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## Migration, Decision Making and Young Families: A Literature Review

Rica Castaneda & Anna Triandafyllidou

Working Paper No. 2022/12

October 2022



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No. 2022/12

## **Migration, Decision Making and Young Families: A Literature Review**

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Working Papers produced through the DemiKnow Project\* are under the direction of  
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ISSN: 1929-9915



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The [Decentering Migration Knowledge \(DemiKnow\) Project](#)\* is a three-year project funded by Canada's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). The project brings together four international migration research centres with the goal to create new knowledge about migration and the role of families, and to address the historic inequity of migration knowledge dominated by the Global North.

Partners include: the School of Arts and Humanities, Edith Cowan University, Australia; the Canada Excellence Research Chair in Migration & Integration (CERC), Toronto Metropolitan University, Canada; the School of Public Administration, Hohai University, China; the International Institute of Migration & Development (IIMAD), Kannur University, India.



## **Abstract**

Research on migrant decision making in recent years has focused on various factors associated with migration aspirations that underlie migrant decision-making (Aslany, et al., 2021; Carling, 2014; de Haas, 2010). Family is considered as one of the main key push factors which deeply influence the choice of students in choosing international education (AIEF, 1997; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). The studies indicate that the family influences the students' decision making in two aspects: guidance/advice and financial support (Defauw et.al, 2018; Kainuwa & Yusuf, 2013). Student mobility is not a response to 'global forces' rather it is attached to family and social expectations (Pimpa, 2005). Decisions to pursue international education can be fueled by the pursuit of higher education by professionals, or aspirations toward better education for their children (Chee 2003). Familial decision-making has figured in different life-stages of the migration process. Studies on economic migrants, refugees and immigrant settlers have readily linked the key role of families in planning and navigating migration decisions. Families also play a main role in examining the thought process involving international education, and as past research would indicate one that combines emotional trappings of familial hopes and expectations, of sensibilities that involve investments, and foresight. Earlier contexts (Waters 2003; Chiang 2008) saw international students as economic migrants, not under the usual labour economic sense, but due to their capital-capacity. Progress in economies and the international education system over time saw the dramatic shift in markets catering to foreign students, nonetheless it remains a family affair. A quick survey on international students and their countries of origin will indicate emerging markets and sources, but has family decision-making changed? What has become of strategies employed in the past, especially in this day and age of technological advancements?

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## Introduction

Families are important in the decision to migrate. While individual members' migration may play a role in the familial "economy," families also provide important financial and social capital for a particular family member's migration project. Families are also crucial in supporting integration at the destination. They receive and send important financial and cultural remittances, and may, at the same vein provide reverse remittances (Mazzucato 2011). Recent migration scholarship has paid increasing attention to the role of families in the migration process (Bauder 2019). We seek to contribute to this growing line of research by reviewing the relevant literature that focuses on the role of familial decision making for migration.

The paper is part of the [DemiKnow research project](#) and specifically focuses on the role of families in the decision making of young adults, with or without families, that migrate as international students (and potentially as prospective economic migrants). We are specifically interested in this paper on the familial ties and their role in the decision making process, looking at both young people who are single, as well as young families (couples with young children). Our project also takes into account the role and viewpoints of the parents of these young adults who are called to support their offspring whether through sustaining their study migration project or by providing support to their grown-up children and young grandchildren.

The paper examines how the role of family evolves in this middle-life situation of young, mature young, and middle-aged adults who engage in study or work-related migration. We discuss relevant literature with a view to signpost the area that our future empirical research will cover and identify gaps in the literature that we could help fill. The paper starts with a short discussion on different family definitions in the migration literature that can help highlight how families play a role in this middle-life stage. Section three reviews the role of families in decision making, paying attention to how this role evolves in different stages of the life course. Section four focuses specifically on international students and their families and on families with young children. The paper concludes by demarcating our approach that is critical of methodological nationalism and emphasises that families need to be understood in their translocal and transnational nature. We also point to the need for adopting an intersectional approach to the family's role in migrant decision making, paying attention to gender, ethnicity, race, and class.

## Families in Migration and Scholarship: A Brief Introduction

Family-related migration is a developing subfield in contemporary migration studies (Kofman 2018). Past literature indicates that a migrant's choice to migrate is highly influenced by their family, and the needs of their family members (Asis et al. 2004; Kofman 2004; Bragg & Wong 2016). Today's families however come in different shapes and sizes. Recognizing this diversity acknowledges a departure from the traditional hetero-normative understanding of families, which assigned family composition as one of its vital characteristic (i.e., nuclear, which meant father-mother-child/ren or extended, where other blood relatives like grandparents are included). In contemporary times and within a global framework, families are political subjects — controlled and stratified (Block 2015; Bryceson 2019), or modelled as cooperative desirable units in citizenship (Simmons 2008; Dreby & Adkins 2010). Families are also constantly being reconfigured. Researchers and institutions highlight that the family composition is more fluid or reactive than earlier acknowledged in relevant research, and therefore call for a broader perspective including different types of families norms (Grillo, 2008; Chavez, 2017). However, states are not the sole institutions dealing with families. Harker and Martin (2012) highlighted how institutions like churches and communities are also present in the discussion and have not readily taken to changes in family composition.

Migration scholarship has typically been concerned with two types of families: **migrant families** at destination, and **transnational families** – notably families who are geographically divided but connected across space and time.. Both types are exposed to changes in lifestyle, cultural norms, and practices (Berry 2007). Different issues have been of concern in each of these two branches of scholarship. With regard to migrant families at destination, there has been an interest in gender roles, the offspring (Portes & Rivas 2011; Cavicchiolo et al 2020), processes of socio-economic adaptation and integration, inter-generational relations (Strasser et al 2009; Renzaho et al 2011), only name to a few. Scholarship on transnational families has looked into the challenges of distance parenting, children left behind, the role of remittances for the families at destination, the reconfiguration of gender roles and inter-generational relations, again only to name a few of the issues investigated.

With regard to either migrant or transnational families, scholars have pointed to the important role that policies play in defining the legitimacy (for immigration purposes) of the family unit (Kofman 2005; Borevi 2015), and shape the likelihood of them being together (Bragg & Wong 2016) and of family members being able to work (Rajkumar et al 2012; Moon 2021). Third country nationals who seek to be reunited with their family in the EU for example, are met with highly selective policies (Scholten et al 2012) which highlight a form of stratification within groups and categories (Schweitzer 2015).

While there are unique features of each family type, current migration literature focuses on adaptability (Kabatanya et al 2021) and resilience (Locke, Seeley, & Rao 2013; Hoang, et. al 2015) in relation to both migrant and transnational families. Issues of concern indeed cut across both types of families such as for instance rationalizing hardship (“making sense”) as is apparent in narratives of lower income migrant families (Locke et al 2013), studies of the challenges of migrant domestic worker mothers being away from their children (Tacoli 1996; Parrenas 2001), or the concerns of migrant husbands struggling with new challenges in the destination country (Charsley & Ersanilli 2019).

**Transnational families** are usually defined by their multi-sited geographies (Singh et al 2012) where, despite immediate family members being physically separated, close ties and family making are present (Schmalzbauer 2004). Research focuses on migrant parents (Parrenas 2001; Chee 2005) and/or migrant children (Tu 2016), considering their economic situations (i.e., work and economic class) (Sherman & Harris 2012; Bailey & Mulder 2017) and gender roles (Tacoli 1996; Parrenas 2001; Yeoh et. al 2005; Ramos and Martín-Palomino 2015). Relevant studies look at processes of reunification (Graham et al 2012; Pratt 2004, 2014) and return (Hertzman 2010) and the challenges of a global household, whose emotional and economic ties cut across national boundaries (Safri and Graham 2010; Douglass 2014; Yeoh et al. 2018). Researchers also study transnational families from the point of view of the left-behind family members (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila 1997; Parrenas 2001; Hoang & Yeoh 2011). Studies have investigated familial roles (Hoang et al 2015), especially in caregiving (Baldassar et al 2018) given the absence of a parent, or in some contexts, overseas children and their familial duties toward their elderly (Tu 2016; Hertzman 2020).

**Migrant families** are often described within the context of permanence and permanent settlement (Jacobs 2019). Some studies examine family life overseas or children’s lived experiences being born outside their parents’ home country (Ducu & Telegdi-Cestri 2018), the renegotiation of roles within the family and societal context (George 2000), and, later on, issues pertaining to generational relationships (Francisco–Menchavez 2020) and kinship (Andrikopoulos & Duyvendak 2020; Bieder 1973).

In his ethnographic work on the Lebanese diaspora, Hage (2005) makes a case against “multi-sitedness” as an approach in ethnographies and in the concept of mobilities. He considers multi-sitedness unhelpful in describing migrant location because transnational families “are situated somewhere” (p. 466), and the word *mobilities* assumes that migrants are constantly moving, which is not really the case — they simply move from one place to another.

Salamonska (2017) highlights how migrant families are indeed situated at different sites in different points of their lives, and such situation starts with migrants as individuals who may or may not have physically moved very often, but are part of the collective that contributes to mobility as they all undergo spatial and temporal changes (p. 7). Francisco–Menchavez (2020) looks into information sharing and strategies among migrant family members as forms of transnational care exchange. With limited resources, family members looking to migrate make use of their social capital (i.e., family networks overseas) to manage risks and lower figurative costs. This ties decision making to shared culture and social mores in familial decision-making — factors outside the boundaries of nuclear family life.

Kofman (2007) and Riano (2011) noted the relative absence of research on family and migration in Europe in the past decades. During the last decade though, there is a growing interest in family migration and migrant families in both research and governance in the EU (Kofman, et al 2012). Countries in need of skilled labour migrants (Ette, et al. 2016) have paid more attention to conditions for family reunification (Della Puppa 2019; Kofman 2018). However, such benefits tend to favour the highly skilled — workers in certain industries are deemed to not earn “enough” to migrate with their families (Bhuyan et al. 2020), or they face state-assigned temporary status (McLaughlin et al. 2017).

Creese and colleagues (2011) introduce the Canadian context in their longitudinal study of migrant families in the Greater Vancouver area. While Riano highlights that European migration policies are more geared toward families and not economic migrants (2011), Creese and colleagues make a case for Canada’s recent shift to taking in more economic migrants with the option of bringing their immediate family members with them. In the same vein with the European context, the decision to migrate to Canada is rarely an individual’s, but that of the family, and the community, argue Creese and co-authors (2011). The study revolved around migrant family practices. It initially considered migrants and their loss of human capital (i.e. skill acquired from work experience) from their country of origin, and then examined their renegotiation with Canadian qualifications, and eventually family making — that is, gendered practices of care and care giving. They also discussed aspirations and upward mobility for their children, along with strategies for wives who are deemed “unproductive,” but are vital in making home — which is integral in building other forms of capital that are useful in integration.

The research undertaken in the DEMIKNOW project is concerned with both migrant and transnational families and their role in the decision making to migrate of young adults, with or without families. We are interested in the challenges that the young family faces at destination but also at the transnational ties that condition the decisions taken both before migrating and upon arrival, in settling down at destination and, for instance, converting a temporary stay to a permanent settlement. The literature discussed above points to the interconnections between these two dimensions which can be seen as two sides of the same coin.

### **Migrant Families, Decision Making and the Life Course Perspective**

Given our project’s focus on the role of families in decision making we turn here to consider the role of families at the different stages of a migrant’s life. The life course perspective is particularly pertinent here because it allows us to unpack not only intersectionality but also the different aspirations, expectations, and (care) obligations that migrants have in different phases of their life.



### ***Decision making within the migrant family***

Research on how families take decisions about immigration has gravitated largely around the concept of care and care giving (Bejenaru 2018; Kōu et al 2017), while other studies point out that there should be more focus on experiences prior to becoming parents (Glick et al 2012; Aslan et al 2020).

Locating familial decision making in the migration context has brought forward the importance of intersectionality. Gender has been a major focus in relevant studies because traditional families typically divide gendered parental duties of providing and reproducing (Lutz 2010). Studies made among transnational and immigrant families show how gender plays an important role in decision making (George 2000; Ramos & Martin-Palomino 2015), and how gender roles are renegotiated in the process, especially when migrant women become the main providers in a family (Locke, Seeley, & Rao 2013).

This is a significant departure from migrations in the last century, when women (and children) were considered passive followers in the migration process. “Children are carried along by their parents, willy-nilly, and wives accompany their husbands though it tears them away from environments they love,” as Lutz described it (2010, citing Lee 1966). Such family arrangements did not disappear in the process — they persist, especially in works about the trailing spouse and families. However, scholarship has highlighted this gendered shift, where transnational families can have dual careers, and men can take the role of the trailing spouse (Harvey & Wiese 1998; Amcoff & Niedomysl 2015). Yang (2019) has noted limited studies on when fathers are absent in the left-behind context. Earlier work on transnational mothering highlighted that fathers are not subjected to similar gendered societal norms (Tacoli 1996; Parrenas 2015).

Work conducted among lower-income migrants indicates how their views about gender can greatly affect household decision making back home. For example, when nontraditional decision-making family members who are overseas—that is, daughters and mothers—contribute to the primary household income through remittances, they garner influence in the household decision-making process (Tacoli 1996; Pickbourn 2016). While this gendered “switch” in breadwinning and decision making (interpreted more as their “buy in” on a seemingly male-dominated process) extends beyond these processes, it also serves as an effort to make up for traditional expectations. It addresses a care deficit in relation to children and elderly parents who are left behind (Parrenas 2001; Locke, Seeley, & Rao 2013; Lam & Yeoh 2019), and establishes social capital (Su 2022; Silvey & Elmhirst 2003).

In their comparative study of social development among young children with foreign-born and native-born mothers in the US, Glick and colleagues (2012) factor migration timing into parenting practices. A finding in their study highlights that mothers and future mothers migrating at certain developmental stages practised different parenting styles that range from consistent to divergent in relation to dominant styles in the destination society.

De Haan (2011) observed that first-generation migrant parents are likely to follow the parenting style they grew up with, regardless of whether it starkly differs from the norms espoused by their host society. In their study of women of migrant descent in Sweden Aslan and colleagues (2020) provide another perspective. They argue that having seen parental inequalities in their parents’ generation drives the women to seek more equitable arrangements in parenting, which the Swedish state context strongly supports.

Another intersectional factor revolves around how much social class differences contribute to parenting decisions (Sherman & Harris 2012) and familial decision making. For example, Locke Seeley, and Rao (2013) in their study of low-income migrants and their families from the developing world, show how migrants must re-negotiate social reproduction (e.g., care for their children, by other family members or local care workers) to attain social protection (poverty alleviation, or improvement of quality of life through income generated through migration). Delegating social reproduction to other family members (i.e. grandparents, other relatives) or,

paying (other) “economically desperate” (Fakier & Cock 2009) women to undertake this domestic role (Kofman & Raghuram 2010) back home. This extension of the “global care chain” (Parrenas 2001; Yeates 2009) as source of informal social protection in left behind communities is apparent in a study of the ‘Londoni’ village in Bangladeshi, where social protection can be sourced from “rich” overseas migrants in forms of remittances in exchange for their domestic services (Gardner & Ahmed 2009). In the municipal district of Emnambithi in South Africa, Fakier and Cock (2009) highlighted a crisis in ‘social reproduction’, wherein the state of poor social protection prompted families to send family members to migrate internally or overseas, leaving behind their children to the care of their grandmothers. This double burden of care of these family members who remained and must navigate daily life with both the inadequate basic services using their insufficient social grants, and unpaid domestic responsibility.

Such underpinnings are not exclusive to transnational families, or the left behind in developing countries. Family reunification can also be viewed as a form of social protection (Lafleur & Romero 2018), or the latter viewed as a privilege left to be desired in varying contexts. Studies on Filipino migrants in Italy and their family household strategies (Tacoli 1996; Pe-Pua 2003; Basa et al. 2012; Serrano et al. 2021) indicate how the mother in the family often plays both “breadwinner and bread maker” roles as they are shaped by both the labour market (i.e., women domestic workers are in demand) and in socio-cultural constructs. Pratt (2006) in her study of family reunification among former domestic care workers in Vancouver noted of differences in expectations versus reality: while there is an aspiration for a better life, instances of marital and intergenerational discord, and poor occupational prospects for both spouse and children are more apparent. Spitzer (2015) in her empirical study of Canada’s Live-in Caregiver Program (LCP) discussed of the prevalence of poverty among reunited migrant families whose main breadwinners are engaged in precarious work.

Gender plays heavily in this discussion, with studies indicating how gender roles are inherited by the next generation, clearly exempting the male offspring from caregiving responsibilities and causing resentment among daughters who now have “to look after the family” (Tacoli 1996: 19; Lam & Yeoh 2019). Charsley and Ersanilli (2019) in their study of Pakistani migrant husbands in the UK discuss how, among many other constraints, the newly migrated husbands’ socioeconomic situation undermines their influence in making decisions in the family, especially when the wife’s extended family provides support in finding employment.

This brief literature review shows the importance of gender and class and the extended family in the decision making of the nuclear migrant family on a range of issues from employment to broader support and even parenting. In the next section we review relevant research that examines how the role of families in decision making may change through the different phases of life of the migrant.

### ***Familial decision making and the life course perspective***

In this section we start by considering how the role of the family in a migrant’s decision making varies in line with their age and stage in life. We start by reviewing the literature on the so called life course perspective that points to the importance of the different life stages in familial decision making to then hone in on the role of families in decision making for international student migration.

The life course perspective is helpful in situating transition to parenthood among immigrants who are new parents, especially when it comes to family formation (Bejenaru 2018). In this perspective the transition to parenthood and practice is influenced by the migrant parent’s childhood and their migration situation. Kōu and colleagues (2017) make use of this perspective in highlighting what they call “linked lives” which brings together interdependencies within the household involving the nuclear and the extended family in different locations (Bailey et al 2004).

In linked lives, decisions are made in accordance with the respective life stages of each person concerned. Notably, grandparents may either take on the carer role (providing care to young children for instance), or the cared for (because in need of care from their adult children). This perspective highlights that the links and the provision of care extend in different directions (Baldassar & Merla 2013). Ducu (2018) touches on this as part of migrant life strategies in familial situations, highlighting the importance of family members' "co-presence" despite distance such as through virtual or physical visits (Parrenas 2001).

Hagestad and Dannefer (2001) urge caution in using the "linked lives" perspective, noting that such micro-level analysis tends to focus on the characteristics of individuals rather than the bigger picture (Kelley et al 2018) limits generalization, making it less susceptible to theory. Dannefer (2018) suggests bringing in this perspective to a global scale, extending the analysis from societal to an international level.

Ramos and Martin-Palomino (2015) studied highly skilled women from Spain and other third-country nationals who come to the EU to work within the context of an agency, and how both the labour market and their family commitments are influential factors in their decisions over a life course. The study highlights how, aside from these structural variables, migrant decision making vary in relation to the migrant's age and stage in their life (e.g. whether they are older or younger) as well as the prevalent family values (Ramos & Palomino op.cit.)

Family-mediated decision making is a key driver in international student migration. Like any type of migration, undertaking international education involves both practical and emotional investment from the immediate family, and the mobilization of social capital through kinship (Beech 2015). Studies have focused on how parents serve as financial resources, and in some cases instigators of the process (Sheng 2012). While there are students who expressed interest on their own migration, the final decisions lie mostly with the parents and their financial capacity (Bodycott & Lai 2017).

There are various routes toward international student mobility, and in different life stages. A common path is through higher education, where attaining a tertiary degree overseas is considered an asset, and the internationalization experience an opportunity (Chen 2017). International students are typically university and college students, followed by postgraduate students pursuing higher studies. Other than the usual demographic makeup of young adults pursuing postsecondary studies, there are also other student types that should not be discounted. Studies of young student families (Pitt & Moss 2019; Loveridge et al. 2018; Doyle et al. 2016) provide a different take on the "young and carefree" depiction of international students, which should also include students whose spouse and children accompany them.

Decisions to pursue international education can be fuelled by professionals' pursuit of higher education, or aspirations toward better education for their children (Chee 2003). Within a life course, international students can be minor-aged children sent by parents overseas—they are aptly called "parachute kids" from East Asia (Zhou 1998), and are often entrusted to a guardian (usually kin) (Shih 2016; Sun 2014). Familial motivations include the aspiration for western education that represents economic and social capital (Waters 2003, 2005, 2015; Salaff et. al 2007), and circumventing mandatory military training at a certain age (Shih 2016).

While transnational parenting is a common theme among international students, research has looked in to situations where families transplant (in the case of astronaut families from Taiwan and Hong Kong (Tsong & Liu 2008), or "goose" families from South Korea (Park & Bae 2009) in order to be with the student, or one parent joins the student in the destination country and the other—the "astronaut" (who is usually the father/ breadwinner)—stays behind to provide income for the family overseas (Aye & Guerin 2001).

Studies on global women and mothering included the "pei du mama" (study mothers) (Chew 2009; Yeoh & Huang 2005) mostly from mainland China who accompany their children to study primary and secondary education, and how they negotiate a living in their host country. The "kirogi omma" featured studies on South Korean accompanying mothers in developed countries

like Australia (Park et al 2021; Koo & Lee 2006) and Canada (Jeong et. al 2018; Kim & Deschambault 2012), where these mothers venture into English literacy advancement on top of their cultural mothering responsibilities.

Studies have also explored familial decisions on education related to the child's age (Adams & Shambleau 2006; Tacoli 1996). Ryan and Sales (2013) in their study of Polish migrants in London collected data on the experiences of migrant parents who brought their children with them. The study highlighted children's age as a factor in decisions made about family migration— younger children are thought to cope more easily with the changes brought about by migrating (i.e., new school and learning English), than children in their adolescence and older. Migrant parents tend to bring younger kids with them and leave the older children behind under the care of relatives (normally grandparents).

Parents' prior experience with migration, and access to various resources is also a factor for the migrant family making informed decisions (Antman 2012; Chee 2003). Studies examining the children of highly skilled professionals and expatriates (Kunz 2016; Wilkins 2013) have indicated differences when it comes to decision making about student mobility: children with highly mobile parents are more conscious of key determinants such as school rankings, and those who choose to stay put more likely basing their decisions on advice from family and friends.

Studies of international doctoral students both in the family way and with young families have indicated deliberate family-factored decision making in terms of international mobility (Mählick 2018; Ackers et al 2008). Gender, which is highly associated with caregiving, plays a major role in decisions. Deciding on where to study and for how long is usually defined by caregiving obligations (e.g. towards elderly parents or towards young children), primarily among female students (Mählick 2018; Ackers et al. 2008).

Economic migrants have also made use of the education route as an entry point to family migration (Streitwieser 2019). Countries like the United States (Gammama Liyanage 2020), Australia, and the United Kingdom (Raghuram 2013), for example, have a significant number of student-visa-holding families. While these and other popular international destinations are open to providing status to these students' accompanying family members, not all visas are created equal (Doyle et al 2016; Sementelli 2002). Some are issued with restrictions, usually indicating whether the holder can engage in any form of employment in the host country (Jiang et al 2020; Kim 2012; Myers-Walls et al 2011).

Studies point out how the authorization to work is vital to the success and sustainability of this complex process of family migration, which not only asserts spousal agency (Block 2021; Vijayakumar & Cunningham 2020), but in this case the family's ability (both migrant and trailing spouse) to sustain both student and family (Bhuyan et al 2018; Raghuram 2013; Yeoh & Huang 2005). The importance of work has led to the proliferation of international education agencies marketing international study programs that promise work-study schemes (Beech 2018), permanent residence eligibility upon completion (Lindsay Lowell & Avato 2014), and the possibility of being able to bring their family with them (Collins 2008; Spaan 1994).

### **Analytical considerations about agency and gender**

Studies note a growing diversification of approaches in studying migration (Merla et al 2021; Paul & Yeoh 2020b). The incorporation of qualitative techniques (consisting of narratives about migrant experiences) with mixed methodologies is a departure from the traditional quantitative slant that once informed migration policy (Collins and Huang 2012). Studies have also problematized the nation-state perspective—also called “methodological nationalism” (Faist et al 2013)—which tends to obscure the role of sub-national and trans-national connections and realities. Tying migration to the state can also limit how migrant mobility gets characterized, especially considering how, in multinational migrations (Paul and Yeoh 2020a; Willis et al 2002),

international migrants live in various destinations for a significant period of time. Studies on decision making using step-wise migration (Francisco- Menchavez 2020; Paul 2011) make this evident.

Francisco-Menchavez in her ethnographic study on step-wise migration mapped 11 family histories in different locations over a span of five years. The approach allowed her to capture how each family member's geographic trajectories varied and are bound by rich stories. This multi-sited fieldwork was creatively done in two countries, but featured many places that the author visited and studied vicariously through a survey of each family member's step-wise migration stories and routes.

While many scholars argue that the state should not be the starting point in migration research, studies continue to frame migration context within this methodological standpoint. Kofman (2018) notes a shift in family migration policies in Northwestern Europe, where the earlier focus on social and humanitarian rationales for family migration is now being overtaken by class determinants, such as economic and social capital, productivity, and self-sufficiency. The "right to family migration" has become a stratified exercise wherein those with the "right" economic profile can migrate as a family, or reunite with their families. These regimes of (im)mobility have dictated transnational care arrangements as well, where physical presence is necessary in care giving, but is limited by the length of stay that the state allows, or the paths available (Merla et al. 2020).

Family migration significantly shifted towards women's roles and voices. Describing family migration as a dependent, highly feminized flow, Kofman, for example, talks about how gender intersects with class (2018). Some female migrants find it harder to integrate into the job market and are working a double shift in providing care for the children, and are therefore "less productive" for doing so. Other female migrant "breadwinners" have to prove their "economic ability" to be able to support family members in the host country.

Egalitarian relationships in dual-income households have also been captured by Clerge and colleagues (2017) in their study of "tied movers," or "trailing spouses" where they showed how international graduate students and their spouses have non- economic motivations that fuel family migration, as well as the decision to form a family as a strategy to circumvent immigration policies. Through semi-structured interviews conducted among couples in which one member attends graduate school in the US, the study used grounded theory to capture the couples' motivations and behaviour.

Another approach made use of gender roles among migrant families, and how traditional beliefs can greatly influence decision making in families. Cooke (2008) noted a departure from the trailing wife research to something more complex and closely tied to motivating individual decision making in associating egalitarian behaviour among couples as an indicator for "rational" migrant decisions. Men who hold traditional gender beliefs can be dependent on their breadwinner wives but are less likely to take on responsibilities in the household, associating these activities with their wives' gender roles, while establishing their masculinity. George (2005) looks into a similar scenario among Indian families whose women migrate first and are the main applicants for family migration.

Building on these critical reflections our research on the role of families in the decision making of young adult migrants will pay special attention to the agency of the people involved, their gendered roles and how these change or are subverted (of both women and men), the interaction between the individual, their family, relevant networks and institutions.

## **Concluding Remarks**

Familial decision making figures in different life stages of the migration process. Studies on economic migrants, refugees, and immigrant settlers have readily linked the key role of families in planning and navigating migration decisions. Families also play a meaningful role in thinking

about international education. As past research indicates, their role combines the emotional pressures of familial hopes and expectations, as well as investments and foresight. Earlier contexts (Waters 2003; Chiang 2008) saw international students as economic migrants, not in the usual labour economic sense, but because of their capacity to generate capital. While progress over time in different economies and the international education system saw the dramatic shift in markets catering to foreign students, international education remains a family affair.

International students are the fastest growing among migrant categories and fuel higher-education economies in their destination countries (Riano & Piguet 2016). They are viewed as their families' and home country's brain gain investments, and are resource extraction points in their receiving countries. Despite this sizable contribution, scholars have paid scarce attention to the intricacies of the decision-making process involved, and the particular role of families, both nuclear and extended, within it. The governance of international student mobility is ever changing, and findings from studies bound by historical context need to be updated to capture and cater to this dynamic landscape.

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