Offshoring social reproduction: low-wage labour circulation and the separation of work and family life

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Abstract

Low-wage labour mobility, across a periphery-to-core economic gradient, is one of the most important forms of contemporary international migration. Feminist scholars have investigated this type of mobility from the perspective of the (transnational) family. Given low-wage labour migrants are often circulators rather than settlers, and that they often migrate alone (without partners, children and other relatives), transnational householding arrangements become commonplace: whereby family care and wage-work is organised and carried out across borders. The chapter reviews the literature on transnational householding and then applies lessons from it to a case-study of Norwegian and UK horticulture where seasonal migrant labour usage is now the norm. We make the argument that physically separating migrants and their households – dividing work and family/ communal life – is pivotal to the realization of surplus value in this sector. The coexistence of low wages and a productive workforce are possible due not only to international migration in general but also to the specific 'offshoring of social reproduction' whereby work in the host country is separated from migrants' active family and communal lives back home. This separation is principally driven by capital, but the agency of migrants is also evident in what constitutes a two-way, though uneven, process of 'arbitrage'. We conclude that more research is still needed to shift emphasis from a workplace/ host-country lens towards a social reproduction/ transnational lens.

Keywords: arbitrage, family, food, horticulture, labour, migration, social reproduction, transnational.

INTRODUCTION

International Organisation for Migration (IOM) data show how important labour migration now is, especially that occurring over a low-income to high-income economic gradient (IOM, 2020). The increasing presence of low-wage labour migration as part of the total labour force in high income regions needs to be understood against the backdrop of an uneven and unequal global capitalist geography; with core economies (high-income regions) continually probing ways to exploit labour and other resources in more peripheral areas (lower-income regions) (Smith et al. 1984; Wallerstein, 1976, 1982).

The importance of transnational family dynamics in relation to low-wage labour migration has been extensively explored by feminist scholars. They have, in particular, focused on migration to provide care services in core economies. This form of (usually temporary) migration underpins what have been termed 'global care chains' (Hochschild, 2000) whereby migrants provide paid care in host countries whilst also balancing family care responsibilities back home. A range of issues are raised by this literature, which we review below, that include: the importance of maintaining 'transnational intimacy' (Parreñas, 2005) with family back home; the sacrifices and costs of physical family separation as a result of labour migration; the role and importance of migrants' remittances to support family left behind; and the importance of economic contexts, and specifically 'jumping scale' (Katz, 2001a) across a periphery-core gradient, to make global care chains work from the perspective of the employer, the migrant and the migrants' wider family.

The literature on labour migration and transnational families has tended to focus on a particular sector (care work) and region (Asia) and this chapter, having reviewed the extant literature, is designed to show how ideas and concepts from it can also be applied to other sectors and other regions. In our case, we look specifically at European horticulture and the impact of temporary/ circulatory harvest migration on (transnational) family structures and dynamics. The core question that we pose is: how is our understanding of low-wage labour migration from peripheral to core economies advanced by examining the physical separation of migrants and their families? To answer this, we combine existing literature with new empirical material.

The physical separation of migrants and their families, as occurs in both care and horticultural sectors, seems to underpin a strong work ethic whilst also allowing wages to remain low. Employers are able to access '*homo economicus*' when migrants are separated from normal family and communal life, as they are when they live at the workplace (on the farm or with the host family). Migrants provide their labour power at one place and their family´s maintenance is realized at another. Moreover, workers retreat to home communities when work dries up and, in the process, relieve employers, host communities and host states of reproduction costs (Hart 2002; Jacka 2017; Jakobsen 2018). They also often send vital remittances back home whilst working abroad (Lund et al. 2013; Wells et al. 2014; Willis and Yeoh 2000). We conceptualize these transnational family arrangements as the 'offshoring of social reproduction', whereby farm owners and farmworkers 'jump scale' (Katz 2001a) within a highly uneven geography of development, which allows greater surplus value to be realized within horticulture than would otherwise be possible. This chapter therefore adds to, and complements, the feminist literature on transnational householding, by placing the question of labour´s social reproduction at the heart of our analysis.

In the sections that follow we first use the existing literature to examine transnational household practices amongst low-wage labour migrants and explore the tensions generated by the separation between working life (in the host country) and family life (in the home country). We

then use this literature to help understand the case of low-wage labour migration to the horticultural sectors of two high income countries (Norway and the UK) and flesh out how labour migrants and employers manage the tensions associated with the separation of work and family life.

LOW-WAGE LABOUR MIGRATION AND TRANSNATIONAL HOUSEHOLDING

Core economies across the globe import low-wage workers; however, families are often left behind. For workers in some industries contracts are typically seasonal or relatively short-term and often tied to a single job/ employer for a defined period, either by lack of alternatives or by formal requirements in visa programmes. Thus, labour circulation rather than permanent settlement can predominate for many low-wage migrants (Yeoh *et al.* 2020). Under such circumstances it is no wonder that transnational families emerge, where workplace production and household social reproduction are physically distanced (Burawoy 1976; Douglass 2015; Lam *et al.* 2006; Safri and Graham 2010). Yet how this separation works – how it shapes employers' and workers' experiences, practices and strategies and adds to the accumulation of surplus value – is addressed in the literature for some sectors and some regions more than others.

For example, since the 1990s, feminist scholars have identified the relationship between care needs in the global north, international labour migration and the family 'left behind' (Chant 1998; Kofman 2012; Pearson and Kusakabe 2012). Through innovative concepts such as 'global care-chains' (Hochschild 2000), transnational or global householding (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002; Douglass 2006; Willis and Yeoh 2000; Yeoh *et al.* 2020), and the 'migration left-behind nexus' (Toyota *et al.* 2007), this literature highlights the importance of the physical separation of migrants and their families in the migration process. It also opens up the 'black box' of households in terms of decision making, distribution of resources and gendered divisions of labour (Elmhirst 2003; Folbre 1986; Kofman and Raghuram 2006; Wolf 1990).

Scholars have discussed how the dual-breadwinner model in core economies has created a shortage of 'hands and hearts' to provide care within the household, generating a demand for migrant labour to supplement family labour (Douglass 2006; Fraser 2016; Kofman 2012). Migrant labour´s simultaneous presence (in host country households) and absence (from the family left behind) constitutes what Hochschild (2000) has labelled 'global care-chains'. The constitution of these 'care-chains' points to how care provisioning is increasingly solved on a private basis by moving labour across a core-periphery gradient (Douglass 2015; Hoang *et al.* 2015; Lan 2008). Feminist scholars, for instance, have argued that the privatisation of care produces a more generalised crisis of social reproduction under neoliberal capitalism (Bakker 2007; Bakker and Gill 2019, 2003; Fraser 2016). This is because care needs in core economies are solved privately by hiring low-wage international labour migrants. This then generates a care-deficit in the migrant's household back home (Isaksen et al. 2008).

Transnational householding thus emerges involving care arrangements that are organised and carried out across borders (Douglass 2006, 2012; Parreñas 2000). Migrants, who are often also care providers, take on breadwinner responsibilities in foreign labour markets while other household members stay back home. While it is not unusual that high-skilled labour migrants bring their spouse and/or their children with them when working abroad, for low-wage labour migrants this is often not possible due to the family´s lack of economic capital and/or the visa regulations of the host country (Nakache 2018; Scott and Jakobsen, forthcoming).

The feminist literature specifically emphasises how the absence of the migrant 'breadwinner', often women but also men, affects the (gendered) divisions of labour within the household and

the family practices of raising children and/ or caring for the infirm (Kilkey *et al*. 2014; Parreñas 2000). It also points towards the maintenance of intimacy across borders to maintain (transnational) family units. Parreñas (2005), for instance, has emphasised the importance of communication technologies for Filipino migrant mothers and their children left behind. This underscores how transport and communication technologies facilitate the possibility of providing for material and emotional needs even under conditions of 'global householding' (Douglass 2006).

Labour migrants contribute materially to the needs of their family back home through remittances: money wired from the country of wage-work to the country of household reproduction. Wells *et al*. (2014), for instance, detail how migrant workers employed within Canada's agricultural sector regularly send money home to Mexico to help their families pay for basic needs such as food, accommodation and healthcare. As such they realize 'arbitrage' by exploiting economic gradients (different wage rates, exchange rates, cost of living, etc.) between home (more peripheral) and host (core) countries.

From the perspective of transnational householding, both the remittances sent back home by migrant workers and the care provisioning by those left behind contributes to the everyday and inter-generational social reproduction of split households (Jacka 2017; Jakobsen 2017; Kofman 2012; Nguyen and Locke 2014). However, while remittances are often hailed as a redistributive solution to the inequalities of an uneven global economy (Bock *et al*. 2016; Faist 2008), and communication technologies go some way to making transnational intimacy among family members possible, the physical separation and often long-term absence of a household member comes at a price (Nguyen *et al*. 2006; Toyota *et al*. 2007).

Investigations of the social costs paid by those 'left-behind' (children, partners and elderly relatives) at the 'labour-sending end' of the global care-chains is a central theme in the literature: what has been termed the 'migration left-behind nexus' (Toyota *et al.* 2007). The global domestic work industry probably represents the clearest manifestation of how the cost and rewards of labour migration are distributed across global care-chains between labour receiving and labour sending households. The literature highlights how absentee mothers and their 'left-behind' children manage the physical separation of the migration process, but also how the 'left-behind fathers need to adjust their care giving work to changing divisions of labour within the household. Yeoh et al. (2020), for example, illustrate some of these dynamics, as they explore how 'doing family' for households that are split across national borders for prolonged periods of time involves reconfiguring the gender politics of care among 'left-behind families'. In their study, the left-behind Filipino daughter resents her mother's absence, as she feels their relationship is 'just about the money', and while she is closer to her father, he is left vulnerable to insinuations from his in-laws that he is an undeserving beneficiary of his wife´s remittances (Yeoh *et al.* 2020: 1719).

The costs of migration to transnational households are also evident in other contexts. For instance, McLaughlin *et al.* (2017) identify the adverse effects of male farm labour migration to Canada on left-behind households in Mexico. For children, the absence of a father appears to have negative impacts on school performance, and children also react to separation 'by becoming sick, depressed, or both' (McLaughlin *et al*. 2017: 691). For the women staying behind, the absence of their spouse involves an intensification of household work and a wider responsibility both for their children´s well-being and for the family farm (see also Rosales-Mendoza and Campos-Flores, 2019). Thus, while migrants and wider household members rely on each other during an often protracted spell of migrant work, through both care arrangements,

emotional ties, and pooling of common resources (e.g. remittances, unpaid household labour), their physical separation comes at a price. While the price of family separation can be discerned within migrant households, such as for left behind children or relatives, the dynamics separating labour power from household social reproduction also form part of an extended geography of uneven development, as we highlight in the next section.

OFFSHORING SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

Much like labour mobility within and across national borders, and the associated family separation that follows in its wake, offshoring – the relocation of activities across national borders – is one of the defining features of globalisation (Peck 2017). While much of the literature on offshoring has centred on the theme of outsourcing production, and jobs, to lower-wage countries, at its core 'the primary function of offshore space of all kinds is to provide opportunities for *arbitrage*: the exploitation of difference for profit' (Potts 2019: 199).

Price differentials between onshore and offshore locations work to allow the realisation of surplus value within an uneven geography of global production. Looking beyond the relocation and outsourcing of production facilities, importing workers (but not their families) is another means through which arbitrage can be realised. This is particularly the case in industries where offshoring production is not as feasible, such as care work and horticulture (Scott 2013a). In the case of arbitrage for wages, labour contractors play a key role in linking onshore and offshore locations, by putting these 'markets' in touch with each other (Peck 1996). These transnational 'labour chains' allow an employer, a HR-manager, or a labour market intermediary to recruit low-wage workers in economically peripheral areas and pass some of the risk of a competitive commodity market onto the workers who are called upon in part for their flexibility (Barrientos 2013). Low-wage labour is then relocated into an 'onshore' production facility where considerable value is added: as, for various reasons, low-wage migrant workers are not only attractive due to lower wage demands but are also known to be compliant to employers' demands and work especially hard (Scott 2013b; Scott and Rye 2021). Thus, a central background condition to the activities of offshoring and onshoring are the uneven and unequal geographies of 'actually existing' capitalism (Peck 2017).

Crucially for the discussion here, the costs of socially reproducing the workforce are often offloaded to households when capital withdraws from the social wage, partly through offshoring its commitment to particular places (Katz, 2001b, 2008). Social reproduction represents the work and social arrangements that allow people and nature to come to life, be sustained and replenished on a daily and long-term basis (Bakker 2007). It is, in short, the biological and social maintenance of labour power on a daily and inter-generational basis. Under capitalism it is important to note that in order to secure life, every person needs to engage with the market to obtain basic necessities (Wood 2002). This makes wage-work important to any notion of social reproduction. However, no one can live on wages alone: households under capitalism combine wage-work with unpaid work and relationships. While this makes capitalism less all-encompassing as a part of our daily lives (Gibson-Graham 2006), scholars have pointed to how keeping activities 'unaccounted for' in market terms allows capital to free ride (Fraser 2016). That is, as unpaid care work, socialisation and maintaining relationships are carried out without capital or states taking them into account, their costs mostly remain hidden (Waring 1999). Yet, they are essential to the reproduction of capitalism (Smith et al. 1984). Thus, the work of social reproduction is both a background condition for capitalism, providing for and maintaining a workforce, yet it remains hidden in most accounts of the economy.

Marxist scholars working in the South African and Chinese contexts, have extended the argument above around the 'subsidy' that the social reproduction of labour provides capitalism (Hart 2002, Arrighi 2009, Zhan 2019a; Zhan and Scully 2018). They argue that, by keeping the added value and cost to workforce provisioning (e.g. giving birth, socialisation) and maintenance (e.g. care-work) outside the official accounts, the price of labour power is cheapened as both states and employers receive the added 'surplus' from household and community work for 'free'. At the same time, the costs of this work (e.g. handling work injuries, infirm care-needs or 'worn out' workers) are 'offloaded' to workers' households and communities (Arrighi *et al.* 2010; Hart 2006; Zhan 2019b).

In the case of international labour migration, as discussed above, these tensions manifest themselves quite differently. On the one hand, there are dual-breadwinner families in core economies who solve their household needs by hiring (largely migrant) domestic workers. On the other hand, there are the transnational households made up of low-wage migrants working in core economies and families left behind in more peripheral areas. Crucially, the presence of low-wage labour migrants without family members joining them appears to be becoming more commonplace in core economies with the 21st century revival of guestworker-type migration schemes.

To summarise, employers now require highly productive workers; and an absence of *in-situ* family ties and responsibilities, allied with a core-periphery mobility gradient, seem to be key in giving low-wage labour migrants a particularly strong work ethic. Whilst the literature on low-wage labour migration and transnational families has tended to focus on care work, in the next section we intend to show how ideas from this literature are also relevant in other migrant-dense sectors like horticulture. In fact, central to the system of migrant labour in horticulture, we argue below, is family separation and the offshoring of costs associated with the reproduction of workers.

<a> LOW-WAGE MIGRANT LABOUR IN EUROPEAN HORTICULTURE

European food production has, over the last three decades, become reliant on low-wage migrant labour following a number of structural transformations (Rye and Scott 2018). Amongst other things, we have seen: the consolidation of farms; vertical integration in the production network with wholesalers and supermarket chains commanding a stronger influence on quality and quantity; just-in-time delivery requirements in the production network; and, a growing appetite within the population for fresh fruit and vegetables (Geddes and Scott 2010; Richards *et al*. 2013). Whereas horticulture before this period of restructuring generally solved its seasonal labour needs through mobilizing residual populations locally, including family labour and the under-employed (Newby 1979; Strauss 2013; Verdon 2017), low-wage international labour migrants have become the norm, especially after EU enlargement in 2004 and 2007. Moreover, the preferences of employers in the horticulture sector for deferent, flexible and hard-working labour, plays an important role in making migrant labour the dominant workforce in the fields (Hellio 2014, 2017; Rogaly 2008; Scott and Rye 2021; Waldinger and Litcher 2003).

As with migrant domestic workers going from the Philippines to the US or Indonesia to Singapore (Parreñas 2000; Yeoh et al. 2020), migrant labour in Europe's horticultural sector has largely been drawn in from more peripheral economies. We have had, for example, Ukrainian workers moving to Polish farms (Górny and Kaczmarczyk 2018) and Polish workers moving to German farms (Fialkowska and Piechowska 2016) and beyond, in a kind of east-to-west, periphery-to-core migration 'conveyor belt'. Similarly, the Mediterranean agricultural industries recruit large numbers of migrant workers from Africa and Central and Eastern Europe

(Gertel and Sippel 2014; Corrado *et al*. 2017), and there are numerous other examples of migrants from more distant locations: such as the Thai wild berry harvesters in the Nordic forests and Bangladeshi strawberry pickers in Greece (Rye and O´Rilley 2021). Beyond Europe, there is also a North American literature documenting a long history of international labour migration from south (Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean) to north (the US and Canada) to solve harvest labour needs (Daniel 1981; Mitchell 2012; Reid-Musson 2017).

Though the conditions of work and life in the horticulture industry are harsh compared to most other occupations in the host country, low-wage labour migrants in the food industry do have agency. This is especially evident when migrants' lives are viewed within a transnational *milieu*. In fact, one of the primary ways individual workers and their families can assert their influence on the resource distribution within the uneven geography of capitalism is by moving across space to earn wages in more affluent core regions, as foreign currency can be used for household consumption (Alberti 2014; Mitchell 1996). In the literature on migrant farm workers, it is often pointed out that seasonal migrants accept low-wages and harsh working conditions, as the wages go further back home (Holmes 2013; Rogaly 2009). The concept of a 'dual-frame of reference' (Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco 1995; Waldinger and Lichter 2003) articulates the observation that the deference of migrants to the low-wages of the industry are partly attributed to the way migrants compare price differentials between the country of work, and the wages accrued there, and the country of family reproduction (Scott 2013b; Waldinger and Lichter 2003). This is not to gloss over the fact that labour migration comes at a price for the individual migrants who toil within precarious employment, and for the family members staying behind (as noted above).

<a> CASE-STUDY: NORWEGIAN AND UK HORTICULTURE

As the literature reviewed above illustrates, though seldom argues explicitly, in the horticultural sector of core economies the tensions between capital accumulation and social reproduction are 'solved' through temporary and seasonal low-wage labour circulation and an accompanying arbitrage. The underpinning conditions for these arrangements are an uneven economic geography (differential wages, employment/ unemployment, exchange rates, costs of living, etc.), transnational migration across this unevenness, and family separation.

We will now illustrate our core arguments through case study material (qualitative in-depth interviews) from Western England (18 interviews) and South-Eastern Norway (18 interviews). In both locations, horticulture has traditionally formed the backbone of the economy and still plays a dominant role, despite its declining relative importance. Food production in each area is dominated by labour intensive crops, particularly fruit and vegetables, that today rely on large numbers of low-wage and temporary/ seasonal labour migrants. The workforces in both countries are now mainly recruited from Central and Eastern Europe, though in the Norwegian study locality there were also migrants travelling longer distances, for instance from Vietnam.

Across the two locations, we interviewed a total of 36 individuals: sampling migrant farmworkers (N=14), employers (N=10), and local community representatives (N=12). Interviews lasted for about 45 minutes to 90 minutes and followed largely similar semi-structured interview guides, covering some common topics related to the migrant worker phenomenon in the locality but also tailored to capture specific aspects for the different interviewee categories.

The migrant farmworkers were from Central and Eastern Europe working on a temporary/ seasonal basis, though some for longer periods of the year, often in a circular mode (moving

annually between home and host countries) spanning many years. Most of the migrant workers lived onsite in tied accommodation, with employers deducting rent from the weekly or monthly wage. Given their long working hours, isolated location and limited integration with the local community, we faced considerable difficulties recruiting migrant farm workers. Thus, employers acted as gatekeepers, and whilst we acknowledge the potential pitfalls of such a recruitment strategy – such as selection of workers that are particularly loyal or the potential effect it had on how our loyalties were perceived by the interviewees (Scott 2013c) – other strategies were less optimal (see also Holmes 2013). Migrant interviews were conducted in English, which required recruitment of interviewees who had mastered the language and, therefore, were among those with longer histories of circulatory migration. While this represents a selection bias – the migrant interviewees were most likely not among the worst-off farm workers in the localities as they had stayed year after year – it also provided accounts that reflected back on many years of experience. The fact that most of the migrant farmworkers are male in our sample reflects the demography of the workers on the particular food production worksites visited.

The employers were selected in order to enhance sample variance. All had long-standing experiences within the horticultural industry, and appeared forthcoming in the interviews. Similarly, the community representatives were selected based on their accumulated knowledge of the local farming sector and/ or migrant farmworker communities. Employer and community interviewees all represented the majority population in the locality: ethnic white, born in the country (except for one Irish interviewee in the UK), and higher socio-economic status (*vis-à-vis* migrants). They were also older. Among community representatives there is a more even gender balance of interviewees. The employer and community interviews were conducted in the mother-tongue language in their respective countries.

OFFSHORING SOCIAL REPRODUCTION AND TRANSNATIONAL ARBITRAGE

In the remainder of the chapter, we draw the extant literature and our new empirical material together. We examine why temporary and seasonal low-wage migrant workers are so attractive to employers in the UK and Norwegian contexts, and argue that a large part of their appeal is connected to the fact that they leave social (family and communal) ties back home. With these transnational family regimes, social reproduction is 'offshored' for the benefit of the employers. However, we also show how low-wage migrants manage this offshoring and gain benefits from it: engaging in what we call two-way transnational 'arbitrage'. Our focus on low-wage labour migration and family separation can be contrasted with higher wage international business migration: where the (usually) male breadwinner is normally able to move *with* his 'trailing wife' who performs invisible care and emotional work *in* the 'host country' (Kunz 2020).

Labour Circulation and the Separation of Work and Family Life

In horticulture, labour needs vary by season. In Norway, the main growing and harvesting season is three to four months, from around June to September. In the UK the peak season is a little longer, from around April to October. In both contexts, and related to this seasonality (which is also crop dependent), there were relatively few examples of permanent migrant farm workers. The vast majority of workers, instead, lived in temporary onsite farm accommodation. Most returned home during the off-season, where they may take short-term jobs or go unemployed and rely on savings from their seasonal work. Migrant farm workers are, thus, often circular and multi-nodal: dividing their work and personal lives between host and home localities respectively.

For seasonal workers, who are mostly housed on the farm, it was often difficult (and in practice prohibited by many employers) to have young family members join them. Spouses may join usually only if they are part of the workforce. Housing on the farm, in the form of caravans, cabins or refurbished barns, was typical, with two to six people often sharing. The cost of lodging was usually deducted from the weekly or monthly wage and was certainly cheaper (and much easier) than living offsite.

It is not only the housing arrangements that deter workers from moving as a family, but also the short-term nature of their stay and low and uncertain income compared to the living costs in the host country. Moreover, except for a wish to stay and spend time together, other family members had few reasons to travel to Norway or the UK, which to them primarily represent the migrating family member's workplace. Illustratively, some of the employer interviewees referred to seasonal farm work as 'North Sea Shifts', alluding to the cyclical work arrangements on the oil installations off the coast of Norway, which combines the distinctive temporal and spatial separation between work and home, and at the same time, lacks separation between work and place of rest while at work. Others have argued that these 'disruptive' rhythms to the mobility process of circular migrants are important in explaining their sought-after work ethic (Yeoh *et al*. 2020; Collins and Bayliss 2020).

Migrant Work Ethic

The uncertainty of the temporary/ seasonal work and the need to secure new employment each year, not to mention the months when work is not available, can be difficult to bear for workers. It is also problematic for employers. At all farms visited, in both the West of England and South-Eastern Norway, recruitment was an ongoing concern for farmers, who typically start the process in January and see the first workers arrive in March. Much of the recruitment in Norway was peer-to-peer, though in the UK agencies and direct recruitment were also evident. Peer recruitment is usually carried out by more permanent staff, often some of the few migrant workers that are employed for the whole year.

The recruitment process is thus characterised by uncertainty and affected by factors beyond the employers' direct control. Yet farmers appeared generally content with the mode of recruitment, relying on migrants instead of local workers. Part of the explanation for this is the fact that while low-wage migrant farmworkers earn a relatively low wage in Norway and the UK, the wage differentials between the host (core) country and the home (peripheral) country is large enough to make seasonal agricultural work attractive. This reflects the 'dual-frame of reference' of migrant workers noted above and helps to explain the motivation for moving abroad to take up low-wage work (Waldinger and Lichter 2003). On the other hand, local workers without this dual frame of reference do not realistically consider the wages and working conditions on offer in seasonal horticulture.

Alongside the dual frame of reference, migrants are considered a very productive labour force because they are housed onsite and there is therefore little separation between home and work. This makes workers very flexible and reliable, to be deployed as and when needed. As one of the farm workers reflected:

> Ya. We all [in] our company, which are working here, are living on farm and we save a lot of time too for this. Because...our job is in our yard [chuckles]. Just enough to go out through the door, and it is...in you are on the job (Gabriel, migrant farmworker for 17 years, South-Eastern Norway).

Commensurate with this, employers tended to boast about the good work ethic of their seasonal migrants. They explicitly related this to the workers' lack of family obligations. Beth (a UK employer) explained:

> It's not a nine to five job. So it's very difficult to work around families…This is growing. It hasn't got time for somebody to, pick the children up from school. The focus needs [to be on] picking there and then, and it's so time precious. We don't know from one day to the next what days the shifts are going to be. So with the guys working here, living here, they are a lot more flexible. They kind of give the hundred percent of their time and their life to the farm once they're here...Cause they haven't got their children…We don't overwork them by any means. I mean there are rules and they can't work too [long]. [But] you know, they haven't got that all "I've got to go tomorrow to go watch my daughter's play or whatever". So they are one hundred percent committed to the job.

Essentially, low-wage circulatory migrants from more peripheral economies are seen by agricultural employers in core countries as the optimal source of labour. This relates very clearly to the lack of *in situ* family/ communal ties and obligations and to a dual frame of reference (Scott 2013b; Scott and Rye, 2021).

Limited Integration

Linked to their strong work ethic, migrants were seen to pose little or no cost to the local community. They were seen to be focused on working hard with thoughts of rural integration often side-lined (Scott and Visser, forthcoming). The combination of seasonality, onsite housing, and a '*homo economicus*' outlook amongst migrants, means that the workforce on farms is often invisible:

> No, they're [people in the local community] probably not aware of the scale. Also, I think, you know, most of the people who come into, or traditionally most of the people who have been coming in to do this migrant work are often single or if they're not single, they've left, they often left their families back in their native countries. They're not elderly, so they don't have a great impact on schools or hospitals or care. And so if they are happy to have a few beers with their friends in, you know, somewhere isolated where they're not visible, by their community, they don't even have that impact on society, you know, because they're not filling up hospitals or schools or things like that (Connor, police officer who grew up in the study area, Western England).

> There are many who are seasonal workers, quite a few, who come here for a short period. This is my impression, right. And then I do not think that they are interested in getting that integrated, they are here to work and...they have some weeks, a month or one and a half. I am not sure if they have much time to integrate (Ida, agricultural officer who grew up in the study area, South-Eastern Norway).

Thus, alongside a strong work ethic, it seems that temporary/ circulatory migrants – even if they return year after year to the farm – tend to remain quite distanced from the rural host communities (for more on low-wage migrant invisibility in rural spaces see Lever and Milbourne 2017; Licona and Maldonado 2014). Low-wage migrants are principally in the host country to work, they tend to live where they work, the work they do is often all-consuming and, on top of this, many have families and commitments back in the home country to focus on during the off season.

Family Sacrifice and Transnational Arbitrage

The separation between family and employment, allied with the strong work ethic, comes at a price. The migrants we interviewed told of how themselves and their family members 'left-behind' can suffer:

> I think it is more bad things. Because of...because of family. Because, I have a young family. Young children so...everyday without them is...you know...its...it won't return, you know what I mean. And children get older and it won't return so...I do not know. Maybe the people who have older children or have adult children have other problems, I think so, but for me the most problematic is the separation with the family. And the good thing is...hmm...[silence]...good things...only the money. Nothing else. Yeah, I think so. Maybe I see other country, and that is also, but alone, yeah. Its... (Gorski, migrant farmworker for 5 years, South-Eastern Norway).

Family separation, and most notably not being around while children are growing up, is managed through the narrative of sacrifice, a theme much discussed in the literature on migrant mothers and 'left-behind' children (Asis 2002; Asis *et al*. 2004; Bloch 2017; Hewett 2009). The migrant interviewees sacrificed part of the household's present emotional well-being for improved material consumption back home and for future joint household endeavours. Thus, migrant farm workers must bridge the physically distanced spheres of work and home life.

Despite the problems and sacrifices associated with this, many migrants also emphasized how the wages earned in the host country actually helped them achieve some of their aspirations back home via transnational investment and consumption practices:

> If you want to work, if you're not lazy, you can come here, you can, you can make money, you can send money to your family, your parents and stuff. You can help Bulgarian economics, because most of the money in Bulgaria is from immigrants. We are sending to many money to Bulgaria. Like that we are helping the country (Anthony, migrant farmworker for 7 years, Western England).

There is clearly a longer-term objective associated with seasonal employment and migrants' hard work and onsite living is accepted with this longer-term objective in mind. Indeed, this is likely one of the key factors that explains why migrants work as hard as they do at the bottom of the labour market as demonstrated across a wide variety of political and national contexts (Dawson *et al.*, 2017; Rigg 2013; Shen 2016; Tacoli and Mabala 2010).

Work in the host country was most commonly explained with reference to house building and/ or remittances to one´s family back home:

> Yes. I make a house, a brand-new house. Yeah. I move the money from UK to Romania, and do that. As long as you've got the house, if tomorrow it's finished. You have to work. You need to live, but I got somewhere to go. Anybody is like that. They think: "All right. If I make some money, I'll make money and make something" (Arthur, migrant farmworker for 7 years, Western England).

> Yeah. So far I would like to keep going this way because, yeah...I build a house. I collect the money for that for some years and I will not finish with that and…maybe I have a bit...backup and maybe in some years I shall start in Poland to do something,

> just to be close to the family. But as long as I can, and as long as it is valuable, I try to work like that (Gaspar, migrant farmworker for 17 years, South-Eastern Norway).

While there is a literature highlighting the costs of transnational household arrangements (Biao 2007; Hoang *et al.* 2015; Nguyen *et al.* 2006; Ye *et al.* 2016) for family members involved, there is nonetheless scope for analysing further how the costs and benefits of these arrangements are distributed by actors beyond the household unit, and how they are experienced and rationalized by different actors.

Undoubtedly labour (migrant workers) and capital (low-wage employers) benefits from 'the exploitation of difference for profit' (Potts 2019: 199) in what could be described as a two-way, though uneven, process of transnational 'arbitrage'. However, the maintenance of transnational family arrangements and the ways in which these underpin both the reproduction of labour power (migrants' work ethic) and also offshore many of the costs of labour reproduction (i.e. importing workers but not families) seems to ultimately serve the economic interests of core economies first and foremost.

CONCLUSIONS

The chapter has reviewed the literature on low-wage labour migration and transnational families and applied insights from this to a horticultural case study. We have argued that the 'offshoring of social reproduction' accompanies certain forms of contemporary low-wage labour migration. In particular: migration related to temporary/ seasonal employment (and thus labour circulation); migration related to the need to live at work (in horticulture and in domestic work); and migration related to a move across a periphery-to-core economic divide are all associated with the separation of the work from the family and communal spheres. To capture these structural underpinnings, we have advanced the related concepts of the 'offshoring of social reproduction' and two-way transnational 'arbitrage'.

The transnational strategy of offshoring social reproduction, and the resultant physical separation between the spaces of production (work) and social reproduction (family and community), appears to provide capital in core economies with an additional degree of labour power. At the same time, migrants also appear to be able to negotiate this separation, navigating their constrained choices by adding value to their low-wage work. Even if this comes at a considerable cost to themselves, their family, and their community, for many migrants the offshoring of social reproduction is still preferable to staying put. This is why we speak of two-way transnational 'arbitrage' with respect to low-wage labour migration. Whereby movement from peripheral to core economies and the associated 'jump in scale' (Katz 2001a) increases the labour power available to core capital and, at the same time, migrants are also able to exploit scalar inequalities, albeit with major sacrifices. It may well be a two-way arbitrage, but it is still a highly uneven one in terms of both the distribution of benefits and of costs.

To date, migration has been viewed primarily through an economic lens centred upon productive wage labour. Yet as a broad feminist literature now attests to, behind every worker is a wider familial and communal *milieu*. Capital and states know that this wider *milieu* sustains labour, but in certain contexts also know that it can pay to keep it at a distance. Given this, it is time for much more attention to be directed towards the hinterlands underpinning, enabling and sustaining migration and migrant work. Specifically, more research is now needed methodologically to shift attention away from a workplace/ host-country lens towards a social reproduction/ transnational lens. This shift would help us to understand better the 'solution' of particular forms of low-wage labour migration within the context of a spatially and socially

unequal capitalist system. This shift towards placing social reproduction at the centre of research would help us to explain better the 'matching' interests of labour migrants and capital; though with highly uneven points of departure and outcomes. Moreover, by methodologically shifting to more comparative research on low-wage labour migration, we can better consider the costs and benefits, as conceptualized by the actors themselves, in labour regimes that involves transnationally embedded labour market participation.

Summing up, migration can challenge conventional understandings of the family and bring into relief the often competing economic and social dimensions of contemporary life. For many low-wage workers, inequalities in the global economy mean that transnational household arrangements must prevail. They prevail because migrants seek out better work opportunities than are available domestically, and, because capital and the state often prefer to import low-wage workers more than parents, carers, friends and human beings. Low-wage labour migration from peripheral to core economies then is associated both with an economic dividend (for employers and the migrant) but also a social (familial and communal) cost. The balance between economic rewards and household sacrifice is a delicate one, but an increasingly prominent one as far as low-wage migrants (especially temporary guestworkers) are concerned.

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