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Familiarization of Migrations in the Migratory Corridors of Latin America: A Theoretical and Methodological Approach

La familiarización de las migraciones en los corredores migratorios de América Latina, una aproximación teórico-metodológica

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary migrations are undergoing significant reconfigurations in terms of population composition, settlement strategies, waiting, and transit within migration systems in and from Latin America. This article, in opposition to critical studies that address this issue, presents an analytical proposal on how the transition from the so-called *feminization of migration* to its *familiarization* has taken place. Migrant families are approached as a collective political subject that challenges the research and action agendas of various feminist movements and migration and refuge scholars from an academic perspective. Methodologically, this essay is based on a multi-sited, analog, and digital feminist perspective that focuses on this novel form of migration and transmigration.

Keywords: 1. migrant families, 2. transnational migration systems, 3. feminist perspective, 4. Latin America, 5. collective political subject.

RESUMEN

Las migraciones contemporáneas experimentan importantes reconfiguraciones en cuanto a la composición poblacional, estrategias de asentamiento, espera y tránsito en los sistemas migratorios en y desde América Latina. Este artículo, en discusión con los estudios críticos que tratan esta materia, apuesta por una propuesta analítica sobre cómo se ha transitado de la llamada *feminización de las migraciones* hacia su *familiarización*. Las familias migrantes se abordan como sujeto político colectivo que interpela la agenda de investigación y acción de los distintos movimientos feministas y de los/as estudiosas de migraciones y refugio desde el enfoque académico. Metodológicamente, este ensayo se sostiene desde una mirada feminista multisituada, analógica y digital, que pone en el centro esta novedosa forma de migraciones y transmigraciones.

Palabras clave: 1. familias migrantes, 2. sistemas migratorios transnacionales, 3. perspectiva feminista, 4. América Latina., 5. sujeto político colectivo.

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INTRODUCTION[3]

It is now an established axiom in migration studies that the more restrictive the border governance systems and immigration policies of the territories of origin, transit, and destination, the more dangerous, lengthy, and costly migration projects become. What is novel, despite this lethality, is that migrations have transitioned from primarily individual to being undertaken by entire families. With this shift, in addition to the reconfiguration of diasporic landscapes—as Appadurai (2019) calls the ways in which migrant communities understand and explain themselves—the frameworks that attempt to understand, and sometimes govern, migration and refuge in the world are also being reshaped.

From the mid-1980s onward, labor and family migration dynamics began to lose their circular nature due to the restrictions stemming from the reform of immigration laws in the United States. It was this shift that led to the emergence, in the early 21st century, of the "family reunification" mechanism within the transatlantic migration system, as a strategy for enabling transnational Latin American families to live together again. In recent times, following the securitization of migration on an international scale, a phenomenon has emerged that has been termed the *familiarization era of migration flows*. This development is a consequence of the militarization and paramilitarization of migration governance worldwide, particularly in the migratory corridors of Latin America.

From 2010 onward, migration studies have documented how the migration patterns of both males and females ceased to be circular (Vega et al., 2016), as legal reforms in immigration laws in Mediterranean Europe and the United States were aimed at restricting chain migrations. This led to the consolidation of family transnationalism, given that the periods of separation between family members increased. As such, these migratory dynamics toward Europe began to resemble those observed almost two decades earlier between Latin America and the United States.

The current article engages with critical studies on this topic, with the purpose of explaining how the shift from the so-called *feminization of migration* to its *familiarization* has occurred. Here, it is proposed looking at the migrant family as a collective political subject[4] that challenges the research agenda, the actions of various feminist movements, and the academic approach of migration and refugee scholars.

The article's proposal is thus structured as follows: first, the political and academic background of how the issue of migrant families arose from the feminization of Latin American migration to

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[4] The legal discussion on the individual or collective subjectivity of a subject of law is as old as legal liberalism itself. To propose migrant families as collective political subjects is central to this study, so as to contribute to the understanding, as in their time the Indianist movements in the American continent constructed (López, 2016), of the idea that, by consolidating collective political subjectivation, jurisprudential discussions are opened to understand the migrant family as a subject of law in itself.

Mediterranean Europe is reviewed. From there, the complexities of current mobility patterns in Latin America are addressed, so as to theoretically ground why the term *familiarization* is currently used in relation to migratory transit. Finally, the approach is supported by means of a theoretical and methodological proposal for understanding these novel forms of migration.

MIGRANT FAMILIES IN THE TRANSATLANTIC AND REGIONAL MIGRATION SYSTEM: APPROACHES FROM POLITICS AND ACADEMIA

The feminization of Latin American migration to Mediterranean Europe and the United States, researched and reported between the 1990s and 2000s, predates the normalization of migration. As mentioned earlier, this section begins with an analysis of how migrant families were problematized and became a collective political subject, particularly so in Latin America. From there, this issue is linked to intraregional migration and to so-called South-South migration (Acosta, 2013); new strategies of human mobility emerge within, leading to a reconfiguration of migration flows in our region.

The issue of families in the field of international migration studies, initially viewed through the lens of methodological nationalism, prioritized addressing the integration of these families upon the arrival of women and their children in the countries of emigration, reunited by the men who led the migration process. This political perspective influenced an academic production focused primarily on countries of the Global North, where the main political concern was managing these families and integrating them into educational and healthcare systems. In turn, this facilitated construing the migrant woman as responsible for family adaptation and the "emotional stability" of the men who led the family into migration (Agrela, 2009).

However, by the late 1990s, alongside the feminization of Latin American migration to Europe and the United States, women became the primary links in family migration chains, the economic sustenance in their places of origin, and those responsible for family reunification at destinations. All of which led to an increased visibility and subsequent debate—not free of stereotyping and stigmatization—that positioned migrant families at the center of political, legal, sociocultural, educational, health, religious, and academic disputes.

The feminization of migration was accompanied by new forms of family organization, primarily those known as transnational families. It is in this context that a rich transatlantic academic production emerged by the study of the feminization of Latin American migration from transnational and gender-based theoretical and methodological perspectives (Lagomarsino, 2014). As a political subject in the European context, family migration was reflected in laws, regulations, and integration plans that gradually imposed rules and restricted family reunification processes, a mechanism which thus ceased to be a right, and rather became a tool of state control (Gil Araujo & Pedone, 2013).

In the Spanish context, the migration flows that underwent a process of acceleration and feminization between the late 1990s and 2008 originated in Latin America, particularly in the

Dominican Republic, Peru, Ecuador, and Colombia, and later in Bolivia, Brazil, Paraguay, and Honduras. This dual process led to transformations in family structures, resulting in a realignment of gender and generational relations, changes in family reunification practices, and in the ways transnational care is organized. Much of the scientific output of that era indeed focused on these issues (Herrera, 2011; Oso & Ribas, 2012).

Transnational families can be defined as deterritorialized social constructs (Sørensen, 2008) that maintain and reconstruct affective, socioeconomic, cultural, and religious bonds across extended distances. These families produced ruptures in the conceptions and ways of exercising transnational motherhood and fatherhood. The multi-sited fragmentation of domestic groups led to new ways of organizing care and to profound changes in child-rearing practices that transcended nation-state borders. These transformations were analyzed under the concept of "transnational care" (Baldassar et al., 2007).

One of the contributions to understanding migrant families as political subjects in the migration management debate, both in destination and origin countries, stems from research on Latin American migrant families (Parella & Cavalcanti, 2010). These studies revealed that the decision of migrants to reunite with their children was made once they had settled in their destination countries, and the women who led the migration were primarily responsible for their children's reunification within the context of emigration.

In this sense, within the field of international migration studies, migrant children and youth emerge as a problem to be analyzed, mainly due to those children of migrants who arrive at different school ages or are born and raised in the context of emigration. In early studies, these children are inextricably linked to schooling issues (Alonso, 2020).

The onset of the 2008 global socioeconomic crisis marked a turning point. At that time, returns of children and adolescents to their countries of origin began to be observed, as family reunification processes in the destination countries did not yield the expected results. This was due to numerous setbacks that prevented successful reunification. In addition to the precarious legal, labor, and housing conditions, a weak social network that made it difficult to organize care and child-rearing tasks in the destination places led to very complex family reunification processes that were quite far from what can be called "a successful migration"; all this led many mothers and fathers to decide, in some cases, to facilitate staggered returns and, in others, to rather undertake migrations to northern European countries.

From that point onward, the research approach on migration from Latin America to Southern Europe adopted a transnational and gender perspective, which has produced a significant body of knowledge on the family ties that develop in these transnational social spaces. Beginning in 2008, the aforementioned global crisis led to political, economic, social, and territorial transformations in the Europe-Latin America transatlantic migration system, and a large number of Latin American countries became places of origin, destination, transit, and waiting for population flows. Currently,

these migratory dynamics are reshaping new geographies of mobility that respond to global phenomena, resulting in increasingly complex routes.

In South America, particularly in countries that have historically been receivers of migration—such as Argentina, Brazil, and Chile—migrant families have not been found a specific issue of political dispute and debate; consequently, scholarly production from gender and intersectional perspectives has rather placed greater emphasis on the strategies and trajectories of migrant women (Magliano, 2015). As for the children of migrants, analyses have focused on the social integration of migrant children and youth, as well as on those of immigrant origin, based on the immigration-school relationship, in terms of socio-educational integration (Jiménez et al., 2017; Novaro, 2017).

Current transformations in population flows pose new theoretical and methodological challenges for the transnational perspective. One of the most important challenges concerns the limitations of focusing solely on the notion of origin and destination. During the development of the transnational perspective's theoretical and methodological framework, emphasis was placed on connections and on spatial and temporal distance to define transnational social fields. Addressing the study of migratory trajectories by paying attention to the new territorialities that are formed in the current migratory corridors in Latin America, for example, puts a strain on the classic analytical categories of transnational migration and transmigration studies, such as origin-destination, transit migration, and waiting places, which entails devising new methodological strategies wherein ethnographic work encompasses these complexities in the current regional migratory geographies (Çağlar & Glick Schiller, 2015; Glick Shiller, 2018; Haesbaert, 2011).

In the border regions of Latin America, daily life—overall organized by women when it comes to family and economics—also introduces specific characteristics distinct from the dynamics of transnational families. From them, an initial debate arises. Agreeing with Guizardi and her team (Guizardi et al., 2018) who, following Stephen (2012), assert that transborder families organize their family and work lives in territories shared by two or more nation-states; as such, daily life displays forms and dynamics different from those managed and organized by transnational families, which migrate to global cities and traverse considerable distances, compared to transborder families. These authors also emphasize that national, regional, and local historicities are more complex than those of transnational social spaces, and that, when addressing borders, territorial transborder issues demand a more meticulous analysis of the relationship between the real and the symbolic.

This debate has resonated in academic literature, as well as in some public policy-impacting materials proposed by migration consultants and administrators to public institutions across the continent. In other words, the debate outlined here and the compiled body of literature are used by Spanish-speaking academics who study contemporary migration south of the Rio Grande. Existing literature has drawn on this debate to construct analyses situated within their respective coordinates (Ojeda, 2005; Rivas & Gonzálvez, 2009; Zuleika & Mejía Garcés, 2012). Today, in addition to this body of literature, the need to construct interstices within the theoretical framework outlined

above, drawing on literary and gender studies, and connecting them with the perspectives of *Prieto* (Anzaldúa, 2021) and Black and Third World (Castillo & Moraga, 2021) feminisms to consider family and migration, transborder identity, and communities of care in motion (Álvarez Velasco & Varela-Huerta, 2022), is also under discussion.

DEFINING FAMILIARIZATION IN LATIN AMERICAN MIGRATORY CORRIDORS

In the last decade, profound geographic transformations have impacted mobility in Latin American migratory corridors, which have fulfilled the territorial function of articulating regional migration systems, complicating and destabilizing them, once migrant subjects of different origins and with diversified mobility profiles enter them (Álvarez Velasco et al., 2021). In these migratory and territorial reconfigurations, migrant families have taken center stage in terms of mobility, waiting, and the organization of community care during transit.

The familiarization of migrations in migration corridors poses new challenges for political activism and academia in addressing what the presence of children, adolescents, and young people on these routes means, and the social positions these population groups occupy in the new forms of family organization within current processes of transnationalism (Pedone, 2025). There is a well-established line of critical research on migration along the Central America-Mexico-U.S. corridor focusing on the displacement of unaccompanied and family-accompanied children, adolescents, and young adults. Some authors, from an intersectional perspective, define this displacement as a product of issues related to injustice, power, and violence: essential themes for understanding the migration of young Honduran and Salvadoran men on their journey north.

As for the corridor encompassing Central America, Mexico, and the United States, a rich theoretical discussion and rigorous empirical work have emerged (Díaz de León, 2023) explaining both the forms of state and market violence in the legal and illegal economies (París, 2017), as well as the resistance and resilience with which migrants confront the entrapment in migratory transit (Frank-Vitale, 2020; Vogt, 2018) linking impoverished Central American countries with the United States and Canada. To sum up, it can be said that there are three causal dimensions that expel migrant families: state violence, market violence, and patriarchal violence. These are mostly perpetrated against women, children, and young people (Varela-Huerta, 2017). And these same forms of violence are experienced by families during transit, entrapment, and settlement in Mexico, the United States, or Canada, when they manage to settle (Díaz Prieto, 2017).

As merely one example, detention and deportation statistics between the 1990s and 2020s show an exponential increase in the presence of women, children, adolescents, and adults aged 60 and over in the United States. In Mexico, the composition of family migration flows is constantly reconfigurating; in their reports, Mexican immigration authorities acknowledge that, in addition to the massive presence of migrant children, women, and elderly people crossing or departing from Mexican migration routes in family groups (Martínez & Calderón, 2022).

The same occurs in the Gulf of Darién, which connects the Andean and South American regions with Central America. Besides traveling as families, Venezuelan migrants, the so-called "Venezuelan walkers," face all kinds of human rights violations in the territories where they decide to stop or become trapped and have to settle in, always waiting to resume their journey. Ethnographic findings from other research indicate that in the Western Corridor of South America, with destinations such as Buenos Aires and Quito (Pedone, 2025), and consistent with studies conducted in other sections of this corridor, Venezuelan families are composed of individuals with at least one member requiring special care, others with critical or chronic medical conditions, most without access to treatment or medication, pregnant or breastfeeding women; also, in many cases, during the settlement process, households become single-parent due to family separation for various reasons (González et al., 2022).

It is worth noting how issues associated with violence, poverty, racialization, subordination, and marginalization, as well as with a complete lack of state support, serve as the driving force and exacerbate vulnerability during migration journeys (Alarcón, 2009; Robles, 2022). Otherwise stated, in addition to presenting a theoretical genealogy of the family as a unit of analysis and the feminization of migration as a reality, as well as offering an epistemic framework for understanding migration in general, it seems necessary to name and acknowledge the connections these topics have with the discussion on children on the move (Álvarez-Velasco & Glockner, 2018; Colectiva Infancias, 2022).

The question to address is the sense in which these forms of governing migration and the strategies adults employ to challenge these mechanisms have transformed the strategies of migrant children and adolescents, day laborers, deportees, and returnees.[5]Besides women and children, young people from different regions are also migrating en masse. Traditionally, young men were often the first in their family systems to migrate; it was in many cases a collective, strategically constructed plan. In current times, it seems relevant to add to critical tools' elements for understanding the familiarization of migrations and the youth violence from which young people in the Global South flee. Their exoduses are recognized as acts of resistance to neoliberalism. It is youth-murdering violence that compels them to flee, that they suffer in transit, and that plagues the daily lives of migrant children and youth in the cities where they settle; it is a policy of the states involved in such structural violence (Ruíz & Varela-Huerta, 2020).

This analysis echoes the many contemporary forms that the concept of family takes today: by providing a name for the "familiarization of migrations," it shares the perspectives of transfeminism and critical family studies that document this quintessential social institution, beyond the heteropatriarchal paradigm with which it has been fixed in the collective imagination

[5] Research on children on the move is still scarce, if compared to the volume and diversity of perspectives on adult migration in general. It is strongly suggested to explore the collaborative work of the Colectiva Infancias (2022), *Infancias en movimiento* (Children on the Move), as it brings together migrant voices and approaches to addressing and narrating the migrations of children and adolescents.

(Angulo & Jarillo, 2017). In other words, the family institution is understood as a diverse social nucleus, sustained by networks of care for the preservation of life, where, in addition to the heteronormative family, same-sex parent families emerge, as already explained by queer feminism; examples of this are the families formed by transgender or lesbian individuals, including migrant children during the migration process itself, as noted by Williamson (2023). Such is the case among migrant children and adolescents traveling alone or abandoned by traffickers. These children attempting to exodus group into families to walk and settle. They become blended families, created from abandonment, "communities of care on the move" (Álvarez Velasco & Varela-Huerta, 2022; Migratory Corridors, 2022).

Based on a review of the aforementioned critical migration studies, the genealogy of how migrant families have been addressed as a collective political subject is traced. This analysis aims to explore and deepen the understanding of how the region has transitioned from the so-called *feminization of migration* to the *familiarization of migration*. In this sense, the familiarization of migration is understood as:

a) Migration projects and processes that rely on displacement of the household group, with everyone migrating together to confront the insecurity of the journey in the face of deepening border processes based on control and permeated by inequalities of gender, age, nationality, and so on;

b) Migrations comprised of groups made up of women, children, adolescents, and men who organize care during migration and during pauses along migratory corridors, in order to protect life along the migratory journey;

c) Mobility strategies in the search for better legal conditions and labor market integration that give rise to multi-sited families in the region, primarily organized by young people who take charge of managing daily family life at a transnational level;

d) Currently, the shift toward the extreme right in destination, transit, and waiting states, with its punitivism, human rights violations, and mass deportations, also indicative of necropolitics aimed at punishing the family unit and exercising vicarious violence, as in the current separations of newborn children from their mothers due to deportations.

From this study's perspective, these ways of undertaking, confronting, and consolidating the migration project represent a form of non-punitive feminist justice. In this sense, the starting point of this work is the discussion from Latin American transfeminism (Valencia, 2012), which analyzes contemporary punitive developments and warns of the necropolitics involved in adhering to the paradigms on which these developments are based. In Arbuet's words, "State borders, as well as identity borders, spaces of enjoyment, pain, crossing, drift, and transaction [...] are places delimited in blood by State governmentality in its expressions of fascism, both legal and illegal" (Arbuet, 2020, p. 127).

This paper proposes thinking of family mobility as a feminist strategy, a latent struggle. By doing this, the struggles of migrant women as they travel in caravans with children in their arms, as they search for their lost sons and daughters on the migration routes of the Mediterranean or the Darién Gap, and as they converge with mothers searching for the disappeared in Mexico, are seen as forms of feminist justice. The aim is to analyze and explain how these women's struggles could point to specific forms of non-punitive feminist justice; that is, those feminisms that oppose the political response, the philosophy of punishment, as the way of (re)acting to social issues and building alternatives for the management of what is common.

A PROPOSAL FOR MULTI-SITE ETHNOGRAPHIES AS A MEANS TO UNDERSTANDING TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATIONS AND FAMILY TRANSMIGRATIONS IN LATIN AMERICA

While the focus of this paper is primarily theoretical, it still seems necessary to share certain empirical insights on how to ethnograph the mobility of the families, as discussed. Therefore, a methodological approach has been developed for this theoretical endeavor, based on collective and shared knowledge and procedural reflections derived from ethnographic work, as well as from the perspectives of academics in Europe, Africa, and the Americas. This by the consistent employment of in-depth interviews, dialogue, and attentive listening as methodological strategies, and co-producing texts sharing authorship with the migrant women themselves.

However, before presenting ways to approach ethnographic work, it seems important, as an exercise proposed to other migration scholars, to situate the position of enunciation, an exercise always relevant for those who engage with the works. The position of enunciation in this work is a product of the social conditions of knowledge production described above; the migrant epistemologies from which the familiarization of migration is reflected were produced through participant observation and in-depth interviews in the migratory corridors of Central America, Mexico, and the United States, and the west in South America.

The theoretical and ethnographic approach proposed to support the idea of how migration has transitioned from the feminization of migration to its familiarization in different migration systems stems from situated knowledge (Harding, 1996; Hooks et al., 2004). The authors define themselves as ethnographers trained in theoretical-methodological transnational perspectives and gender studies, and as committed to a longitudinal understanding with political and academic implications in both emigration and immigration contexts, in ongoing transatlantic and interregional dialogue, where Latin America plays a structuring role in these international displacements, given that this region is the territory of origin of the families that move together.

The authors of this paper share migratory and professional trajectories in Spain, followed by a return to their places of origin in Latin America. They also share political activism for the human rights of migrant populations during the first decade of the 2000s in Europe, specifically with and as migrant women workers. This does not imply equating their own privileged experience as academics with that of the women who are the protagonists of this research: the migrant, displaced

women. During the period between late 1990s and 2012, fieldwork focused on Mediterranean Europe as a context of immigration and on some Latin American countries, such as Ecuador and Colombia, as places of emigration.

In this sense, from the ethnographies carried out by the authors over the last decade in Latin American migratory corridors—many of them longitudinal studies— findings were revisited to construct the concept of the familiarization of migrations, and to shift the focus away from individual mobilities and deportation statistics and reports, as well as to address the adverse effects of migration control regimes.

Therefore, rather than research findings, the priority of this paper—for length reasons—is to propose methodological guidelines, field actions that may allow elucidating how to construct a subfield of study on human mobility when such mobility is undertaken by entire families. To construct this proposal, the findings produced in the last decade in research were employed; these focused on the migratory corridors of Central America-Mexico and the United States, mainly with Central American, Caribbean and Mexican, Ecuadorian and Bolivian families, as well as Moroccan and Algerian families (Varela-Huerta, 2020).

In the Western migratory corridor, research has focused on destination, transit, and waiting territories such as Argentina and Ecuador. Between 2017 and 2022, ethnographies were conducted in Quito, Ecuador, with families from Latin America—Colombia, Venezuela, and Haiti—and from transcontinental migrations originating in Asia—Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Palestine, Lebanon, and India. In that same period, a longitudinal study was carried out with young Venezuelans whose trajectories were characterized by high mobility within the region. This study produced an ethnographic corpus between Quito and Buenos Aires, along with regular contacts to track high-mobility routes, both within the region and toward countries in the Global North (Pedone et al., 2019; Pedone, 2024).

While these ethnographies were mostly conducted in-person, multi-sited, and longitudinal, in contexts of high mobility, such as the migratory corridors of the region, regular contact via WhatsApp and other social networks has become a methodological strategy that, although by no means replacing presence in the field, constitutes an effective tool that allows for organizing struggles and resistance to protect life in the face of abuse by the police and criminal gangs.

This trajectory of several decades of scientific production, both personal and that of other colleagues dedicated to the study of transnational family organization, has allowed to build a bridge with current family dynamics in intraregional migrations within Latin America. In addition to the longitudinal approach, this familiarization has been discovered in episodes of in-person support of migrant struggles, such as in the case of migrant caravans or when families travel together from the south of the continent. This way, facilitating the understanding of the transformations in migration patterns, which have been observed by ethnographing episodes of concrete migrant struggles.

Thus, it is proposed that to study the familiarization of human mobility in Latin America, attention must be paid to the reasons for exodus, and to the forms, duration, and geographies of the territories inhabited by families during migrations and transmigrations, which often transform into waiting, territorial confinement, or settlement in places they initially assumed only as transit points.

Besides the reasons for exodus and the conditions of transit and waiting, it is also essential to practice radical listening, accompanying or engaged observation, and to construct communities of care in motion (whether analog or virtual) within the processes of crossing, confinement, detention, deportation, and return. All that which contemporary migration scholars have always practiced, but now with a broader scope of subjectivities, moving beyond fragmentation by age or gender. In addition to specifically studying young people, children, adolescents, women, the elderly, and adult men, all those who migrate seeking a dignified life must be studied—whether as blended, blood, or chosen families, but always as collective subjects traversing the continent. This is not new whatsoever, nor are family migrations themselves. What is new here is the proposal to begin using this collective political subjectivity as a form of disobedience to border regimes and neoliberalism.

Of course, it must be acknowledged that for decades, various organizations, migrants, and migrant advocates, as well as academics, have been taking families into account. Just as one example, the Institute for Women in Migration (IMUMI, acronym in Spanish for *Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración*) was one of the first to recognize this complexity in the composition of transmigrant groups through Mexico, and in its 2017 report, Central American Migrant Families in Mexico: Recommendations to Expand their Protection (Díaz Prieto, 2017), it already stated:

> There is a high number of families among those groups seeking asylum, specifically families comprised of mothers and their children. In recent years, various studies on transnational motherhood have documented that the majority of Central American migrant women are young mothers without a partner, who are the economic sustainers for their families and have networks and support systems enabling them to migrate. However, in the past, women migrated without their children, who most often were left in the care of another woman in their place of origin. If a decade ago the women of the TNC already felt threatened by gang violence, its increase and intensification in recent years—with a devastating effect on them, their children, and adolescents—has led them to migrate with their sons and daughters, as that is the only way they find to protect them from violence and crime, as well as to achieve greater development opportunities (Díaz Prieto, 2017, pp. 12-13).

These "opportunities for development" that Díaz Prieto refers to are actually vitalistic calculations, says Gago (2019), escape strategies to reimagine and rebuild life in territories where they can live as a family. This is the temporal cohort that, in addition to the spatial-territorial one of understanding migration routes as corridors (Álvarez Velasco et al., 2021), is proposed to explain this familiarization of migrations on the continent.

This is why, well into the millennium, transnational families are characterized by having been separated for long spans of time and employing diverse strategies to reunite. One of these, increasingly widespread, is migration in family units (Díaz Prieto, 2017). This reality has been shaped by the neoliberalization of economies, when, on a global scale and in a particularly violent manner, the financialization of the economy was imposed on the continent, reshaping social contracts. In addition to being considered a reserve army of labor, large social strata/castes are deemed surplus, disposable, something that Saskia Sassen (2015) proposed should be understood as processes of "expulsion" of entire population groups within the world system.

This familiarization, hereby argued, is a product of neoliberalism and arises within the context of the dismantling of the welfare state, as life in the "Third World" becomes hyper-precarious. From the 1970s to 2023, helplessness has spread to the peripheries of the world-system. This has resulted in large-scale human exoduses, some for clearly "political" reasons, such as the Salvadoran and Guatemalan exodus from civil wars, the recent Honduran exile, or the Syrian, Afghan, and Yemeni exiles.

The fact that migrants from the Arab world no longer move only to the metropolises that colonized them was already known; it has been studied by migration interpreters since postcolonial migrations were disrupted by neoliberalism, and it has been explained by so-called "diasporic studies" (Brah, 2011). What is new are the ways in which families *from outside the continent* are settling in Latin America; Asian and African migrants are also increasingly migrating as families, and are betting their lands and territories, their genealogies, and their future on it (Pedone, 2020; Latin American Center for Investigative Journalism ([CLIP, [acronym in Spanish for *Centro Latinoamericano de Investigación Periodística*], 2021).

Indeed, just as capitalism mutates, migration policies have for five decades combined the securitization of external borders with hateful policies for the "management" of racialized populations within territories, not only in the Global North but also in the Global South. That is to say, what the familiarization of migration expresses as a symptom of current times is that, in addition to the temporal (neoliberalism) and the territorial (migratory corridors in Latin America), the financialization of capital deterritorializes/disrupts postcolonial scenarios, and the South and the peripheries become destinations for entire families and communities (South-South migration, migrations trapped in transience and waiting).

The human mobility practices in Latin America that have been observed provide certainties on political insurgency, the agency of migrants that decides to migrate as a family. There is a profound political dimension to traveling in family units—whether bonded by blood or through marriage—along migratory corridors in Latin America. According to the experience and ethnographic work presented here, spanning more than two decades, among the families fleeing neoliberalism and its widespread violence, there is a decision based on the belief that migration is an effective way to reach habitable worlds.

Garcés (2005) reflects on this life drive as a strategy of resistance and liberation, deeming it a radical political practice. It is proposed here that moving as a family is a concrete form of these resistance practices, as demonstrated by migrant families. In addition to gang violence and state impunity, migrant women, during the 1990s and until before the pandemic, migrated alone—aided by a *coyote* or in groups of peers, but without children—and sent remittances for years to their families until they were able to reunite with their elders or descendants. In some instances, they discovered domestic and sexual violence in their original homes where they had entrusted their children. For this reason, and because of the obstacles to achieving family reunification, their political imagination led them to travel with their children, mothers, and grandmothers.

Currently, children, adolescents, and young adults on the move have grown noticeable in the western South American migratory corridor, and some studies no longer only emphasize their arrival and educational integration, but also address their survival and resistance strategies, which trace increasingly complex routes in this region. These complexities are evidenced by the ethnographic work of the Migratory Corridors Collective (*Colectivo Corredores Migratorios*) in Ecuador, which speaks of a country of walkers along the region's corridors:

> They are children and adolescents who leave their homes in Venezuela and form small communities along the routes, which allows them to survive together while they travel to Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, or Chile. Similar groups form if the young people return home for a while, in search of documents or because life alone is no longer viable (Migratory Corridors, 2022, p. 18).

Likewise, with a keen eye on the inequalities that intersect in these migratory journeys, recent research on the familiarization of Venezuelan migration in the western South American migratory corridor has shown that in recent years, young Venezuelans who belonged to the middle class in their places of origin are leading family migration projects with high mobility across the continent as strategies to send remittances, sustain family transnationalism, and resist processes of social declassing in their original location (Pedone, 2025).

Finally, an emerging issue in intraregional migration in Latin America concerns the political agency of migrant youth, where it can be seen how young people on the move take center stage in shaping their own projects, their migratory, educational, labor, and activist trajectories, and in producing knowledge through their involvement in migrant struggles (Anderson & Solis, 2022; Madrid, 2022), as well as in collective struggles in the places where they were born and raised as new generations, as in the case of Argentina (Gavazzo, 2019; Identidad Marrón, 2021). All these struggles challenge the adult-centric perspectives that, from different spheres, have been shaped regarding migrant children, adolescents, and young adults in various transnational migration systems, and which raise questions about how to form families along the way.

Moreover, familiarized migrations have seen the reorganization of trafficking and smuggling networks (Fauzi, 2020), whose losses amount to millions of dollars when taking into account that

each migrant is charged thousands of dollars to cross borders to the northern hemisphere. However, and in order not to reify the notion of familiarized migrations as merely a new form of migrant agency, it seems necessary to clarify that in addition to families deciding to migrate together, simultaneously, from origin to destination, human rights violations have also been documented, not only against migrants themselves, but now also against entire family units, carried out by coyotes, cartels, and public servants. That is to say, there has been a trend whereby kidnappings and the continuum of violence are no longer solely and primarily directed against men and women, but also against their children. Nowadays, these crimes and acts of violence are inflicted on entire migrant families.[6]

In the face of this reality, it is emphasized that it is a moral, ethical, and political imperative to imagine policies of radical solidarity and hospitality, as Khosravi (2021) calls them. One must understand migrant families as nuclei of resistance—families not always based on blood ties but rather composite, complex, and diverse, formed in transit, while in wait, or through affective bonds. It is urgent now to imagine action-research mechanisms, but also narrative ones, to embrace and account for these political practices, of the ways in which migrant women trapped in transience resist, both explicitly and implicitly (Núñez, 2017). It is here, in addition to the oppressions and necessary struggles (Davis, 2016), that convergences and intersections can be found—mechanisms of theoretical and political imagination that embrace the life strategies of these families and, at the same time, result in political costs against those who enact racist laws.

Summarizing, it is for all these reasons that the central argument of this text is that an agenda must be opened in migration, anti-racist, and feminist studies that starts from the certainty that the migrant family—as a collective political and legal subject in different migration systems—is transforming both social positions within the household group and migrant struggles and ways of migrating, severely affecting the migration industry, challenging the humanitarian industry, and exercising, even from conditions of high precarity, the right to live in a family.

CLOSING REFLECTIONS

This article begins with the genealogy of critical migration studies and how they have addressed the collective political subject that the migrant family constitutes, in order to propose lines of inquiry that will translate into a new research agenda centered on the familiarization of migration and transmigration in our region. This theoretical and thematic journey led from the so-called feminization of migration to its familiarization. This article is an exercise in mapping a genealogy of the state of the discussion on the familiarization of migration, aimed at understanding the migrations of women, men, sexual dissidents, children, adolescents, young people, and families in studies on migration, refuge, forced displacement, and asylum.

[6] See the 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022 annual reports of the Network for Documentation of Migrant Advocacy Organizations (REDODEM, acronym in Spanish for *Red de Documentación de las Organizaciones Defensoras de Migrantes*).

As posited by Kroshravi (2021), while borders are manifestations of a national imaginary, they are also bodily experiences. Just as barbed wire and fences lacerate the bodies of migrants, traversing the paths, the migratory corridors leave internal and visible scars on women's bodies (Jorge, 2020), but they also generate new social relationships and institutions that challenge the patriarchal order of capitalism.

This work opens a dialogue stemming from the authors' reunion, decades and struggles later, to reflect together on a reality that seems ripe for being addressed, acknowledged, and named: families are migrating en masse. This political agency, however, is rendered invisible by political, legal, and academic discourses that insist on representing, managing, and protecting migrant children and adolescents from a perspective of vulnerability, rather than recognizing them as subjects of law.

This work initiates an investigative approach, addressing the challenge these families pose when they call upon the observer to engage with them as collective subjects of law and spokespeople for their own stories. Thus, the proposal is to sharpen and politicize listening, to identify the intersections of these struggles, and to practice recognizing the intersections of shared oppressions. To fracture the necropolitical fantasy that migrations can be governed (Ríos-Infante, 2022), beginning with the exercise of recognizing the political agency of these migrant families walking through the continent as a research agenda of contemporary feminisms.

In a current context that denotes a shift towards what is considered technofascism, which, although developing and reshaping itself for years, now holds power in the United States, El Salvador, and Argentina, as well as in certain regions of Europe. This reflection is carried out in the framework of the third month of Donald Trump's second term as president of the United States. Simultaneously with the review of these lines of inquiry and working hypotheses, mass media and social networks portrayed the transfer of migrants to the (illegal) maximum-security prison on the Cuban island of Guantánamo and the CECOT detention center in El Salvador. The media coverage of this process intensifies and is now being instrumentalized to reinforce a pedagogy of terror with which this new phase, considered a total war against migrants and their communities, is inaugurated.

Cooperation agencies have abolished subsidies for providing food and healthcare to migrants in shelters in Mexico and Central America during this period, as the Trump administration has cut off funding for so-called "development cooperation." Reports are circulating about prohibitions sent as memos to organizations on the other side of the world that offered legal assistance to undocumented migrants in the United States. As can be seen, the right to asylum has been *de facto* suspended. The Trump administration is showing cruelty toward the families of internationally displaced persons by means of law enforcement raids on schools, hospitals, and workplaces, some of which have been sensationalized during prime time. During the last weeks of 2024 and the first weeks of 2025, reports were received from families who have been supported virtually from the

other side of the wall, who relate that many undocumented people in the United States are not attending their workplaces as a strategy to avoid the risk of deportation.

This article concludes by attempting to clearly interpret the forms that the familiarization of punishment has taken in contemporary times for those who dared to challenge the regime of family borders. It is from these observations that it is emphasized the urgency of thinking with and from migrant families about possible forms of epistemic disobedience, as well as strategies for the support and empowerment of these threatened collective subjects.

Translation: Fernando Llanas.

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