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Transnational Families and Neo-Liberal Globalisation: Past, Present and Future

RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

The concept of 'transnational family' coalesced in the context of neo-liberal globalisation during the late 1990s and 2000s. This article traces the social, economic and political forces that have influenced the spread of transnational families throughout the world during the 21st century. Meanwhile, the digital revolution in social media communication and cheapening international travel costs has facilitated transnational family members communication with one another. Examining material exchanges between transnational family members in sending and receiving countries, childcare support for migrants' left-behind children provided by home-based family members has been a critical enabler of women's out-migration. In turn, migrants' remittance payments have been a basic lifeline or a source of improved standards of living for family members in sending countries. Overtime, global neo-liberal policies have generated the context for the expansion of transnational family migration through promotion of international travel and internet communication. However, neo-liberalism has inadvertently paved the way for the growth of national precariats and one-state populism resting on segments of Western national populations' resentment of international migration. Collapsing neo-liberalism as well as the intensification of global warming and the onset of the COVID pandemic are likely to influence the future of global migration and transnational familyhood in, as yet, indeterminant ways.

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INTRODUCTION

The enforced migration of millions of Africans to the Americas as slaves in the 17–19th centuries, voluntary or indentured mass migration of Europeans to the Americas and similarly South Asian migration to Africa during the latter half of the 19th century into the early 20th century, is demographically imprinted on world history. The migrants left their natal countries and formed families in destination countries. They were physically distanced from their source countries, and were unable to maintain close contact with the family members that they left behind.

By contrast, remarkable technological advance in electronic communications and air travel has facilitated global migration over the last two decades. Consequently, millions of international migrants can now remain in close social contact with family members, despite the physical distance separating them. Material conditions have been conducive for the formation and geographical spread throughout the world of transnational families of seemingly endless diversity.

The term 'transnational family' surfaced at the turn of the 21st century defined as 'families that live some or most of the time separated from each other, yet hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of collective welfare and unity, namely "familyhood," even across national borders' (Bryceson & Vuorela 2002: 1).[1] Transnational familyhood is a culturally creative and socially interactive way of life, involving family network support for select family members to migrate across international borders in the hopes of gaining better living conditions and an economically upward mobile trajectory or the safety of a politically stable country.

A transnational family's internal dynamic and growth trajectory evolves as familial relationships based on blood ties and, in some cases, affective associational ties of physically proximate adopted kin relations. Relational ties solidify through interactive mutual exchange and support during the family's generational life cycle in transnational space. Migration and marriage shape transnational family membership and inter-relationships. Migration encompasses people moving for an array of reasons notably: to secure employment, to escape war and political oppression, as well as for 'follow-up' family reunification of a spouse, offspring, parents or an arranged marriage partner from abroad etc. The cross-border mobility may be state-sanctioned or undocumented.

This article traces the historical evolution of the transnational family, drawing attention to the changing material context and influence of neo-liberalism (Section 2). Beginning with the processes of transnational family formation and perpetuation, Section 3 illustrates examples of the proliferating literature on transnational remittances and care circulation. The two sections that follow examine transnational families' changing context as many neo-liberal state agendas have given way to one-nation populism, as the world becomes more globally inter-dependent and risk-prone with threats of global warming and COVID-19. The conclusion summarizes trends, interrogates the nature of cosmopolitanism and poses questions and possibilities for the future of the transnational family and nation-states in an era of contested globalisation.

1 This article is dedicated to the memory of Ulla Vuorela, who died in 2011. Her analytical contributions to on-going anthropology, gender and transnational family studies are sorely missed.

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TRANSITION FROM MIGRANT TO TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES IN THE CONTEXT OF NEO-LIBERAL GLOBALISATION

The foundations of neo-liberal globalisation crystallised after the destabilising effect of the 1970s international oil price rise and the subsequent 1980s 'free market' policies of Reaganism and Thatcherism. As the economies of the oil-producing Middle East surged, large swathes of the world scrambled to adjust to a new geo-political map. Europe and North America had to economize, whereas agrarian Africa, Latin America and Asia, with over 50% of the global population at the time, contended with a more competitive world trade regime (SAPRIN 2004). Many poor low-population-density countries crippled by high petrol costs, lost their comparative advantage in agricultural exports and plunged into heavy debt. International Monetary Fund and World Bank debt relief imposed 'structural adjustment' conditionality with drastic cutbacks on developing country government spending during the 1980s. Thereafter trade liberalisation policies of the 1990s accelerated the speed and rising volumes of capital and commodity flows primarily between industrialised countries in the global market. Interestingly, the World Bank assumed international labour flows would remain stable.

> International migration of people in search of work is the laggard in this [globalization] story. Annual migratory flows from developing countries (total inflows and outflows) are no greater now, relative to population size, than in the early 1970s, at about one emigrant per thousand inhabitants' [...] Most migrants still stay within their regions. (World Bank 1995: 53)

Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton (1994) argued the opposite in their book *Nations Unbound*, pointing to the existence of increasingly deterritorialised citizens of nation-states.

Meanwhile, international migration was taking on distinctively new patterns. Neo-liberalism encouraged the free flow of commodities, capital and labour globally as well as the expansion of occupational professionalism, specialisation and expertise of multi-transnational families. Bi-transnationalism, which had fluctuated in its incidence during the late 19th and 20th centuries, markedly expanded, fuelled by rural deagrarianisation in many parts of the developing world, which was generating surplus labour supply that failed to be absorbed by urban industrialisation. The UK, France and the US, initiated recruitment programmes for migrant West Indian, North African and Mexican labour during the 1950s and 1960s to offset post–World War II labour shortages (Bryceson 2019; Goulbourne et al. 2010).

Migrant recruitment frequently involved occupational stereotyping of incoming ethnic groups who were expected to return to their home countries. Generally, return migration was over-estimated. Instead, family reunion migration contributed to the growth of ethnic migrant communities in the destination country. Often these communities had female fertility and population growth rates above the national average. In addition to institutional bias against foreigners, large family size placed strain on migrant children's educational and social advance.[2]

2 Patriarchal endogamous migrant families tended to evidence traditional high-fertility norms related to arranged marriages with wives arriving from their ancestral homeland (Shaw 2014).

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During the 19th century, family members in source countries had bid farewell to their migrant family members, rarely expecting to see each other ever again given the cost of long-distance transport, often involving trans-oceanic journeys (Moberg 1951, 1959). Erratic delivery of postal correspondence formed the main means of keeping in contact (Bryceson 2002). During the 20th century, modes of long-distance transport improved but remained expensive. Face-to-face reunions between source and destination family members were exceptional or at best infrequent. Circular and permanent migration were often entwined in chain migration. A migrant was likely to follow preceding family members, neighbours or friends to the same destination, resulting in the import of language and culture from their country of origin, exemplified by the circular Mexican migration of *bracero* labourers into seasonal horticultural production across the US border in California (Massey & Pren 2012).

Despite not having regular interactional contact with their natal families beyond written correspondence, migrants tended to retain a strong identity with their homeland and native language, forming cohesive settlements in which their home culture and language dominated daily interaction. By contrast, transnational families of the present are able to use multiple communication channels: mobile phone calls, text messages, Skype and What'sApp, etc. for transferring practical information and emotional support to their family members living abroad be it in the home country or more widely, which imparts a shared sense of family in substance and immediacy in the absence of direct physical contact (Vertovec 2004). The next section reviews 21st-century trends in transnational families' cross-border exchange relationships.

SOCIAL PROCESSES OF TRANSNATIONAL FAMILYHOOD

Prompted by their new environment and remote material and emotional support from natal family blood ties, migrants engage in social 'relativising', defined as active pursuit or passive neglect of intra-familial transnational ties. Sharing feelings of mutual attachment and obligation, family members are subject to conscious rationalisation of emotional and material attachments. Shared social responsibilities are continually weighted against the individual needs and the physical practicalities of transnational families' temporal and spatial logistics. Being neither simply blood ties nor fixed entities, transnational families are highly adaptable (Bryceson & Vuorela 2002: 19). The evolving nature of intra- and inter-familial relations is part of cultural experimentation in which fixed family cultural norms of their countries of origin, on one hand, and the national customs and laws of their adopted countries of residence, on the other, are fabricated into hybrid family forms.

Mobile phones and the Internet have massively heightened people's awareness of national differences in wealth, spurring new migration patterns in recent years: first, migrants from proliferating source locations embark on migration treks of increasingly greater distances. Second, increasingly larger numbers migrate speculatively without employers' or governments' assurance or support for acquiring gainful livelihoods at their destinations.[3] Third, rising numbers of migrants have become entangled

3 While most 19th-century migrants did not have guaranteed jobs at their destination in the Americas, they tended to be farmers who migrated from land-scarce to land-surplus countries where they gained access to arable land in excess to what they had farmed in their home countries. In the US, the Homestead Act dispensed free land to settlers on the condition that the settler farmed the land for a minimum of five years.

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with criminal gangs of brokers who illegally smuggle them across national borders, charging large sums of money while exposing them to exceptionally high levels of personal risk (Andersson 2014; Näre 2020). Fourth, Europe, historically a sending rather than migrant-receiving continent, has joined North America in becoming a destination of mass migration.

Although the direction of mass migration is almost invariably from relatively poor to more economically affluent or politically stable countries, mobility and settlement patterns differ by country and continent. In Southeast Asian source countries, migrants move towards affluent Asian countries such as Singapore and Japan or the Middle East. Their migration tends to be based on pre-arranged contracts that foster circular migration patterns rather than long-term settlement in the destination countries. By contrast, along the most traversed migration routes from lower-income Latin American and African source countries to North American or European destinations, migration is now more open-ended and speculative, with a view to gaining permanent settlement in the destination country.[4]

Since the large European migration surge of 2015, prompted by the Syrian, Afghan and Iraqi refugee crises and reinforced by labour migrant streams from Eastern Europe, Latin America, Asia and Africa, cross-border migration has become a major politically polarising issue for destination nation-states. The spread of international trade liberalisation benefited many while disadvantaging many more. The consequent disparities of global wealth pulled many towards migration to affluent countries in post-industrial Europe and North America, industrialising Asian countries and the oil-rich Middle East, whereas others were pushed by political strife or growing climate distress in their home countries. The migrants hailed primarily from deagrarianising countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, where their comparative advantage in world trade had deteriorated and employment opportunities were thin. The UN estimates of global 'migrant stock by age and sex' that measure non-nationals residing in countries abroad rose 57% from 173.5 million in 2000 to 271.6 million in 2019 before the spread of the COVID virus caused a significant drop in new migratory mobilities (UN-DESA 2019). This geographical shift of productive labour entailed profound welfare changes for migrant families, ranging from exacerbating poverty, to poverty-alleviation, to wealth creation.

REMITTANCES: INTRA-FAMILIAL MONEY AND IN KIND EXCHANGE

Remittances, sent by migrants once they have settled and secured livelihoods in the destination countries, constitute the major conduit for maintaining transnational family cohesion. In the remittance literature, economists (Agarwal & Horowitz 2002; Lucas & Stark 1985) were the first to draw attention to the quantitative growth of remittances on household welfare in sending countries. Anthropologists followed with fine-grain qualitative studies (summarised in Cohen 2011), which have documented the *modus operandi* of remittances in different settings with varied structures of intra-familial obligations, beneficiary patterns and rationales for remittance-sending between family members (Gutierrez 2018; Singh 2019). Remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries continued to increase reaching a record-breaking $534bn

4 One notable exception is the circular migration of East Europeans to Western European countries given unimpeded border crossing rights for all nationals of the EU member states.

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in 2019, over three times greater than the global flow of foreign aid ($166 bn) (World Bank 2020), testifying to the pro-active agency of millions of people crossing borders to improve their living standards, relative to a shrinking level of western donor aid.

Remittances flow back or forth between source and destination countries, depending on the changing financial circumstances of senders and receivers. Many, if not most migrants, lean heavily on family financial support to fund their travel abroad. At first, remittances are a form of payback, reassuring the family back home that the migrant is committed to sharing his or her earnings for family needs. In cases of undocumented often speculative migration, the natal family is held accountable for paying off the migrant's debt to people smugglers, especially for the long, hazardous, expensive journeys from China, Southeast Asia and the Middle East to Europe or from Central America to North America. In these cases, Bloch, Sigona and Zetter (2014) found Chinese migrants had a strong sense of obligation to use their earnings to repay the debt they have incurred. By contrast, East European and Brazilian migrants, in the same study aimed to accumulate money to invest in education or land purchase to advance their own life prospects back in their home country, anticipating that their undocumented status would put them in danger of being deported. Ability to pay-off family debt and the amount and regularity of remittances sent home is contingent on migrants' financial earning power. Unskilled migrants, who do not know the language of the destination country nor have useful contacts for finding employment, are usually destined to lead an undercover, hand-to-mouth existence that hinders payback to their families.

Those who succeed in sending the bulk of their earnings home, usually do so at great cost to their day-to-day welfare. The remittance expectations of back-home families weigh especially heavy on African migrants (Belloni 2020; Bloch, Sigona & Zetter 2014). Clough (2018) encountered African migrants in Malta who had daily mobile phone contact with their families at home, which exerted tremendous moral pressure to send remittances to meet their family needs in their home country, while the migrants themselves had insufficient earnings to cover their own basic needs. Many migrants make harrowing journeys across the Sahara desert and the Mediterranean in small boats to Europe only to be deported. Personal histories of African migrants attempting to reach Europe via the North African Spanish enclave of Ceuta commonly revealed that failure did not deter them from repeatedly trying again (Andersson 2014).

In some African countries, rites of passage dating back to historical colonial practices of circular labour migration and family remittances persist as a moral imperative for migrants to send financial remittances to assist their families coming from: economies wracked with war (Syria, Democratic Republic of Congo and Somalia); areas where subsistence agricultural output could not cover families' material needs; and increasingly climate-altered Sahelian farming systems (Senegal, Mali and Eritrea) (De Haan, Brock & Coulibaly 2002; Piguet, Pecoud & de Guchtener 2011; Selby et al. 2017).

Formerly, mass employment opportunities were primarily available in low-paid seasonal agricultural labour or unskilled industrial factory work, with a hiring bias towards men. However, automation in agriculture, industry and mining worldwide has made serious incursions on men's work. Increasingly service sector work, tailored to personal needs and face-to-face delivery has come to the fore as the major source of employment in affluent western and industrialising societies where households now tend to be composed of wives as well as husbands working outside the home,

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creating widespread demand for women's domestic service.[5] Thus, both men and women are migrating to earn money for their families (Ehrenreich & Hochschild 2003; Parreñas 2015; Sørenson & Vammen 2014). Single and married women migrate from poor to affluent countries in large numbers to act as domestic servants. Men are likely to be earning more than women in higher-paid work, nonetheless it is often observed that women tend to send more money home than men and their payments are more regularised (Abrego 2009; Nurick & Hak 2019; Sørenson 2005).

FAMILY CARE CIRCULATION

Baldassar and Merla's (2014: 25) concept of 'care circulation' refers to reciprocal, asymmetric and multi-directional exchange of care that spans the course of family life. Ariza (2014) uses the concept of the family life cycle to analyse differences in care patterns between source and destination countries. Remittance payments and care circulation are most pronounced on the part of first and second-generation migrants. Once migrants reach grandparenthood, they taper their assistance. Kilkey and Merla (2014) coined the term 'family care regimes' contrasting their informal nature with formal 'state welfare regimes', stressing how vital the former are to the welfare of family members in the source country.

A family's life cycle is composed of phases of physical and social reproduction of a conjugal couple beginning with marriage and cohabitation, followed by the birth of children, childrearing, generational fission and death, thereafter continuing with younger generations' progression through the cycle (Bryceson 2019: 5). Migrant family members in the destination country are on call to provide emotional support, financial and material transfers, childcare and distress assistance, for the vulnerable, notably children, the elderly and the infirm. Twenty-first-century transport and communication improvements make their intra-familial generational exchange encounters physically possible.

Care issues and dilemmas abound for families left behind and for migrants in destination countries contending with emotional and physical separation from their children and spouse, keeping up with regular material support for them, as well as extended family requests and the specific needs of elderly and sick family members. It is usually not feasible for migrants to field all requests and responsibilities. Transnational family exchange and care relationships are established, maintained or curtailed in the selective process of 'relativising', whereby one's cherished family members are those who succeed in negotiating an exchange of mutual benefit embedded in acceptable levels of dependence and inter-dependence (Bryceson 2019: 11).

DeWaard, Nobles and Donato (2018) estimates 'parental absence via migration' is high in several Latin American countries with evidence of diverse rates of prevalence ranging from 7% in Peru, 16% in Mexico, El Salvador, Nicaragua, to 21% in Puerto Rico. The knock-on effect of rising female labour migration from Latin America and Asia for domestic and childcare work in affluent destination countries is that women migrants usually leave their children behind in the care of their husbands or *in situ* grandmothers or aunts. Not all family care exchanges are necessarily based on close biological ties. Sometimes, close friends or neighbours are 'relativised' to become 'aunties' in care gap situations.

5 Also migrant men work in domestic service, albeit infrequently relative to women (Näre 2010; Sarti & Scrinzi 2010).

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Cautious mothers make various backup arrangements for the sake of their children's welfare. Many feel guilty about leaving their children to earn remittances, knowing that they may receive heavy criticism from their families and neighbours and the quality of their children's daily care is out of their control (Ariza 2014; Britt 2017). Lam and Yeoh (2019) explore the moral quandary of women leaving their children. Mothers' decision to migrate hinges on assessing whether their children stand to gain more from the money earned to provide material home improvements and children's educational opportunities as opposed to foregoing the financial income and staying home to look after their children's day-to-day welfare. The decision is heavily dependent on availability and adequacy of substitute childcare.

While some home-based fathers manage childcare and housework in their wives' absence, others are reluctant to get involved (Lam & Yeoh 2019; Parreñas 2015). Educated migrant fathers tend to take more interest than others in parenting (Mazzucato & Dito 2018). Male migrants abroad readily rely on their wives for childcare, but they nonetheless face childcare dilemmas. Poeze (2019) documents how some Ghanaian fathers arrive at their destination unable to find reliable remunerative employment, which prevents them from sending sufficient remittances back to Ghana for child support. Still others are regular remitters but feel estranged from their children because their emotional presence and socialising role as fathers cannot be transmitted through telephone conversations (McKay 2007). Some irregular migrants face a double bind that if they travel back to Ghana to see their children, they will not be able to re-enter the destination country to resume their work and family financial support – one of many examples of how migration policies of the receiving nation-state impact on transnational family relations.

FRICTION AT THE FRONTIER: TRANSNATIONAL FAMILIES TRANSITIONING FROM NEO-LIBERALISM TO ONE-NATION POPULISM

Cultural and political contradictions are bound to arise between transnational family members who criss-cross borders and hold different passports from one another, but the most noticeable contestation takes place between transnational families and nation-states, as the political and economic context of nation-states alters.

Neo-liberalism of the 1990s fostered burgeoning service-led economies in Europe, North America and rising industrialisation in China and India. Increasingly during the 2000s, digital and biotechnological innovation catalysed escalating labour redundancy in migrant destination countries of the West (Brynjolfsson & McAfee 2014). Multi-national corporate investment strategies prioritised the hiring of low-waged workers in poor countries or alternatively automation, leading to unskilled and skilled job loss, especially of men, in affluent industrial and post-industrial economies (Goldin & Reinert 2012; Goldin & Mariathasan 2014; King 2017; Stiglitz 2002). Widespread labour displacement left segments of national populations dependent on state welfare programmes, feeling disaffected, demeaned and trapped in Western economies. Under neo-liberal global labour market restructuring, those affected coalesced into national 'precariats', characterized by their general consciousness of relative deprivation linked to worsening terms of employment in their respective nation-states. Increasingly restricted to casualised part-time work, euphemistically called 'flexible work', left them coping with continuous uncertainty about the adequacy and sustainability of their current and future income earning (Standing 2011).

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Meanwhile, Latin America, Asia and above all sub-Saharan Africa, deagrarianising since the 1980s, generated paltry industrial job opportunities for rural people leaving the land (Bryceson 1996, 2002). Seeking livelihood possibilities, many migrated abroad legally or illegally. Their expanding northern- and western-bound cross-border migration flows engendered mounting resentment on the part of labour-displaced citizens in the destination countries (Andersson 2014; King 2017).

Growing anti-migration sentiment prompted heavy pressure on political leaderships in Europe and North America for a rethink of neo-liberal migration policies. Tightening visa entry for labour migrants, refugees, family reunion and marriage gained ground in some countries during the 2008 meltdown of global finance, yet neo-liberal policies generally continued to prevail (Bryceson 2019). However, the unprecedented migrant inflow into Europe in 2015 catalysed by fleeing Syrian refugees and a rising exodus of African labour migrants, marked a turning point. EU migration controls were overwhelmed by a surge of 1.8 million migrants entering by land and sea (FRONTEX 2017).

A politics of resentment against the imbalances of 'winners and losers' in the free flow of commodity trade and capital investment flared. During his 2016 presidential campaign themed 'Making America Great Again', Donald Trump rallied the support of mostly ageing, white, displaced male blue-collar workers against Mexican migrants. Trump gained popularity through his threat to erect an insurmountable wall between Mexico and the US. His bigoted political discourse spread as a contagion elsewhere. Populist support for closed borders and one-nation nativist policies tipped segments of the electorate towards xenophobic political parties and electoral candidates in Germany, the Netherlands, France, UK, Austria, Italy and Sweden. Over the next two years, electorates in Hungary, Poland, Turkey and Brazil elected presidents advocating one-nation nativism.

The UK's political transition from neo-liberalism to one-nation populism is illustrative. Resentment against migrants was galvanised by Tory politicians' slogan 'Take Back Control' during the Brexit referendum of 2017 and the two national elections that followed in 2017 and 2019. A so-called 'metropolitan liberal elite' were vilified, who in UK were identified with London and southern England, where well-paid, multi-lingual, professionally trained employees were concentrated, including many EU migrants. In contrast, many northern parts of the country, yet to recover from de-industrialisation, evidenced higher rates of unemployment. Playing to populist sentiments, Theresa May, the then Prime Minister in 2018, alluded to multi-transnationals in her remark: 'If you believe you are a citizen of the world, you are a citizen of nowhere'.[6]

Politics in several affluent countries around the globe became more constricting for transnational families with respect to border crossing and keeping in touch with family members abroad (Bryceson 2019). A constellation of other trends mitigated the threats to their family coherence and welfare. Social media expanded beyond Skype and Facebook to a broader array of communication channels: Zoom, YouTube, What'sApp, Instagram, Snapchat etc. While vastly extending global communication, the impact of ephemeral instant real-time communications generates harmony or

6 Theresa May's speech at a UK Tory party conference quoted in *The Guardian*, 5 October 2016. Far from seeking welfare benefits and being a drain on the public purse, EU migrants contributed a net gain to Britain's tax revenue and held the legal right to work in the UK, just as UK nationals had the right to work anywhere in the EU.

apprehension within families (Madianou & Miller 2012). Scientific advance in the field of artificial intelligence is predicted to primarily erode white-collar employment and further undermine blue-collar work in affluent destination countries, constraining transnational family members' ability to send remittances (Ford 2015). Meanwhile, unemployment and poverty driving the migrant flow from the global South to the global North is increasingly difficult to moderate and control. The most pressing threats to source and destination countries alike are discussed in the next section.

COLLIDING GLOBAL REALITIES

At the outset of the 2020s, visible accelerating global climate change was commanding public alarm, second only to the eruption of a deadly pandemic engulfing families and nation-states in fear everywhere.

CLIMATE CHANGE: TOP OF THE GLOBAL AGENDA IN THE FACE OF NATION-STATE INACTION

Rachel Carson's (1962) prescient book *Silent Spring* was the first to draw non-scientific readers' attention to links between increasing human-generated pollution and climate change. Despite UN efforts to coordinate environmental action from the 1970s onwards, decades of national governmental inertia resulted in average global temperatures continuing to rise by more than 1°C since pre-industrial times. In 2015, every nation-state in the world, on the basis of evidence provided by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, signed the Paris Agreement to keep the global rise in temperature 'well below' 2°C. In fact, the world was already approaching 1.5°C and showing mounting signs of the detrimental impact of existing greenhouse gas emissions (Lawton 2018). Increasing unseasonal weather and gyrating climate fluctuations of climate change have had detrimental effects on plant and animal habitats, ecosystem regulation and the propagation of innumerable species. Human populations worldwide have experienced rising levels of water and air pollution to varying extents.

The economic growth imperative of neo-liberal capitalist investment in the massive expansion of manufacturing in Asia and large-scale mono-cropping of oil palms, soya etc. by agro-industrial corporations in Southeast Asian and Latin America adds to the environmental destruction generated by industrialised countries and global transport systems. Air travel's carbon emissions contribute to climate change. Reduction of air travel is likely to have a knock-on effect reducing physically dispersed transnational family members' opportunities for face-to-face visits. Nonetheless, autocratic one-nation populist leaders, like Bolsanaro of Brazil and Trump in the US, vocally denied climate change, passing it off as fake news. Climate change, recognised as a fundamental threat to humankind, necessitates reconfiguration of western lifestyles and patterns of wasteful consumption of the earth's resources (Reuveny 2007).

Under neo-liberalism, nation-states and multi-national corporations' investments have been propelled by profit and maximising production and consumption for consumers without due attention to carbon emissions and adverse environmental consequences (Standing 2019). One-nation nativist leaders upheld the economic growth imperative of their countries to gain a competitive edge against other nations. Smil's (2019) painstaking documentation of the environmental costs of the capitalist

growth dictum graphically illustrates how environmentally destructive the worldwide spread of capitalist commerce and industry over the course of the 20th and 21st centuries has been.

Global climate change undermines the livelihoods of the world's poorest families who live directly off land and sea resources. Facing dwindling output from their traditional pastoralist, agricultural and fishing livelihoods increasingly intensifies their search for more secure and remunerative work prospects, often propelling migration to distant lands (Torres & Branford 2018). International air travel is implicated in climate change and is increasingly a target of environmental activists. Less air travel would, at the very least, raise the cost of travel and lessen face-to-face contact for care visits of transnational family members. For all these reasons, future transnational family numbers may shrink rather than expand in the future.

THE COVID-19 THUNDERBOLT

The sudden onset of the COVID-19[7] pandemic in the Chinese city of Wuhan, at the end of 2019, caught national governments by surprise. By 1 July, 2020, roughly five months after the first cases of the virus surfaced, the global COVID-19 mortality count had climbed to over half a million people and as of November 2021 numbers over five million people.[8] The virus spread from China to Europe and North America in the first couple of months, then started to intensify in the world's poorest countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia, where medical services quickly could not cope with the spread of the virus.

The axis of transnational family relations pivots on the social locus of mutual support. Transnational families' networks of economic and emotional sustenance for family members are finely tuned to family members' needs, on one hand, and capabilities on the other. Up until the COVID-19 crisis, they were nurtured by digital contact and occasional, timely direct in-person social encounters with one another. Actual demands and supply flows of help depend heavily on the logistics of digital communications and long-distance transport.

Transnational families of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) origin have experienced higher than average COVID fatality in many European and North American countries. They tend to be lower income households of large family size and multi-generational membership, often having adults with co-morbidities like cardiovascular disease and diabetes. In the UK, Bangladeshi and Pakistani households recorded the highest incidence of COVID-19 death, characterised by crowded housing, close-knit three-generational, often migrant, families (Razaq et al. 2020), with endogamous marriage practices and high female fertility (Charsley 2005; Coleman & Dubuc 2010; Kulu & Hannemann 2016). In Sweden, a similar pattern emerged with Somali Swedes accounting for 5% of the country's COVID cases, but only constituting 0.5% of the population (TRT World 2020). Part of this tragic mortality gulf was attributed to the Somali community having lower literacy, language barriers and being less culturally receptive to public health information (Rothschild 2020). Transnational families with higher levels of education and better command of the national language of their residence did not face the same level of COVID vulnerability.

7 COVID-19 is the acronym for 'Corona virus disease' identified in 2019.

8 Statistics from https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/ (accessed 1 July 2020, and 3 November 2021).

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Quarantine and lockdown measures were implemented in one COVID-afflicted country after another. Notably, people living in extremely crowded housing, as described earlier, were at a tremendous disadvantage during 'stay at home' quarantines. National governments set controls on residential household members' physical mobility[9] with respect to the purpose, frequency, duration and mode of movement beyond the boundaries of residential houses. The quarantines combined with various degrees of 'lockdown' restraints on national border crossing. Accordingly, transnational family members' global lives were extremely constrained with a high likelihood of travel abroad for care of needy family relations being precluded. Conversely, people's digital lives expanded leading to most of the population experiencing virtual family communication even with their locationally proximate relations along the lines that transnationals were already accustomed to.

Under lockdown 'non-essential' production, services and commodity market exchange shut down, immediately creating job loss that potentially jeopardised transnational family households' remittance-sending to family members in source areas shrank (The Economist 2019). Global provisioning of basic goods and services were radically streamlined, to adapt to the new material reality. Mark Carney, former Governor of the Bank of England-cum UN special envoy for climate action and finance, commenting on the future effect of the lockdown on people and global markets, prophesised:

> [T]his sea change will create and destroy value. Creativity and dynamism will still be highly prized, but new vectors will shape value: economic, financial, psychological and societal [...] the crisis is likely to accelerate the fragmentation of the global economy [...] local resilience will be prized over global efficiency [...] Entire populations are experiencing the fears of the unemployed and sensing the anxiety that comes with inadequate or inaccessible health care. These lessons will not soon be forgotten (Carney 2020).

Transnational family members in source countries faced the direct threat of COVID-19, subjected to less-reliable medical services and little or no state welfare support compared to families in destination countries. The uncertainty of COVID-19's future incidence and the absence of an effective vaccine cast a dark shadow over health and economic survival. The physical barrier of lockdown measures between transnational families spanning affluent and poor countries would eventually be lifted, but the knowledge that long-distance family members' care provisioning was so vulnerable under pandemic conditions is unlikely to be forgotten.

Meanwhile, lockdown social distancing regulations designated families housed together in one location as the primary unit of social interaction. The lockdown,[10] generally confined people within their houses with only short forays out for exercise or food and medicinal purchases, restricting people's mobility to the immediate radius of their neighbourhood. This tended to strengthen supportive ties between neighbours, who shared similar risks of contracting the virus, and similar problems of contending with the localised pattern of demand and supply of basic goods and services. The proximity of neighbours and the awakening of neighbourly mutual support was

9 With the notable exception of Sweden.

10 The stipulations of lockdown for 'non-key workers' vary by country. I am drawing on the UK experience in Spring-Summer 2020.

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vital to resident families, be they transnational or not, during the uncertainty and difficulties of daily pandemic life.

CONCLUSION: MOVING FROM PAST AND PRESENT PREDICAMENTS TO A VIABLE FUTURE

Transnational families have gained salience in the era of neo-liberal globalisation, spurred by the increased outreach of air travel and digital communications. Every transnational family is unique, with a specific demographic composition, migration history and socio-cultural background. Existing quantitative and qualitative documentation of transnational family remittance transfers show their cross-border material transfers of money cumulatively mounted to a larger value and arguably more recipient-efficient distribution than foreign aid transfers from affluent nation-states in the 21st century. Foreign aid, aimed at compensating for the inequities of global economic wealth and material well-being, channelled through state or bureaucratic non-governmental organisational channels has never been enough nor finely tuned to people's needs and reliable and timely delivery. Yet, transnational family remittance transfers, as a form of balancing world inequities, has been largely unrecognised and unappreciated by destination nation-states.

In an age of growing one-nation populist agendas and opinion-polarising social media, transnational families face an existential crisis. As neo-liberalism is replaced with anti-migrant populism, governmental checks and balances, rule of law and civility all decline, reinforced by the emergence of 'fake news', ascendancy of arbitrary social media–evaluated democracy and justice, and social media–inspired hate crime against migrants (Bacigalupe & Cámara 2012). These trends generate uncertainty and interference with harmonious transnational family relational ties and economic welfare.

Nativist one-nation populism is a backlash reaction against neo-liberal capitalist policies. Multi-national corporations and technological breakthroughs of the 1990s and 2000s propelled transnational familyhood into a compromised existence. The 2008 financial crash and national austerity policies enlarged class divides, job loss and economic precarity (Standing 2016; Wolf 2018). The national populist leaders that have come to the fore since 2015, blame migrants for job loss in the destination countries, downplaying transnational corporations' policies of outsourcing industry abroad and the growing momentum of automation and artificial intelligence. Transnational families are haplessly trapped in the contradiction between a world economy driven by transnational corporate power and increasingly impotent nation-states lacking viable solutions to the dysfunctional national economic welfare impasse. Self-seeking populist leaders vie for election on the basis of false promises and disingenuous 'them vs us' sloganeering, dismissing the international economy's ubiquitous global inter-dependence.

Over previous decades, neo-liberal nation-states turned a blind eye to market excesses and labour exploitation in the belief that fast economic growth would iron out the inequities between globalisation's winners and losers. Neo-liberal globalisation has been largely unregulated, leaving global commodity and capital markets maximising profits at the expense of the environment and the poor. The one-nation nativist response has even less chance of providing adequate regulation, because it is bent on

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the notion of their nation 'winning' in international market competition at the expense of other nations, while disengaging themselves from international cooperation aimed at achieving a more secure and just world.

For the foreseeable future, the world will rely on global markets and sovereign nation-states, but these institutions need to be moderated by rule-based covenants of globally minded institutional agencies like the UN to ensure justice at the international level. Meanwhile, global networks of transnational families, endeavouring to ensure social welfare of their cross-border family members, need scope to carry on contributing to the social security and improved distribution of global wealth through intra-transnational family networks.

Existing transnational families act as repositories of collective identity, material welfare, emotional security and meaning for their members. The global market provides a broad spectrum of outcomes between economic opportunity and penury, whereas the nation-state is tasked with providing justice and security, yet has no global supervision over the outcomes of complex interlocking international forces that bear on national and family welfare. One-nation nativism's isolationism and divisive politics severely exacerbates rather than eases political insecurity and the economic welfare imbalance between 'haves' and 'have-nots'. A conducive context for global environmental balance, political stability and human welfare at family level is in disarray. The life-threatening COVID-19 pandemic and on-going environmental degradation can only be resolved by firmly directed global cooperative effort.

Recently, the term 'cosmopolitanism' has become associated with the notion of a 'metropolitan elite', with connotations that reverse the original meaning of cosmopolitanism.[11] Derived from the Greek words *cosmos* denoting 'universe' and *polites* meaning 'citizens', the concept of 'citizens of the universe' has emerged over time. The philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah (2006) narrates how the original paradoxical meaning of the word pointedly challenged the Greek convention of the time that every civilised person belonged to just one community. The concept endured over time with the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius gaining fame and posterity for upholding the Greek cosmopolitan principle of the oneness of humanity at a time of upheaval and invasion of the Roman Empire in the second-century AD.[12] Two entwined cosmopolitan themes are threaded through history: first, obligations stretching beyond family bonds and ties of shared citizenship; and second, recognition, understanding and tolerance of difference. Cosmopolitanism logically stands for each person having responsibilities towards every other. However, Appiah (2006: xiii) warns that:

> there will be times when these two ideals – universal concern and respect for legitimate difference – clash. There's a sense in which cosmopolitanism is the name not of the solution but of the challenge.

At this historical juncture of one-nation populism, amidst unprecedented environmental and viral threats to the earth and its inhabitants, the warning that cosmopolitanism will face contestation is emphatically affirmed. Given the human

11 Commentators have noted that the term 'cosmopolitanism' is being distorted and equated with elite attitudes of affluent urbanites rather than used to denote shared values of social inclusion regardless of class, colour and creed (see Vertovec & Cohen 2002 for delineation of approaches to cosmopolitanism in the 21st century).

12 So too, during the 18th-century Enlightenment, Voltaire interpreted cosmopolitans as people obliged to understand those with whom they shared the earth and play a part in global inter-dependence (Appiah 2006).

urge to migrate is as natural as the urge to settle, the concept of 'global neighbours' and cosmopolitan ethical concern directed at 'distant and generalised others' is essential for the earth's survival (Appiah 2006: 157).

Beck (2006) argues the enduring cosmopolitan ethos of 'all are equal and everyone is different', constitutes a principle especially vital for our present deeply insecure world. Global climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic and the risk of world war amidst trade wars and heightened nationalist superpower rivalry between the US, China and Russia, all point to the same fundamental imperative: the global population faces extreme risk and must act together. Everyone's welfare is inextricably entwined as global neighbours and families.

It is readily apparent amidst prevailing global threats that nation-states do not have universal solutions to such risks, in fact under one-nation nativism, nation-states' combative indifference to each other generates heightened risk. Transnational families now dotted around the world, constituting networks of humanitarian care and welfare, represent nodes of relative stability and hope. Documentation of the evolution of transnational families over the next decade will be vital to understanding and preserving the world's common humanity.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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