This chapter has provided an account of relevant efforts to theorize and analyze different TSP. In order to approach my research question: *How do Nicaraguan migrant women access and provide social protection in Nicaragua and Spain?* I have developed a three pronged framework to guide my research, grounded on a view of 'social protection from below'. I suggest that three important lenses should be taken into account when analyzing social protection in the move. In order to understand the ways in which migrants' access and provide social protection a *transnational angle* is needed. There is a straightforward justification for this, the increasing transnationalization of migrants' lives, demands new ways of theorizing social protection. I particularly draw on the work of Bilecen and Barglowski (2015) on 'assemblages of social protection', as this concept implies that TSP is a dynamic a fluid process, which takes places across borders and involves state and non-state actors.

In addition, looking at TSP as 'assemblages' highlights the different levels of analysis: the local, the national and the transnational as well as the level of formality and informality in social protection arrangements that migrants engage with across borders. The distinction between formal and informal social protection is relevant insofar as it allows for an identification of different sources of social protection and the gaps that exist in formal social provisioning systems. In this sense, the researcher can identify "the resource flowing in informal networks together with formal welfare structures" (Ibid.:212). As authors have suggested, nonetheless, the distinction is merely analytical and will be informed by the particular context and case (Bilecen & Barglowski 2015; Boccagni 2011; Faist 2013). Hence, the focus here should not be on seeing formal and informal social protection as opposites, but as interacting entities and process.

The second angle is the *migration-social protection nexus*. Why this focus? Well, because "migration challenges the way social protection is organized" (Bilecen 2017:80). The migration-social protection nexus emphasizes the double character of migration. On one hand, migration can be a form of social protection which improves migrants' life changes and livelihoods. On the other hand, mobility can heighten migrant-specific vulnerabilities and risks which demand further, and sometimes new forms of social protection. Here, the concept of precarity provides a good framework to approach. These tensions are key for understanding the opportunities and challenges migrants have to engage with in social protection.

The final and third lens I propose to approach the study of social protection is *gender*. Given that my research explores Nicaraguan migrant women's engagements with social protection at a transnational level, gender represents a central category of analysis. Not because my research focuses on women, but because it examines these women's engagement with social protection in relation with men and with other women (i.e. those women who stay in Nicaragua). Hence, gender comprises a "constitutive element of social relationships" (Scott 1986:1067). I suggest that this framework allows for a better understanding of how migrants engage with transnational social protection.

Chapter 4 - A Multi-Sited and Intersectional Research Methodology

Most studies dealing with social protection and migration take place in one given moment, and leave out the changing nature of migrants' engagement with social protection arrangements. A multi-sited methodology tackles this limitation by providing an interesting angle of analysis to examine the changes in social protection arrangements migrants experience across their trajectories. Consequently, this methodology is suitable for the study of cross-border phenomena, such as Nicaraguan migrant women's engagement with transnational social protection because it facilitates "a more holistic research on the challenges and opportunities emerging from the interconnectedness of existing social protection" (Mingot & Mazzucato 2017:788) arrangements in Spain and Nicaragua. Moreover, informed by the feminist understanding that "it is important to articulate gender with other dimensions of identity" (Mahler & Pessar 2001:443), I have used an intersectional approach to show how engagement in social protection at the transnational level is also determined by migrants' gender in relation to their immigration status, ethnicity and social class.

To develop a transnational framework for the study of Nicaraguan migrant women's engagement with transnational social protection I designed a research methodology which that privileges their transnational processes and allowed me to gather data in both the immigration and the emigration countries. Given the limitations of doing research *simultaneously*, as other researching transnational migration issues do (See Faist & Amelina 2012; Mazzucato 2009), I conducted research in Spain and Nicaragua *sequentially*. Similar methodologies are used by Grabska (2014) and Mahler (1999).

Also, a multi-sited methodology encourages a consideration of other relevant transnational actors, such as migrants' family members in the country of origin. Therefore, even though my research focuses on Nicaraguan migrant women's engagement with social protection I also include the voices of non-migrant individuals whose lives are also affected by this migration. Doing empirical research with different actors located across borders provides multiple perspectives of the diverse degrees of mobility and transnational ties among Nicaraguan migrant women and their non-migrant families in Nicaragua. In this sense, only through a prism of immobility am I able to understand mobility and its consequences for those who are immobile.

Accordingly, the findings of this research are the result of an interactive process of data creation and knowledge production between Nicaraguan migrant women in Zaragoza, their family members in Nicaragua and key informants who have been involved in working in related fields.

4.1 Access to Participants

My research is built from my collaboration with Association Atarraya Centroamérica (AAC). AAC is a non-profit organization integrated by Nicaraguan and Spanish members. It was founded in 2007 to provide support to the Nicaraguan community in Zaragoza. My involvement with this organization not only helped me identify Nicaraguan migrant women participants but also exposed me to relevant information about the dynamics of Nicaraguan emigration to Spain. Javier Arce, the president of the association and one of my key informants was my also gatekeeper. He facilitated access to Nicaraguan migrant women and provided logistical support during my stay in Zaragoza. This meant, however, that Nicaraguan women in my research have a very specific profile. They are organized with the association, where they have encountered a network of support and solidarity.

Participants' Sociodemographic Profile

Nine Nicaraguan women participated in my research. They are between the ages of 29 and 64 years old. All nine identify as cis-gender and heterosexual women. Seven of them have been in Spain for more than five years and have residence permits. The other two came not more than one year ago and are undocumented. Five of the women have completed some sort of tertiary education in Nicaragua while the other four only finished high school. Six of the women work as domestic workers. The others work as a janitor, one had two part-time jobs as a waitress/geriatric care assistant, and the last one is currently unemployed. This research focuses on third-country migrants from Nicaragua who work in low paid, low qualified jobs in Spain. All of them are mothers. Seven are single mothers and two of them are married and raising their children together with their partners. The women consider themselves to be working class in Spain, but middle class in Nicaragua. Income among the women varies but they all report earnings below the Spanish minimum wage (€858.55 per month)[8].

4.2 Data Collection Methods

I divided my data collection period into two different stages, between Spain and Nicaragua. I used a variety of qualitative methods to gather knowledge on how Nicaraguan migrant women engage with different forms of social protection across these geographies. During the first part of my fieldwork I spent 30 days in Zaragoza, Spain, from July 1st to July 30th, 2018. In this stage I collected data through in-depth interviews and organized one focus group discussion (FGD) with Nicaraguan migrant women. I also carried out semi-structured interviews with key informants who work on issues related with migrant communities in Spain. Furthermore, I engaged in participant observation which took place every day, in sociability interactions with participants. For the second stage of my fieldwork I traveled to Nicaragua, from August 3rd-September 4th, 2018. During this period, I carried out semi-structured interviews with family members of three of the women I interviewed in Zaragoza. In what follows, I review the different qualitative data collection techniques I used during fieldwork.

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[8] https://www.cuidum.com/blog/salario-empleadas-del-hogar-2018/

Migration life-story interviews

Using people's stories can be a powerful way to gather knowledge and information about a given issue. The purpose of using the life-story method was not to examine Nicaraguan migrant women's life as a whole but rather to focus on a life-course approach in relation to the women's' migratory trajectories and their cross-border engagements with social protection. The purpose of using the life-story method was not to examine each Nicaraguan migrant women's life as a whole but rather to focus on a life-course approach in relation to the women's' migratory trajectories and their cross-border engagements with social protection.

I decided to focus on the life-course perspective because it "seeks to describe the structure and sequences of events and transitions through an individual's life" (Bailey 2009:407). By engaging with participants' migratory histories, this approach allowed me to understand their trajectories and the transitions they have experienced as Nicaraguan women, accessing and providing social protection for themselves and their families at a transnational level, in the various "spaces and times they flow through" (Ibid.:408). In addition, this method offered an important opportunity to take migrant women's agency into account, and hence contributed to a more nuanced understanding of gender and migration.

I developed certain criteria to select participants. I only interviewed women who had migrated at least five years ago because they could convey a broader perspective on their engagement with social protection in a complex context of mobility, continuity and change at a transnational level, throughout the span of several years and through multiple geographies. Out of the five participants, four had migrated at least ten years ago and one migrated seven years ago.

I met with each respondent individually twice. Each encounter lasted between two to three hours, though sometimes they would extend longer if I was invited to their homes. Our first encounter was usually somewhere nearby the city center, in a café or local bar. I asked participants to choose the venues for the interviews because I wanted them to be in a comfortable, familiar space. I was also aware of participants' time constrains, and always proposed to meet them when and where it was convenient to them. In all interviews, I requested participants' oral consent to record and use the information they shared with me. Interviews follow more of a conversation structured, to allow participants themselves to open up and talked about their migratory trajectories and issues they deemed relevant.

Focus Group Discussion

Besides the interviews, I also conducted one focus group discussion (FGD) with seven Nicaraguan migrant women. The FGD covered four main themes: migratory trajectories, access and provision of social protection in Spain and Nicaragua, viability of social protection and reconfiguration of gender relations. I did not set any criteria for choosing participants in this activity. Instead, my aim was to provide a space where Nicaraguan women, newcomers and longtime migrants, could come together and share their experiences about their engagement with social protection.

Semi-structured interviews

I conducted 7 semi-structured interviews. In Spain, I interviewed four key informants in Zaragoza, two academics and two NGOs workers who informed

me about available sources of social protection for Nicaraguan migrant women and provided contextual knowledge about the migration and welfare regime in Spain. In Nicaragua, I did three semi-structured interviews with family members of Nicaraguan women I interviewed in Zaragoza. For this I followed a matched sample methodology (Mazzucato 2009).

Participant Observation

Furthermore, I complemented my research with participant observation to contextualize the narratives shared by participants through the other data collection methods. I carried out my observations on a daily basis during my time in Zaragoza at relevant sites where Nicaraguan migrant women socialize, particularly during activities related to AAC.

4.3 Data Analysis

Interviews and the FGD were recorded and transcribed. I conducted preliminary analysis putting together participants' migration life-stories and identifying relevant life elements related to engagement with social protection. This provided a framework to approach the FGD and interviews with family members in Nicaragua. Informed by my research questions, I identified four main themes in my data sources: 1) access to social protection, 2) provision of social protection from migrants to families in Nicaragua, 3) viability of social protection and 4) reconfiguration of gender relations. This analysis was undertaken manually.

4.4 Reflections on Positionality, Reflexivity and Ethical Considerations

In doing research of this nature, where I share a similar cultural and migration background with participants, yet differences are also evident, questions about my position as an 'insider/outsider' of researched subjects emerge. However, as Wolf suggests (1993:7), "'insider'/'outsider' categories are rarely so pure or simple, but rather, layered with complex and multiple facts". For instance, Nicaraguan migrant women saw me as an insider due the national and cultural background we share as Nicaraguan women. As such, we had shared a similar understanding, a common language, for talking about topics related to gender-related violence, women's rights, or the position of women in Nicaraguan and Spanish society which facilitated the development of trust between us.

In addition, being a migrant woman myself, with a complex migratory trajectory, helped build rapport and a sense of relatedness with participants. These similarities incited a sense of empathy among us. Other times participants perceived me as an outsider. As a middle class, bilingual, young Nicaraguan woman, currently pursuing a Master's in the Netherlands I was seen as a '*preparada*', a high skilled, well-educated, migrant woman. Nonetheless, this did not affect my research in any negative way, and perhaps even validated my credibility as a young researcher. This goes in accord with Vives (2015:62) who emphasizes that egalitarian relationships can stem not only necessarily from "sameness" but also from "empathy, reciprocity" between researcher and participants.

Diane Wolf (1993:1) suggests that "fieldwork as a research method poses particular challenges for feminists because of the power relations inherent in the process of gathering data".

Throughout my interactions with participants I was reminded of the power relations and potential inequalities that exist in these exchanges; for instance, something which struck me in particular was that in my daily interactions with the women of AAC, I evidenced the pressing preoccupations that undocumented Nicaraguan women experience daily. Actions which I took for granted such as walking down the streets of Zaragoza, or using public transportation proved deeply stressful and worrisome situations for these women, who feared being detained by the police, and the negative consequences that could bring. Although participating in my research did not directly exposed these women such dynamics made me reflect about the vulnerabilities and uncertainties experienced by some participants, as well as their constant efforts they make to try to remain at the margins of society and not get caught, which paradoxically represents too, a strategy of resistance. These dynamics gave way to ethical considerations in my research.

I ensured confidentiality and anonymity of participants by using pseudonyms to refer to them, with the exception of key informants for whom I have maintain names. Although none the participants cared if they were identified by their names, I decided to use pseudonyms. This came about from a process of reflexivity, a "continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation" (Berger 2015:220) of my own positionality in relation with participants and their lives. Seeing and learning about their daily experiences, motivations and fears, and being aware that some participants were still in an irregular situation, it was important for me to protect respondent's identities and prevent any risk of harming them or their families, for that matter. In a sense, as Berger (2015:220) suggests, this meant a

> "turning of the researcher lens back onto oneself to recognize and take responsibility for one's own situatedness within the research and the effect that it may have on the setting and people being studied".

Chapter 5 – Between *Here, There* and *Somewhere Else*: Mapping Nicaraguan Women's Migratory Trajectories
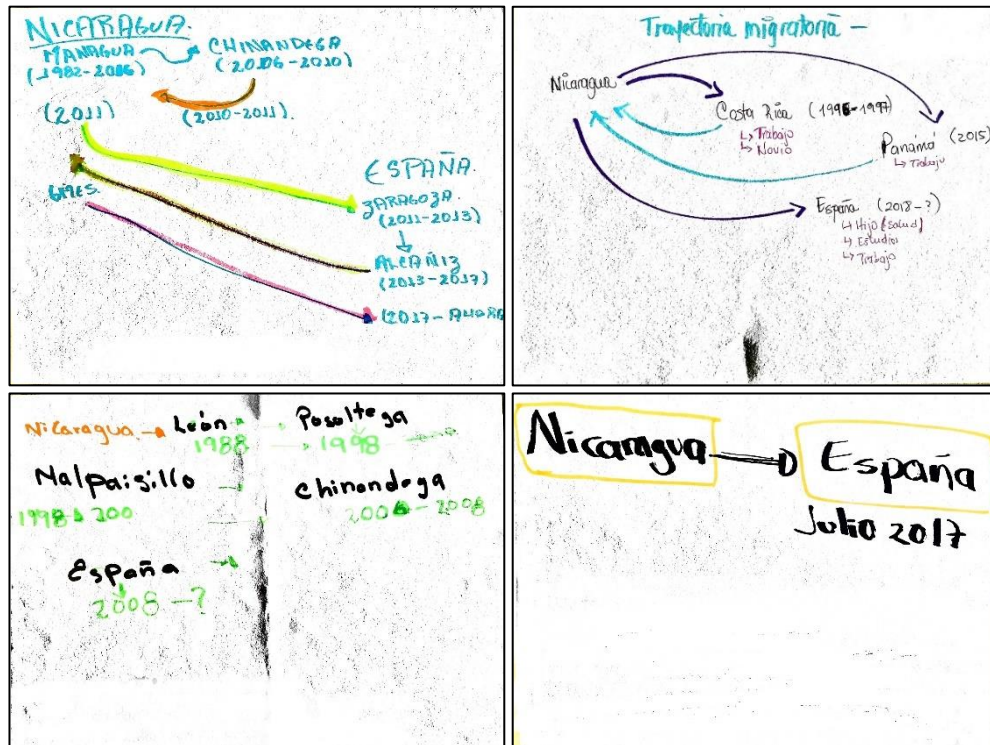
Figure 1. Display migratory trajectories of four Nicaraguan migrant women. I asked respondents to sketch their trajectories as part of the activities during the FGD. Source: The author

This chapter is based on the migration life-stories of Karla, Olga, Fatima, Mariana and Sonia, as well as insights from the FGD participants, Valeria, Amanda, Claudia and Silvia. To understand how Nicaraguan migrant women engage with social protection it is relevant to look at their migratory trajectories. First, because often the search for social protection takes migrants to different places, as social protection is not always achieved in one single location. And second, because engagement with social protection is contingent upon migrants 'markers of heterogeneity', such as immigration status and gender. In this chapter I discuss common mobility patterns in women's migratory trajectories. Then I provide an overview of the organization of participants' transnational lives.

5.1 Mobility Patterns

I started my first interviews with participants with the following question: *Can you tell me the story of your migration?* Two important patterns emerged from women's narratives: the reasons for their migration are related to social protection and trajectories follow a non-linear path.

5.1.1 Reasons for Migrating: Searching for Social Protection and More

Participants' reasons for migrating are significantly linked to improving access or provision of social protection for themselves and their families. The *hope of economic improvement* is the most salient factor shaping participants' migratory projects. The women speak of this in terms of increasing the welfare of their families, particularly their children's. While it is the women making the decision to migrate, often "children are the central axis of family migration and often a critical reason why families move back and forth and sustain transnational ties" (Levitt & Glick-Schiller 2004:1016). This is articulated by two participants:

> "I had two small children and the economic situation was not improving for my family. My mother migrated first, and then I followed. I did it because I wanted my children to have a better life" (Amanda, FGD, July 2018, Zaragoza).

> "I have a vision than by coming here I can change my economic status and help my two daughters in Nicaragua. We all come with the illusion of improving our economic situation. That is the goal but have to see what really happens" (Valeria, FGD, July 2018, Zaragoza).

The illusion of improving one's economic condition is a recurrent theme in participants' narratives. Yet, this expectation is "also embedded in the construction of a world abroad" (Dannecker 2013:663). As the following fragments suggest, migratory projects of these women are often coupled with *personal aspirations* which are usually related to gaining more autonomy and a desire to 'see the world':

> "I took the decision to migrate because we were struggling. It was becoming difficult to make ends meet and I had to find a way to provide for my children. But I also left because I had never been abroad. I wanted to experience *something different*" (Karla, FGD, July 2018, Zaragoza).

> "I did not come to Spain because of economic hardship. More than anything, I came because I wanted to escape from the authority of my father. I wanted to make my own decisions and *live my life*" (Sonia, July 2018, Zaragoza).

Non-economic elements are also significant in shaping participants' decision to migrate, particularly access to healthcare. In doing research with Andean transnational migrants in Belgium, Colombia and Peru, Lafleur and Romero (2018:9) found that "health plays a key role both as a trigger for mobility but also as an opportunity to access care that is not available in the home communities". This is also the case for Olga, who migrated to Spain because she needed to get treatment for her eyes. Therefore, Olga found in migration an avenue to improve her health:

> "I had a good life in Nicaragua. I would not say that very well, but at the level of the situation in Nicaragua. If I emigrated here, it was not for economic reasons, nor for political things or anything like that. I emigrated because I had a problem in my eyes, because of my health. I wanted to fix them" (Olga, July 2018, Zaragoza).

Participants report that *family reunification* is another significant reason for migration. This is the case for Fatima who migrated to Spain to reunite with family and get the support of personal networks:

> "When I was 17 my mom migrated to Spain. After a year, she decided to bring me because I was the youngest of my three siblings and I missed her a lot" (Fatima, July 2018, Zaragoza).

These accounts emphasize the complexity of migratory movements, and go beyond the mainstream discourse of migration as a strategy to overcome poverty. Furthermore, they display the women's agency and the multifaceted dimensions of their decision-making. In this sense, as Bonifacio explains "*migration is personal.* Although migration touches families and communities, the experience is deeply personal" (2012:6).

5.2 Between Here, There and Somewhere Else: Non-linear migratory trajectories

Nicaraguan women's migratory trajectories are not always linear (i.e. from A to point B). Rather, like Karla's example in the Introduction chapter, the search for social protection takes these women in complex and contingent migration journeys, with multiple origins and destinations as well as different mobility patterns. Migratory trajectories of participants circumvent mainly two spaces, *here*, Spain and, *there*, Nicaragua; but also expands to *somewhere else*, those locations where Nicaraguan migrant women had lived and worked before and after settling in Spain.

Nicaraguan migrant women's narratives suggest that for them and their non-migrant families, *here* and *there*, and sometimes *somewhere else* evoke particular meanings and exist in continuous confluence: events in Spain deeply affect the life of those in Nicaragua and vice-versa. The *here* and *there*, and *somewhere else* thus are social, political, cultural and subjective sites which are in constant dialogue, interacting through different transnational process and dynamics. For example, a recent event that was affecting participants' life in Spain was the political and socioeconomic crisis that erupted in Nicaragua since April 2018. Since the crisis many have been sending remittances more often and in higher amounts to help members of their families due to the deteriorating economic situation in Nicaragua. Participants needed to reorganize provision of social protection, in the form of remittances, in order to provide a safety net to those in Nicaragua.

5.2.1 Organization of Nicaraguan Women's Transnational Lives

Participants identified crucial events that become important in shaping their migratory trajectories and the organization of their transnational lives. A significant aspect is their migration status. The women indicated that at least they remained undocumented for at least two years, in some cases more. Being in an irregular situation is a precarious "social condition" (Schierup & Jørgensen 2016:2). One of the women mentioned feeling like an 'invisible woman', and others equating being undocumented with a sense of 'powerlessness'. In this regard, "migration may be experienced as immobile: simply a trial to be endured before being able to look back at a better time" (Scheller 2018:4).

This is also aggravated by the migration regime in Spain, where most resident permits are linked to employment contracts. For Nicaraguan migrant women who mostly work in domestic work or in other temporary, precarious jobs, this

means that linking their status to their "work situation is in many cases a precarious and uncertain bond" (Malgesini Rey et al. 2004:86). Participants suggested that this arrangement makes them fall back and forth into irregularity.

Menjivar (2006:1008) coined the term 'liminal legality' to refer to this condition, which takes place when migrants hold "neither an undocumented status nor a documented one, but may have the characteristics of both". Moreover, she suggests that this "is neither a unidirectional nor a linear process, or even a phase from undocumented to documented status, for those who find themselves in it can return to an undocumented status when their temporary statuses end" (Ibid.). Fatima's case illustrates this experience:

> "I got my residence permit after two years in Zaragoza. After another two years, my residence permit expired. At the time, I was unemployed and without a job contract I knew I could not re-apply for a residence permit. Again, I had no choice but to become an undocumented again. Three years after I had my daughter who was born a Spanish citizen and I was able to apply for a new residence permit through the 'family rootedness' process. I am now hoping to apply for the Spanish citizenship" (Personal interview, July 2018, Zaragoza).

Another participant emphasized the effects that a state of legal liminality has in terms of their work:

> "It is hard to experience that ambivalence. If you don't have a regular situation employers abuse more, they don't pay you, they don't make it easy for you. It's a radical change, going from documented to undocumented (Silvia, FGD, July 2018, Zaragoza).

In his study with Bolivian migrants in Spain, Speroni (2017:88) highlights that "'los papeles' [the papers] is a symbolic landmark for migrants and have a vital impact on the mobility dynamics and strategies" (Speroni 2017:88). Similarly, the women reported that being documented facilitated their engagement with social protection, as it allows them to work in the formal economy with higher wages and opt for live-out jobs, which they see as less precarious. Moreover, a regular status facilitates circular migration and visits to Nicaragua.

Another key aspect is participants' work. In their first years in Spain, Nicaraguan migrant women choose to work as in-home domestic workers because that arrangement provides a faster avenue to save money. Participants suggested that when for undocumented migrants, working as a live-in domestic worker can also bring a feeling of safety if the worker is undocumented, as they do not have to be exposed in the streets where police could stop them and request their documentation. At the same time, participants pointed out that there are downsides to being an in-home domestic worker, particularly the isolation and abuses from employers. After some years, most of the women shifted from being an in-home to and out-home domestic worker, which usually happened after getting their residence permits. Seven of the nine women participants started working as in-home domestic workers when they first came to Spain. Now, five of them have moved onto working as out-home domestic workers or got other jobs. This has allowed them to get involve in more activities outside work due to more flexible schedules, furthering their integration in the Spanish society

In addition, in their first years in Spain, it is very common for the women to send from half to almost all of their monthly income to their families in Nicaragua. One of the participants noted: "In my first years here, I would send almost all my money. I only kept with me the little I needed" (Mariana, FGD, July 2018,

Zaragoza). Most participants reported that as years go by, they significantly decrease the remittance amount, only sending money in case of an emergency or due to major events like the current crisis in Nicaragua.

Table 1. Nicaraguan migrant women's life configuration in Spain, based on migratory trajectory

Life's aspect	Less than four years residing in Spain	More than four years residing in Spain
Immigration status	Irregular	Regular
Type of work	In-home domestic workers	In-home & out-home domestic workers
Housing	Living at the workplace	Combination between living at the workplace and renting a room/apartment
Days off at work	One or two days off per week	Diversity in organization of women's time, depending on their work schedule
Social Relations/Integration	High level of social isolation. Fear of being detained by the police	More level of autonomy and mobility. More awareness of the social context. Nicaraguan migrant women feel safer due to temporary residence and work permit
Transnational links with Nicaragua	Relations and contact with Nicaragua via cellphone, internet, remittances and gifts. Traveling to Nicaragua is not feasible	Links are maintained via cellphone, internet, remittances and gifts. Visits to Nicaragua are now possible
Remittances	Remittances are sent periodically. Women send half or more of their monthly income to their families in Nicaragua	Remittances are sent sporadically. Women send smaller amounts and keep more to themselves. Some stop sending remittances altogether

Source: The author, based on data obtained during fieldwork. Table adapted from Hernández Cordero (2015:55).

In sum, analyzing migratory trajectories of people on the move contributes to under-standing social protection in a context of migration (Grabska et al. 2018). For participants and their families, migration represents the main avenue to ensure social protection and provide better life chances for themselves and their families, even when that means facing hardship in the host country. The women's trajectories reveal that their "positionalities before, during, and after migration shape the opportunities that are open to them" (Vives 2015:67) in terms of engagement with social protection. And at the same time, participants' trajectories change and evolve as the women negotiate and navigate opportunities and limitations brought by migration.

Chapter 6 - "Women Make the World Go 'Round": On How Nicaraguan Migrant Women Access and Provide Social Protection

In this chapter, I analyze Nicaraguan migrant women's engagement with transnational social protection, in terms of access and provision of social protection. I first distinguish the main sources of social protection reported by participants, and viewing Nicaraguan women as *receivers* of social protection. For analytical purposes, I make a distinction between formal and informal social protection arrangements in order to "illuminate the influence of formal social institutions and measures, or the lack therefore, on the 'strength' of informal migrants' social networks" (Boccagni 2011:170). In the second part I examine how women ensure social protection for their families in Spain and Nicaragua, viewing them as *providers*. Findings reveal that participants employ two main strategies to ensure social provision: remittances and transnational care arrangements. Together, these dynamics depict the constellation of participants' 'assemblages' of social protection (Bilecen & Barglowski 2015) across borders.

6.1 Nicaraguan Migrant Women as Receivers of Social Protection: Formal and Informal Arrangements

6.1.1. Formal Social Protection: Navigating State Provision Systems in Spain and Nicaragua

In Spain

As I discussed in Chapter 2, health and education are conceptualized as social rights for any person residing in Spain, regardless of their legal status. Nicaraguan women highly appreciate having access to public healthcare. All of them reported they have had different types of treatment, for example: Olga had cataract surgery. Sonia delivered her baby as an undocumented migrant with no issue, and recently had gastric bypass surgery, all covered by the public healthcare system. A few years ago, Karla had a back problem and was able to get treatment in the local hospital. Mariana injured her arm and she is currently receiving physiotherapy. Provision for health, along with education, is also an important element for those women who are mothers, like Fatima, and have their children in Spain.

Nonetheless, provision for healthcare for migrants is not guaranteed. In 2013, Spanish President Mariano Rajoy passed 'Real Decreto-Ley 16/2012', a law which revoked undocumented migrants' rights to public healthcare. The government such law "would prevent foreigners from gaming the system for the purposes of welfare tourism, discourage illegal immigration, and save the government money" (Dobbs & Levitt 2017:57). However, studies suggest there is no evidence that migrants 'abuse' the public healthcare system or any other form of public formal social provisioning. (See Carpio & Cabrero 2005; Fuentes 2007). After Law 16/2012 was passed, undocumented migrants could only seek medical attention in the case of children, medical emergencies or prenatal care (Dobbs & Levitt 2017). This of course put migrants and their families in a very

precarious and vulnerable situation, which Sonia articulates in the following passage:

> "When Rajoy took away the access to healthcare many undocumented migrants had a hard time. If you got sick you couldn't go to the pharmacy because they would not sell you anything without a prescription and the only way to get a prescription was by seeing a doctor. People only relied on herbal medicine, that was the only thing available. Even if they had a medical emergency, many avoided going to the hospital because they feared they could be deported" (Personal Interview July 2018 Zaragoza).

Despite this law, certain autonomous communities[9] have flexibilized requirements to facilitate access to social services to undocumented migrants and in others, specialized parallel mechanisms are established to address said collectives, generally in collaboration with organizations of the third social sector (Rodríguez Cabrero 2003).

The other important source of formal social protection for participants is social security through the Social Security Regime of Household Employees. Nevertheless, the women reported that under this scheme they do not feel protected or 'cared about' by the Spanish state. A participant emphasizes this:

> "How is it possible that still we do not have unemployment benefits?! They do not care what happens to use when we do not have a job" (Fatima, July 2018, Zaragoza)

Moreover, participants explained that often, employers would refuse to register them in the system as they do not want to pay their contribution, making it really difficult for them to access this service. Other types of formal social protection that participants reported having access to were '*ayudas*', or basic social assistance in the form of cash transfers or subsidies for food or rent from the municipality in Zaragoza. However, these were very limited and the women do not rely on them as a secure source of social protection.

In Nicaragua

Many Nicaraguan migrant women have registered with the Nicaraguan Institute of Social Security (INSS) while working and living in Spain. The women pay a monthly contribution towards what is known in Nicaragua as '*seguro facultativo*', or voluntary social security insurance. Although this is not a migrant-specific scheme it allows Nicaraguans living abroad to access coverage (El Nuevo Diario 2018). It works in the following way. The women pay a monthly contribution set at the amount they wish to pay (the minimum per quota is $18.00 USD) for the required quotas before retirement, which in Nicaragua amounts to about a minimum of fifteen years. Once they reach their retirement age, these women will be able to get a monthly pension. This has become a strategy for migrant women to ensuring social protection in the incoming years by securing a monthly pension., especially for those who will not be able to claim a pension in Spain. One of the participants put it this way:

> "It's a good option because the contribution is not too expensive. Given that I won't have access to a pension here in Spain, at least I know I will have something in Nicaragua" (Karla, July 2018, Zaragoza).

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[9] Spain is divided in seventeen autonomous communities. Each is endowed with certain legislative autonomy and administrative powers.

Gaps in Formal Protection for Migrants

Although the Spanish state grants access to certain social protection programs such as education and health, the provision of other social protection highly relevant to tackle the precarious lives of Nicaraguan migrant women, such as social security, is not always guaranteed. For those who work as domestic workers, the reform emerged as a mechanism to provide better social protection for them, however its implementation has been limited. In addition, the reform does not address structural conditions that increase risks and vulnerabilities of domestic workers, particularly migrants.

Hence, this analysis reflects structural issues beyond availability of social provision, which have to do with the precarious and vulnerable status of Nicaraguan migrant women in relation to access of social protection. As Fuentes (2007:180) underlines, "eligibility does not translate to an equal level of entitlement and quality of the healthcare system, nor in the standardized usage of those services by different social groups".

6.1.2 Informal social protection: 'reverse remittances', local organizations, solidarity fund and personal networks

Mingot and Mazzucato (2015:792) underline that informal social protection can be seen as a "versatile social protection because it might fulfil different functions". In a transnational context migrants access to formal social protection is usually limited so they rely on informal sources of social protection (Bilecen & Barglowski 2015; Boccagni 2011; Grabska et al. 2018; Mingot & Mazzucato 2017). In the case of Nicaraguan migrant women, these sources are their families back home, local organizations in Zaragoza that provide social services to migrants and their personal networks.

Migration studies usually "conceptualize migrants as providers of social protection for people back home" (Dankyi et al. 2017:81). However, Nicaragua migrant women are also *receivers* of social protection. The forms of support provided by non-migrant kin to these women can be conceptualized as 'reverse remittances'. Mazzucato (2009) coined this term to refer to the resources and services that those left behind facilitate to migrants and help them to achieve their migratory projects. It suggests that a flow of remittances can be two-dimensional. In a context of transnational social protection, this becomes relevant because it sees migrants as both providers and receivers of social protection.

The care provided by non-migrant kin to migrants' children or parents is an example of reverse remittance that represents "an integral system of global social protection" (Dankyi et al. 2017:80). Baldassar and Merla (2004) call this "care circulation", which refers to the negotiated and reciprocal processes that transnational families use to establish care arrangements across borders.

All the women I met, access informal social protection through transnational care arrangements. These arrangements are usually devise to provide care for their children. Moreover, seven of the nine women are single mothers, without any support from their children's biological fathers. The biggest support system comes from maternal grandparents, especially grandmothers who often assume the role of the children's 'social mothers'. When I talked to Karla's mother in Nicaragua she emphasized this:

> "Their father never, never, helped. Not even with a penny. The only one who has supported Karla is me. Her children love me like a mother. That's why she left happy and without being too worried because she knew that her children were in good hands" (Laura, August 2018, Chinandega).

These care arrangements can also fulfill a symbiotic function, as children left behind can also become care providers for their elder grandparents (Mingot & Mazzucato 2015:792). Such dynamics took place in the families of Valeria and Mariana:

> 'My daughters who are 16 and 17 live with my mom. My mom makes sure they are alright but at the same time my girls also take care of my mom. The support is mutual' (Valeria, FGD July 2018, Zaragoza).

> "When my mom left for Spain we stayed with our maternal grandparents. They took care of us until my brother and I grew up and could live independently. And now it's us who help taking care of my grandmother" (Alex, August 2018, Chinandega).

Other 'reverse remittances' than the non-migrant kin offer to Nicaraguan migrant women are support with organizing paperwork for certain procedures. For instance, Karla's mother helps her with paying her contribution to the social security in Nicaragua:

> "Every month I send my mother $100.00 USD for the social security payment in Nicaragua. She goes to the bank in Chinandega to get the money and at the same bank she deposits the $100.00 USD in the Social Security" (Personal interview, July 2018, Zaragoza).

In the same way, for Sonia, support of her family in Nicaragua has been quite important. Together with her husband she started a small parcel service between Spain and Nicaragua. In this process, her father's support was significant in securing the success of their company:

> "In the beginning, my dad helped us to set up the business in Nicaragua. He was the visible face of our company in there – while we were here in Spain he supported us there in Nicaragua with making the customs clearance, the distribution, and everything. He did it without charging us. He said 'I support my daughter because it is my daughter's business'" (Personal interview, July 2018, Zaragoza).

In addition to reverse remittances, getting involved in activities at AAC represents an essential aspect of participants' access to social protection. It is in this space, through the interaction with other women that they are able to inform themselves about reforms the social security both in Spain and Nicaragua, and other useful information on health services, job opportunities, employment rights, legal processes for visas and resident permits, courses and trainings for improving their work opportunities, and social services from charities and local NGOs.

Faith-based organizations can also play a relevant role in providing social protection to migrants (Mingot & Mazzucato 2017). Some of the women receive support from catholic associations in Zaragoza. Karla is one of them:

> "The people running the organization gave me things: second-hand clothes, dishes, cutlery. They also furnished my apartment. When I needed they also gave food vouchers and helped me find a job" (Karla, interview July 2018, Zaragoza).

Moreover, some of the women are members of a rotating and credit association (ROSCA), an initiative that emerge within ACC and is now managed by the association's board and Nicaraguan migrant women themselves. Participants call it a Solidarity Fund. Through this ROSCA, Nicaraguan migrant women can save money and obtain micro-credit loans at a one percent interest rate. This initiative has had a lot of value, especially for undocumented migrants who are not able to access banks in Spain. Thieme (2003) suggests that ROSCAs are 'multi-functional organisations' given that they not only offer financial support but they are a space where members can exchange relevant information. Two participants describe their positive experiences with this initiative:

> "Every month we meet for the Solidarity Fund. It is nice because we help each other, we catch up on everyone's life. It's a space to share. It makes it easier for us to save money or to ask for a loan when we need" (personal interview July 2018 Zaragoza).

> "I broke my glasses on the bus. So I asked for a loan and got new glasses. And now that I had to pay the deposited for my new apartment I also got a loan. It has been really helpful because it takes you out of trouble if you have an emergency" (personal interview July 2018 Zaragoza).

As other research suggests, personal networks are also crucial in facilitating access to social protection (Bilecen 2016; Boccagni 2011; Grabska et al. 2018). Menjívar (2002) notes that migrants' women's personal networks help them access medical services. Similarly, for Nicaraguan migrant women in Spain personal networks are essential in facilitating access to social protection services or employment through referrals. Socialization, although sometimes limited, is crucial for women to learn about formal and informal social protection provision. It is usually on Sundays when have the chance to socialize. As Pavlou (2016:161) notes, "Sunday as a full day off gives domestic workers the opportunity to meet and socialize with their peers; this is an essential condition to collective organization and mobilizing".

6.2 Nicaraguan Migrant Women as Social Protection Providers: Remittances and Transnational Care Arrangements

Boccagni (2011:170) sees migrant's informal TSP "as the aggregate outcome of leavers and stayers' everyday practices of mutual support and concern, such as remittances and transnational care". For Nicaraguan migrant women, remittances are the most significant avenue to ensure social protection for their families. Economic status has improved in the women's transnational households thanks to the flow of remittances. They have been able to invest in house renovations and pay for private schools and universities for their children. In addition, these are mostly "re-feminized" remittances"[10], as the sender and the recipient are usually women. In addition, remittances also allow families of migrants to cope with risk (Wong 2006). This is reflected in participants' experience, whose remittances help their families in Nicaragua to manage risk; for example, in cases when someone loses their job, or in times of economic crisis. Alex, Mariana's son articulates this:

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[10] Personal interview with Ana Romea, July 2018, Zaragoza

> "Since my mom went to Spain she has always been supporting us, especially when we have faced bad times. Now that I am unemployed she supports me a lot: she sends me money to support my child. She also sends some for my grandmother. Because of that I try to do as she says" (Personal interview, August 2018, Chinandega)

Furthermore, Boccagni (2017:17) addresses that "critical to the impact of remittances on social protection is also the interdependence between money transfers and other forms of care". The second way that Nicaraguan migrant women provide social protection to their families is by engaging in transnational care arrangements through which they give "emotional and practical support at a distance" (Merla 2012:159). In this process, technology has become crucial for women to care for their significant others across borders. Especially for women whose children are in Nicaragua, the Internet and social media becomes a tool to be *virtually present* and to engage in transnational mothering. The following fragments illustrates this:

> "Technology allowed me at least to coexist with my children, despite the distance. I would help them with homework or if they asked me something. I also punished them if I had to punish them. More or less it helped me to be *present*, despite the distance, to be always present, in anything, always with them" (Amanda, FGD, July 2018, Zaragoza)

The women's transnational mothering challenge the notion of the 'care drain', suggested by scholarship on Global Care Chains (See Hochschild 2003), which assumes that when women migrate to work in care related sectors a care drain takes place in the families left behind (Lutz & Palenga-Möllenbeck 2012). However, as Piperno notes (2007:67) "female emigration does not merely produce a care drain". This is the case for participants who despite the physical distance, they continue to care for their significant others in Nicaragua, particularly their children.

Visits to Nicaragua are another way in which Nicaraguan migrant women maintain connections and care for their non-migrant families. The women share a strong desire to spend time with their families in Nicaragua. But having their significant others visiting them in Spain was not common as it often required considerable time and money investments. For some women like Karla, Mariana and Sonia, visits to Nicaragua became frequent after they obtained their residence permit. However, other women have not returned once since they arrive in Spain. Olga for example has not been back to Nicaragua in her twelve years in Spain. She says, "I have not gone back because it takes a lot of money and I think it is a better investment if I use that money to help my children" (Personal interview, July 2018, Zaragoza).

In doing research with Salvadorian migrants in Australia, Merla (2012) found out that many did not visit their families in El Salvador because their precarious conditions posed financial limitations, restricting the possibility of visits. This is very similar to the situations Nicaraguan migrant women experience in Spain, who prioritize sending remittances instead of paying visits to their families back home. For the women with an irregular status, visits to Nicaragua are not really an option as they risk not being able to reenter Spain. Hence the women wait until obtaining their 'papers' to be in a more stable position to go back.

To sum up, Nicaraguan migrant women create 'assemblages' of social protection, resourcing to and organizing different types of formal and informal social

protection in Spain and Nicaragua. In these assemblages the women are both receivers and providers of social protection. Participants access formal provisioning in Spain in the health and social security sectors. However, this protection is sometimes residual, especially for social security coverage for domestic workers. In addition, some women are enrolled in the social security system in Nicaragua as a way to ensure a pension in the future. Despite access to formal provisioning, the women mostly rely on informal sources of social protection, particularly their families in Nicaragua, local organizations and their personal networks. Remittances and transnational care arrangements, particularly transnational motherhood are the two main channels that participants use to provide welfare for their families left behind.

Chapter 7 - Effects of Transnational Social Protection on Nicaraguan Migrant Women

This chapter considers the effects and implications of transnational social protection for Nicaraguan migrant women, in terms of viability and reconfiguration of gender relations. In this first part, I address women's efforts and sacrifices to make social protection viable for them and their families. The second section discusses whether women's engagement with social protection leads to a reconfiguration of gender relations in a transnational context.

7.1 "Even when it is not viable we make any sacrifice to make it": Viability of Social Protection

When I asked participants if they thought social protection was viable for them and their families, their responses were ambivalent. The women highlighted that providing social protection is more viable in Spain than in Nicaragua. In doing research on Ecuadorian migrants' engagement with TSP, Boccagni (2011:218) found that "working overseas remains the key means of social protection for migrant families despite the social and emotional costs for those who migrate and those left behind". This is also the case for participants who reported that although in Spain their employment conditions are precarious and insecure, and that being far from their loved ones is not easy, they have more economic opportunities in Spain than in Nicaragua.

One of the participants suggested that, "if you are here in Spain it is easier for you to provide for your family" (Valeria, FGD, July 2018, Zaragoza). Similarly, another woman indicated that "the fact of being in Spain does not limit you as much as being in Nicaragua. You can do more here" (Claudia, FGD, July 2018, Zaragoza). In this sense, migration makes social protection viable because it gives Nicaraguan women greater chances to provide social protection for their families.

Also, participants emphasized that the extent to which they can provide for their families is linked to them being employed and earning an income. One of the participants suggested that "as long as you have a job, it is viable" (Silvia, FGD, July 2018 Zaragoza). However, finding a job can be difficult, especially while being in an irregular situation. Valeria shared her struggle when she arrived to Spain:

> "At the beginning I would go to job interviews but they only asked: papers, papers, papers! They would not hire me without a permit" (FGD, July 2018, Zaragoza).

Further, during their first years in Spain, Nicaraguan migrant women's work is not only informal but also precarious. The concept of precarity is helpful for understanding how migrant women make social protection possible because it provides a framework for understanding their positions. Precarity is not only related to their work sphere but "transcends it and interacts with workers' wider livelihoods and social locations" (Siegmann & Schiphorst 2016:116).

A significant factor which heightens participants' precarity is their low wages. The monthly minimum wage stipulated for domestic workers in Spain for 2018 is €858.55 euros. Nevertheless, none of the women reach that amount. One of the participants describes her struggle to make ends meet:

> "At the end of the month I'm always tight on money. Only in rent, water and electricity I pay 500 euros, 500 euros! I pay 300 euros for my apartment. For electricity, water, hot water, and other services I pay another 200 euros. Only on those things I need 500 euros already. Then the food, the tickets, the internet, the cell phone, what I send to my family in Nicaragua and maybe the small treat you want to give yourself. Do you know how hard is to pay for all that, my god! *No me cabe la vida para trabajar* [my whole life is not enough for all the work I have to do]" (Olga, July 2018, Zaragoza).

Other participants spoke of viability in terms of the future. For example, Amanda suggested that in the long-term sending remittances is not really viable given that that could be money she could be saving for her future and the future of her children who are now with her in Spain. However, she feels it is a 'moral obligation' to support her in-laws in Nicaragua. Hence, remittances are also shaped by negotiations of reciprocity and obligation between Nicaraguan migrant women and their significant others in their country of origin. Sonia articulates this feeling of 'moral obligation' or responsibility: "the money for remittances is *sacred*; you must send it" (FGD July 2018). Nonetheless, even when their situation is really precarious, participants provide for their families. As Amanda's quote it the beginning of this sub-section, these women make any sacrifice to make social protection viable, often financially restricting themselves, in order to provide for those in Nicaragua. This precarity, of course, affects the way women are able to access and provide social protection. As they emphasize, better paid, more stable jobs would facilitate viability of social protection, but often in reality that is a meager option even for those in a regular situation.

7.2 "I do the working; my husband does the cooking": (Re)configuration of Gender Roles

Informed by Mahler and Pessar's concept of Gendered Geographies of Power, this sub-section discusses "how "gender operates simultaneously on multiple spatial and social scales (e.g., the body, the family, the state) across transnational terrains" for Nicaragua migrant women. This analysis is linked to examine if and how engagement in social protection can transform (produce/reproduce/contest) gender relations in both Spain and Nicaragua.

Like other studies evidence (see Grabska et al. 2018), the provision of social protection is linked to Nicaraguan migrant women's gendered roles as mothers and daughters of those left behind. The two channels through which Nicaraguan migrant women provide social protection, remittances and transnational motherhood reinforce gender norms which are embedded in the social and cultural transnational context. For instance, when I talked to the families of the women in Nicaragua, they suggested that their daughters or mothers are more 'reliable' than male members when it comes to providing support to their families. Being a good mother or daughter, caring from afar, and providing help are social expectations of migrant women who are seen by their families as the ones responsible for their wellbeing. It is interesting to know that although most of the

women I spoke were single mothers, their children did not expect their fathers to provide for them, financially nor emotionally. The responsibility of providing protection and care seems to fall exclusively on migrant mothers, who are expected to be present and provide for their families. These dynamics are embedded and informed by context. In Nicaragua absence of fathers is widely common and to some extent socially 'accepted'.

For Nicaraguan migrant women, their migratory trajectories and transnational experiences have given them new ways to perceive gender relations. For instance, participants emphasized that through the process of migration they have become the main breadwinners in their families, and have gained awareness of their own money and their sense of selves. As Assis et al. (2004:205) underline, "other than as a means to help promote their family's well-being, women also see in migration a journey of self-discovery".

Family members in Nicaragua also change the ways the see the women. Migrant women occupy an important place, not only as providers but also as decision-makers in important matters. It is them, rather than their male counterparts, who usually decide who will be next in the migration chain and how remittances should be used. What is also relevant is that participants see themselves as the heads of their transnational households, a leadership which is shared by women across borders, in Nicaragua with their mothers or sisters.

However, the reconfiguration of gender roles does not happen without tensions. Nicaragua women embrace the role of breadwinner along with that of "traditionally 'female homemaker' identities - which, far from home, [are] possibly reshaped but by no means denied" (Boccagni 2013:226). For the women, this creates feelings of distress and anxiety given that being a 'traditional female homemaker' implies a heavy emotional effort from distance. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that some respondents acknowledge that they experience a deepening of traditional gender norms in their jobs as domestic workers. Before coming to Spain some of the women had office jobs in Nicaragua, and their private and public sphere were clearly distinguished but now, as domestic workers, they feel they are always a private sphere, and that traditional gender norms (i.e. considering domesticity an essential feature of women) are reconstituted in their jobs they perform. This also relates to the double marginalization of migrant women in Spain. That is: besides the stratification and segmentation along gender and ethnic lines of labor markets reveals the double marginalization of migrant women. They do not only establish themselves in the most precarious and less remunerated sectors, but this also reinforces gender roles, given that they have to do perform the work that Spanish women do not want to do in the domestic and care sectors.

In their lives as transnational migrants, Nicaragua women contemplate the gender roles they have in Spain and Nicaragua, comparing these two 'life-worlds'. Bonifacio (2015:6) underlines that the new and different culture of migrant women's host society can "offer many ways to challenge, transform, or negotiate traditional prescriptions of womanhood, women's work, and identities, among others". For instance, participants emphasize that given the configuration of their lives in Spain "men have begun to share the responsibility for childrearing and housekeeping, thereby redefining other aspects of gender dynamics in more egalitarian terms" (Levitt & Glick-Schiller 2004:1015). This contrasts with gender expectations in Nicaragua. This is the case for Amanda who brought her husband from Nicaragua. Now in Spain, he is a stay-home father. She explained:

> "In Nicaragua, in your family, in your relationships, in marriage women are the ones expected to do the cleaning, the cooking, raising the children, but here is different. We are more equal" (FGD, July 2018, 2018).

Sonia is married to a Spanish man and have a daughter together. They work together in their own parcel business but it is Sonia who runs it. In the FGD she shared the following:

> "In my house I do the working. My husband does the cooking. I am the one in charge of the business, I answer the phone and deal with customers while my husband is the one who does more chores at home. I was not used to a man like this before!" (FGD, July 2018, Zaragoza).

Participants highlight that engaging in work can be a way of transgressing traditional gender roles. This was the case for Karla when she went to El Salvador and set up her own business in an economic activity which was dominated by men:

> "When I went to El Salvador I started a bicycle food cart business. My ex-husband told me then: 'Hahaha, you will not be able to do it because that's for men'. And I said to him, 'I will prove you wrong'. Against the odds, I ran my business for a whole year, and had up to 5 bicycles, 3 of my own. I showed him and other people that a woman could do it" (personal interview, July 2018, 2018).

Therefore, women participants "have pushed the gendered frontiers of the productive sphere forward through their participation as independent labour migrants across international borders" (Assis et al. 2004:201). In addition, participants also speak about reconfiguration of gender relations in terms of empowerment. On one hand, they explain that their precarious work conditions, being away from their families, and the isolation can be very disempowering. The sacrifice entailed to provide social protection for those in Nicaragua is very high. On the other hand, the women are empowered through their personal networks and relationships, particularly by their involvement with ACC. In this sense, empowerment should be seen as relational process (Cornwall 2016:344).

> "As I said, I came with 18 years old, and I was working as a live-in domestic worker. Now, over the years, I have felt the need to support and promote gender equality and the rights of the domestic workers. I have learned a lot through the Association, through the social networks. I feel an empowered woman in all aspects. When you do not know anything is hard to be empowered. Like when I came here I did not know the laws about family, parental authority, my rights, etc. But now I know about these things, but today I feel empowered" (Fatima, July 2018, Zaragoza).

Summarizing this chapter, participants make social protection feasible by engaging in different of formal and informal social protection arrangements and strategies. Furthermore, the extent to whether viability of social protection is possible is highly related to the volatile lives and precarious work of Nicaragua migrant women. Findings suggest that engagement with transnational social protection can lead to a reconfiguration of gender relations as women gain more agency, autonomy and decision-making power within their families, which sometimes leads Nicaraguan migrant women to feel empowered. Nonetheless, such engagement can also reconstitute traditional gender roles.

Chapter 8 Conclusions

This research has emphasized the need to carefully examine how migrants, especially women, engage in transnational social protection, and the challenges and opportunities this brings to their lives and the lives of their families. Formal protection is hardly effective in addressing the various risks and vulnerabilities that people on the move face. It is rather through a combination of informal and formal social protection arrangements that migrants make welfare viable for themselves and their families. Nevertheless, this comes at the expense of migrants' large sacrifices, such as precarious life conditions and distance from loved ones. The experiences of women presented in this research is illustrative of that. Is it only through a combination of formal and informal social protection 'assemblages' that they are able to engage in social protection at a transnational level, in Spain and Nicaragua.

The case of Nicaraguan migrant women provides an example of the added value that the conceptual framework proposed in Chapter 3 has for approaching the study of transnational migration from three lenses: transnational angle, migration-social protection nexus and gender. Looking at transnational social protection through a migration-social protection nexus can help identify migrant-specific needs and vulnerabilities, and social protection interventions to address them and which can go in accordance to current migration and transnational trends. In this sense, this research highlights the structure of opportunities and barriers to access and provide social protection across borders. Such fragmentations and contradictions need to be noticed in order to provide a sharper analysis of migrants' engagement with social protection. Moreover, Nicaraguan migrant women's experiences demonstrate that transnational social protection is gendered process, as strategies and practices of social protection, such as remittances and transnational care arrangements, are embedded in participants' family expectations which are also shaped by gender notions in the country of origin and destination.

Furthermore, Nicaraguan migrant women's narratives "reveal effects of immigration legislation on personal lives, which one cannot simply read off the legal or policy texts" (Erel 2007:no page number). They are important in examining the issue of social protection in a transnational context given that they illustrate the ways in which women experience exclusion from social protection schemes in Spain and Nicaragua, but also highlight the ways in which they actively create informal strategies to engage in social protection and ensure welfare transnationally, contesting and resisting these structures of exclusion.

In this sense, although it is true that respondents do face a lot of challenges and obstacles, and experience a double-marginalization, as migrant women and domestic workers, none of them "see themselves as victims of a destiny they have not chosen" (Vives 2015:75). Instead, as this research evidences, Nicaraguan migrant women continuously make choices, sometimes out of a limited number of options, to shape their lives and the lives of their families. A significant amount of these choices are directly related to the diverse ways in which they engage in social protection to ensure their own and their families' welfare transnationally. The act of migrating itself represents one of these important choices. Emphasizing Nicaraguan migrant women's agency, and seeing them "as what they are:

people with experiences prior to and beyond migration, with desires, aspirations, choices, and fears" (Ibid.) is essential to grasp a nuanced understanding these transnational dynamics.

Moreover, I would like to underline that migrants also provide vital contributions to their host societies. The case of Nicaraguan migrant women in Spain provides evidence of this. It is only through migrant labor, mostly female migrant labor, that the demand for care in Spain is covered. Migrant domestic workers, generally undocumented, have become 'the solution' to the Spanish care problem. Nonetheless, this has been a widely overlook aspect in academic and policy debates. Future research could examine they ways in which migrants help to provide the social protection and fulfill welfare demands in host societies, particularly in the area of care. This would mean looking at welfare systems in migrant receiving countries as "beneficiaries of irregular work performed by the undocumented for example in the case of elderly care sector" (Mingot & Mazzucato 2018:2132). Additionally, more research that combines intersectional, gender and a transnational approach is relevant and required to redefine and comprehend migrant's engagement with social protection across borders.

Additionally, I would like to suggest certain policy recommendations for enhancing the social protection of Nicaraguan migrant women. First, bilateral agreements between Nicaragua and Spain can be set in place, which can allow Nicaraguan migrants to gain portability of benefits. Taha et al. (2015:3) suggest that "the portability of social protection is an important transformative reform needed to respect the human rights of migrants, who are required and generated by the global economic system". As such, this initiative could help migrant populations to reduce risks and vulnerabilities related to migration, and thus can facilitate other informal forms of social protection, such as transnational care arrangements. The Nicaraguan government could as well implement policies and programs to support the its migrant populations abroad as well as their non-migrant significant others in Nicaragua. Some countries, such as Ecuador and Philippines have already set institutions in place which provide services to migrants and their families within the border of their countries and abroad, and could serve as models.

Finally, as Levitt (2017) emphasizes, "*families and communities cross borders but the legal, pension and education systems that serve them do not*". Therefore, today and for the time to come, the topic of *social protection the move*, TSP, will remain a relevant matter of contention in social policy, development and migration fields. Perhaps then the transnational social question that we should envision to tackle is not only how migrants access and provide social protection across borders but also how can just, inclusive and transformative social protection be provided for people on the move.

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Annexes

Annex 1. List of Research Participants

Fieldwork Part I: Zaragoza, Spain

Interviewees (Nicaraguan Migrant Women)

Name	Age	Dates
Sonia	35	July 10 2018
		July 25 2018
Mariana	53	July 11 2018
		July 13 2018
Olga	64	July 11 2018
		July 12 2018
Karla	48	July 11 2018
		July 18 2018
Fatima	29	July 18 2018
		July 22 2018

Interviewees (Key Informants)

Name	Organization/University	Date
Erika López	Casa de las Culturas	July 2 2018
Ana Lucía Hernández Cordero	University of Zaragoza	July 5 2018
Ana Cristina Romea	University of San Jorge	July 14 2018
Javier Arce	Association Atarraya-Centroamérica	July 16 2018

Focus Group Discussion Participants

Name	Age	Date
Fatima	29	July 22 2018
Olga	64	July 22 2018
Sonia	35	July 22 2018
Amanda	32	July 22 2018
Silvia	45	July 22 2018
Valeria	42	July 22 2018
Claudia	40	July 22 2018

Fieldwork Part II: Nicaragua

Interviewees (Family Members of Nicaraguan Migrant Women)

Participant	Relation to Participants in Zaragoza	Age	Date	Place
Alex	Mariana's son	27	29 August 2018	Chinandega
Carmen	Sonia's mother	65	29 August 2018	Managua
Laura	Karla's mother	60	30 August 2018	Chinandega

Name	Age	Years in Spain	Arrival Year	City of Origin	Migration before/after Spain	Children	Partner	Head of household	Education	Employment
Sonia	35	7	2011	Managua	Yes, internally in Nicaragua. And also in Spain, from Zaragoza to Alcañiz	1 in Spain	Married	Together with husband	Agricultural engineer	Owns a small parcel business
Mariana	53	9	2009	Chinandega	No	1 in Spain and 2 in Nicaragua	Married	Together with husband	High School	Live-in domestic worker
Olga	64	12	2006	Managua	No	4 in Nicaragua	Single	Yes	Trained as a nurse in Nicaragua	Live-out domestic worker
Karla	48	13	2005	Chinandega	Yes, before to El Salvador (4 years)	2 in Nicaragua	In a relationship	Together with husband	High School	Live-out domestic worker
Fatima	29	10	2008	Jinotega	Yes, after to Costa Rica (2 years) and then returned to Spain	1 in Spain	Single	Yes	High School/Currently studying nursing	Waitress/Geriatric care assistant
Amanda	32	10	2008	Chinandega	Yes, internally in Nicaragua because of Hurricane Mitch.	2 in Spain	Married	Together with husband	Technical degree in accounting	Live-out domestic worker
Silvia	45	15	2003	Jinotega	Yes, came to Spain for 3 years went back to Nicaragua and returned to Spain after 2 years	3 in Spain	Single	Yes	High School	Janitor
Valeria	42	1	2017	Chinandega	No	2 in Nicaragua	Single	Together with mother in Nicaragua	Technical degree in accounting	Live-in domestic worker
Claudia	40	0.5	2018	Managua	Yes, to Costa Rica and Panamá for work.	1 in Spain	Single	Yes	Master's degree/Currently studying accounting	Unemployed

Annex 2. Participants' Sociodemographic

Annex 3. SRHE before and after 2011

Working conditions and social benefits of the Special Regime for Household Employees (SRHE) before and after the 2011 reform

	1985	2011
Conditions of Employment		
Obligation of employment contract	No	Yes
Salary	National minimum wage	National minimum wage
Salary reduction for live-in domestic workers	Possibility of a 45% reduction	Possibility of a 30% reduction but subject to conditions stipulated by Workers' Bill of Rights
Regulation of working time	No	Yes
Unpaid 'presence' time	Yes	No
Overtime compensation	Unspecified	Yes (in employment contract)
Minimum time off (including holidays)	Unspecified	Yes (in employment contract)
Type of work to be performed	Unspecified	Yes (in employment contract)
Social security contributions	Fixed rate of 140 euros/month only if working more than 72 hrs/month	Depending on income and number of hours worked.
Social entitlements		
Sickness benefit	After 29 days of illness	After the 4th day of illness
Statutory maternity leave	No	Yes
Unemployment benefit	No	No
Old age pension	Yes (flat rate minimum contributory pension)	Yes (possibility of a higher pension for those with higher contributions)

Source: Elaborated from Ibáñez and León (2014:122)

Map 1. Location of Zaragoza in Spain

Map 2 and Map 3. Location of Managua and Chinandega in Nicaragua