# Intimacies of power in the circulation of care[i]: making gender across generations. Transnational Andean families[ii] in Quito and Madrid

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*Abstract*

*Can the circulation of care influence how women exert agency in the transformation of gender norms across generations? Based on ethnographic fieldwork and life-story interviews, this chapter sheds light on intimate power relationships within an extended family originally from a village north of Quito, with members living in Madrid. The study focuses on the effect of intergenerational and sibling dynamics on the organization of social relations within transnational families, specifically on intergenerational cooperation, power relations and their influence on managing care and the intimate at a distance.*

*The analysis centers on the use of ethnic boundaries in power relationships and how ethnicity is instrumentalized to negotiate gender norms, influencing the circulation of care in transnational families.*

*Introduction*

This chapter examines how different axes of inequality[iii] –gender, generation, class and ethnicity– operate in the circulation of care in transnational Andean families in Spain and Ecuador. "Circulation of care" serves here as a framework for analyzing women's agency in the transformation of gender norms over time within an extended family originally from a village north of Quito (Ecuador), with members living in Madrid (Spain). The study focuses on the effect of intergenerational and sibling dynamics upon the organization of social relations within transnational families, specifically on intergenerational cooperation, power relations, and their influence on managing care and the intimate at a distance. It uses a longitudinal approach to understand how these transformations participate in forms of social knowledge and practices, always embedded in specific 'conditions of possibility' (Foucault, 1976). This chapter does not seek to answer the question of what causes gender norms to shift, but rather looks at how a combination of circumstances may give rise to changes in gendered discourses and practices.

These reflections derive from a multi-sited ethnographic study[iv] conducted between Madrid and Quito using qualitative data collection techniques including participant-observation and interviews to analyze the migration of families from a peri-urban Ecuadorian indigenous community. As I will show in the personal histories, ethnic relationships and the proximity of Quito have historically been crucial to the gender and generational norms at play in this community. This dynamic renders ethnic identities important factors in social interaction on a transnational scale. Social remittances in South-North migrations may also have a twofold role in reshaping intimate relationships in transnational family and ethnic networks. This case study sheds light on the dynamics of family reunification, the main strategy for Ecuadorian migration to Spain over the last

two decades (Herrera et al., 2005), and the reorganization of family commitments it entails.

First, I provide a short description of Ecuadorian migration to Spain and a review of the literature on gender and ethnicity in migration contexts, specifically in the Andes, followed by a brief discussion of methodology. I then present the personal histories of two generations of extended transnational family members, from which I derive a genealogy of social changes. I go on to discuss a conflict that arose within the family regarding responsibilities for physical care and the unequal circulation of care within the family in a context of reorganization across national borders. Throughout, my analysis focuses upon how ethnic boundaries are mobilized in the negotiation of power within intimate relationships at a distance. The final section addresses the circulation of care and its influence on power dynamics within transnational families, and consequently on women's agency, and how this impacts the transformation of gender norms across generations.

*International migration and patriarchal structures*

In the most recent wave of Ecuadorian migration, most migrants have headed to Europe, especially Spain, but also Italy and to a lesser extent other countries like England, Belgium or Switzerland. This trend was due to networks established in Spain and Italy during the 1980s and 1990s, as well as to the demand for labor in Spain (mostly informal care work but also jobs in the construction sector). It is important to note that, unlike earlier migrations in which men usually migrated alone, in this wave of migration women were often the initiators of the process, and family reunification was the principal strategy afterwards (Herrera et al., 2005).

Spain entered a recession in 2007, coinciding with the beginning of the international financial crisis. Political decisions made by the Spanish Government added to the recession's impact upon the population, especially upon migrants; many families could not cover their mortgages and lost their residential investments. In 2010 there were 484,623 persons born in Ecuador officially residing in Spain; 2016 data put this number at about 410,517 (INE, 2016). Some returned to Ecuador, others migrated to third countries. Many families are still struggling to maintain their financial, social and emotional investments in Spain. Today, almost every family in Ecuador has members living abroad, mostly in Spain, and 'transnational family organization' is part of daily life for the majority of Ecuadorians.

Gender is a key element in the identity and organization of transnational families. Not only does it form a groundwork for the circulation of care by organizing the duties and responsibilities of each member according to a sexual division of labor and controlling women's mobility and sexual behavior, it also impacts cultural aspects of group identity and constitutes a lifeline to the home country (Espiritu, 2001). As feminist scholars have shown, migration can exacerbate the burden upon women to preserve collective national and/or ethnic identities (Anthias, 2000, Echevarría Vecino, 2012). If participation in family and ethnic networks provides emotional and material support, it also has its constraints, especially for women (Zontini, 2010). Strong affective bonds

oblige individuals to take into account the feelings of other family members when making decisions, such that gender transformations become a negotiation: 'Individuals are involved in negotiating ties and responsibilities rather than simply breaking away from difficult relationships' (Zontini, 2010, p.823).

Power relationships within the family have been analyzed by many feminist scholars (Anthias, 2001, Zontini, 2010, Gregorio and Gonzálvez, 2012, among others). In the Andean context, Van Vleet (2008) and de la Cadena (1991) have demonstrated how different axes of inequality are articulated in the relationship between *nuera* (daughter-in-law) and *suegra* (mother-in-law). In this dyad, class, gender, generation and affinity are used to negotiate the power relationship between the two relatives, often invoking markers of ethnic identity. These authors have shown the complex implications of virilocal residential patterns for gendered generational hierarchies between women. Local patriarchal structures lend power to the *suegra* when she manages to subordinate her *nuera*: this enables the family to exploit the work of the *nuera* and, at a more symbolic level, to maintain its honor by controlling the *nuera's* behavior (de la Cadena, 1991; Van Vleet, 2008).

For Andean *nueras*, as for many women from other regions, migration has proved an important ploy in restructuring gendered asymmetries. Migration can distance them from positions of subordination and make them 'heads of household' (Oso Casas, 2000). Nevertheless, symbolic structures of domination, like the notion that migrant women 'abandon' their children (Pedone, 2008), have emerged alongside migration processes, exacerbating controls on women's mobility and sexuality (Echevarría, 2012; Espiritu, 2001; Gregorio and Gonzálvez, 2012). We should therefore not assume that migration necessarily leads to emancipation from patriarchal structures, but rather analyze the interaction between gender and migration as a complex and multidimensional process.

The present feminization of migration has to do with to a specific historical moment in capitalism's crisis of care. While migration opens possibilities for change in gender relationships by restructuring gender asymmetries, the characteristics of this transformation cannot be predicted (Parella Rubio, 2012). Gender and the feminization of migration have recently become prominent topics of study (Mahler and Pessar, 2006). Focusing initially on mother-child and conjugal relationships, and using the 'global care chain' as the main framework of analysis, these studies have highlighted global inequalities based on class, race, ethnicity and gender, but have failed to account for the complexity of processes within transnational families (Baldassar and Merla, 2014, p.27).

Newer research on transnational families has proposed an important shift in how care is conceptualized. Its core definition has been enlarged to include multidimensional forms of support—practical, personal, physical, emotional, moral, financial— and care is increasingly understood as multidirectional, that is, it does not only move from South to North as the care chain concept suggests. Moreover these conceptualizations recognize care carried out by a multiplicity of actors, including elders and children. The scope of analysis has broadened from nuclear family to extended family, and has been re-evaluated in light of the subjective importance of presence and new analyses of virtual practices. The circulation of care can be defined as the 'reciprocal, multidirectional and asymmetrical exchange of care that fluctuates over time within transnational family

networks subject to the political, economic, cultural and social contexts of both sending and receiving societies' (Baldassar and Merla, 2014, p.25).

The main purpose of this chapter will be to render visible the influence of the circulation of care on the balance of forces within intimate relationships at a distance, and what this means for women's agency in the transformation of patriarchal structures in transnational families.

*Gendered ethnicities: an ethnographic and life-story analysis*

Between February 2011 and December 2013, I conducted three years of intense multi-sited ethnography between Madrid and Quito among transnational families from the village of Jatun Pamba, a rural (peri-urban) community northeast of Quito. I carried out forty interviews with members of different generations of these families, ranging from teenagers to elderly people, living in Spain or in Ecuador[v].

The study of power within intimate relationships is particularly complicated because it involves numerous axes that subjects themselves cannot always identify in their own discourses: social categories like gender or ethnicity are naturalized in the process of legitimating the exercise of power (Anthias, 2001). My research gave priority to ethnographic encounters as a way of observing the daily experiences of gender within family and ethnic networks. Working inductively, I represented social interactions as openly as possible in my field notes and provided ample space for the subjects' interpretation of their own practices. The ethnographic work relied heavily on participant observation in community activities in Madrid organized by Jatun Pamba families: principally sporting and cultural events, family religious events (marriages, baptisms, etc.) and other family reunions. I also participated in the daily lives of families in Madrid and in Ecuador.

In order to understand the 'conditions of possibility' for gender transformations I analyzed details of social changes over time using data collected through in-depth interviews. Designed as life-stories, these interviews enabled me to reassemble migrant trajectories, and build genograms of ten extended families, including seven hundred people from Jatun Pamba. This revealed that certain transformations of kinship had been central to the evolution of women's agency on gender norms. Through the genograms, I identified kinship patterns such as marriages and endogamy, post-marital residences, family alliances and family property divisions. This enabled me to analyze family strategies of reproduction over four generations, covering a period of nearly eighty years. The concept of social reproduction enables one to look at the circulation of care in relation to political economy, and understand that the choices made by members of transnational families are made under circumstances (such as the development of economies in the Andean region) that affect how value is attributed  to different kinds of social capital. Social capital associated with the city of Quito, for example, confronts and mixes with social capital attained inside the village. These values are intimately related to ethnic and gender identities: for example, social capital derived from contact with Quito is associated with a *mestizo* identity and can influence the hierarchical relationships between two indigenous women.

In many of the life-stories of individuals from Jatun Pamba, ethnic boundaries are invoked in specific relations of power. I center my analysis on when these boundaries become manifest and what effects they produce on gender. In other words, how ethnicity is instrumentalized within power relationships, and how it is used to influence gender norms, in one way or in another, by influencing the organization of intimate relationships and the circulation of care in transnational families. The next section uses the history of Eleonora's family to illustrate this.

*Across generations in an Andean transnational family*



Eleonora's Family
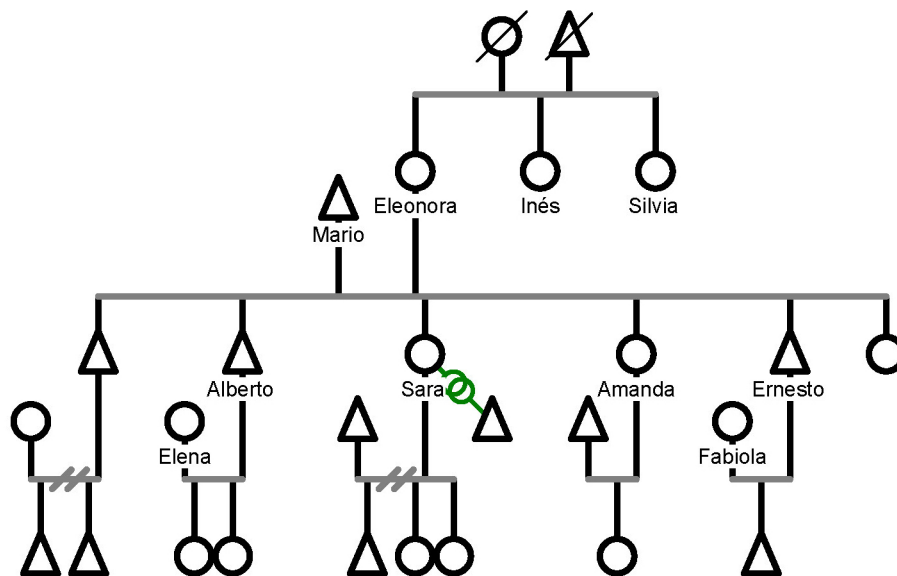
Eleonora was born in the 1940s to a poor family from the lowlands of Jatun Pamba, fifteen kilometers from the center of Quito. When she was ten, her mother died. Eleonora and her two younger sisters had to leave school and go work as domestic servants in Quito, at the house of their father's *compadre*, a *mestizo*. The three girls, Eleonora, Inés and Silvia were very close. Eleonora met Mario at the house where she worked; he was the gardener. When they married, Eleonora and Mario went to live with Mario's parents in a village thirty kilometers north of Quito. She recounts how she suffered there, working the land, taking care of the animals, cleaning the house, and cooking, all under the harsh discipline of her *suegra*. She did not know anything about life in the countryside, she says, and her *suegra* used to call her *karishina* ('like a man' in Kichwa), a term used to insult women that do not do housework properly. Eleanora complained so insistently to her father that he 'rescued' her, she says, and the couple went to live with him. The agreement was that the father would ask his *compadre* to take back Eleonora and Mario as domestic workers.

A few years later, with the financial and moral support of Eleonora's father, the couple bought a piece of land in front of her father's property, built a house, and raised

their three daughters and three sons there. At that time, virilocal residence was the expectation in the region, and uxorilocal residence was only accepted under certain circumstances, specifically when the family of the bride had contacts in Quito. This is a symbolic element that regulates the alliance between two families, but this social capital also has a material dimension: in this case, Eleanora's father could find a job for both Eleonora and Mario.

Symbolically, the relationship Eleonora maintained with the city since her childhood endowed her with an 'urban' ethnic identity, something she used to negotiate a certain position in relation to her *suegra*. She was not a country girl, she recalls, and would certainly not permit her *suegra* to beat her. She had the opportunity to build her house next to her father's place and own her own piece of land: she did not have to work for her *suegra*, and could therefore earn her own money and invest in land.

To Eleanora's chagrin, she had to marry her 17 year old daughter to her partner, in accord with the local tradition of marrying young lovers. Her daughter, Sara, was forced to go live with her husband's family, which was wealthier than her own family. A few years later, Sara was publicly beaten by her husband and Eleonora could not 'rescue' her as she herself had been rescued. She started to fear the same might happen to her second daughter, Amanda, aged 14. A few years before, in 1975, Eleanora's sister Inés had left the country with a German family she had worked for in Quito, and she was now living in Madrid. Eleonora called her sister to ask her to take care of Amanda. As she recalls:

"All my children got married very young. […] So… since the others got married and so… my idea was that the others might be something in life, that they not suffer. The idea… since my sister Inés migrated, after she migrated she took my daughter Amanda, she was only fourteen. I took from her the love of her mother. I did not send her away because I didn't want her with me, no! I sent her so she could be another person, you know… Prepared. That way she could have something we are not" (interviewed in Jatun Pamba, July 2012).

Amanda thus became the second woman to leave the village and go to Spain, where she worked for a wealthy family living in North Madrid. Throughout the 1980s Amanda and Inés helped people from Jatun Pamba find jobs as domestic workers in Spain. The money Amanda sent back did not directly pay for her brothers, Ernesto and Alberto, to study, but it helped the family enough that her brothers did not have to leave school to work. Alberto went on to study engineering.

In the late 1980s Spain entered the European Economic Community and its economy boomed. Pay was relatively good for domestic workers, and the rate of exchange between Spanish *pesetas* and Ecuadorian *sucre* was extremely favorable for migrants. Eleonora proposed that Amanda build a house right next to her own; a couple of years later they decided to buy a new piece of land together so Ernesto and Alberto could build a small shelter to raise pigs. In the early 1990s, Amanda helped her brother Ernesto and his wife Fabiola migrate to Madrid and find jobs as domestic workers. Alberto, now married to Elena, stayed in Jatun Pamba, and started to live in Amanda's newly built house. Meanwhile Amanda met her husband and they bought a small apartment thirty kilometers outside Madrid.

In 1998, Ecuador entered the socio-economic and political crisis that led to the dollarization of its currency. In the three years that followed, a readjustment of the family occurred: Alberto and Elena decided to migrate to Madrid because they could not make a living in Ecuador, leaving their two children with Eleonora for a few months. Then Eleonora followed, taking the kids with her. Mario eventually migrated as well, a few years after. At the same time, Ernesto and Fabiola, who had built a house in Jatun Pamba on Fabiola's family property, returned to the village. In Jatun Pamba, Sara had started to work with her aunt, Silvia, who had a prosperous chicken business that survived the crisis.

In Spain, after a few months as domestic worker, Alberto found a job as an engineer and he and Elena managed to rent an apartment in Madrid where they lived with their kids and with Alberto's parents. When I met them, almost ten years later, they had just bought two apartments in the same building: Eleonora and Mario were living on the second floor, Alberto, Elena and the children on the third.

*Ethnic boundaries on a transnational scale*

In the summer of 2012 I accompanied the Madrid-based members of the family on their two-month holiday to Ecuador. One morning over breakfast Elena and Fabiola began to speak about a conflict with their sisters-in-law over the physical care of Eleonora, their mother-in-law. Elena explained that she was taking care of Eleonora in Spain since they live in the same building. Now, during the summer holiday, Fabiola was hosting Eleonora and Mario during their stay in Jatun Pamba. They said neither Sara (in Ecuador) nor Amanda (in Spain) were assuming any responsibilities for their mother's care. Moreover, Eleonora had decided to give the family's best piece of land to Sara because she recently had divorced her husband and needed a place to build a new house. Fabiola mentioned that since Sara had a new boyfriend she was not taking good care of her adolescent daughter, who was staying several nights a week at Fabiola's place. Elena said that Sara should not have a new boyfriend: in the village when you get divorced you should devote yourself to the care of your children. Elena said Amanda was giving moral support to her sister, and Fabiola and Elena agreed that Amanda's position was the result of having lived in Spain too long. 'Now she is too liberal' they told me.

The first notable element in this conversation is the relationship between the sisters-in-law and the conflict over responsibilities for physical care. The two women judge their sisters-in-law through the prism of village gender norms. But the relationship between the sisters-in-law also serves to mirror the positions of brothers and sisters in this family, their rights and obligations to care and to receive care. As a resource, care is "unevenly distributed within families subject to cultural notions of gender and identity roles" (Baldassar and Merla, 2014, p.8), determining the type and the volume of resources each member receives and is able to mobilize.

In the Andes, as in many other parts of the world, women have historically borne responsibility for most physical and emotional caring, and their education was not a family priority. Men received more social and economic support from their families, while at the same time they had fewer physical care duties and therefore more time to study, travel, and make contacts outside the family circle. In this conversation, however, we witness a somewhat different picture. The husbands of Fabiola and Elena have not

received any land from Eleonora, while both Sara and Amanda have. At the same time, Sara and Amanda have fewer responsibilities for physical caring, and receive emotional support from their mother: It is well established in the family that Amanda and Sara are Eleonora's 'favorites', a preference Eleonora defends by saying that they were forced to leave the house when they were adolescents and 'they lost their mom's care' too young.

Eleonora legitimates this transformation of gender roles through a discourse of equal distribution of resources within the family: If Sara and Amanda are receiving more economic and emotional support at this moment, it is because—according to Eleanora—twenty years ago the boys of the family received their part. Alberto received help from his mother to study engineering in Quito while the rest of the family was obliged to cut expenses on food. Ernesto received money from his mother in the early 1990s in order to migrate to Spain. For Eleonora, the love and financial support she gives to her daughters now is to compensate for not having been able to give them much before.

Nevertheless, the unequal division of the family property and the transformation of gender norms it represents generates a situation of conflict. Negotiation is necessary if Sara and Amanda do not want to be regarded as *huairapamushkas* ('daughters/sons of the wind' in Kichwa) a term used to insult those who do not respect social norms. What the sisters-in-law (Fabiola and Elena) highlight in this negotiation is an ethnic identity. For them, the problem is the 'too liberal' identity of their sisters-in-law. The two women associate 'liberal' with 'European/Spanish women in Madrid' but also with '*mestizo* women of Quito' who have historically dominated and despised indigenous women. In the specific negotiation of gender roles taking place in the Andes, power relationships are articulated through ethnicity, social class and generation (de la Cadena, 1991; Van Vleet, 2008).

In Foucaultian terms, power relations can be understood as a series of actions that take place the midst of an interplay between forces (Foucault, 1976, p.124). They depend on each situation, on each actor present or recalled in a particular conversation. This does not mean they are 'volatile'; they are based on previous structures, on historical events, on political economy, on the formulation of laws, and on social hegemonies, all of which orient present situations (Foucault, 1976, p.122). Ethnicity is one such field of forces in relation. Ethnicity is used here in the sense of boundaries that are constructed socially, under concrete circumstances, depending on the actors at play in a given interaction (Barth, 1969). It may be exploited in order to influence discourses, decisions, values, and behaviors, and ultimately to orient how care circulates in transnational families.

In the conversation cited above, the two sisters-in-law deal with symbolic and material elements of the local patriarchal structure closely related to the construction of ethnic boundaries. When they talk about the inadequacy of Sara's behavior, they invoke a local norm: a divorced mother or a widow is expected to devote herself to raising her children, a norm that legitimates practices of control over women's bodies and sexuality. Having a boyfriend after divorce is considered by the two women 'too liberal' and related, for them, to changes in the organization of family and of women's sexuality in Quito and in Spain.

If some structures of patriarchal domination tended to disappear during the second half of the twentieth century in Jatun Pamba, others proved harder to transform.

Migration does not seem to have been either the origin or always the driving force of these transformations. In Amanda's case, and in many other cases, migration was a strike against a structure already in flux since before the 1980s, the material foundation of patriarchal domination in the Andes: the exploitation of the work of *nueras*. This transformation is in part related to regional and global political economic transformations under way since the 1950s, leading to the devaluation of the rural world and a diversification of accumulation strategies by rural families impelled by globalization (García, 2014, p.76). It is also related to the arrival of a Protestant mission in the area in the 1950s, as well as projects by European and North American NGO's in the 1970s and 1980s working towards the economic and social emancipation of women, mainly through the inclusion of women in the education system since the 1960s in the village (Suárez Navaz et al., 2006).

In the present migration of Andean families the fact that women sell their labor in a market economy is now generally accepted, but new forms of patriarchal domination have appeared alongside the migration processes, exacerbating controls on women's mobility and sexuality (Gregorio and Gonzálvez, 2012). Ethnic social capital obtained through membership in ethnic networks has recently been conceptualized as a two-sided coin with positive and negative consequences, in which gender and generation are important axes for participation. While the support provided by these networks can be extremely helpful, it can also be an instrument of control used to shape behavior (Zontini, 2010). Pressure exerted by the transnational community can lead to the instrumentalization of culture, ethnic identities and gender norms when ethnic minorities confront discrimination in the country of destination (Espiritu, 2001). As a result, gender prescriptions can become stricter than in the country of origin (Echevarría, 2012).

Amanda, who suffers constant control of her mobility by other migrants from Jatun Pamba in Spain, was especially sensitive to the situation of her sister. Sara did not attend most of the family events that summer because her boyfriend was not invited. People in the family publicly criticized her new relationship. The judgment of her behavior by her sisters-in-law and other family members could have concrete material consequences. Where would she live without the help of her mother? Would she be able to keep her material independence?

On my last visit to the village, in June 2016, Sara was living with her kids and her new boyfriend in a new house built on her mother's land. The moral support Sara received from both her sister and her mother as well as the economic help from her aunt Silvia—who gave her the money for the new house—and of her mother—who gave her the piece of land—had helped her to maintain material independence.

*Intimacies of power and the circulation of care*

Eleonora's family story illustrates practices of 'circulation of care', conceptualized as the multidirectional, reciprocal and asymmetrical exchange of care in transnational families. In Eleonora's family we see that care, like moral and financial support, is multidirectional and involves multiple actors (between siblings when Amanda helps her brothers to migrate for example, but also across generations when Eleonora decides to

support Sara through her divorce); it also appears to go beyond the nuclear family, meaning the scope of analysis has to include members of the extended family (sometimes in-laws). Most importantly, the case study shows how individuals are entangled within power relations in which ethnicity plays a role both constraining their practices and enabling negotiations and transgressions in which their agency is crucial. Over two generations, we see how the rights and responsibilities of each family member are influenced by the place that person occupies in the family and village, but also by the history of relations, how a series of resources are allocated and what capacity each member has to mobilize resources in the circulation of care.

The power to transform, for example to shift norms, arises from a particular disposition of forces in power relationships, like the social capital Eleonora's father could mobilize when she got married. The opportunity Eleonora had to change the pattern of residence and avoid working for her *suegra* arose partly thanks to transformations in the regional political economy of Quito, influencing the ethnic relationships between particular individuals (i.e. *suegras* and *nueras*) thus facilitating symbolic and material transformations around gender and generation.

Here ethnic relationships, conceptualized as relations of power that use different boundaries as marks of difference (like workplace or moral positions on divorce), can influence the balance of forces one way or another. Playing with the ethnic identities ascribed to them through the participation in different ethnic networks allows women to influence the circulation of care and thereby gain better positions within their families. Nonetheless women have to face the limits of what it means to 'be a woman of Jatun Pamba' if they don't want to be called *huairapamushkas* and lose important resources necessary for their agency. At the same time, they can negotiate a transformation of gendered roles and ultimately influence practices of transmission and descent. Eleanora's decision to give preference to her daughters influences the discourse on what is right to do, on what is possible. This 'condition of possibility' enables some women to gain a better position in their families, sometimes at the expense of other women (in the story of Eleonora's family, no men assume responsibility for physical care: the *nueras* continue to take up the slack). A next step would be to evaluate if these transformations can actually alter profoundly the patriarchal structures.

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[i] This is a pre-proof version of the chapter 8 of the following book: Isabella Crespi et al. (Eds): Making Multicultural Families in Europe. Palgrave Macmillan

[ii] I would like to thank the people of Jatun Pamba, without whom my research would not have been possible, for sharing their experiences with me and accepting me as a (somehow peculiar) member of their families. I also want to thank the persons who have read previous versions of this chapter, Maya Paltineau, Sarah Smit, Rupert Small, Maggie Schmitt and the editors of this book for their numerous comments.

[iii] Each of these axes divide the social subjects and situate them in different categories and social positions. As Anthias (and other feminist scholars) explains, these axes are important elements of social stratification because they determine the allocation of socially valued resources and social locations (Anthias 2001: 368).

[iv] This research is based upon qualitative data drawn from ethnographic work done towards my doctoral thesis in Social Anthropology thanks to a PhD scholarship of the Autonomous University of Madrid.

[v] My analysis is influenced by a research project on return migration, directed by Gioconda Herrera and Cristina Vega, in which I participated in 2013. Based on thirty interviews with different members of families of Jatun Pamba in Madrid and in Quito, the project focused on personal and family trajectories of migration and gender differences in the mobility strategies.