

Metaphorical Concepts in Research on Migrant Families: Care Deficits, Social Capital and the Care Commons

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Context

- Recent statistics indicate that the financial crisis has led to *less* circular migration and trend toward *more long-term settlement* in the Poland-Norway migration (IMO report for Norway, 2011-2012)
- Before the financial crisis, the outmigration was mainly short-term mobility dominated by male breadwinners that commuted between Poland and Norway.

Does female migration cause care deficits?

- The gender composition in the migrant population has changed; in the years 2006 and 2007 the majority of arriving Polish migrants in Norway were men and only 19% women. In 2009 39% of the migrants were female.
- 2013: 53.778 male migrants and 28.823 female migrants from Poland lived in Norway
- Is the increasing female migration causing care deficits in Poland?

Metaphors

- Social Capital / Care Capital: Exchanges of «Social Chits»
- Care Resources as «free goods», unpaid and invisible care work
- Care commons
- «Metaphors are pervasive not just in everyday life, but also in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of what we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.» Lakoff and Johnson, 1980:3

“Care resources” as metaphor

- Care resources: a society’s care pool is the balance between the supply of available hands and demands from dependent persons like children and frail elderly family members. Women’s unpaid care work in families and communities.
- Care deficit : “lack of care”, “shortage of attention”, “emotional coldness”, “scarcity of intimacy”, “social ignorance”, “invisible needs”, “no warming hands”, “not enough motherly love”, “dis-solution of the family”, “disintegration”, “empty emotional and social spaces”

Social Capital as metaphor

Social capital are “social chits”, a series of favours that are owed or owing.

They differ from money in two ways:

In a pure economic exchange, we borrow money, and we repay money – the currency remains the same. In the exchange of social chits, we give in one currency and repay in many others.

In a pure economic exchange, if we borrow money, we pay it back at a specified time, but in the exchange of social chits, we leave open the time for repayment.

“The commons” as metaphor

- The commons is a metaphor that refers to the cultural and social resources accessible to all members of a society. If we can think of caring resources as important social and cultural resources, we can conceptualize the complexities in national and transnational care practices as “care commons”.
- Care commons can include public goods like public and universal health and education. As a true commons, a care commons cannot be commodified, the commons are inclusive rather than exclusive and care resources are shared. Families and communities create care commons, social inclusion and stability.

Metaphors as cognitive frames

- The commons is a spatial metaphor that can widen our horizons and shed light on the complexities migrant families experience as actors in transnational spaces of care. Migrant families' care commons nourish their "life worlds" (Jürgen Habermas.)
- The (social) capital metaphor gives us a vision and a cognitive frame that focus on exchanges of "social chits" and a "capital" that people "has".
- "Care resources" and "care deficits" are metaphors referring to the taken-for-granted nature of women's' unpaid care work, and how changes in the ways people pool their care resources together can initiate changes in the distribution of roles not only in families but in larger communities as well.