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NAVIGATING FAMILY MIGRATION IN SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH[1]

Problematyka migracji rodzinnych w badaniach nauk społecznych

Abstract: This article examines different types of family migration and their effects on family life, with a particular emphasis on selected dimensions of parenthood in the context of migration - especially the experiences of single parenthood and parenting in multicultural or transnational settings. Through an in-depth literature review, it discusses the motivations for migration, decision-making processes, and the challenges families encounter as they embark on their migration journeys. Furthermore, it presents the experiences of the family within a conceptual framework that goes beyond the Western understanding of these concepts. It emphasizes the parental perspective which is found to be missing in academic literature. Therefore, constructs such as kinship, agency, and belonging serve as lenses through which parental experiences are examined. The article reveals both macro and micro levels of family migration processes and their social perceptions, which contribute to the formation of parental culture and in turn influence migrant parents' experiences. Finally, it serves as a call for

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future research, including more nuanced studies of family migration and migrant parenthood in particular.

Key words: migrant families; parenthood; culture of parenting; migrant parents; family migration

Streszczenie. W niniejszym artykule przeanalizowano różne rodzaje migracji rodzinnych i ich wpływ na życie rodzinne, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem wybranych aspektów rodzicielstwa w kontekście migracji – zwłaszcza doświadczeń samotnych rodziców oraz rodzicielstwa w środowiskach wielokulturowych lub transnarodowych. Na podstawie dogłębnej analizy literatury omówiono motywy migracji, procesy decyzyjne oraz wyzwania, przed jakimi stają rodziny rozpoczynające swoją migracyjną podróż. Ponadto artykuł omawia doświadczenia rodziny w ramach koncepcyjnych wykraczających poza zachodnie rozumienie tych pojęć. Podkreśla perspektywę rodzicielską, której brakuje w literaturze naukowej. Dlatego też pojęcia takie jak pokrewieństwo, sprawczość i przynależność służą jako soczewki, przez które analizowane są doświadczenia rodzicielskie. Artykuł ujawnia zarówno makro-, jak i mikropoziomy procesów migracji rodzinnej oraz ich społeczne postrzeganie, które przyczyniają się do kształtowania kultury rodzicielskiej, a tym samym wpływają na doświadczenia rodziców-migrantów. Wreszcie, stanowi on wezwanie do podjęcia dalszych badań, w tym bardziej szczegółowych analiz migracji rodzinnych, a w szczególności rodzicielstwa migrantów.

Słowa kluczowe: rodziny migrantów; rodzicielstwo; kultura rodzicielstwa; rodzice migranci; migracja rodzinna

Introduction

Family migration is "the international movement of people who migrate due to new or established family ties" (Kofman, Buhr, Fonseca 2022: 137). According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development ([OECD] 2017), people migrating for family reasons

constitute the largest migrant group entering OECD countries, exceeding labor and humanitarian migration. In 2022, around 2.2 million migrants moved to OECD countries for family reasons; this constitutes 40% of all permanent migrations (Migration Data Portal). Historically, research on family migration did not surface until the 1980s, despite its significance within migration patterns (Boyd 1989; Zlotnik 1995).

Elenore Kofman et al. (2022) claim that family migration follows diverse trajectories, "from the adoption of a foreign child to family members accompanying migrant workers or refugees, as well as people forming new family units with host country residents" (2022: 137). Furthermore, family structures vary across cultures and time (Faircloth, Hoffman, Layne 2013). However, immigration laws and policies in many countries conceptualize families as nuclear and composed of heterosexual partners/parents with their children (Ritholtz & Buxton 2021). In Europe, LGBTQ migrants have only recently gained the right to family reunification procedures for bringing their partners to their new place of residence (Stella, Flynn, Gawlewicz 2018). In Poland and in Hungary, this right still does not exist (Mizielińska 2022).

Recently, Helena Wray et al. (2023) argue for the inclusion of temporality in the study of family life including migration. They cite Carol Smart (2007), who moved away from the static concept of 'the family,' and proposed "foregrounding temporality and connecting time to motion: in and out of relationships, of phases of life, movement in space, etc." (Wray, Charsley, Kolbaşı-Muyan, Smith 2023: 369). The 'temporal turn' has become a significant paradigm shift in migration studies (Griffiths 2021; Griffiths, Rogers, Anderson 2013) as it emphasizes the complexities of analyzing the migration itself as well as family formation and practices. Families are seen as fluid and constantly being reconstituted and renegotiated, adapting across space and time. Needless to say, this diversity affected behaviors, lifestyles, and ways of raising children (Goździak & Main 2020). Adopting a fluid definition of family allows me to look at social changes in family and migration dynamics from the perspective of an observer. Therefore, this definition will be mainly employed throughout the text. Many researchers have focused on conventional

aspects of migrant families' lives such as parental responsibilities, communication patterns, gender differences, and social expectations (Dreby & Adkins 2010; Faircloth et al. 2013; Gillies 2008; Grillo 2008; Moritz-Leśniak 2024). It is thus difficult to find studies that go beyond the accepted definitions to present different realities of migrant parents' stories. Traditional definitions often cause misunderstandings within generalizations, as simple terms cannot convey the complexity of individual stories. For example, inequalities in the complex experiences of migrants relative to non-migrants related to class, gender, generational dynamics, and economic status show that migration can cause or increase existing familiar tensions (Dreby & Adkins 2010). Therefore, reconceptualizing and broadening the definition of family migration must consider the contexts of both the receiving and sending societies (Baldassar, Kilkey, Merla 2014; White 2018) as well the cultural background and motivations underlying the decision to migrate.

Some argue that a significant emphasis on family migration emerged due to the presence of transnational families and the inception of the transnationalism concept, defined as "the processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement" (Schiller, Basch, Blanc-Szanton 1992: 1). It is hard to discuss migrant families' trajectories without acknowledging existing transnational ties. Therefore, I use the concept of transnationalism to assist in establishing the following types of migration: transnational families, returning families, and refugee families. Following Caroline Brettell (Brettell & Hollifield 2000) I understand this formulation as a way to help theorize about similarity and differences and delineate relational and dynamic nuances. Moreover, I analyze how specific types of family formation, such as single parenthood and mixed families, intersect with migration.

Given the increased mobility and complex family formations of the 21st century (Faircloth et al. 2013), my aim is to construct a taxonomy of family migration based on a comprehensive review of recent migration literature in the past 25 years. The main objective of this article is to describe and analyze different types of family migration by considering the diverse types of both migration and families. Since my research

concentrates on migrant parents living in Poland, in this text, I focus on migration to Europe. However, I do acknowledge research in countries with more migratory experience, such as the US, and therefore, I include examples from this region as well. Given the long history of migration in these places, texts from these regions offer a rich array of diverse examples that support a coherent and nuanced analysis. I begin this article by briefly defining migration as well as family and parenting in migration. I then analyze the literature on selected types of migrant families. In each part, I present the characteristics of certain migration types and how they impact family life and parenting experiences.

Migration, family and parenting in migration

There is no legal definition of international migration. Simply stated, migration is the movement of people from one place to live and work in another one (Goździak 2021). The International Organization for Migration defines a migrant as any person who has changed their country of usual residence, regardless of the person's reason for migration or legal status, whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary, or the length of the stay (IOM 2024).

Until fairly recently, anthropological definitions of the family were influenced by Western cultural assumptions about the relationship between biology and kinship. It is virtually impossible to separate the history of family studies from kinship studies in anthropology because kinship was the initial basis for understanding family (Peletz 1995). Some scholars found these definitions of families too static. Sylvia Junk Yanagisako (1979) critiqued understandings of families as those limited to mother-child core (e.g., Goodenough 1970) and argued that such conceptualizations did not capture the whole familiar spectrum, especially those formed outside the West. Furthermore, they possibly reinforced 'intensive parenthood' (Hinton, Laverty, Robinson 2013) and 'intensive motherhood' (Faircloth 2013). Others suggested using kinship relationships to better frame family dynamics, especially newer understandings of kinship

based on social and cultural relationships, not solely on biological ones (Read 2019). This broader understanding of kinship is of particular import in migrant communities.

Fictive kin, defined as family-type relationships based not on blood or marriage but rather on religious rituals or close friendship ties, constitutes a type of social capital that many immigrant groups bring with them and facilitates their incorporation into the host society (Ebaugh & Curry 2000: 189). Examining parenting, understood here as a "particular historically and socially situated form of childrearing" (Faircloth et al. 2013: 1), illustrates changes in both family-related migration and parenting culture (Faircloth et al. 2013; Rafaetta 2016; Romagnoli & Wall 2012). While many scholars researching families tend to emphasize parents' perspectives, possibly reinforcing the culture of parenting and expert-led parenthood, there is relatively less interest in exploring the experiences and perspectives of migrant parents regarding their parenting journey (Musumeci & Naldini 2017).

"Migrant parents are a special target for normative attitudes" (Rafaetta, 2016: 41); their parental experiences are analyzed without reference to different cultural backgrounds and realities or parenting practices and values. For example, Pamela Feldman-Savelsberg (2016: 93) notes that as their children grow up in Berlin, migrant Cameroonian parents are confronted with various situations that cause them to question their parenting repertoires. To be deemed good parents, migrants are expected to follow the legal rules and cultural standards of the host country. Currently, parents are inundated with information on how to rear children, the most suitable education for their children, and how to facilitate social and emotional development (Shapiro 2022). This approach to parenting seems to be very Western-centric and focused on a particular social and economic class of parents and members of migrant families strive to meet those standards.

Additionally, traditional roles in migrant families are often challenged and aggravated by sociocultural misunderstandings between them and their host country (Segal 2005: 563). Migration cannot be viewed as effectless; rather, the "migration processes themselves affect parenting styles" (Öztürk, Reisenauer, Castiglioni, Walper 2023: 3). Migrants share

some common experiences, such as lack of family support networks or acculturation distress (Emmen et al. 2013). Therefore, they may adopt different parenting strategies as they adapt to new realities. Cultural and individual differences likely play a significant role in migration itself, and often influence parents' perceptions of their own experiences as mothers and fathers.

Transnational families

Focus on transnational families in migration studies stemmed from the concept of transnationalism, which encompasses dimensions such as economy, politics, culture, and religion (Dahinden 2010) and may be both occasional and permanent (Portes, Guarnizo, Landolt 1999). Transnational families are built on temporal and geographical projects related to relational and emotional needs. However, "distance doesn't need to influence the intimacy or bond between family members but it can reinforce living familyhood and emotional understanding" (Slany, Ślusarczyk, Pustułka 2017: 5). The reinforced bonds can then be viewed through the lens of relationships built in host countries with new significant individuals.

Migration history plays a significant role in how decisions about migration are perceived; indeed, contemporary moves are typically predicated on previous ones (Cohen & Sirkeci 2011: 25). Households often influence the decision to migrate and looking at those who are left behind provides a better understanding of the experience of those who move (ibidem). This distinction shows that the effects of migration on the family system start much earlier than the physical move itself. The family's cultural and biographical roots as well as previous experiences functioning as a transnational family seem to be significant when analyzing the way family members operate during migration or separation. Previous history, cognitive patterns, and individual experience would either equip migrants with helpful resources or bring frustration.

Transnational family migration entails changes in gender roles and affects feelings regarding migration. One of the difficulties scholars may

face while trying to understand transnationalism is its intersectionality. A nuanced understanding of transnational families requires considering different social categories such as gender, class, ethnicity, and migration status. It also cannot be understood without considering policy making processes through a global lens. Polish discourse includes very ambiguous attitudes towards emigration. Polish nurses interviewed by Elzbieta Gozdziak (2016) talked about the difficulty of deciding to move abroad. Their narratives corresponded with Ewa Morawska's (2003) discussion of difficult Polishness, related mainly to parental practices. To fulfill their "obligations" as caregivers, many migrant women, Polish or otherwise, continue to act as family caregivers, whether they live apart from their children or are simply involved in activating kinship ties across borders. Rhacel Salazar Parreñas (2005) provides deep analysis of female labor migration and underlines the traditional gender scripts used by Filipino men who stayed at home and were reluctant to take on household responsibilities. Sylwia Urbańska (2015) on the other hand argues that the challenges of female migration stem from a lack of social scenarios involving mothers being separated from their children due to migration. In contrast, men tend to feel pressure to support non-migrant family members through economic advancement (Dreby & Adkins 2010: 681). Conservative politics also play a role. Cultural expectations about gender roles, particularly in relation to parenting obligations, continue in host countries where they are coupled with the modern concept of involved parenting (Feldman-Savelsberg 2016; Raffaeta 2016).

While migrants seek new social connections and build new support networks, they become fictive kin with those who share their migration experiences (Feldman-Savelsberg 2016). Hence, kinship emerges as an alternative category for understanding family relations that may not fit within Western definitions (Andrikopoulos & Duyvendak 2020). According to McKinlay (2023), 'families of origin' encompass those we are born, adopted, or raised into a family, while 'chosen families' represent kinship bonds formed in young adulthood to complement or compensate for challenges faced within families of origin. Within a transnational context, migration involves forging connections with new individuals –sometimes

those related to the family of origin such as grandparents or extended family – who offer support or with chosen family who are individuals typically met in the host country.

The rise of new media has reshaped patterns of migration by enabling parents (especially mothers) to maintain and perform familial roles—such as active participation in the lives of their children—across distances (Madianou 2016). Yet, this emerging flexibility is still situated within persistent gendered realities: women's mobility is often framed in relation to care and family obligations, reflecting how traditional expectations continue to shape and legitimize migration choices. Digital platforms allow migrant women to remain visibly engaged in family life, challenging the notion that migration requires a withdrawal from domestic responsibilities (Urbańska 2015).

Transnational migration is often important for improving the lifestyle of all family members, feelings of satisfaction and success, and family relations. It results from implementing various practices to maintain family relationships. Using technology or return visits are the most common strategies, but very much depend on the migrants' economic statuses (Kofman et al. 2022). Hence, migration can serve as a space for developing new practices (Main & Goździak 2020), which most likely go beyond any parental instructions and patterns one may otherwise receive. It often determines the potential and resources that can be used for family reunification – either for the return of those who moved or by reuniting family members in a new place.

Returning migrant families

The trajectory of returning families is often connected to prior transnational practices (Carling & Erdal 2014). Precisely defining "return" is impossible; there are too many variables involved. For instance, a return might be permanent or temporary. Krystyna Iglicka (2010) proposed a typology where returns are divided into those which are forced and those which are occasional. Forced returns would be related not only to legal

deportations, but also to loss of employment, financial difficulties or family problems. Occasional returns are those which can serve as a break for the next migration.

Migrants typically leave someone close to them behind, usually a spouse or child. Studies agree that the decision to return is often much more complex than that about the migration itself (Czeranowska, Parutis, Trąbka 2023; Weldemariam, Ayanlade, Borderon, Möslinger 2023). Research on migrants who returned to Sub-Saharan Africa found that social and personal factors were the most important driving the decision to return (Weldemarian et al. 2023). Whether a return is permanent or just a stop before the next migration is difficult to define, especially within Europe where one can easily move across most EU countries (White, 2018). In some cases, the return is planned during the initial decision to migrate, while in others it is based on changing perspectives or unfulfilled expectations after the move. What influences the decision to stay or return is not always push and pull factors but rather what encourages people to stay in one place and repels them from another (Bolognani 2014).

The reasons for returning have long been linked to lack of integration (Czeranowska et al. 2023); scholars initially argued that people who are strongly transnational and weakly integrated are more likely to return (Carling & Pettersen 2014). However, successful integration in the host country can also prompt return migration (Haas & Fokkema 2011: 755), a phenomenon referred to as a 'successfully completed project' (Grzymała-Moszczyńska H., Grzymała-Moszczyńska J., Durlik, Szydłowska 2015). In this case, migrants return to their origin country for various reasons, including better job opportunities or to retire there.

Scholars show that males, familiers with children and people (Krisjane, Apsite-Berina, Berzins 2016) with higher education are more likely to return. The decision often coincides with the age of the migrants' children and the need to enroll them in school (Grosa & King 2022). Return migration is a gradual process (Carling & Erdal 2014) and challenges related to returned migrants' parenting depend on the decision-making process, the situation in the origin country, and other variables. Migrant parents often have expectations about their "home country" and a need to adapt

to a new-old culture. Anne White (2022) noted that maintaining and even extending transnational ties can accompany reintegration of returning migrants into the origin society. This balancing between two worlds where each seems to be equally important may be challenging for many actors, including parents, children, and friends. Returning families also bring with them new resources, traditions, technologies, ways of celebrating different events, language and professional skills to their origin country (Goździak & Main 2020).

Refugee families

Refugee families do not return as often as other migrant families. The term "refugee family" refers then to the legal status of a particular family in a specific country as well as forced displacement (Indra, 1999), but it can also relate to the identity of forced migrants who are undocumented or receive protected status. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees ([UNHCR] 2023), 108.4 million people were forcibly displaced at the end of 2022 with the majority being minors or parents.

Refugee families are pushed from their homelands and often the host country is not the first one they enter in search of asylum. Some would most likely return if given guaranteed safety. Refugee families also face uncertainty about the duration of their displacement, leading to further consequences for their settlement and integration. Refugee family members may also become separated. Despite broader theoretic understandings, reunification often continues to be missing from family protection regimes (Ritholz & Buxton 2021). Moreover, the impact of policies and conditions on parental care are influenced when the problems of refugee families are defined by their trauma as a 'regime of truth' (Shapiro 2022: 657).

The experiences of forced and transnational migrants often intersect in that they often both leave behind family members or connect with new social groups. Irene Tuzi (2023) shares the stories of Syrian refugees in

Germany, emphasizing the 'waiting' process experienced by some families. She refers to a Syrian father who arrived first to safely settle before he will bring his wife and children, who may have to stay in other countries for an unknown period of time. The man refers to this time of separation as 'waiting'. Yet, even in the context of separation, families try to implement practices to help them cope with waiting (ibidem: 165) or prepare for it in the future. Hence, even if migration is forced, refugee families are active agents ready to implement new ways of building their lives and supporting their families. Despite insecurities, they often try to establish new social connections through various activities. While looking for these, they seek help to support their wellbeing or improve vocational skills and so use this time of 'waiting' in separation to prepare for a better future. New connections provided a "sense of belonging that made life in separation more bearable" (ibidem: 172). This seems crucial in times when everything that was known and secure is lost.

Parental care can be challenging especially in the socially isolating situations experienced by many refugee families. Yet a main struggle for most refugee families is the reunion of their family (Beaton, Musgrave, Liebl 2018). The main issue seems to be the lack of understanding and formalizing family ties within political and legal frameworks. Refugees' own understanding of who counts as family may differ from the definitions used by host governments. The lack of complex and cross-cultural understandings of family ties has led to the individual tragedy of many people. Yet in the UK, family reunification has positively accelerated the integration of both those already in the country and new arrivals (Beaton et al. 2018: 26).

Parenting culture in host countries also impacts how migrant families care for their children (Rafaetta 2016). For example, Nicole S.Berry (2013) discusses undocumented Hispanic women in North Carolina, USA, in terms of the parenting knowledge seen as a necessary foundation for a healthy family in North American parental discourse. Latino parents expressed fears regarding the care of their children due to their demanding work schedules, limited opportunities for extra care, and concerns about dangerous street environments. Additionally, they may experience stress

related to the fear of their children being taken away due to parental absence at home (Berry 2013).

Christiana Kouta et al. (2022) highlight the need to support migrant parents through empowerment, education, and social, financial, health, or legal assistance. However, parental empowerment is unlikely without recognizing the skills and agency of migrant parents in child-rearing practices.

Migrant parents' experiences according to family formation

An analysis of the many types of family formations is beyond the scope of this article. Rather, I emphasize and reflect on the diversity and challenges that these realities (i.e., single parenthood, mixed culture parenthood) bring to the contexts of migration, parental experience, and where these intersect.

Single parenthood is a distinct aspect of family and parental practices. It may arise as a consequence of migration, such as separation due to refugee policies or other factors. Based on the cultural and social changes associated with single parenthood, I distinguish single parents who come to a host country from those who become single once already there (c.f., Bernardi et al. 2018). The trajectories of family transformations may differentially influence the parental situation and the resulting consequences on the family – whether parents become single or are incorporated into a transnational family model. Single parenthood does not imply a lack of a second parent. In the example mentioned earlier, Cameroonian fathers often work in different EU countries, while their children stay with their mother in Germany (Feldman-Savelsberg 2016). The mothers are challenged to find new ways of raising their children and build sisterhoods with other women who share their experience.

Single parents face many economic and social challenges that often intersect. For example, migrant women are either out of work or work long hours in full-time positions that take them away from their families (Milewski, Struffolino, Bernardi 2018: 156). Migrant single mothers also

face more difficulties with returning to work after having a child or with finding a stable job. Community and social networks usually help new mothers and fathers adjust to the change in their life situation but the lack of this cultural or social village to support migrant parents is a key challenge. Isabel Shutes (2022) indicates that women who migrate to UK as EU nationals and as single parents, may face increased risks of poverty and unemployment, alongside childcare barriers to work.

However, there might be a contradictory effect of single parenthood on migrant families. On one hand, it can make family members more vulnerable, while on the other, it may also encourage a higher level of integration as new connections are sought outside the family (Dronkers & Kalmijns 2013). Single parents create new bonds – sometimes within their own diasporas, sometimes outside of their cultural borders, with the help of their children. Among Cameroonians in Germany, single mothers connect with family and friends to balance work with child care and the intersection of kin- and community-based networks allows unrelated individuals involved in reciprocal child care to become kin (Feldman-Savelsberg 2016: 97).

Globalization and mobility also encourage mixed culture families, another family formation where members can come from diverse ethnic, racial, national, religious, and cultural backgrounds (Brzozowska 2015). Mixed families offer insights into child-rearing practices and the challenges faced within diverse cultural backgrounds. Edwards et al. (2012) use the term "mixing families" to emphasize the dynamics of adjusting to a new family environment. Thus, the process of 'mixing' refers to sharing different social and cultural practices and creating new ones. Despite numerous challenges, cultural capital, particularly for children, can be a significant shared strength (Bourdieu 1997). Parents handle those cultural differences in many ways from refusing one culture, through combining both to integrating some elements from each. This daily life reality is associated mainly with household practices, child rearing, education decisions, and gender roles.

Conclusion

The 21st century has generally been a time of increased flows in migration and mobility. However, family migration and parenthood in migration context is not a universal concept, as it encompasses diverse experiences that cannot simply be understood through Western definitions alone. To truly comprehend the nuances of family migration, we must delve into the intricate dynamics of kinship, agency, and belonging – concepts which help to navigate parents' experiences, unpack conventional categorical understandings of families, and stand in contrast to the evolving culture of parenting.

Family migration cannot be understood in isolation; it must be examined at both macro and micro levels. At the macro level, political forces shape the realities of migrant families, influencing policies that either facilitate or undermine their integration. The micro level simultaneously examines the cultural context and individual histories of each family, unraveling the complexities of their migration journey and parenting strategies.

Yet existing research and support programs are often built on fallacies of idealized parenthood shaped by the privileged. The culture of parenting is formed by multiple actors and stakeholders, and its study often neglects the complexity of the background, migration history, cultural diversity, and parental practices of migrant parents. A primary driver for parents to migrate is a sense of responsibility, derived from various sources, including the impetus to meet social and gender expectations.

I believe that discussion of the complexity and intersectionality of different family migration experiences will lead to more focus on migrant parents' participation in global and local family studies. Considering changes in family migration trajectories and parental care strategies, this article is a call for future research to expand on the intersection of parenthood and migration. Simultaneously, I foreshadow my research interests and empirical texts focused on parents within migration context, particularly within the educational sector, which I hope will result in more observations enabling to broaden understanding of migrant parents' reality.

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