

# “Gender, return migration and shifting positions of power within the household: the case of women returnees in Lima, Peru”

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# Declaration

Hereby I declare that this thesis is my own work and not the work of someone else. I also declare that I was informed of completion and assessment rules of MISOCO Programme.

**15.05.2014**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Peru has not been historically a country of emigration, but rather an immigration one, with people coming from different countries like China, Italy, Japan and Spain (Escrivá 1997, p.71). Nonetheless, this changed during the 1980's decade and intensified in the period going between 1990 and the 2000's. According to Altamirano (2003), this happened given the deterioration of the national economy, lack of employment, intense population growth, political instability and internal violence. More than two million Peruvian nationals live now outside their homeland<sup>1</sup>, especially in countries like the United States, Spain, Italy and other neighboring countries in South America like Chile or Argentina. Spain, the second preferred destination, hosts around 16% of all the Peruvian migrants alone.

Women represent a slight majority among Peruvians abroad, counting for 50.8% of them by 2012<sup>2</sup>. They also represent little more than half of the Peruvian population living on Spain (53.6% of the total). These women usually migrated to meet economic and personal goals, coming from lower-middle and middle class backgrounds, having higher education and college degrees (Escriva 1997, p. 52). They are also characterized for being mainly educators, psychologists, lawyers, professional nurses and social assistants (Escriva 2003, 76). According to Escriva (2003), most of these women suffer from frustration, given the fact that the majority of jobs they are able to get are on the fields of care and domestic work, experiencing a decline in their social position within the class hierarchies.

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<sup>1</sup> INEI-OIM-MIGRACIONES: Perú: Estadísticas de la Emigración Internacional de Peruanos e Inmigración de Extranjeros 1990 - 2012.

<sup>2</sup> INEI-OIM-MIGRACIONES: Perú: Estadísticas de la Emigración Internacional de Peruanos e Inmigración de Extranjeros 1990 - 2012

However, given the relatively favourable conditions for Peruvian migrants in Spain, a good number of them have been able to leave domestic work and find intermediate solutions after a first period. According to Escrivá (2003), they have transferred their migration experiences to segments where they can find jobs in Spain, such as migration law, international NGO's, social assistance for migrants, among others. Moreover, some of them have decided to receive technical training or to enrol in postgraduate programs in order to get better jobs (Escrivá 2003, p. 76). In that sense, during their time in Spain, many of them are able to obtain not only economic gain, but also an important human capital.

Furthermore, it is important to remark that these women usually migrated alone, sometimes reuniting with their families in Spain after a while. Moreover, some of them met their partners abroad, got married and started a family. However, the reason why a lot of them migrated by themselves was to overcome the difficult situation in Peru. For them, migration was a way to obtain a greater economic and human capital than what they were able to do in the Peru. In that sense, most of them were on the search of better opportunities of upwards social mobility for them and their families.

Given the global economic crisis that has affected migration destinations like Spain since 2008, together with the more stable economic situation in Peru, a growing tendency of return can be identified, especially for women. Although the majority of Peruvian women have legal residence in Spain, are better integrated in the society and have experienced certain occupational mobility, their job options are still strongly gendered, and restricted to some sectors, which have been especially affected by the economic crisis, like the NGO sector, nursing and care-work. Moreover, given the fact that most of the time are the main economic providers of their households and have dependent children, their

situation has become more vulnerable with the crisis, pushing them to consider more intensely the possibility of returning. In that vein, it can be observed that from the total number of returnees from 2008-2012 (143 038) a slight majority were women (50.94%), with their number increasing by year<sup>3</sup>.

As it is well known, geographical movements (and especially, return migration) have particular ways of affecting the activities, beliefs, behaviours and relations of the people who experience them (Tienda and Booth 1991), either directly (migrants) or indirectly (non-migrants). Moreover, they do not entail just the mobilisation of people, but also the mobilisation of different material resources, skills, values and ideas. Altogether, these elements introduce changes in the relations that take place in different spaces, like the society, the family and at the individual level (Pessar and Mahler 2003). Furthermore, it is essential to keep in mind that migration and return patterns are highly gendered (Lawson 1998, p. 42) and that gender has an important effect on the access of individuals to certain locations of power in the social relations, configuring their outcomes and the possibilities of social change.

Regarding this, return migration appears as an interesting phenomenon to explore, introducing elements of gender in the analysis, especially when it comes to study contexts where migration and return have been feminized. Moreover, it is also important to put attention to the changes that take place when women migrants return to their home countries and reintegrate with their families. This phenomenon will shape the relations between the members of the family by transforming the dynamics of domestic decision-taking and of domestic economy. Most importantly, it will affect the previous ideas, beliefs

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<sup>3</sup> INEI-OIM-MIGRACIONES: Perú: Estadísticas de la Emigración Internacional de Peruanos e Inmigración de Extranjeros 1990 - 2012

and practices that frame their daily interactions and relations within the social contexts where they are inserted (Tienda and Booth 1991).

My aim in this study is to analyze the possibilities of change for women opened by the phenomenon of return migration. In order to so, I have decided to study specifically the case of bread-winning Peruvian women that returned from Spain since 2008. I believe that studying this group might be interesting as there seems to be a growing pattern of return migration from that country in the last few years. Also, their position as economically active women in the family reveals interesting gender dynamics at work in the context of return.

Taking this into account, as well as what is established in the literature, the main research question that leads this study is: *how does return migration of economically involved Peruvian women influence their position in the gender relations within their households?* Regarding this, I have elaborated a set of secondary questions that will try to deepen the understanding about the effects of return. These are:

- How does return migration affect the perceived position of returnee women in the dynamics of domestic decision-taking and the domestic economy?
- How does return migration contribute to a perception of shifting power positions and changing gender roles in the families?
- What are the factors that mediate in the perceptions of change in the positions of women after return? How do they combine to determine an improvement, a decline or restructure of them?



To answer my research question, I gathered information in the city of Lima, Peru, as this is both the context of departure and return of most of the Peruvian migrants. Data was collected first through informal conversations with (7) returnee women. After the first moment of getting in touch with the issue in question, I collected more detailed data from these women by following a method that combined episodic and semi-structured in-depth interviews.

This data allowed me to arrive to a plausible theory about return migration, building a deeper understanding on how women perceive their position of power in the context of their families upon return. In that sense, I was able to identify how each one of the factors related to the domestic economy and the process of domestic decision-making are modified after migration and what are the possible elements that influence these changes, like gender ideologies, resources or agency.

The distinctive feature about this theory relies in two reasons: one, it recaptures the complex richness and the sub-processes that are unleashed by return migration in the smaller scales (i.e. the family scale and the individual scale) which affect the wider processes in society. Second, it includes gender as an important element that determines different experiences for the individuals.

Many of the contemporary theories about return migration, like the social network theory of return migration (Cassarino 2004), tend to ignore the importance of these two elements, reducing the understanding about this phenomenon to the larger scale. Moreover, it standardizes all experiences. It makes its differences depend on the information and resources returnees can mobilize and depending on that, labels them in terms either of failure of success to reintegrate.

However, talking about return migration in terms of economic success or failure provides incomplete information about the changes in the women's power position in their families upon return. In that vein, it is important to pay attention to how each one of the factors related to the domestic economy and the process of domestic decision-making are modified after migration. Likewise, it is essential to recognise the possible elements that influence these changes, like gender ideologies, resources or agency. Consequently, just by paying attention to these factors, the power position of the Peruvian returnee women in the family can be identified, taking into account all of its complexity.

In this piece, the mentioned issues will be addressed as it follows: In Chapter 2, I provide a discussion on the main theories and empirical studies about return migration, migration and gender, building a gendered approach to return migration. Furthermore, I provide some information regarding gender ideologies in Peru. In Chapter 3, I describe the methods of data collection and data analysis I used for my research, as well as some ethical issues raised during the process of fieldwork. In Chapters 4-7 I present the main findings of the research. In Chapter 4, I discuss the reasons to return, arguing that most of the women put the family at the center of their decisions, trying either to avoid or deal with existing or future difficulties that rise during the period of migration. In Chapter 5, I try to identify how the position of women in the domestic economy changes upon return, taking into account how the factors of access, contribution and control of material resources change. I argue that differently than even when the majority of women seem to have experienced a decline in their access of resources, this does not necessarily affects the other factors, because they are influenced by elements of gender and agency. Similarly, in Chapter 6 I try to identify how the position of women in the domestic decision-making changes upon return, taking

into account how the factors of authority and time spent in domestic work. In this case, it is even more difficult to determine a pattern of decline or improvement, given the effects that gender exerts in each one of the factors. In the last Chapter 7, I discuss how focusing on the smaller scales of the individual and the family has allowed me to recognise the importance of the intangible resources and the sense of agency in affecting the possibilities of these women of improving their position of power in the future.

## **II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In the thesis, I draw on three main theoretical frameworks: return migration, gender and migration, as well as relevant theoretical approaches on gender roles and the domestic division of labour. These theories are essential to frame my research question. In this chapter I will also discuss relevant literature on gender ideologies and gender roles in Peru.

### **2.1 A gendered approach to return migration**

Geographical movements have particular ways of affecting the activities, beliefs, behaviours and relations of the people who experience them (Tienda and Booth, 1991), either directly (in the case of the migrants) or indirectly (in the case of the non-migrant kin/relatives), sometimes producing social change. These movements tend to be complex, constantly shifting the points of departure and arrival. They form spaces that intersect these points through the exchange of economic and non-economic elements between those involved.

Return migration is a particular geographical movement that involves migrants going back to their homeland to re-settle (Gmelch, 1980). Many theories have tried to grasp the dynamics of return, concentrating on the causes that motivate it and their consequences on the possibilities of re-integration of the migrant in the home country. For example, the neoclassical approach considers return migration a consequence of the miscalculation between the costs of migration and expected earnings of labour migrants, who were not able to meet their economic goals (Cassarino 2004).

Other more recent approaches have left aside the idea of return as a strategy to deal with economic failure, concentrating on the complexity of processes, motivations and exchanges that determine the decision to return and influence re-integration processes. They have given centrality to the idea that movement is not necessarily one-sided, as it implies the mobilisation of both tangible and intangible resources that allow migrants to maintain linkages between the home and the host country (Cassarino 2004).

One particularly interesting approach is the social-network theory of return migration. This theory defines return migration as a phenomenon that involves cross-border economic and social relationships between migrants and non-migrants. These relationships entail the exchange of information about the home country (Cassarino 2004). Moreover, it also implies the mobilisation of financial and human capital. According to this approach, information about the opportunities in the home country and the relevance of resources influence the decision to return as well as the re-integration process. Consequently, having high financial and human capital and complete information about the home country will determine a successful process of return and re-integration. It will also determine the possibilities of migrants being agents of development.

This approach allows for a more complete understanding of return migration, as it pays attention to a wider set of forms, motivations and circumstances under which this phenomenon takes place. However, as it seeks to understand the implications of return migration for the wider society, it aims to explain the process at a large scale. Hence, even if it is still useful, it provides incomplete understanding about the dynamics of return migration that take place in the smaller scales, like the family and the individual. In these contexts, there are other processes at work that go un-noticed at the larger scales, but that

affect importantly what happens in them and can provide information about the possibilities of change.

In that sense, it is important to come up with a framework that will provide information on how return migration affects the relations between the migrants and non-migrants in the family and at the individual scale. Such an approach will enable a better understanding on how it transforms the previous terms of economic and non-economic exchanges, as well as the ideas, beliefs and practices in the household.

In addition, it is essential to come up with a framework that takes into account some differentiating factors that determine contrasting experiences among individuals in society, like gender. According to Hondagneu-Sotelo (1992) and Lawson (1998), gender is a set of relations that contributes to organise migration patterns. Gender relations constantly constrain and allow the migration and settlement – and in the context of my research, re-settlement at home - of both women and men in very different ways, by establishing different positions and roles for them.

Thus, gender has also an important effect on the access of individuals to locations of power in social relations, configuring their outcomes and the possibilities of social change. In that vein, to fully understand changes in the perception of women and their families regarding their position in the household after return, it is central to pay attention to the gender ideologies framing their daily interactions and relations.

Moreover, I want to establish that by analysing the influence of return migration on how household inequalities are improved, eroded or just restructured (Tienda and Booth: 1991, 56), we can see how wider gender roles and social locations are also transformed or maintained. All of this would be relevant in order to establish whether there is a change in

favour of women regarding the distribution of power, once they have lived the migration experience and come back to their countries with the intention to settle permanently.

## **2.2. Gendered geographies of power**

In order to explain the effects of return migration in the gender relations between women and their families, this study has found very useful theoretical approaches regarding gender, migration and household dynamics. One of this is the theoretical model of “gendered geographies of power”, coined by Pessar and Mahler (2003). They consider three important elements that should be included in the analysis of gender dynamics articulated with migration processes: geographic scales, social locations and power geometries.

First, through the concept of geographic scales, they try to focus attention on the idea that gender is constantly operating on various spatial and social scales (i.e. the body, the family, the state). It is between and within this particular scales that gender practices and ideologies are subjected to re-affirmation, reconfiguration or change (Pessar and Mahler 2003, p. 815). For example, inter-states processes, like labour migration would have an effect on how gender roles might change at the individual and the family scale when a woman migrates to become the economic provider. In this study, I want to focus predominantly on the scale of the individual and the family and how gender ideologies that operate upon them are affected by the phenomenon of return migration. Furthermore, I want to explore how gender relations in the family are affected by return migration. By taking into account the simultaneity in which gender dynamics operate at the scales of the

individual and the household, I will be able to provide a more comprehensive analysis of this issue.

The concept of “social locations” is also very important. According to the authors, it refers to the “persons” positions within interconnected power hierarchies that are created through a series of socially stratifying factors (Pessar and Mahler 2003, p. 816). People normally act and think according to what their positions dictate. Given the different existing power hierarchies (class, race, gender, sexuality, nationality, etc), they are positioned in very different and complex ways in the relations that establish with others. Moreover, these positions are not static but fluid and always shifting depending on the specific contexts and situations. This is relevant for the study because by looking at the ways Peruvian women act and perceive their relations in the family, their locations in the gender hierarchies and the shifts caused by return can be more easily identified.

Finally, the concept of power geometry, introduced first by Massey (1994) and reworked by Pessar and Mahler (2003), is central to understand why some gender beliefs and practices that operate throughout various geographic scales are prone to re-structuring and change, and why some social locations are fluid and able to transform. Massey (1994) establishes that recognising the agency that people are able to exert over the processes that determine their social locations is essential to understand processes of empowerment.

Related to this, Kabeer (1999) and Malhotra et al. (2002) mention that putting attention to agency provides information about enabling factors (material resources, skills, family support, etc.) that allow individuals to make strategic life choices and achieve their goals (that is, to become empowered). Moreover, Pessar and Mahler (2003) indicate that the focus should not just be on agency, but in these enabling factors, especially in individual characteristics that make possible substantive agency. Thus, identifying agency



and the elements that it involves, is important to determine the possibilities that women have to change their position in the family hierarchies after return.

The importance to take account on these elements is also mentioned by Tienda and Booth (1991). The authors claim that among many things, individual characteristics and personal traits either constrain or allow women (and men) to improve their social situation (Tienda and Booth 1991, p. 54-55). Thus, focusing in some of these factors and their influence in the event of return migration will be useful to reveal what are the restrictions and possibilities for women to shift their positions in the power hierarchies once they return to their home countries.

In a study carried by Handapangoda (2012) about returnee women from Sri Lanka, the importance of the individual factors that enable agency is confirmed. The author found that individual potential and personal qualities like initiative contributed in the possibilities of returnee women to negotiate their status in the household. She also found that other enabling factors, like family support, made a difference for returnee women since those who claimed having support from spouses were more able to get back into productive occupations.

In sum, the theoretical model of gendered geographies of power is useful because it allows to analyse in a more detailed way how gender acts over the interactions that are established between returnee women and their families; how it influences the location and relocation of their positions within the shifting power hierarchies in the household; and how it affects and is affected by agency and its elements, transforming their social locations and contexts. The study will draw on this framework, in order to locate the gender elements that determine, are re-affirmed or become modified by the relations that are established and negotiated among the returnees and the non-migrants.

### 2.3. Migration, gender roles and social change

Tienda and Booth (1991) have developed a theoretical framework that remarks on the necessity to carry out research in the interconnected fields of migration and gender, to allow for a better understanding of the types of situations through which the social locations of women are prone to be transformed, therefore causing social change. In that sense, they argue that it is vital to take into account gender ideologies, obligations and expectations that are embedded in certain societal contexts, determining the roles of men and women. These expectations tend to produce beliefs, practices, activities and behaviours that are reproduced in the social relations, determining certain roles and uneven power positions for both of them (Tienda and Booth 1991, p. 52-53).

This is connected in some way with the idea of “doing gender” coined by West and Zimmerman (1987) and taken up by Chesley (2011) in her work on bread-winning mothers. The concept claims that gender is constructed through the interaction of individuals trying to meet the societal expectations around the sex in which they are categorized. That is why, when women become the bread-winners, they experience feelings of guilt, leading them to spend more hours in care-work whenever is possible to meet their role as care-givers.

An empirical research carried by Guarnizo (1996) about Dominican returnees has explored this idea further. Through interviews, he was able to discover that women were more prone to cite family-related reasons to return than men (Guarnizo 1996, p. 26). Furthermore, he found that the most common motivations for women to return were concerns about their children and that they were more likely than men to return before accomplishing their migration goals. This seems to confirm partially that the decisions of women about return are strongly mediated by the internalisation of their roles as care-

givers, which, at the same time, would likely affect their possibilities of shifting their social locations in the power hierarchies within the household.

Similarly, a study by Zhang (2013) about returnee women in rural China confirms the importance of context-specific gender ideas and roles in determining the decision and outcomes of return migration. Zhang argues that the prevailing patriarchal ideologies in China affect how women take decisions regarding return migration, as they are strongly constrained by the subordinate position they occupy in the households. Therefore, their decisions about mobility are not independent, even when it appears so, as they are constrained by their roles as daughters, wives and mothers.

Additionally, a study about Mexican women and migration by Hondagneu-Sotelo (1992), confirms the centrality of paying attention to the gender roles and ideologies embedded in specific contexts. She found that even when women are able to migrate, their experiences in the destination countries tend to be strongly marked by the cultural beliefs around gender that are embedded in their home context. This might happen either just through transference of their normative roles to the host country and/or by having to compensate the abandonment of their caring obligations at home through money and gifts. Nevertheless, Hondagneu-Sotelo also recognizes that gender is fluid, works in complex ways, and that many of the gendered beliefs and practices are prone to change thanks to some dynamics boosted by migration, thus a gradual modification of the locations in the power hierarchies of men and women.

Handapangoda's (2012) study further illuminates points made by Tienda and Booth (1991). In her study, the author was able to recognize that the internalisation of gender ideologies could explain at some extent why many of these women did not experience an

upturn in their situation by being relocated in a position of power in the family hierarchies. The results showed that the internalisation of gender ideologies in Sri Lankan rural society were the most downplaying factors for the social empowerment of returnee women (Handapangoda 2012, p. 557).

The fact that the Sri Lankan women are often socially accused for abandoning their families, created feelings of guilt that push them to resume their normative roles upon return. This means that they often have to give up on other activities, like starting small businesses. In addition, since men experienced decline in their status when their spouses became the main providers, they tried to balance this loss by neglecting care-work. This, for Handapangoda, results on the re-affirmation of the men's position of power, hence being a sign of the maintenance of the subordinate social location of Sri Lankan returnee women.

Yet, the author also mentions that although the gender order seems to relapse with return, there are some slight changes in the traditional gender ideologies that take place due to the process of women's migration. This experience re-defined the ideas regarding the mothering and fathering roles, as well as those regarding the productive work of men and women (Handapangoda 2012, p. 576-577). In that sense, it is important to recognise that traditional gender roles and power hierarchies can be subverted and gradually changed thanks to (return) migration.

In summary, this framework points on the importance to recognise that the changes in the women's power position and their interactions with other individuals are influenced by context-specific gender ideologies. Women (and men) have to be accountable for them and are always at risk of being stigmatised for not "doing gender" appropriately, feeling pressured to meet gendered social expectations. This is particularly salient in the process of

return migration, because the placement of gendered individuals in different contexts leads them to “do gender” differently and sometimes contradictorily. This opens the possibility for the transformation of the gender ideologies and the shifting of the social locations of the individuals involved.

## **2.4 Dynamics of domestic decision-making**

Tienda and Booth (1991) also stress the necessity to look at both the distribution and re-distribution of domestic goods at different stages of the migration process and how they are affected by the previously mentioned factors. By looking at these exchanges, it can be determined whether or not there has been social change and a shift on the locations of the individuals involved in them. Furthermore, by paying attention to both types of exchanges in close interaction with the individual factors, it can be determined whether there has been an improvement, a decline or a restructuring of the position of women in the family.

An improvement would most likely be mediated by positive factors like the transformation of the gender ideologies in favour of women; a greater family support and recognition of their contributions to the family; a receiving context that is socially and economically favourable to women and by personal characteristics that allow them to take the initiative and look for ways to become more socially and economically empowered.

Differently, a restructuring will probably be determined by the combination of some of the positive factors, like a more economically favourable receiving context, together with other downplaying ones like deeply rooted gender ideologies that will not allow a greater

change of the social locations, and thus, of the terms of exchange. In summary, it can be stated that different combinations of the previously mentioned factors, paired together with changes brought by the event of return migration, will establish the new terms of economic and non-economic exchanges for women and their relocations on an improved position in the power structures.

A concrete example of restructuring of inequalities can be found in the case of Sri Lankan women mentioned before. As regards restructuring, I understand a situation where the unequal position of women vis-à-vis men, remains the same but where the circumstances in which the economic and non-economic exchanges take place have changed at some extent. The majority of the Sri Lankan returnee women studied by Handapangoda, once back home, resumed their unpaid care activities in male-dominated homes, something that did not differ that much from their unequal situation before migrating.

Even in the cases where women continued contributing to the family expenditure, they did not hold greater authority or autonomy in the family. Moreover, their contributions to the household were not necessarily better appreciated by the members of the family. Hence, most of the women were still in a subordinate position in the gender hierarchies. The only things that changed concretely for them were the contexts where economic and non-economic exchanges took place and in some cases, a greater control over their earnings; this, lamentably, did not always have a significant effect in the improvement of their social locations.

Another example of restructuring is provided by the women studied by Zhang (2013). In this case, women's position in the household also did not experience any changes after return. Even when during migration, their contribution made them more visible in the

family and upon return they gained some power on the decision-making processes, most of them were back to assume “redundant non-waged labour in the household” (Zhang 2013, p. 186). Moreover, their agency to make decisions was obtained through their “proper position” in the family, which means that they could only exert decision power through the same patriarchal mechanisms that maintained them as subordinate. Thus, there is no substantive transformation in their unequal position in the family from the moment previous to migration.

## **2.5 Gender ideologies in Peru and the role of women**

In order to explain the effects of return migration in the position of Peruvian women returnees in the family, it is important to discuss how gender relations, ideologies and roles are organized in Peru. As mentioned by Tienda and Booth (1991), context-specific gender ideologies influence the relations between gendered individuals and determine a hierarchy of power in the scales in which these relations take place. Given that return migration implies the re-insertion of women in relations that are informed by a predominant system of gender ideas, it is important to identify what these ideas entail.

However, identifying a single system of gender ideologies in Peru is a difficult task. Given the cultural heterogeneity of the Peruvian society and the existence of different ethnic groups and rural communities that preserve their own gender dynamics (Fuller 2004), it is impossible to make a generalisation. Since my research is located in the city of Lima, I will concentrate on describing the system of gender ideologies regarding the family in the Peruvian urban context.

The prevailing gender ideologies in urban Peru have inherited their characteristics from the traditional hierarchic system from the colonies and the processes of modernization of the political system during the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries which led to a more equal society (Fuller 2004). During the twentieth century, changes in gender relations happened in a faster pace, given that women gained equal rights, political participation, access to education and possibilities to control their fertility (Fuller 2004).

However, some traditional characteristics remained, as the State is still weak, preserving patrimonial traits. Furthermore the Catholic Church preserves a strong influence over public life (Fuller 2005), pushing conservative agendas and views in public opinion. This contributed to maintain the position of women in Peruvian society as unequal in contrast with that of men. This has also created inequalities among women from upper, middle and lower classes, as the latter have less possibilities to fulfil the ideal image of “modern woman and mother” (Fuller 2005) that predominates Peruvian society.

The prevailing idea regarding the role of Peruvian women is that they have to aim to be “working mothers and wives”. Thus, the woman’s life project is no longer linked exclusively to her mothering role. This has been caused by the fact that Peruvian women have now greater choice than before, as they have access to education and birth control methods, although this is not uniform, especially among lower class women.

Being a “working woman”<sup>4</sup> is considered highly desirable among Peruvian women (Fuller 1993) because it is related to obtaining a status in society, which has often led many of them to put marriage and reproduction on hold, in order to prioritise their careers. This has been particularly true for the generation of single women that have reached adulthood

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<sup>4</sup> The term in Spanish “mujer de carrera” cannot be literally translated in English, as it loses its meaning. I will use this term, as it encapsulates its meaning a lot better.



in the past twenty years, as they have grown exposed to the changes brought about by modernisation. Moreover, most of the women that became mothers in the last period who were already working at the time were able to choose to go back to work without any obstacles. This has entailed, to an extent, a more balanced distribution of the childcare and domestic work between men and women and has generated changes in the role of men in the family as well.

However, even when this happens, the roles of Peruvian women are still strongly tied to the household. Despite the many changes that have allowed them to enter the job market and gain a different position in the family and in society, they derive their social recognition mainly from their roles as wives and mothers (Fuller 2004). In that sense, the decisions regarding their careers are related to their domestic roles, as they tend to prioritise their duties in the household at the moment of choosing jobs.

Consequentially, they end up spending more time in housework, as well as advancing less in their careers than their male partners. Moreover, this also limits their capacity of contribution to the family expenses, which, at the same time, determines a less privileged position to negotiate in the household bargaining (Fuller 2004). In conclusion, the normative disposition of roles in the household is preserved, with the men keeping their position as head of the household and breadwinners, whereas the women are still subordinate, although at less extent, to male authority.

## 2.6 Discussion

Taking into account diverse approaches regarding gender, migration and domestic dynamics, I have been able to build a plausible framework that suits the objectives of the research. Its adequacy derives from its ability to provide an explanation on how return migration affects the gender relations and the perceptions of women about their own social locations. First, it allows for a better understanding on how the characteristics of the context of return have an effect on gender beliefs, practices and ideologies and on their possibilities to be changed or maintained (Tienda and Booth, 1991). Here, taking into account the gender ideologies and roles of Peruvian women could prove useful in contextualising these dynamics. Second, it helps to recognise how these gender ideologies mediate on the decision of return migration and how they influence the possibilities of change in the location of women once they are back at home. Finally, it focuses on the terms through which economic and non-economic exchanges in the household are carried after return. This will allow identifying if and why the inequities of women vis-à-vis the men of their families have been reduced or maintained.

### III. METHODOLOGY

This study has relied on some elements of the grounded theory approach, since it aims to have flexibility in the process of collecting, using and analysing data (Flick 2009). The element of flexibility has been central to this research, since it deals with a phenomenon –return migration and gender relations in the household- that so far, has not been addressed satisfactorily by other studies. Given that there is a lack of theories and plausible explanations regarding this issue, my main purpose has been to build a deeper understanding of it, increasing the knowledge that I had about it through the same process of research. Thus, the adequacy of some of the tools provided by grounded theory has derived from my objective to come up with a rich analysis of the complex phenomenon of return migration and its effects in the gender relations within the household.

In the following lines, I will provide more detail about the methods of sampling, data collection and analysis, explaining why they are appropriate in approaching the phenomenon of study. I will point out some limitations and shortcomings derived from field work and try to show how they provide information about the lack of theoretical approaches on gender and return migration. Finally, I will also discuss briefly some ethical issues that have risen during the data collection process and how they pose some challenges in doing qualitative research.

### 3.1. Method of data collection

The method of data collection combined informal conversations, episodic interviews and elements of semi-structured in-depth interviews. This combination is useful because it allows the researcher to capture deep subjective meaning as well as gather narrative-episodic and semantic knowledge from the respondents' answers (Flick 2009). Through this method, I was able to gather information about the concrete situations and circumstances that took place during different stages in the process of return migration. Moreover, I was also able to get information on how the interviewees extracted meaning, abstracted concepts and relations from these circumstances. Consequently, I obtained rich information that allowed me to compensate for the limitations of not being able to observe return migration in a longitudinal manner.

I included two types of questions in the interview guides in order to make it easier to capture different answers from the respondents that alluded to the different types of knowledge mentioned above. One set of questions focused on allowing the interviewees to develop their own narratives in detail, being similar to those found on semi-structured in-depth interviews, but focusing on specific "episodes". The other set focused on more concretely pointed questions (Flick 2009), but still gave some freedom to the interviewee to expand and systematise her own knowledge about the phenomenon in question. Both sets of questions were structured in a way that connected context and concepts systematically, without limiting the possibilities of the interviewee to elaborate on her own knowledge regarding the phenomenon in question.

### 3.2. Sampling and Data Gathering

Drawing on the openness of the grounded theory approach, I started my fieldwork without knowing what would be the extension of the basic population I was going to take into account for my study. However, I had a few ideas about the characteristics of my interviewees. In that sense, the selected cases had to share the basic features of being the former breadwinner, returnee women from Spain.

Nonetheless, getting access to a sample sharing these characteristics was very difficult, not only because it proved to be extremely specific, but also because of other two reasons. One of them was due to the invisibility of returned migrants, which might be linked with the shame usually associated with return, as it is considered a “failure” (Bastia 2011, p. 588). In that sense, getting access to the wider group of returnees was already a difficult task. Second, women in Peru are still uncomfortable with being labelled as breadwinners, given the internalised ideologies and social expectations about normative gender roles in the family (Fuller 2004).

Consequently, I had to redefine the features of my sample, something that proved unproblematic given the flexibility of my research design and the combination of sampling methods. One of them was purposive sampling based on the principle of convenience. I used this method during the first moment of my fieldwork, since it entailed selecting the cases that were easiest to access to given the limitations of time and money. According to Patton (2002) this is a suitable way to select cases when there are limited resources of time and people. Once I was able to get access to a few cases through purposive sample, I

resorted to snow-balling sampling in order to diminish the risk of a bias. A more detailed explanation of the fieldwork in Peru as well as on the cases will be presented in the following section.

### 3.2.1 Fieldwork in Peru

During the months of January and February 2014, I conducted fieldwork in the capital city of Peru, Lima. According to the statistics collected by the National Institute of Statistics and Informatics of Peru (INEI), this city is the context of departure and return of most of the Peruvian migrants<sup>5</sup>. Also, it is where most of the returnee women will be more likely to resettle, since it is the economic centre of the country and provides greater chances for returnees to start business ventures and gives them and their families, better opportunities to experience social mobility.

Given the fact that returnee women do not usually tend to group in the same neighbourhoods or gather in the same urban spaces like their peers abroad, they are most likely to be dispersed through the city and therefore, being difficult to reach in a single specific area. This dispersion, together with the other difficulties mentioned above, will also create some obstacles in accessing this population.

Given the difficulties, I resorted to different ways to access the population of interest. One of them was tracing and contacting non-governmental and civil organisations in Peru

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<sup>5</sup> INEI-OIM-DIGEMIN: Perú: Estadísticas de la Emigración Internacional de Peruanos e Inmigración de Extranjeros 1990 - 2011

and Spain dealing with migrants that could provide me with contact details of returned migrants. These organisations were:

- The Association of Families of Peruvian Migrants and Returnees (AFAMIPER), a small civil association formed with the aim of influencing the state policies about migration.
- The Organisation of Ibero-American States (OEI), an international organization that at the time, was implementing a project of aid for Peruvian migrants in vulnerable conditions returning from European countries.
- The Association of Latin American Women in Spain, AMALGAMA, a non-profit civil association of women in Spain.

From these organisations, I was able to obtain the contact details of five women in total and I could draw my three first respondents. In a second round, to downplay the risk of bias, I asked these women to provide me the contact details of acquaintances that could be in a similar situation as theirs. As a result, I was able to get two more respondents through snow-balling. Finally, I got access to my last two respondents by different methods. One of them was through an ad I posted on a social network page of Peruvian migrants in Spain. The last one was through a personal acquaintance. Given the difficulties in qualitative research, the researcher has to rely on creativity, not only during the process of creating categories and analyzing, but also when difficulties during fieldwork arise.

In consequence, the total number of respondents I could get access to was seven (7) women. As previously mentioned, during the first moment of purposive sample, I re-

defined the basic characteristics for the selection of respondents in order to get to a wider sample. A detailed description of the cases can be found in the following table:

**Table n° 1: Characteristics of the cases**

	<b>Time spent abroad</b>	<b>Time living in Peru after return</b>	<b>Economic involvement during migration</b>	<b>Marital status</b>	<b>Presence of children</b>
<b>Belisa</b>	20 years	2 years	High	Married	Yes
<b>Monica</b>	8 years	7 months	High	Married <sup>6</sup>	Yes
<b>Ana Maria</b>	10 years	2 years	Low	Married	Yes
<b>Maria</b>	10 years	5 years	High	Divorced	Yes
<b>Liliana</b>	10 years	2 years	High	Single	No
<b>Rosa</b>	16 years	7 months	High	Married	Yes
<b>Gabriela</b>	7 years	2 years	High	Married	No

It could be argued that, given the fact that these is a small number of cases, saturation has not been reached and thus, it would be difficult to identify commonalities drawn out of the implications of these commonalities to the larger whole (Baker and Edwards 2012). However, in qualitative research there is not such a thing as an “ideal” number of

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<sup>6</sup> Even though Monica was still legally married to her husband, they lived in separate households. Moreover, her husband’s involvement with the family was really low.



interviews that one has to carry out. The number depends on many considerations that are specific to the research, as access to resources, time and how important the number is important for the objectives of the study (Baker and Edwards 2012). Furthermore, having a small-n of cases does not mean to not be able to capture the richness of the cases and complexities of the phenomenon of study, as this can be achieved through a detailed case-study.

Finally, considering that the objective of this research is to identify the effects of return on the gender relations, the research will be focused on the “snapshots” of women’s daily lives and the effect that return migration has on them, although being able to relate them to some points in the past. Here, I want to clarify that while my purpose was not to reconstruct in a retrospective manner the whole process of migration until the event of return, I believe that it is important to allow some flexibility for the interviewees to be able to identify the circumstances and factors connected to the past that have influenced some outcomes at the present moment.

### **3.4. Ethical considerations**

Ethical considerations are something essential to take into account during the whole research process. The researcher has to consider the integrity, interests and concerns of the participants at every step (Flick 2009), being constantly aware of them to avoid interfering with their rights. The researcher does not only have to assure the welfare, dignity and rights of the participants, but also aim for informed consent during the data collection (Flick

2009). Respondents should be able to have complete information about the conditions under which the research is taking place and be entirely capable to make conscious choices about their participation in it, so risks are prevented and rights are protected.

In doing qualitative research, the researcher will often find situations in which ethical issues arise and decisions have to be made in order to protect the respondent. During fieldwork, I have experienced some situations that made me raise some ethical concerns.

Before conducting my interviews, I first made sure to have full informed consent from these women. During our first contact, I explained to them the aim of the research and the subjects that we would deal with during the interviews. They also had full knowledge of being recorded and verbal agreement about the use of their testimonies was obtained and recorded before starting the interview. They were also fully aware of their possibilities to stop the recording or to ask for confidentiality from my part. None of them were especially reluctant or worried about the information they had disclosed with me.

However, during some of the interviews, concern about harm during the data collection process arose. For two of these women, return migration was still a sensitive subject, since it was attached to feelings of loss and estrangement. Furthermore, as the research was framed in the context of the family, some of them expressed having gone through familial difficulties that they were still trying to make sense of.

Many of these issues came up in the narratives of these women during the interviews, often accompanied by tears and prolonged moments of silence. During these moments, it was necessary for me to privilege the principle of confidentiality, so I often turned off the tape recorder and after a moment, we were able to continue again without any problems. In

situations like this, it is important for the researcher to show some sensitivity and be reflective, considering the participants role and think from their perspective (Flick 2009, p. 43). By doing so, the researcher will learn to more adequately balance ethical concerns and the necessity to obtain data.

### **3.5. Data analysis**

Finally, the analysis of the obtained data was made through the multi-stage procedure of thematic coding. This is the most suitable method because it pursues a deep analysis of the cases taken into account, preserving the meaningful relations found in each case regarding the issue of study (in this case, the issue of the effect of return migration on gender). This is important for the objectives of the research, because it keeps the specificity of the narratives and own interpretations of the interviewees. At the same time it allows for comparability (by finding common themes and categories among them, across different domains). In that sense, it goes along very well with the episodic interview method, by allowing both certain structuring and openness regarding contexts (Flick 2009, p. 323).

The procedure to reveal the characteristic elements and structures of the data (Dey 1993) was the following: first, I read the data several times in order to familiarize with it and be able to notice some patterns. During this first stage, I was able to come up with some initial codes and description about them. After doing a second revision of the data, I was able to identify where patterns occurred and to keep the information of the data I deemed useful, labelling and categorising in order to come up with more comprehensive codes and the

descriptions of them. In the third stage, I combined the codes into themes that reflected accurately the data. On the following stages I refined the themes, defined them and determined which ones contributed to a better understanding of what the data was about, the behaviours and the contexts that produce them. In that sense, the main themes emerged as central: reasons to return; access of women to material resources before and after return; control over own/family finances before/after return; contribution to the family economy before/ after return; gender ideologies regarding to the family; level of authority before/after return; time spent in domestic labour before/after return; changes on the identity upon return; improved sense of agency.

## **IV. THE NATURE OF THE DECISION TO RETURN**

Identifying the motivations and factors that influence the decision of return is a complex task, as return migration is a multi-faceted and heterogeneous phenomenon (Cassarino 2004). According to the evidence, there are several conditions- like social status, resources, skills, etc- that influence the decision to return, making every situation a particular one. However, given that there are some coincidences in how these conditions have affected returnee women, some similarities in their motivations have been identified.

Evidence shows that women have not only one, but several reasons that influence their decision to return, although some are more decisive than others. Yet, all of them are important to understand the path of return. Furthermore, a few of them have taken the decision to return, mainly as a response to current problems that have pushed them out of Spain. Conversely, most of them have done so in order to avoid future difficulties, trying to prevent risks that would severely affect the situation of their families and their own situation.

### **4.1 “I did not want to, but I had to”: “real factors” and the decision to return as a response to a critical situation**

As mentioned previously, the reasons to return that some interviewees had were mainly a response to current difficulties that they have experienced while living in Spain, which made their lives and the lives of their families no longer sustainable. Thus, these

reasons were “real factors”, as their situations were already critical and their possibilities of survival were significantly reduced, experiencing a strong push to leave the country. Consequently, they became their primary motivations to make the decision, which sometimes were reinforced by other secondary considerations that triggered the final event of return. According to the evidence, the decision to return of Belisa, Liliana and Maria was in response to the current problems they were having.

Belisa and Liliana, returned because of an unexpected event, which was the loss of their jobs. Furthermore, they found it difficult to get another one and to recover financially, making the situation even more critical. According to Belisa’s account, since she and her husband became unemployed because of the financial crisis, maintaining that their level of expenditure was becoming increasingly impossible. Since they had no other income than Belisa’s unemployment funds, the necessity to make a decision was urgent, as they had three small children to take care of.

*“Well, we worked in two sectors that have been severely affected by the financial crisis, so we lost our jobs (...) we were not very reflexive in taking that decision, because time was running out and money too (...) also, we had to make sure to save for the family expenses, so our children would not lack anything...” (Belisa)*

The case of Liliana was similar to some extent, as she too became unemployed and was unable to find a job that would cover her own needs. Furthermore, she did not have savings or unemployment funds. Although she did not seem to have strong familial reasons

to return, as she was single and did not have children, the family component was also important in her decision because she economically supported her mother and her older brother.

Losing the means of survival implies not being able to contribute to the family expenses, which brings some contradictions, as the returnee woman is not able to maintain her role of economic provider or head of the family (Handapangoda 2012). This reinforces the decision to return, because the pressures the returnee has by assuming that role become more difficult to bear once her means of provision are limited. Therefore, return is considered an option that allows her to avoid the pressures of taking the responsibility of both her and her family's expenses and not receiving any income.

*“It came a moment when I was very tense because my part-time job ended (...) and I had to take care of my expenses and the expenses of my mom, but I did not have money (...) I did not know if the next month I would have an income (...) so there is when I said ‘I have to go back to Peru, to see how things are there.’” (Liliana)*

Finally, the decision of Maria to return was entirely motivated by a family-related factor. She mentions that the main reason that pushed her to return to Peru was that her younger daughter had developed some psychological problems while Maria was in Spain, which led to a family crisis. This situation created feelings of guilt in Maria, which made her decide to return to resume her mothering role.

In summary, the job loss, the decrease of the contribution to the family income and family problems were real factors significantly affecting these women and pushing them to choose the option to return. This is similar to the findings of Guarnizo (1996) as well as Zhang (2013) that unemployment and family matters are among the most prominent issues for women to consider return. Their situations were so critical that they rendered the stay in Spain no longer sustainable. In these cases, taking the decision became really urgent, as their situations were already declining and family members were affected by it. In that sense, they were not only pressured by the difficult circumstances, but also by the internalised gender and family obligations, which forced them to assume a greater share of the responsibility for their families' welfare.

#### **4.2 Risk management: pull factors and the decision to return**

Most of the interviewees have mentioned that return was motivated by the necessity to avoid dealing with the risks of staying longer in Spain, as it could severely affect their economic and familial situations. Thus, their main reasons to return were not concrete circumstances affecting them at the moment, but the anticipation of problems that could become unsustainable in the near future, if they were not previously controlled. For example, for Ana Maria, the decision to return was motivated mainly by the expected effects of the financial crisis on her husband's job and on the welfare of the family. Even though her husband had not been fired and his position was not particularly threatened, she considered that this situation created a lot of uncertainty around the family stability.



*“(...) my husband was working in the bank. The economic situation was not bad, but my husband was supposed to get a promotion and then nothing happened. We also had just bought a house and the bills were high (...) the financial crisis started getting worsening. So then, we decided to return (...)” (Ana Maria)*

Interestingly, even though Ana Maria had lost her job, this was not considered as urgent a reason to return as the uncertainty over her husband’s work situation. This might have happened because her husband’s contribution was the most important, so losing it would have been problematic for the family. However, this also responds in certain way to the internalisation from the part of Ana Maria, of the normative wife role, as she granted priority to her husband’s decisions. Therefore, a reason for women to return might be mainly related to prevent a decline on the economic situation of the family and be reinforced by pressures to accept the decisions of other family members.

Similarly, even though Gabriela did not lose her job by the time of return, she could foresee that her sector was soon going to be affected by the financial crisis. Furthermore, her husband’s situation became somewhat vulnerable because of the financial crisis too, having to travel periodically to Italy in order to be able to work. These circumstances also created some tensions in the couple, so Gabriela wanted to avoid further problems.

*“There was this factor, the financial crisis that was coming...they were cutting the funds for projects I was involved in (...) also, my husband spent half of his time in Italy, because he was not able to get jobs in Spain. So I said ‘no, this is not going well, we have to go.’ I mean, I could have stayed, but then I would have probably lost my job anyways (...)” (Gabriela)*

From this, it can be said that another reason for women to return involves both, avoiding the risk of decline in the economic situation and of familial or marital stability. The case of Monica is also family related. Even though she also wanted to avoid economic risks, her strongest motivation to return was to prevent more serious problems for her younger daughter, who had been unable to adapt to Spain. This shows how the pressures related to the mothering role affected importantly the decision to return.

In the same way, Rosa’s decision also anticipated problems with her husband. She believed that returning was the best option to avoid future tensions, because in Peru, her husband had more job possibilities and could retake his role as breadwinner. Rosa believed that the fact that she became the breadwinner, while her husband was the care-giver, was potentially problematic for the marriage stability. Pressures of friends and family to maintain the normative gender roles reinforced this idea. Thus, she felt compelled to “do gender” in order to meet the social expectations imposed on her to fit normative gender roles (West and Zimmerman, 1987).

*“A friend always told me ‘you have to let him support his family, because in Peru he has the opportunity, you do not need to do anything else’ (...) my husband told me that my friends perceived he was depressed, ashamed, psychologically affected. So those feelings made me weigh the decision to return (...)” (Rosa)*

In sum, the evidence suggests that instead of reacting to existing problems, most of these women have decided to return to avoid future problems that they had perceived. Given the levels of uncertainty and the unfavourable conditions, these women opted to prevent risks. Therefore, they decided to return in order to diminish the effect of adverse circumstances, like economic or familial crisis, even when these decisions meant to leave their jobs and previously gained status, as in the case of Rosa. Family related factors were particularly prevalent in persuading these women to make the decision to return. This happens because gender ideologies are at work, pushing women to assume the responsibility of the family members during challenging times.

### **4.3 Secondary factors and triggers**

In the previous sections, the evidence has shown that the main motivations to take the decision to return are aimed to respond either to current difficulties or future problems. Nonetheless, it is important to pay attention to the secondary factors and “triggers” that lead to the final event of return, because these are the ones that reinforce the initial reason to return and determine the final outcome.

For example, Belisa and her husband had considered living in another European country. However the fact that she had few economic resources to mobilize to a new country, together with the information that life costs in Peru were lower, made her realize that she could cover her family's expenses better by returning to live in Peru. These two factors, together a matter related to their children's schooling, finally triggered the decision to return. Furthermore, the possibility to count on the support of Belisa's parents for housing was a secondary factor that reinforced the decision.

*"(...) in fact, when we decided to return, we considered several other countries (...) then we started closing options...and everything pulled us here. First of all, because of the school we had found here for my children ... and second, because of having the family here, my parents (...)" (Belisa)*

Similarly, Monica also mentioned several family related secondary reasons that reinforced her decision to return. One of them was meeting her grand-children and recovering contact with the children she left in Lima. Yet, Monica also mentions a personal component, which was exploring the possibility of a relationship with a man living in Peru. Therefore, the decision to return is not only influenced by the availability or lack of resources to mobilize to the host country, but also by gender ideas and practices about being a mother and being a "woman" in a context of migration.

Gabriela considered a mix of reasons related to resources, personal reasons and family related reasons to back up the decision to return. One particularly important personal

reason that triggered return was that she wanted to start her own craft business in Peru, which was her main goal in life. A secondary reason that reinforced this decision was to reconnect with her parents, especially with her mother, as they used to be close to each other before she left for Spain.

*“(...) I partly wanted to return because I wanted to start a venture and I could not do it from Spain (...) so I had been relegating it. I knew it was easier to do here, that I could achieve it here, so that was a reason (...)” (Gabriela)*

As evidence shows, the triggers and secondary factors have been important in pushing women to finally make the decision to return. Similar to the real factors and the risk factors, they also combine personal and family related reasons. These factors are lower in the hierarchy of importance to determine the decision to return. The secondary factors reinforce the already taken decision to return and act as a way to reassure the woman of its adequacy. The triggering factors are those that make the decision to return an inevitable one, leaving other possibilities aside. They both are marginal to the main push or pull factors, but are still central to guarantee the realization of the return.

#### 4.4 Conclusion

The nature of the decision to return provides important clues to the possibilities of change in the position of women in the household. It also informs how decisions to return are influenced by internalized gender ideas and obligations, having an important effect on how a woman's power position might change or not. This confirms the idea that gender contributes to the organisation of (return) migration patterns and different pathways for women along the migration experience and in this case, in the return migration experience (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003).

The findings show that most of the interviewees put familial reasons at the centre of their decisions to return (family related reasons), especially in the cases when there are serious difficulties affecting the family stability (real factors), which confirms the idea that the women's reasons to return (of women) are directly related to the women's normative gender roles in the household (Zhang 2013). These decisions are sometimes reinforced by personal motivations, without them being their central incentive to return to Peru.

Moreover, the triggering reasons that have led the interviewees to take the final decisions are mainly connected to family considerations. This seems to confirm the findings of Guarnizo (1996). Similar to my findings, Guarnizo argued that familial concerns were important for Dominican women to make the decision to return, their children's welfare being among the main reasons.

Following this, a few observations can be made. First of all, when women's decision to return aims to deal mainly with current difficulties affecting the family, there

could be a decline on their position of power. Given that the decision of return is marked by an unexpected family event and by restrictions to meet economic goals, returnees tend to have fewer material resources to mobilize to the home country, making economic reintegration difficult (Cassarino 2004).

Moreover, pressures over women caused by the internalisation of normative gender ideologies might make them assume certain obligations upon return that restrict their possibilities to choose independently over their own resources or careers. It can also be said that when the reason to return balances concerns for the future personal and familial situations, as in the case of Gabriela, the gender ideologies are less at play in the decision. As a result, the location of women within the gendered relations in the household remains mostly unchanged. However, all of this has to be further explored together with other factors, in order to be able to understand the complex dynamics of gender relations in return migration.

## V. GENDER ALLOCATION AND THE POSITION OF RETURNEE WOMEN IN THE DOMESTIC ECONOMY

As argued in the previous chapter, for Peruvian returnee women, coming back to Peru implied having to leave everything behind in order to be able to find economic and familial stability that could no longer be guaranteed by staying in Spain. However, economic stability could not be achieved immediately once back in Peru and it depended on how prepared these women were to face the changes brought on by return migration.

Given that most of these women returned to Peru without clear job prospects or material resources, their possibilities regarding the dynamics of domestic economy changed. This happened because they could not maintain their position as economic providers at the same level as they could before returning. However, change is not always uniform, so in order to determine if there has been a decline or not, it is important to take into account how return migration affects the different factors related to the access, control and contribution of women to domestic finances.

Even though all of these factors are influenced by the access to resources, evidence has proven that its decline does not automatically entail a change on the other factors. This reveals that the dynamics of domestic economy are more complex than initially thought, as they are also influenced by elements of gender and agency, which mediate differently on the possibilities of women of stabilising economically in the household after return.



## 5.1 The position of women in the domestic economy

What happens when an event like return migration affects status of women as economic providers? As argued by Tienda and Booth (1991), focusing on the changes in the access of women to resources caused by migration, can provide information about the changes in the possibilities they have of affecting the distribution of the household resources. However, access to resources is linked to other factors, like the contribution to domestic finances, the control over their own finances and the control over the family finances that provide more complete information about the position of women in the domestic economy upon return.

In the interviews I conducted, I have been able to find that in most of the cases, the possibilities of women to influence the domestic economy had diminished after return. Hence, their position to negotiate the allocation of the resources with the rest of the family members had declined. This decline has not been uniform, as the above mentioned factors have been affected differently. Taking this into consideration, the respondents can be divided into three different groups, depending on the combination of these factors that determine different positions of women in the domestic economy, as shown in Table n°2.

**Table n° 2: Position of women in the domestic economy**

	<b>Access to material resources</b>	<b>Level of contribution to everyday expenses</b>	<b>Control over family finances</b>	<b>Control over own finances</b>
<b>Controlled provider</b>	Declined	Stable	Stable	Declined
<b>Autonomous agent</b>	Declined	Declined	Declined	Increased
<b>Stable provider</b>	Stable	Stable	Stable	Increased

### **5.1.1 Controlled providers**

In the first group are those women who have maintained the same level of control over the family finances as before, despite having lower resources. I denominate them “controlled providers” as they prioritise the allocation of their limited resources to the family expenditure, thus resulting in them having less control over their own finances. These are the cases of Belisa, Monica and Ana Maria. During their time in Spain, the three women were able to contribute to the household expenses at different levels, having access

to material resources through their wages and allocating part of it to their own expenditure. They also had some level of control over the decisions regarding the family finances, (being) in some cases higher than in others.

Monica and Belisa were important economic providers in Spain, having a greater part in the decisions over the household finances than other members of their families. Conversely, Ana Maria had less control than her husband, because she contributed less to the everyday expenses. A quote from Ana Maria can illustrate better how and why the level of contribution can remain almost the same after return. In her case, this happened because as she still contributes what she was able to, while her husband remained the main provider because he still had more access to resources than her.

*“(...) my husband paid for the monthly expenses when we were in Spain, because he earned more than me. I contributed with what I could. It is still like that, because he is working and I am still looking for a job (...) he tends to tell me first what we should do with it, but we talk about it, we talk everything out (...)”* (Ana Maria)

Conversely, upon return, Belisa was able to obtain money from unemployment funds and temporary jobs. Monica could access a limited income by installing a small catering business helped by her sons. Although these productive activities did not allow them to earn at the same level as they could in Spain, they remained one of the most important sources of income for their families, which might have guaranteed the maintenance of a high level of control over the household finances.

*“When I was working in Spain, I used to send home three to five hundred euro. Now it is impossible for me to do so, but I am still the only one maintaining the household, so I decide which part of the money goes to this or that (...) I am the one who decides, my opinion always prevails. I am the axis of this family (...)”* (Monica)

However, it seems that although the decline on their access to material resources had not necessarily affected their capacity to contribute and control the household finances, it affected their capacity to control their own finances. According to the interviewees, this seems to happen because after return, their earnings were limited and they had to prioritise the survival of their families over their own expenditure.

For example, as the contribution of Belisa and Monica could not be balanced by the contribution of other family members, all the income they obtained from their small jobs and funds had to be allocated entirely to cover the basic needs of the family. This forced them to leave aside any costs related to their personal expenses and to keep their previous lifestyle.

*“There is a big difference. When you work there, you work hard, but at the end of the day you are able to pamper yourself a bit. Here, even when you work as hard, you are not able to do so. I don’t know why it happens. It might be because my sons*

*are not contributing to pay the services at the moment (...) I am the only one who is supporting the family (...)*" (Monica)

Although Ana Maria also experienced a decline in the control exercised over her own finances, her situation is different to the other two women. She did not have any important sources of income upon return other than small savings and had to rely almost entirely on her husband's contribution to take care of her expenses. This means that, whereas in Spain she could allocate part of her salary to her own expenditure, now her husband was the one who decided over the resources she could use to cover her personal needs.

As (it) has been suggested previously, these women also suffered a decline in their access to resources mainly because they were unable to find jobs or occupations in Peru that could sustain their level of expenditure. They argued that one of the reasons why this happened is because they lacked access to networks of employers and job offers that suited their skills. However, a crucial reason that limited their possibilities to find a job is related to the fact that they felt the obligation to fulfil their mothering role upon return. This not only happened because their access to care services in Peru was restricted, but also because they had internalised the idea that they were the most adequate when it came to assuming childcare and domestic tasks rather than other family members.

For example, Belisa argued that she decided to spend the first year at home in order to spend more time with her children. However, this situation continued for longer than she had foreseen, because she did not have enough resources to pay for childcare. Furthermore, even when she had the help of her husband, he spent less time with the children because she

considered she was more capable of taking that responsibility. This, together with the fact that she believed her working experience did not fit the requirement of the Peruvian labour market, limited her possibilities of finding a full-time job.

*“Well, I returned with a one-month old baby and two children, so during the first period I was completely dedicated to be a mom (...) I had unemployment funds for two years, so this allowed me to stay at home for a year and a half (...) It was just during the second half of last year that I have really been able to start looking for jobs, but it has been difficult, because my CV is too bulky for the positions I apply for (...)”(Belisa)*

*“(...) I can barely leave the house because of the children. In summer, there is nothing I can do (...) It is going to be easier once the children go back to school, but I will still have to stay with my younger son (...) so yeah, there is a situation here that does not let me get out of the house that much, so I cannot properly search for the job I want.” (Belisa)*

Similarly, Monica and Ana Maria claimed that they chose to stay at home for a period to take care of their daughters, since they were having difficulties with the reintegration process. In the case of Monica, because she was the only economic provider, she tried to pair this obligation and her necessity to have an income by working from home. This shows

how gender ideologies are at work here. They determine the options women have to access material resources and reinforcing the already existing restrictions they face to enter paid occupations.

In summary, the access of these women to resources through paid jobs and the possibility of controlling their own finances declined, which resulted in these women having fewer opportunities to choose their own careers and to enter paid occupations. The evidence suggests that this happened because in most of the cases, women felt compelled to fulfil their mothering role, as they had dependent children to take care of. This is a response to the strong social pressures over them to assume their mothering roles, which are especially strong in countries with more normative gender norms like Peru (Fuller 2004).

However, it should be noted that even when they abide by these obligations and expectations, their growing consciousness about themselves show a shift in their identities and a greater awareness of their own agency. None of these women considered staying at home a permanent situation, having clear intentions of going back to the labour market and contributing again to the household finances. A quote from Monica illustrates this more accurately:

*“I want to have a job. At this point, I think I am able to do any job, I really do (...) I could work in a call centre or in a reception desk (...) I cannot say that I am scared, because I am not. I think I'm prepared for any challenges (...) I see myself having a real job, out of the house.” (Monica)*

### 5.1.2 Autonomous agents

Moving onto the second group, Maria and Liliana had experienced an overall decline in their position in the domestic economy during the first period after return. Nonetheless, in contrast to the women in the previous group, the level of control they had over their own finances had actually increased after this first period had passed, since they became independent from the households and did not have to contribute to them anymore.

During their time in Spain, they were the main economic providers for their households, sending money to their families in Peru and also being able to allocate some of their resources to pay for their expenses abroad. Moreover, the control they had over the family finances was higher than in the other cases, because they were the only economic contributors and they did not have to balance their decisions with other contributors.

*“(...) when I was sending money to my mom, I even said what had to be bought and it was done at my command (...) I pretty much had the power to decide (about)everything and anything (...)” (Liliana)*

Once they had returned to Peru, these women could not enter the job market for a period of time, so they did not have access to a steady income. Additionally, they did not count on any important savings, investments or other alternatives that would allow them to



continue contributing at any level to the household. Therefore, they became partially dependent on the basic resources other family members could provide for them, like accommodation or meals. This also meant losing almost completely their capacity to make decisions about household finances, because they had no money to support their families and therefore, their ability to decide over them was restricted.

For example, Liliana was unable to get a job immediately after return and she had to resort to the help of her mother and her older brother to cover her basic needs, although she had the remnants of some saving that she used for her own expenses. This meant a change in her family's attitude, which restricted her control of the domestic finances, being constantly reminded by them of the fact that she became almost a dependent, whereas before the situation was different.

*“(...) I was no longer an economic provider (...) I was just contributing (with) ‘my share’ (...) I could not decide for anyone, just for myself. And because I was living with my mother and brother, their position was like ‘you are no longer looking out for us, we are now taking care of you again (...)’ (Liliana)*

Similarly, after return, Maria could not find a job easily. She had some small money from the sale of her car, which she relied on for her own survival, while her accommodation was provided by her children. Furthermore, her older daughter contributed some money towards the household expenses, because she started working. Maria had little control over these resources, not only because she was not providing them, but also because

her older daughter was constantly remarking that it was her contribution, establishing her independence from her mother.

The loss of control over the family finances and of the status as main providers caused tensions between these women and their families. Some contradictions emerged, as their families considered that the women's migration brought more economic and personal costs than gains. In contrast, the women felt some sense of progress, regardless of this not having translated into material gains. This situation pushed them to start an independent life from their families, something that they were able to do as soon as they could find a job, disregarding their responsibilities as economic contributors to the household.

*“During the first period, there was a lot of distancing (...) after some months, I was able to find a job that required me to be outside of Lima and I took it because I wanted to take a break from my daughters (...) Currently I am not contributing to them, not at all, because they are both working (...) each one is independent and looks after their own expenses (...)” (Maria)*

Even when Maria's access to material resources declined because she earned less than in Spain, she gained more control over her own resources. This is a consequence of not having to allocate part of her income to the household finances because her daughters were economically independent. Thus, by becoming autonomous from the household, she was able to use her entire wage as she desired, having to only cover her own expenses.

Liliana's situation was analogous. Shortly after she got a job, she moved out from her mother's house to avoid dealing with the pressures to contribute to the family. This allowed her to have total control over her own resources. At this point, Liliana considered that the position of economic provider was more of a burden than a desirable status, so she avoided it, being very reluctant to contribute to her mother's expenses even when she could.

*“(...) At times, I feel pressures from the part of my mother. She says ‘I do not have money to pay the phone bill’ ... but I say ‘well, I have my own expenses’... I mean, I made it clear that I come first and if they need my support ...it is not precisely going to be monetary (...) it is none of my business. I've learned to be clear about those things, in order to avoid having pressures (...)” (Liliana)*

As previously discussed, these women lost their control of the household finances because they did not have access to resources and thus, they could not contribute to the family expenses. This happened because these women were unemployed upon return and unable to get a job for some time, after which they could get access to an income and be independent from their families. How can the initial decline in the access to resources and their partial recovery be explained? And what made these women decide to stop contributing to their households?

The answer to the first question points to some overlaps with the women of the previous group. Similarly to them, the initial decline in their capacity to access material

resources was linked to the fact that they could not get a job, as they did not have contacts with employers and their skills were under-appreciated in the Peruvian job market. For example, Maria mentioned that most of the job offers she received offered salaries that did not match her experience and skills, so she was reluctant to take them. Liliana argued that one major difficulty was that she felt that her job experience had no value, because jobs were always given to applicants with contacts in high positions.

*“When I came back, I found myself on a situation of ‘working disability’ (...) job experience is not valued here (...) getting a job is complicated, because you always have to know someone to get it, even when you have good skills. That does not matter at all (...)” (Liliana)*

Another factor that might have contributed to the initial decline in access to resources, especially in the case of Maria, was the pressure to stay at home, confirming the fact that gender ideologies have greater influence when women are mothers. Maria made this decision out of what can be suggested was self-imposed guilt, trying to make up for not complying with her mothering role while she was in Spain. This, together with the difficulties to enter the job market, restricted her possibilities even further from economic recovery.

Nonetheless, the point of contrast with the women in the first group is that Liliana and Maria were able to finally recover their access to material resources to some extent. Once they found jobs, they cut off their economic contribution to their families and went to

live apart from them, thereby gaining more control over their own resources. As they had no dependent children to take care of or pressure from partners and spouses, they could deal better with the gender pressures. Thus they had the option to distance themselves from their families and to create a more independent life. Even when Maria was affected by these pressures at first, she was ultimately able to ignore them, as her daughters had become economically independent.

This may have also been reinforced by their awareness of their own agency, which allowed both women to feel able to progress regardless of the difficulties they faced after return. As stated by Pessar and Mahler (2003), initiative contributes to substantive agency which at the same time influences the possibilities of women to affect their position of power regarding others. In this case, by taking the initiative of becoming independent of their families and actively looking for a job, these women were able to improve their initial position in the domestic economy by gaining more control over their own resources.

*“Being in my mom's house meant having pressures not only because of my own situation, but because of everybody else's situation in the house. So I decided to be alone. I wanted to take care of my expenses, do my own thing (...) I knew I could deal with my own problems and solve them. That's what being abroad taught me. I had started over so many times (...)” (Liliana)*

To sum up, women in this group experienced a general decline in their position in the domestic economy after return migration, although they were able to increase the level

of control they had over their own finances. This was possible because they decided to stop contributing to the broader household economy and to distance themselves from their families, which they were able to do since they did not have dependent children or spouses, dealing better with the pressures of gender norms and expectations. This possibility was also reinforced by the awareness they had of their own agency and the sense of empowerment they had acquired while living in Spain.

### **5.1.3 Stable providers**

Finally, the third group of cases shows a completely different situation to the other two. The two women in this group, Rosa and Gabriela, are “stable providers”, as they reported stability in their overall position in the domestic economy and a slight increase in the control over their own finances. This means that, compared to the other cases, their possibilities of access to material resources, their level of contribution to everyday expenses and their control over the household finances remained practically unaffected.

During their time living in Spain, both were working and had significant level of control over the household finances. Rosa contributed equally to her husband for a period of time while living in Spain, although she became the breadwinner after 2008, when her husband’s job was affected by the financial crisis. In the case of Gabriela, she mentioned that even when she and her husband always contributed equally to the everyday expense, she became the main contributor for a short period while living in Spain. During this period, her husband was earning less because there were job shortages in his sector.

Similarly to the other cases, after they returned to Peru, neither Gabriela nor Rosa had job prospects. However, in contrast to the other respondents, both had access to a significant quantity of material resources through personal savings and investments. This allowed them both to maintain their status as important contributors to the household and control of the allocation of household resources. Hence, they were able to keep an important influence in determining how the family income was distributed.

*“Well, actually I’m the one who makes the decisions about the money we contribute, that hasn’t changed (...) I have always taken control of them. Let’s say that I am a matriarch. In my family, it has always been like that. He (my husband) has no complaints. He obviously takes care of his own expenses, but the money we gather together, I am the one who manages it.” (Gabriela)*

The status of Gabriela remained unchanged throughout the process of migration and return. She had an important level of control of the family finances from the beginning and was able to maintain it without any problems after return. This may be in part due to the fact that she never stopped contributing to the household income. Yet, the evidence also suggests that this is related to the fact that her husband had less normative points of view about the arrangements of the financial decision-making. Thus, evidence suggests that having a supportive partner or spouse can mediate in favour of the maintenance of the position of women as important decision makers in the domestic economy.

*“We always talk to each other to decide about something. It depends, though, because if something has to be bought for the house, then I decide (...) I know sometimes I have a temper and he is always much more open in that aspect, he is not conflictive and I have all of his support (...)”* (Gabriela)

Both women also saw an increase of their control over their own resources. In the case of Gabriela, this happened because a year after return, she was able to start her own business. As a result, she was able to allocate what she earned to her own investments. She could do so not only because she did not have any dependent children, but also because she did not have to help her husband any longer, as he got a stable job after return. This gave her more freedom to decide to spend the money she made on her own projects and goals, without having to feel forced to allocate a part to support other family members.

*“The money I earn, I re-invest it. Some part goes to the household of course, but I can use a big part for my things (...) now that he (my husband) knows I am doing what I like, he tells me ‘just if you want, you can contribute, but you don’t have to’, so this has given me the opportunity to do some other things, like taking my mother for a trip...”* (Gabriela)



The case of Rosa is somewhat similar. After return, her husband started working and making money, the household expenses were more equally shared between the spouses, in comparison to when they were in Spain. That meant that she could save part of her investments in her future career plans, as she was planning to apply for a notary position and set up a notary's office in the near future. Therefore, she had more control over her own finances, because she no longer had the obligation to spend it all on her family.

*“I told my husband that I wanted to return, because I was tired of being the only one contributing (...) it was a stressful situation because sometimes the expenses of the household were surpassing my income (...) so now that he is working, I feel more relieved (...) I don't even have to work, you see? Just by sitting, I am earning money and I can save, because I am not spending it all (...) I have plans to apply for a notary position and install my office, so it helps. It is a good arrangement (...)”*

(Rosa)

Why did the access to resources and the level of contribution of these women remained almost unaltered after return? One of these reasons, as has already been discussed, is that they had a good amount of savings and investments that allowed them to compensate for their lack of salaries. For example, Rosa had been saving and investing in farming and fishing businesses in Peru, something that rendered her a good income to pay several of the household expenses and save money. Thus, she kept contributing significantly to the household, even when she stayed at home after return.

Whereas in other cases, staying at home seems to have negatively affected the women's possibilities to influence the domestic economy, this was not the case for Rosa thanks to a significant quantity of savings and alternative funds. Consequently, it seems appropriate to conclude that the presence of resources might mitigate in some cases, the negative effects that gender pressures have on the possibilities of women to influence the distribution of economic resources in their families.

Another reason that might have contributed to the stability in status instead of a decline, at least in the case of Gabriela, is not having children. This allowed her (to be able) to distribute her resources in a productive way, because she did not have to provide for them. It also allowed her to have fewer pressures to settle for any job that would support the family expenditure.

*“In my case, I have not had any pressures to work to support someone, because in that case, I would definitely have to get a job. I had more economic freedom in that aspect (...) and my husband, well, he has his work and (...) I've always helped with some things but he is autonomous. So, I am lucky that it has always worked out like that for us” (Gabriela)*

Instead, thanks to the availability of resources, she could take her time to start her projects and install her business. Here, the role of agency and the support of her husband

were also important factors, since they allowed her to have initiative to carry out her business venture and to avoid the gender pressures related to her role as wife.

## 5.2 Conclusion

Drawing on what was observed from these three groups, there are a number of things that can be concluded. First, in the majority of the cases, the interviewees have shown a decline in their position in the domestic economy. The women who were able to count on a good quantity of resources as savings or investments were the exception. In this case, the resources allowed them to keep a good level of contribution and control over their own resources and the household resources.

Second, even when the women in the second group experienced a decline in most of the factors, the first group seemed to be the most affected by return migration. This happened because, even when they still had control over the family finances and their levels of contribution were stable, they had serious restrictions to balance this with their desires to find a job and be more autonomous. In comparison with the women in the other two groups, the women in the first group counted on very little material resources to allocate to their own needs. Furthermore, their possibilities of getting a job were restricted, because they had to prioritise their role as mothers.

This is a response to the societal expectations on women as care-givers that make them assume a bigger responsibility for their children and prioritise it over their own

careers (Chesley 2011). This is especially true in countries like Peru, where the woman's status is determined not only by their capacity to work outside the house, but also in a big part, by assuming the roles of wife and mother (Fuller 2004, p. 210).

Finally, it is also essential to mention that the support of other family members and the sense of agency have a role in allowing these women improve their current positions. For example, the support of her children helped Monica to start a small catering business. This was important because it allowed her to work and have a source of income, even when her possibilities were restricted because of her low skills and lack of access to savings.

Furthermore, the sense of personal growth and sense of agency, have allowed these women to feel capable of taking control of their own situations and make strategic life choices, even when they were still constrained by gender ideologies and roles. The desire to affect their own circumstances to change their own declining conditions shows some sense of empowerment, as conceptualised by Kabeer (1999). The argument is supported by the evidence that most of the interviewees were trying in different ways to regain access and control to economic resources. They were doing so by applying for jobs, looking for loans or trying to get involved in other income-generating activities

## **VI. GENDER ROLE ALLOCATION AND THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN THE DOMESTIC DECISION-MAKING**

In Chapter 4, it has been discussed how the position of Peruvian returnee women in the domestic economy has declined or remained stable. It has also been discussed how gender ideologies have influenced these outcomes and how these women have tried to balance them through their own agency. Nonetheless, it has not only been their position in the domestic economy that has been affected, as many other non-economic factors that determine women's social location in the family have changed as well.

After return, most women had experienced changes in their possibilities to negotiate the time spent in domestic work. As a result, a good number of them increased the time they spent on domestic tasks. Likewise, their authority has suffered a decline, as they had fewer possibilities to influence the family decisions than before. Nonetheless, these two situations do not necessarily go hand in hand, being mediated by economic resources, familial status, agency and the influence of the rest of the family members. Depending on the case, different combinations in these elements have been able to guarantee some stability in either one of the two previously mentioned factors.

### **6.1 The position of women in the domestic decision-making**

Drawing from the evidence, it is difficult to determine a clear pattern of decline in the position of these women in the domestic decision-making. Even when in most of the

cases there has been an increase on the time spent in housework, the levels of authority have maintained stable in the majority of them, too. Moreover, some women have not experienced any increase in the time spent in domestic work, regardless of changes in their levels of authority. Finally, it is relevant to mention that one of the interviewees was able to slightly improve her position after a brief period of decline, by reducing her time spent on domestic work.

**Table n°3: Position in the domestic decision-making**

	<b>Level of Authority</b>	<b>Time spent in domestic work<sup>7</sup></b>
<b>Conditional domestic agent</b>	Stable	Increased
<b>Undermined domestic agent</b>	Declined	Increased
<b>Discredited domestic agent</b>	Declined	Stable
<b>Stable domestic agent</b>	Stable	Stable

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<sup>7</sup> The amount of time spent in domestic work is related to the distribution of domestic tasks between the members of the family upon return.

### 6.1.1 Conditional domestic agents

The women in the first group are “conditional domestic agents”. As such, they have maintained the levels of authority they had prior to return. Consequently, they are able to influence decisions in the household at the same level than the period before return. However, they have also increased the time they spend on domestic tasks. In that sense, their authority is conditional to matters concerning other members of the family, especially children. Yet, the possibilities they have to decide over the allocation of their own time outside the household are limited.

These are the cases of Belisa, Monica and Ana Maria. While living in Spain, these women spent most of their time working outside the home. In the case of Belisa and Monica, this was inevitable because they were the main economic providers for their families. Thus, they had to be fully involved in their productive occupations.

Similarly, Ana Maria was also working full time while living in Spain. Even though she was not the main economic provider and had fewer pressures to spend more time at work, she seemed to have internalised that it was ideal for a woman to work as much as her husband, because it gave them a better status in society. This is related to what Fuller (2004) mentions about Peruvian middle class women, arguing that they consider having a job and a career as important requirements to obtain social recognition.

*“I was working full time in the administrative and customer service area of an enterprise called Seguros Iberica (...) it was good, because the money allowed me*

*to help pay the mortgage of the house we bought in Spain (...) now I want to start working again. I want to do it because it makes me feel good, people see you differently, your family sees you differently (...)*” (Ana Maria)

These women spent less time in domestic tasks while living in Spain because they were able to transfer them. For example, Monica had the help of her youngest son and daughter with the daily domestic tasks while she was out working. In the cases of Belisa and Ana Maria, most of the housework was transferred to a domestic worker because they had enough economic resources to afford it.

*“Things in Spain are given so both spouses can work (...) my children could stay doing extra school hours until five and at that hour, a lady would come home to help us with the children. Some days I would return home at that hour and look after the children, so she could dedicate her time completely to other domestic tasks (...) In the case of my husband, well, for him it was really difficult to do this, because he had a fixed schedule, while mine was flexible (...)*” (Belisa)

It is interesting to point that even when Belisa and her husband were working a similar amount of hours, she had taken more childcare responsibilities than him. Likewise, Ana Maria also claimed being the one who spent more time with her children when she was in Spain, as her husband’s job was more demanding. That means that during this time,



these women spent more time on domestic tasks than their spouses, even when they had transferred the majority to other women.

After return, these women not only kept spending more time in housework than other family members, but it also had increased from the time they were living in Spain. This might be explained by the fact that they were not able to transfer these tasks to other women anymore, since their access to resources that they could allocate to it had decreased substantially.

However, this does not necessarily explain why Monica increased her time on domestic work or why these tasks were not transferred equally to other family members. A plausible explanation could be that they decided to assume the majority of the household tasks in order to meet the obligations imposed to them by their gender roles. Given the fact that these women had dependent children, they felt more pressured to comply with their mothering role upon return. In consequence, they ended up spending more time in domestic work than other family members who were not exposed to such pressures.

As discussed before, Belisa decided to stay at home for a year and take care of her children, while her husband looked for a job. She considered this to be the best arrangement, as it would give her more time to spend with them, something that she was unable to do before because her work in Spain was very demanding. In the meantime, she also took responsibility of other domestic tasks. As a result, the time she spent in domestic work increased, going from working full-time outside the home, to being a full-time mother.

Monica decided to resume her mothering tasks out of guilt due to leaving two of her children in Peru and to the responsibility to help of helping her younger daughter with reintegration. This was reinforced by the idea she internalised that as a woman, she was more capable of domestic work than men. As a result, she took care of most of the housework, although she still distributed some small tasks among her children.

Ana Maria also claimed that her decision to assume the majority of household tasks was to help her children with the re-integration process and to allow her husband to get out of the house and search for a job. She considered herself more capable of these responsibilities than her husband. Furthermore, she believed her husband had more opportunity to find a job that would allow the family to re-settle economically, because he already had some job offers and prospects before return.

*“With my husband, we decided that he would take care of the economic part and I would stay at home to take care of the children, because he had less trouble re-inserting himself economically than me. My main responsibility was to search for a school for them and help them with school work...especially the older one since she was having trouble adapting (...) (Ana Maria)*

*“(...) the mother is the mother at the end, right? You can teach a man how to do the things at home, but he is not going to be able to do them as well as you. So, yes, maybe he can do it, but we have decided like that. I am the one who looks after the house and after the children (...)” (Ana Maria)*

Accordingly, the greater difficulties that women had to find a job might reinforce the effect of gender ideologies in determining the increase of the time spent in domestic work. This means that, since they were forced to stay at home by their circumstances, they did not have any more options but to dedicate most of their time to housework in order to feel useful and to deal with the lack of employment more positively. However, they did not consider it to be the best situation and hoped (to be able) to get back in the job market soon.

*“Being with my children had made things easier. The joy, the chaos and the tiredness when you go to sleep make things easier at the end of the day. They keep me busy and tired, but happy...they give me things to do, so I forget for a moment that I am worried (...) but I do not pretend to be a housewife all my life. They better not get used to it (...)” (Belisa)*

Regarding the levels of authority, these women have maintained the same that they had before return. In the case of Belisa and Monica, the level they maintained was high, being able to significantly influence most of the family decisions. The evidence shows that in both cases, they could maintain this status because they were still able to be the main economic providers of the household. More importantly, other members of the family did not act like more powerful counterparts affecting their authority, since they had accepted the position of the woman as an essential decision-maker. This is related to the greater

sense of agency that these women had upon return and the shifts on their identities, which made them portray themselves as more empowered individuals.

For example, even when Monica had conflicts with her husband or her sons about decisions concerning the upbringing of her younger daughter, she was still able to impose her ideas. She did this by mixing both strategies of dialogue and manipulation. She also maintained her confident attitude to establish her points of view, which helped her to make her voice heard by the rest of the family members.

*“They (my sons) can disagree with me, raise their voices, but I have a louder voice than theirs. Or I just lower my voice and get out of the house, so they become frustrated because there’s no one to put a plate of food for them in the table. That is their worst nightmare (...) I am no longer the quiet and submissive mom I was. I have a point of view, I say directly what I want to say and they respect it. When I feel restless about something, I go, turn off the television and tell them what I think and what I want so we can solve it.” (Monica)*

In the case of Ana Maria, she also maintained the same level of authority, although this was lower than her husband’s. As it was discussed in the previous chapter, Ana Maria’s husband was a powerful counterpart, because he had always been the main economic provider. As evidence has shown, he was also able to re-integrate economically more easily upon return, something that allowed him to maintain the control over the distribution of resources, while Ana Maria’s possibilities to do so remained marginal.

However, both Ana Maria and her husband maintained a more balanced level of authority over other household matters, for example, choosing a school for their children. Even though the decline on Ana Maria's contribution to the family finances could have affected her authority, this did not happen because she was also able to maintain an important level of agency over them. Moreover, her husband recognised the importance of her opinion, as she was more involved in the domestic issues than him.

In sum, the women in this group increase the time spent in domestic work mainly because of the gender pressures that made them assume a greater responsibility of the household tasks than other family members. Nevertheless, it is also partly an effect of the few opportunities they have to get an occupation outside the household. Moreover, it is difficult to determine a decline on the position of these women in the domestic decision-making, because their level of authority had maintained stable. This situation was possible because, even when gender ideologies led them to take a bigger share of domestic tasks, their sense of agency and family recognition had mediated to prevent a fall in their influence on the decisions regarding domestic issues.

### **6.1.2 Undermined domestic agents**

Moving on to the second group, after return Rosa and Maria had experienced an increase in the time spent on domestic tasks. However, in contrast to the women of the previous group, their levels of authority had also declined, although in different amounts. The women in this group are denominated undermined domestic agents, because both their

authority and their possibilities of allocating their time to other activities outside the household had been undermined after return.

Both of these women spent the minimum time doing domestic chores while living in Spain. In the case of Maria, this happened because she left her children in Peru and had an independent life abroad. Therefore, the household tasks were transferred to her oldest daughter. By comparison, the factor that caused Rosa to reduce housework to the minimum was that she had to assume the breadwinning role while her husband was unemployed. In consequence, she transferred most of the care tasks to him, whereas the housework was assumed by a paid domestic worker.

Their levels of authority before return were substantially high, because they were the only economic providers of their households and had the entire control of the decision over the distribution of resources. Additionally, Rosa and Maria had also stronger influence over non-economic matters, not being particularly pressured by family members to distribute their power of decision among them, because they were mostly dependent on these women.

This changed after return, with Rosa and Maria experiencing a decline in their levels of authority. This happened because the dependent family members obtained some level of independence from these women after return. Hence, they were able to put more pressure on both Rosa and Maria, being able to obtain more power of decision over household matters.

For instance, during the initial period after return, Maria did not have the resources to contribute to the daily expenses, so her older daughter started contributing with material

resources to the family. This allowed her to take greater control over the household finances compared with Maria, whose economic situation declined, as discussed in the previous chapter.

However, Maria's loss of authority was more substantial, as her children were reluctant to accept her opinions once she returned. This happened because they developed a strong sense of independence, since they had lived for ten years without Maria's influence. Hence, once she tried to impose her authority, some contradictions appeared, clashing with the dynamics of decision-making which her children had established in her absence. Ultimately, these conflicts could not be solved, resulting in Maria losing her authority and accepting her daughters' independence, by distancing herself from them.

*“There was a moment when my daughters became weary of my presence because I was trying to control them (...) so when I realized it, I left the apartment (...) I mean, I was even trying to control the time when they would return home, asking at what time they would be back (...) but I could not do that anymore, I just had to assume how things were by then.” (Maria)*

The loss of authority that Rosa experienced was less substantial compared to Maria. Once her husband was able to get back into paid labour, he changed his approach about the process of decision-taking within the household. That means that whereas before he would discuss every decision with Rosa, after return, he started making more autonomous choices, without necessarily asking Rosa for her opinion. Nevertheless, Rosa considered this

unproblematic, as she wanted her husband to take a more active role in the family decisions, even at the expense of losing some of her own power of decision.

Rosa and Maria also increased the time they spent on domestic work, mainly because they both felt pressured to resume their mothering tasks after return. In that sense, they are similar to the cases of Belisa, Ana Maria and Monica. According to the evidence, they experienced strong feelings of guilt about having neglected their mothering roles in the past. In addition, they also felt responsible for having transferred these tasks to other family members, especially when this contradicted the normative gender roles in the family.

For example, upon return, Rosa consciously decided to spend more time than her husband in domestic work. This was motivated by the fact that, during the last period in Spain, she was constantly exposed to pressures to reverse the non-normative disposition of gender roles in the household. Rosa felt guilty for taking the breadwinner role to make up for her husband's unemployment, as it did not allow her to fulfil her socially imposed role as care-giver.

Moreover, she felt responsible that her husband was forced to take this role instead, since she believed that not being the breadwinner was causing him a series of contradictions. Thus, in order to avoid this situation, she decided to return to Peru with her family, in order to give her husband the opportunity to retake his role.

*“I thought that my husband had to be the breadwinner (...) there was this time, when my son travelled to Spain for the holidays that saw all of this and said: ‘Mom, I don’t know about you, but I think Dad will end up affected psychologically...what*



*makes him stay here alone, isolated, looking after two children, when he could have so much to do in Peru?'. He was right (...) so I said 'no, we have to return (...)'*  
(Rosa)

In the case of Maria, the necessity to resume her mothering role pushed her to stay at home and take charge of all of the domestic tasks during a first period after return. This was triggered by the fact that she felt guilty for abandoning her daughters at a young age in order to migrate to Spain. However, as it was previously discussed, this situation did not continue for a long time, as she had some conflicts with her daughters that pushed her to search for an independent life once she was able to get a job.

In sum, the authority and the possibilities of these women of spending their time outside of the household were undermined after return because of different reasons. First, their levels of authority declined because other members of the family gained some status to act as counterparts. Second, their time in domestic work increased as an effect of gender ideologies, which pushed them to take a greater share of the domestic work in order to compensate for the fact that they had neglected these tasks before.

### **6.1.3 Discredited domestic agents**

This group includes those women whose levels of authority declined significantly, but did not spend more time in domestic work upon return. This happened because the

strong contradictions they experienced as an effect of the decline of their authority, made them take distance from their families. A clear example of this is the case of Maria after the first period living with her daughters. She went from being fully involved in housework at the beginning, to just taking care of her individual responsibilities in the second moment.

As discussed before, the cause of this is that the tensions with her daughters after return, made her leave her daughter's apartment once she got a job. After doing so, she was no longer able to decide over matters concerning her daughters, because they were already economically independent. Furthermore, since she started living by herself, she was just taking care of her own domestic responsibilities, being completely autonomous. Consequently, like in Spain, she did not have to take part in the distribution of household chores, because she was no longer part of the household.

In the case of Liliana, the loss of her capacity to provide funding for the household caused also a loss of authority over the family expenditure. However, the decline on her authority was substantial, as she was also restricted on influencing other decisions, finding resistance from her mother and brother. This happened because both of them resented her lack of economic contribution and her minimal involvement in domestic tasks.

Liliana avoided increasing her time in housework to make up for the decline of her economic contribution to the family. As discussed in the previous chapter, this created conflict with her family, which, similarly to Maria, pushed her to take distance once she recovered financially. Evidence suggests that compared to Maria, Liliana was able to maintain the minimum time spent in domestic work (at the minimum the whole time) consistently after return.

The reason for this is that she was not pressured to fit the role of care-giver, as she was single and did not have children. Additionally, this could also be explained by the fact that from the beginning, Liliana never really fit the care-giver role. Instead, she took the role of head of the family after her father died. This provided her with a greater sense of independence and agency, which she maintained after return, even when she was having difficulties in doing so.

*“(...) after my father passed away, I took his place. I was the head of the family (...) this happened because I have always been an independent girl (...) so no, when I returned I did nothing to deal with the pressures I had. My brother once confronted me and mentioned that I should be at least be helping in the house (...) instead, what I have done is distance myself from them, because it was becoming toxic for me that they saw me as a failure. I needed to take a distance from them and to start taking care of myself.” (Liliana)*

In summary, the women in this group could maintain the time spent in domestic work with lower levels of authority, because they were able to take distance from the household. After experiencing a significant discredit from the their families, as they were no longer seen as influential agents, they decided to deal with this contradiction not by trying to regain their position in the household, but by becoming independent from their families.

#### 6.1.4 Stable domestic agents

Finally, there is only one case where the time spent on housework and the levels of authority had remained stable before and after return. This is the case of Gabriela. Evidence has shown that she was able to maintain her authority, because she kept a good level of economic contribution to the family finances after return. However, the main reason for this is because she similarly kept a good level of independence from her husband and was able to sometimes prevail over him, since he had less normative ideas about the dynamics of decision-taking within the family.

*“My husband knows that I am the one who puts everything in order. He does not mind. I organise where everything goes...I organise where the money goes, where this goes, where that goes...everything, everything.”* (Gabriela)

Moreover, she also did not increase the time spent on domestic labour upon return, due to three reasons. One of them was that she did not feel pressured to compensate her lack of economic resources with housework, as she had access to a good amount of them, which allowed her to still contribute with the family expenses at a high level.

A second reason is that Gabriela seemed to be less affected by gender pressures than other women. Given that she did not have children, she did not experience any feelings of

guilt that would make her spend more time at home. Thus, she was also less exposed to gender expectations linked to the care-giver role.

*“I have seen that...I mean, I got together with other returnees and I have seen that compared to them, I could do what I wanted because I do not have to take care of anyone. Maybe if I had, the situation would be different and I would not be able to do what I want to do, which is dedicating myself to make this work.”* (Gabriela)

Finally, as was presented in the evidence, Gabriela had the priority to start a business in Lima, so she dedicated mostly to her project. As a consequence, she did not feel particularly compelled to devote more time to doing domestic tasks. This was also facilitated by the fact that her husband did not put pressure on her to do more housework upon return, even though she was spending more time at home. The reason for this is that he supported her on her new venture, so he wanted to give her the chance to dedicate herself to it completely.

## **6.2 Conclusion**

Drawing on what was observed from the four groups, it can be concluded that there is not a clear pattern of decline in the position of returnee women in the domestic decision-making, as it varies among the cases. Furthermore, four of the seven interviewees claimed

having kept stable their levels of authority, when five of seven mentioned having increased the time spent on housework. Besides, after increasing the time on domestic work during the first period, one of the cases regressed to her previous situation, thus maintaining the same time she spent on housework before return.

In most of the cases where there has been decline in the authority levels, this also has been related to a decline in the access these women had to economic resources, as well as in their possibilities to contribute to the household. This is similar to the findings of Handapangoda (2012) that Sri Lankan women's authority declined once they returned after a period of migration because they were unable to contribute to the household anymore. Nonetheless, the decline of this authority is not necessarily caused directly by the loss of economic power, but by the restrictions that other family members impose over these women, once the former do not depend on the latter anymore. The case of Rosa provided a better understanding of this. Even when her access to resources and level of contribution were stable, her authority over non-economic matters declined slightly since she had to transfer some to her husband, who became economically independent from her upon return.

In the cases where decline did not happen, this was partly related to a stable level of contribution. Nonetheless, it was mainly due to the fact that there were no powerful counterparts to balance the authority of these women, together with the sense of agency, allowed them to maintain a sustained influence over the decisions regarding other members of the family.

Interestingly, stable levels of authority seem to be related, in some cases, with an increase in the time these women spend in domestic tasks. This seems to be contradictory

as it would be logical to think that when a woman increases the time she spends on domestic work, she has less authority to influence in the distribution of domestic tasks. Even when this can be confirmed in some cases, there are multiple factors at work that could explain this situation.

One of them is that women spend more time in domestic tasks as they are unable to find a job, so they are forced by their circumstances to spend more time at home, as discussed by Handapangoda (2012). Another reason is that women seem to have chosen this option, pressured by gender expectations and ideologies, sometimes moved by feelings of guilt for not being able to fit their normative gender roles (Chesley 2011).

Finally, another interesting observation is that a decline on the levels of authority sometimes goes hand by hand with the decline on the time spent on domestic work. Evidence suggests that this is related to the effect of a strategy some women use to deal with a significant change in their authority. When women experience a substantial decline of their levels of authority, they try to deal with this by attempting to recover their autonomy. It is important to remark that this seems to be only possible when gender ideologies have less influence which is often related to not having dependent children or spouses.

## VII. “I AM NOT THE SAME, I AM DIFFERENT”: AGENCY, IDENTITY CHANGE AND STRATEGIES OF EMPOWERMENT AFTER RETURN

As previously discussed, after return, most of the interviewees had experienced a significant reduction in their access to material resources that would “expand their possibilities to make important life choices” (Kabeer 1999). They have also increased the time spent in domestic work, while other factors related to resource control and decision-making had maintained more or less stable. Hence, return migration seems to have determined some level of regression on the position of these women in the family, instead of a substantive positive change.

Paradoxically, these women seem to perceive return migration in a more optimistic light than expected. They consider themselves more capable to make life changing choices than before, thus recognise some progression in their situation. Furthermore, they have experienced a change on their identities, presenting themselves as more modern and advanced than those who have not migrated.

This situation was determined by their newly acquired sense of self-worth, which allowed them to claim having experienced a personal growth upon return. In this chapter, I argue that the change of identity works as a strategy that enables the return migrants to build a sense of agency, helping them to balance the contradictions created by return migration. This is especially true for female returnees, since they have to maintain their previously gained position, while being exposed to gender-related pressures and having more limited resources than before.



## 7.1 “A different way of being and doing”: personal growth and identity change as tools for substantive agency

As previously mentioned, upon return, most of the interviewees experienced contradictions derived mainly from the decline on their access to material resources as well as in other factors, although this varied depending on the case. Conversely, most of them claimed to have experienced a personal growth, being able to acquire working skills, social abilities, different world views, norms and values. For example, Monica claimed that living and working abroad not only provided her with the skills to adapt in new circumstances, but also allowed her to improve her self-esteem.

*“My self-esteem was so low that I would let my husband beat me and manipulate me because he was the provider for the family. I had to obey his every word (...) I did not know how to pursue my independence at that time (...) but now I know that yes, I am able to get ahead (...) I gained a huge amount of self-esteem. I do not have to depend on him, if I never did, a lot less now (...) my children know it, I am not the mother they used to know and they appreciate me even more.” (Monica)*

These newly acquired characteristics helped her to improve her sense of self-worth and build a critical consciousness, realising that she could overcome her abuse situation. This has also contributed to a change of identity in her case, as she became aware of her differences regarding those who stayed in Peru. For example, she realized that it was due to

the deeply internalised sexism in Peruvian society that abuse happened, so she wanted to prevent her children from viewing it as something natural. In comparison, she presented herself as someone that was conscious of this situation and tried somehow to reverse it in everyday life, especially with her sons.

An interesting point to make here is that Monica recognised two competing ways of being and doing: one was ultimately to accept these attitudes as natural and constrain her choice to them; the other, to put them into question and aim for greater equality at home. Becoming aware of this allowed her to realise that she could act upon this situation and change it, by pushing to have more independence and authority in her household.

Therefore, she not only experienced a change in her identity, but this also led her to develop a sense of agency and a capacity to make decisions in her family that she was able to maintain. Furthermore, she was able to retain some independence to achieve her goals to start a business and have employment, despite her current limitations of access to material resources. In that sense, she could balance the relative loss of economic power with the new skills, values and sense of self-worth that she had acquired.

The case of Liliana also provides a good example. As discussed previously, she not only experienced a decline in her access to material resources and contribution to the household, but also of her decision-making capacity. Moreover, upon return, there was a decrease in her status, being perceived as a failed migrant and having to rely in the family for support. This brought about tensions in the household, also causing a decline of her control over the family finances and her power of decision.

Return migration imposed serious restrictions on Liliana because of her lack of access to resources, decline in her contribution to the family, loss of control of the household finances and decline in her authority. However, she mentions that it was because of the skills, abilities, values and ideas she acquired in Spain, that she was able to recover from the first moment of decline.

Before migration, she felt frustrated and discriminated because of her modest background, which made her feel unable to take action in order to change her situation. After return, her attitude had changed completely, feeling more capable of achieving her goals despite being in a disadvantaged position. Thus, she experienced personal growth by developing high self-esteem and self-confidence.

This happened because during her time in Spain, Liliana learned to exert her own agency, being able to make important life choices and affecting important life outcomes (Kabeer 1999). She acquired norms, values, skills and professional abilities that enabled her to expand her capacity to decide upon her goals, which allowed her to achieve a professional status and upwards social mobility. This also caused a change of her identity, perceiving herself as a progressive and independent woman. Even when after return her choices were restricted, her new sense of self helped her to face better the contradictions of return, being able to get a job that required her professional skills and to stop depending on her family's support.

*“I do not feel bad, I have been getting ahead. I am now in a moment when I have to start from zero, but I have already started over twice before, I am not afraid (...) I*

*see that I have the tools to face the world and accomplish things (...) now I can say: 'I want this for my life' (...) stability for me is not having a normal life, with the house, the dog and the family. For me stability was something else...well, it was to accomplish things for me...having autonomy, independence, contributing (with the) to society (...)" (Liliana)*

Here, Liliana also identifies two competing ways of being and doing: one related to fit the “ideal” role for a woman in Peru by being a working mother and a wife, in order to get social recognition (Fuller, 2004). The other, based on seeking social recognition through personal growth, autonomy and personal achievements. By realising this, Liliana was able to widen her choices, discovering that she had the chance to take non-normative paths. This allowed her to regain her independence after returning to Peru, permitting her to distance herself from the pressures of her family and to resist other gender related pressures.

As discussed before, Maria also experienced similar contradictions to those of Liliana, being able to deal with them by relying on her newly gained skills and views of the world. Despite having an initial regression, by trying to fit the social expectations of being a mother, she was finally able to face this contradiction by realising that she could get ahead independently of the family. Her newly acquired ideas, values and skills marked a change of identity and enabled her to affront the tensions with her daughters and her limitations to get a job by making use of her own agency. This reveals a progression in her situation from the initial period after return.

The developing of her critical consciousness also informed her of the two competing ways of being and doing that Liliana had noticed, being able to achieve the one that allowed her to seek social recognition out of the context of the family. This also allowed her to broaden her possibilities to impact on her own life by making choices through her ability to exert agency.

*“I think that as a woman, when you return, you have to value your own experience and make it valuable to others (...) in the household too, you cannot return looking defeated, because if they see you defeated...what does the family do? Well, they put you in charge of domestic tasks (...) you're relegated to do the basics in the household. And you have to assume that with another perspective. Look at me, being professional and all, it cost me a lot and I fell for that, but I got up (...)”*

(Maria)

In the rest of the cases, the effects of the personal growth and the changes of identity in the possibilities to increase the agency are less clear, especially in those where there have been strong gender pressures. However, all of the cases mention at some point how these elements have allowed them to broaden the scope of choices they had and the opportunities to influence over their own lives.

As discussed before, Gabriela counted on good access to resources and autonomy from her husband after return. However, she also experienced some contradictions during the first two months of her stay in Lima. Gabriela had some conflict with her father, feeling

pressured by him to comply with some normative, more traditional expectations after return. However, she also was able to rely on the new ideas and her new sense of identity to separate from him and be sufficiently independent to accomplish her goals.

*“He (my father) was expecting things professionally and personally from me that were not going to happen. So that was the negative factor: returning and finding someone very closed-minded when I had to open up when I was in Barcelona. There are no hierarchies there and returning to this type of stiff structure strikes you when you come back (...) he would put so much pressure on me because I was not what he thought I should be (...) and maybe a few years ago, I could have relented, but not anymore (...)” (Gabriela)*

In the case of Rosa, the access to material resources has mediated in the contradictions caused by return, although she experienced a personal growth. During her time in Spain, she developed a strong confidence which allowed her to face return in a more positive way. Even though she decided to stay at home, pressured by her role as housewife, she still held the ability and the self-confidence to make choices about the next step in her career, even when these plans were still uncertain.

*“I feel really good about myself. I felt really, really good. I feel that I am successful (...) I sleep really well every night because I know I did everything I could do. That*

*I have achieved everything I could and even more. And now, well, now we'll see how things go here (...) it seems like I am doing nothing now, but I am planning it all." (Rosa)*

However, even when she was exposed to different gender dynamics by taking the breadwinner role, her choice was still limited by normative ideas and expectations about gender. Evidence suggests that her decision to return was marked by gender pressures that affected her potential for professional growth. By returning and staying at home, she prioritized her husband's career over her own, as in Peru she had fewer choices and limited opportunities to achieve her career goals. Thus, her possibilities of agency were more restricted than before.

Finally, in the cases of Ana Maria and Belisa, the effects of personal growth and the change of identity in their possibilities of agency are also less clear. Although Ana Maria affirms having developed several skills by being abroad, these had not yet translated to an important change in her own situation. For instance, she was still unable to exert enough initiative to gain economic independence from her husband, as she had seemingly assumed her stay at home without contradictions. Moreover, she still abided by the normative ways of being and doing, maintaining the belief that to get social recognition as a woman, she had to rely on her role on the household.

*"Being abroad opens your mind, that's true and you are more able to do things you have never done before. But I do not think that is much appreciated here. For*

*example, the other day I went to a job interview and the interviewer did not even ask me about my experience. But I am hoping to get the job (...) if I do not it would be fine though, because for the moment, I have the responsibility of holding the house together now. Otherwise, who would? That is a woman's job (...)" (Ana Maria)*

This might have happened because throughout the experience of migration and return, she maintained a status that was subordinated to her husband's. Moreover, the fact of having small children had constrained her choices and diminished the effects of her newly acquired capacities and values on her sense of agency.

The case of Belisa is somewhat similar, although she seems to have developed a critical consciousness, even when her choices were also restricted because of the lack of resources and the gender pressures. Compared to the rest of cases, Belisa lived for a longer time in Spain, so she claimed that her identity had changed substantially during her time abroad, something that she was only able to realise after return.

According to her, living in Spain made her acquire some capacities that allowed her to present herself as more modern and progressive than the average Peruvian person. She shows certain pride in this and considers it has allowed her to be more open-minded, more socially advanced and to carry herself with more confidence and authority.

*"It is not only because I am a different person, but also because living in Europe...makes you think, for instance, that gay marriage is normal...or if you are*



*like this or like that, doesn't matter (...) unfortunately, society here is like this (...) I am not planning to adopt this way of being, because c'mon, once you have progressed, why would you go back? I am not the same, I am different. I have learned to have more openness, more confidence in my relations." (Belisa)*

Her personal growth and change of identity have also enabled her to question the existent beliefs about the gender differences that generate inequality, like the idea that women can just achieve a status in society through the role in the family. In her case too, she realised that there were two competing ways of being and doing, connected to the extent to which one assumes the mothering and housewife role.

Nevertheless, even though Belisa was critical of this, she relented to some of these gendered social expectations, which made her assume most of the domestic work upon return. This, as discussed before, restrained her possibilities to work as well as reduced her agency. However, although her choices were more limited than before, she was still able to affect her life's outcomes, making decisions and searching for alternatives to deal with her limitations in finding a job.

In summary, upon return, most of these women had mentioned developing a sense of personal growth and a change in their identities, portraying themselves as modern and progressive. This contradicts a rational choice to return. Despite the decline on their situation, they argue being more or equally capable to make life changing choices than before. This is ostensibly a strategy to deal with these circumstances, allowing them to

balance the loss of authority, gender constraints and the pressures from their families in order to be able to maintain their capacity to make important life choices.

This happened whenever the sense of personal growth and the identity change have permitted these women to develop a critical consciousness about their prior situations. By doing so, they are able to identify how some ways of being and doing are taken for granted and naturalized, constraining their possibility to exert substantive agency (Kabeer 1999). In that sense, by being able to resist and to choose their own ways, they are able to expand their possibilities of acting to achieve their goals. However, this does not always happen, as sometimes the development of a critical consciousness is limited by gender related constraints, as in Ana Maria's case.

## **7.2. Discussion: adopting empowering strategies to deal with return**

As suggested by the evidence, returnee Peruvian women had perceived a change in their identities that has led some of them to be critical about their own circumstances and even act upon them after return, in order to be able to achieve their goals. Even when their situations were critical, as in the case of Maria and Liliana, they have been able to formulate their experience of return in positive terms. This was possible because during their time in Spain, they could accumulate several non-material resources as skills, abilities, values, etc. that became enabling factors for them to exert agency (Kabeer 1999).

According to Massey (1994) and Pessar and Mahler (2003), the importance of recognising personal agency and the level of influence it has over the events in which social

locations are transformed, is necessary to understand the complex processes of empowerment. Furthermore, Pessar and Mahler (2003) have not put the focus on agency itself, but in the influence that individual elements have on it, like personal characteristics or particular states of mind. So it is not just the structural factors or material resources that determine the situation of women after return migration, but also the abilities they develop and the characteristics that they acquire.

In the previous section, I tried to explain how these newly acquired individual traits have allowed women to experience personal growth and a positive change in their identities, which in some cases, led to substantive agency after return. For example, it enabled Maria to change her declining economic and familial situation. By making use of her new capacities, she became independent from her family and regained control over her economic resources after a while. This reveals certain possibilities of empowerment for returnee women, as sometimes they are able to act upon her goals, even when they have limited access to economic resources.

These non-material resources do not function exactly as replacements for the lack of material resources, as they provide women with different capabilities to exert agency. They give them the opportunity to identify competing “ways of being and doing” and enable them to come up with strategies to resist those that maintain them unequal. For example, they allowed Monica to realise that she did not have to subordinate to her husband, becoming independent from him and the head of the household upon return.

Being abroad made her able to recognise how negative sexism was and to develop a stronger sense of self-worth and authority that she was able to maintain and re-affirm upon

return, being able to impose her decisions on the household as never before. Thus, the new capabilities and sense of identity helped her to increase her possibilities of agency and achieving independence, autonomy and developing authority upon return.

Nonetheless, as discussed before, not in all cases are able to count on some enabling factors that foster empowerment, brings empowerment per se. That is, that even in the case of being able to rely on a good quantity of material and non-material resources that allow the individual to exert agency, sometimes this possibility is still restricted. This happens because of the structures of power in society, which are specific to different contexts. For example, in a country where gender inequalities are bigger, the possibilities to exert agency, even when having access to resources, could be more limited, compared to countries where they are more equal.

Therefore, even when new skills, abilities and values allow the development of a sense of agency, as in the cases of Belisa, Ana Maria and Rosa, the agency is still constrained by other powerful processes internalised in society, which maintain systematic gender inequalities. One of them originates in the fact that the mother is the only one responsible for the welfare of the children, which restricts the possibility of women to transfer these tasks to men equally and to choose to spend their time in other activities.

Finally, it is important to mention that I do not intend to claim that return migration causes empowerment or to identify the factors that enable it. Instead, I have tried to make sense about how women are able to deal with return, when their concrete circumstances are not favourable. In that sense, I have been able to identify that most of them rely on the

capacities they have acquired abroad in order to make sense of the contradictions caused by return.

In conclusion, the evidence indicates that it might be important not only to pay attention to how the access to economic resources determines the position of women in the household upon return. It is also important to notice how the individual traits and non-measurable resources affect their capacities to maintain or change this position after return migration has happened.

## VIII. CONCLUSIONS

The understanding of the phenomenon of return migration still remains hazy, despite (the fact that it has been addressed and studied since 1960 (Cassarino 2004). Many theories have attempted to frame this phenomenon, the most recent being the social network theory of return migration (Cassarino 2004). This theory argues that return migration is influenced by the capacity of the returnee to mobilise tangible and non-tangible resources and to obtain complete information about the current situation of the home country. However, it ignores the complex richness and the sub-processes that are unleashed by return migration on the smaller scales –for example, in the scale of the family and the scale of the individual- which affect the wider processes in society. Moreover, some elements that determine different experiences for the individuals, like gender, are not taken into account, ignoring the fact that geographical movements tend to be organised through these factors.

In my research, I intended to add the element of gender to the study of return migration and focus on the smaller scales – the family and the individual. Moreover, I wanted to make the female experience visible, as there are just a limited number of empirical studies dedicated to exposing the particularities of the women's experiences of return migration. Most importantly, my aim was to identify how women perceived their position of making choices in the context of their family upon return.

In order to do so, I concentrated on the case of Peruvian returnee women from Spain who had been economically involved during migration. Studying this group was

particularly interesting, as there seems to be a clear pattern of return migration in the last few years, especially that of women. Given that I found the existent theories on return migration not sufficiently explanatory, my research was informed by two different theoretical approaches: one of them was the theory of “gendered geographies of power” (Pessar and Mahler 2003). And the other was the framework on gender, migration and social change developed by Tienda and Booth (1991). Both helped me to recognise the processes (economic and non-economic) and the elements (resources, gender ideologies, and agency) that were affecting the position of women at the individual and the family scale upon return.

The contribution of this research draws from the fact that it addresses many gaps of the literature regarding return migration and gender. First, it enhances the limited knowledge about these two interconnected issues. Moreover, by concentrating on the smaller scales, it introduces other elements that have not been given enough significance in the study of return migration, like agency and empowerment. Besides, part of its importance also derives from the case itself, as return migration to Latin American countries has not been addressed enough, given that it is a recent phenomenon caused by the global financial crisis.

The data gathered allowed me to argue that talking about return migration in terms of economic success or failure provides incomplete information about the changes in the women’s power position in their families upon return. Consequently, it is important to pay attention to how each one of the factors related to the domestic economy and also how the process of domestic decision-making are modified after migration and what are the possible elements that influence these changes, like gender ideologies, resources or agency.

In that sense, the key finding is that neither an improvement, nor an overall decline in the women's power position in the family after return can be generalised, even where there is a decrease in the access and control of economic resources in most of the cases. This happens because gender ideologies and the capacity to exert agency over their own situation intervene to determine different outcomes for the position of women in the family.

This complexity can be observed from the decision of return. Although in most of the cases, the concern of these women for the family welfare has strongly influenced this decision, the different levels of internalisation of gender ideologies determine less uniform levels of change in their situation upon return. For example, while Belisa and Gabriela considered a set of reasons concerning the family as their rationale for returning, Gabriela proved better at balancing the family pressures than Belisa, because she did not have to take care of children.

This complexity is further confirmed by paying attention to the changes in the factors involving the domestic economy. Even when most of the interviewees had shown a decline in their position in their access to resources, this did not necessarily mean a decline in the levels of contribution or control of the family economy. For example, those labelled as "controlled providers" preserved their levels of contribution and control, despite the decline on their access to resources.

Furthermore, some of the interviewees experienced a decline in most of the factors concerning domestic economy, except for the control of their own resources, which, at some point, allowed them to become autonomous of their households, becoming independent agents. This group seemed to be less affected by return migration than the



controlled providers. This happened because the potential of the latter to make strategic choices over their own careers and occupations was limited by their role as mothers. This reveals the effects of gender ideologies among Peruvian women, as those who are mothers tend to prioritise their role as such over their own careers (Fuller 2005).

However, it is also essential to mention that there were elements such as the support of other family members and the sense of agency seemed to be having an effect in helping to improve their situation. Particularly, an improved sense of agency has allowed these women to feel capable of taking control of their own situations and make strategic life choices, even when they were still constrained by gender ideologies and roles. A clear example of this was the case of Monica, who, despite not having enough access to resources after return, was able to launch a small food business with the help of her family; her situation was improving thanks to her initiative of looking for a small loan.

The factors involving the dynamics of domestic decision-making showed less clear patterns of decline in the position of returnee women. Most of the interviewees kept their levels of authority stable, even when this was combined with an increase of the time they spent in domestic work, as in the cases of Belisa, Monica and Ana Maria, who belong to the group of “conditional domestic agents”.

An explanation for this unlikely combination of factors is that the women in this group were unable to find jobs, due to being forced to stay at home. However, as already discussed, the limitations in finding jobs were partially related to the prioritisation of the mothering role. Therefore, it seems that gender expectations and ideologies were the central

reason for these women to spend more time doing domestic work, sometimes as a product of self-imposed guilt for previously neglecting it (Chesley 2011).

Where there has been a decline in the levels of authority and an increase in the time spent in domestic work, as in the case of the “undermined agents”, the decline in the levels of authority appears to be more associated with the transferring of authority from these women to other members of the household, as the latter became economically independent from them. Moreover, the augmentation of time spent on domestic tasks in these cases, is also more an effect of internalisation of normative gender roles than of having access to resources or contributing to the household. This is shown by the case of Rosa, who despite having good access to resources, decided to stay at home so that her husband could be the breadwinner.

In the case of Gabriela, who was the only stable domestic agent, neither a decline of authority nor an increase of the time of domestic tasks took place. This is partly because of the fact that her levels of contribution and access to resources were stable. Nevertheless, the determinant factor here is that she had a high sense of agency and seemed to be less influenced by normative gender roles, neither was her husband. Moreover, this was reinforced by the fact that she did not have obligations that would keep her at home, unlike the cases of Belisa or Ana Maria.

Another interesting observation is that a decline in the levels of authority sometimes goes hand-in-hand with the decline in the time spent on domestic work, like in the case of “autonomous agents”. Evidence suggests that when women experience a substantial decline in their levels of authority, they try to deal with this by neglecting domestic work and

becoming independent from their households, attempting to recover their autonomy. However, gender ideologies also mediate here, as this only seems possible when they are less exposed to obligations to fulfil normative gender roles.

Building up from this point, it is important to remark on the importance that agency has in these women's accounts as well as in their perceived position of power in the family upon return. Most of them have shown an enhanced sense of agency as a product of the change of identity that they have experienced. This change of identity has been caused by the acquisition of "intangible resources" (Cassarino 2004), that is, the set of skills, values, ideas, etc that they have acquired during the period of migration and can mobilise following their return.

These intangible resources have increased the sense of personal growth of these women and have permitted them to see their experience of return in a more positive light, even when it has affected their possibilities to make strategic choices about their lives (Kabeer 1999). Most of these women have seen their position at home altered in some way after return, although some more than others. However, it is through this subjective sense of empowerment that they have been able to make sense of the contradictions that return has caused, sometimes allowing them to take concrete measures to change their circumstances, as in the cases of Liliana, Maria and Monica.

In conclusion, the incorporation of the element of gender in the study of return migration and focusing it on the scales of the family and the individual is very useful in order to capture the complexity and richness of the phenomenon. It provides more complete

information about how individuals (especially women) experience this process and how it influences their perceived position of power in the family and in the wider society.

Consequently, it compelled me to notice that the decline in the access and control of economic resources does not always involve an overall decrease in the position of women after return. Moreover, it has allowed me to confirm that gender significantly affects the position of women upon return, as it often mediates the effects of having access to resources and stable levels of authority. Additionally, focusing on the smaller scales of the individual and the family has allowed me to recognise the importance of the intangible resources and the sense of agency in affecting the possibilities of these women of improving their position of power in the future.

Finally, although I consider having made an important contribution to the literature on return migration, I recognise some limitations to this study. First of all, since I have concentrated on highlighting the women's perception of the effects of return migration on their position in the family, this has left aside the perspective of other family members, particularly spouses. In that vein, I consider that a deeper understanding that takes into account these perceptions is needed, so the effects of gender on the phenomenon of return migration can be better understood. Furthermore, I have claimed that by focusing on the scale of the individual and the family, larger-scale processes in the wider society can be understood. However, in order to identify how it happens, further research has to aim to interconnect these two scales, taking into account other differentiating factors like race and class, which might determine different paths and experiences of return migration.

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