THE FAMILY FACTOR IN MIGRATION DECISIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Until recently, migration history was focused largely on European and trans-Atlantic migration streams. Also, economic differentials between regions were generally translated into the decision-making of individual actors, who were supposed to weigh the costs and benefits of migration. This dominant but implicit 'model' hid from view the ways in which migration is embedded in family structures, that—across the world—can be very different from the Western European ones. The traditions, values and daily practices related to the family affect migration in many ways. The intensity and composition of migration flows is affected by inheritance customs, household structures, marriage patterns, family strategies and ties between kin. This chapter aims to identify and discuss these 'family factors' in a structured form to see whether their impact on migration differs in various regions of the world as well as in different periods. To begin with, I will introduce my definitions of family and migration and discuss my selection of themes within this vast field.

We can define family as 'socially significant' kin with whom one shares basic activities. First of all, family members provide emotional warmth and support to one another. Families take care of reproduction and the socialization of children. Family members who co-reside in households are engaged in procuring and processing goods needed for consumption. In their division of labor for these tasks, families act as 'budget units', which means they exchange work and goods without internal reckoning. Also, families manage and transmit property from one generation to the next. Finally, families form specific social networks enabling members to leave the household and engage in different economic activities.

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1 Lucassen 2007; Lucassen and Lucassen 2009.
2 Harrell 1997.
These widely diverging functions of the family have their own logic and are studied by different scientific disciplines. They are also connected to migration in different ways. For the sake of simplicity, we will make a distinction between three ‘domains’ of family activities. The first domain encompasses marriage and family formation, household composition and the succession of generations. The rules that structure these activities have been studied extensively in anthropology. The regionally dominant practices of family formation and succession are often summarized in the highly generalized form of ‘family structures’, or—as we shall call them here—‘family systems’. How are family systems—regarding the rules on who marries whom, who inherits, who co-resides with the parents—related to differences in migration propensity by gender and by sibling position? The second domain concerns the economic logic of co-residence in family households. Joint production and consumption give rise to migration dynamics of their own. Balancing the family budget sometimes means attracting household members, sometimes expelling them. Also, families can generate additional income by sending family members to work elsewhere and send their income or part of it home. We take our inspiration for this domain from micro-economy. The third domain relates to the connections between dispersed family members, who may provide information and support to another. The study of family ties and networks is particularly advanced in sociology. The importance of family networks in generating and sustaining migration streams is widely recognized. What are the dynamics of these family networks and how are they related to other social ties and networks?

What is migration? Following Tilly and Moch, migration can be defined as those geographical moves that are relatively long-distance and relatively permanent. This definition allows us to separate migration from both permanent but highly short-distance moves (intralocal, residential mobility) and potentially long-distance but non-permanent moves (commuting, tourism). Migration implies a rupture with daily activities and connections and a reorganization of life in a new place. Depending on the distance and the social organization of the move,

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1 Tilly 1978; Moch 1992. In Manning’s typology of migration (Manning 2005: 3–15), migration is defined as moves within or between communities based on common languages and customs. In the 19th and 20th centuries, because of global language convergence a purely linguistic definition of community has become less revealing.