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Roberta Raffaetà

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# Migration and parenting: reviewing the debate and calling for future research

Roberta Raffaetà

Roberta Raffaetà is Research Fellow at the Department of Sociology and Social Research, Trento University, Trento, Italy.

## Abstract

**Purpose** – The term “parenting” has come to assume a specific sociological meaning: it defines parents’ role and agency not only with regard to their children, but also to the state, medical doctors, psychologists and educators. How normative stances toward parenting affect the lives of parents has started to be analyzed in the social sciences, however less is known about how the “culture of parenting” impacts on the way migrant families take care of their children. The purpose of this paper is to untangle the conceptual and disciplinary roots of parenting studies stemming from early anthropological studies of kinship and ethno-psychological theories, through to the anthropology of childhood and child rearing and the current socio-anthropological studies of parenting. This review offers conceptual tools for the creation of a critical perspective on migration and parenting.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The paper acknowledges the theoretical and empirical gap in the study of migration and parenting by illustrating the sparse and interdisciplinary literature which has dealt with migration and parenting.

**Findings** – The paper discusses the presented literature’s limits and potentialities in light of the new culture of parenting.

**Originality/value** – The paper addresses future paths for ethnographic work.

**Keywords** Transnationalism, Childhood, Migration, Parenting, Child rearing, Paediatric

**Paper type** Literature review

## Introduction

To be a parent is commonly described as a difficult job; one can only imagine what it might be like for a migrant parent in a new land. Despite its practical relevance, this topic has been poorly investigated, and when it has been done, it has occurred only tangentially to other research topics. Migration and parenting is a slippery topic, constantly in tension – and dialogue – with transversal themes and disciplines like reproductive and child health, family studies, feminist and gender studies, research on childhood, migration and health and on policy and migration studies.

Most of the literature dealing with migration and parenting is framed within the biomedical paradigm, in terms of migrant parents’ accountability and expertise. From a socio-anthropological point of view, little has been problematized about migrant parents as crucial actors within an emerging standardized culture of parenting, how migrants’ cultural diversity interacts with current notions and practices of parenting, and how this is complicated by wider structural conditions such as the legal status of settlement.

Against this backdrop, this paper is a call for examining these critical issues pertaining to migration and parenting. The paper sketches the main strands of analysis which have so far dealt with migration and parenting. Given the paucity of research on this topic, it is necessary to first

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provide an interdisciplinary review of the literature. This also allows for an exploration of disciplinary boundaries and potential opportunities for creative and productive collaborations.

The paper starts discussing what the state of parenting today and how it has come to be conceptualized. It begins by first discussing and problematizing early anthropological studies of kinship in an ethno-psychological framework, in the anthropology of childhood and child rearing, and lastly, in current socio-anthropological studies of parenting. This literature review is intended to provide conceptual tools for the creation of a working concept of parenting and, at the same time, acknowledges gaps in the analysis of migration and parenting. The second section of the paper is then devoted to deciphering the diverse and often divergent works that have dealt with particular aspects of parenting and migration. These include feminist studies of motherhood, anthropological analysis of migrant birth practices and pregnancy, studies of transnational families and biomedical and psychological studies of child-rearing practices among migrants. The paper discusses the limitations and potential contributions of these works, and in conclusion, sketches possible future paths for research on migration and parenting.

## Methodology

This review is based on a systematic literature review conducted between May and December 2010. I searched the social sciences database of the Web of Knowledge. Search terms included: “migra/immigra” and “parent/parenting”; “child rearing” and “migra/immigra”; “motherhood/mothering”; “parenthood/parenting.” The systematic literature review was the first step within an anthropological and ethnographic project about migration and parenting in X (XX, 2013; 2015). A systematic review is often a useful first step for orienting fieldwork. Fieldwork took place from January 2011 to January 2013 and served to address criteria for the identification and selection of further reading. During the ethnographic research, key dominant themes emerged, thereby stimulated the review of work about migration studies of family, study of migration and health and anthropological literature on childhood and parenting. Overall, about eight articles and volumes were reviewed.

The criteria orienting the review were based on elucidating the socio-anthropological work about the interrelationship between parenting, migration and health. This served to identify related themes (e.g. the anthropology of childhood or transnational studies of family) and to look for interdisciplinarity in search of innovative insights into the topic. Priority was given to the intersections, similarities and gaps regarding existing literature on the themes of migration and parenting, rather than an in-depth specific disciplinary analysis of this work. The aim was to understand the genealogy and politics of the discourse about parenting, childhood and migration, paying more attention to the continuities and discontinuities among disciplines, rather than following a principle of disciplinary coherence. The result is critical review spanning feminist studies, anthropological studies of reproduction, transnational families and biomedical and psychological studies. However, this work has some limitations. For instance, this paper does not provide a clear portrayal of how the topic has been dealt within specific disciplines; hence, there are omissions that make the work appear less systematic. Nevertheless the merit of this paper is to provide an interdisciplinary exploration of migration and parenting.

### *At the origin of parenting*

Current parenting studies (Faircloth, 2009) derive from and expand upon early anthropological work on kinship, which is understood as an important political and legislative element of social systems. Proceeding from a structural-functionalist perspective meant to understand the function of kinship within the social structure, early anthropologists also investigated how relatedness is conceptualized (Carsten, 2000). The social role of parents (*mater*, *pater*) could be indeed different from the biological one (*genitor*, *genetrix*). A first example famously given by Malinowski (1922) described how biological fatherhood did not have much importance among Trobriand Islanders, who favored the affective bond of a man with the mother or with the child. Evans-Pritchard's (1951) example among the Nuer showed how the role of a parent may not be based on gender. Typically, discussions about the meaning of parents' role were dispersed within

larger monographs exploring various aspects of a specific population. Only after the Second World War did the study of parenting practices emerge as a specific focus within the sub-discipline of psychological anthropology.

The study of how parents in various societies take care of their children is usually known as “anthropology of childhood and childrearing” (Montgomery, 2009; Lancy, 2008; Deloache and Gottlieb, 2000; Froerer, 2009), thus downplaying the role of parents in favor of the child. Parenting after all is an object of study difficult to capture and delimit: it is the paramount concept to defining relationality. Its definition is in constant transition since it articulates the dialectic between the individuality of the parents and that of the child, with pregnancy and adolescence being the two extremes of the spectrum. As an embryo, the child constitutes one whole with the mother. Hence, becoming a mother is “the physical embodiment of connectedness” (Rothman, 1989, p. 35). As a child is born, his/her individuality starts to singularize through increasing steps of physical, cognitive and emotional independence from its parents, which includes struggles over autonomy that notoriously culminate with adolescence (Thorne, 2001). The middle of the spectrum (the child’s infancy) is the most problematic to define in terms of agency, given that the definitions of a child, adult and parent vary across socio-cultural contexts.

Since the early 1990s, socio-political agendas emphasized the definition of a child. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, enacted in 1979 (James and James, 2004; Montgomery, 2009), contributed to the boost of child-centered studies. Under this paradigm, some anthropologists worked in close partnership with non-governmental organizations supporting children’s rights, while others criticized the UN Western-Centric conception of childhood, revealing the existence of a cultural politics of childhood, in which children stand at the crossroads of divergent cultural and political agendas (see Scheper-Hughes and Sargent, 1998; Stephens, 1995; James and James, 2004; Zelizer, 1985).

As result of the popularity of child-focussed studies, a recent search in anthropological and sociological databases using “parenting” as the main search word reveals an overarching emphasis on the parent-child relationship in adolescence. Parental practices in other life stages of children are usually labeled as “child rearing.” According to the Cambridge Dictionary ([http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/rear\\_3#rear\\_3\\_\\_3](http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/rear_3#rear_3__3)), child rearing means “to care for young animals or children until they are able to care for themselves”: in this connotation, children share a similar status to animals. This similarity applies to other languages. In Italian, for example, people say “allevare,” which indicates both the care of children and animals. So, the meaning of child rearing pose a parallelism between children and animals, implicitly portraying children as not yet part of the human community, but as nature – still to be socialized. It is possible, therefore, to parent an adolescent but not a child, who can be only reared (or bred). To speak of child rearing is also to naturalize the task, assuming that the associated practices are easy, basic and unquestioned, ical and disassociated from culture, and not requiring any training or skills.

### *Cultures of parenting*

The new emerging culture of parenting indeed complicates the traditional concept of child rearing. With the progressive weakening of institutional social structures and relationships of trust in the public sphere, as well as the increasing rhetoric of individualism and concurrence in work settings, the family has been fetishized as the sole site for the respite of the soul and the expression of genuine emotions (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Lasch, 1977). Much energy has been put into how parents raise their children – transforming parents into paranoid (Furedi, 2008) or anxious (Nelson, 2010; Warner, 2006) persons. The transformation of an ascriptive identity (that of parents) into a set of practices (parenting) started in the 1950s, coinciding with the growing literature of expert advice on how to properly take care of children (for analysis of it see Ehrenreich and English, 1979; Hardyment, 1983; Hays, 1996). In more recent years, the ideal of “intensive parenting” (Hays, 1996) has variously merged with other ideal-type parenting like “attachment theory” (Bowlby, 1953), “tiger mothers” (Chua, 2011) and “helicopter parents.” All of them are intensive practices of parenting that exert an high degree of control over children, thereby requiring expertise from the parents and significant time and expenditure.

Scholars have recently started to devote their attention to these parenting cultures (Faircloth *et al.*, 2013; Faircloth and Lee, 2010; Lee *et al.*, 2010; Lee, 2006). In Europe, the Center for Parenting Culture Studies located at the University of Kent (<http://blogs.kent.ac.uk/parentingculturestudies/>) is an important reference point for the critical study of parenting practices and their cultural-political implications. These studies show how family and parenting have become important sites of negotiation in current democracies between the role of the individual and that of the state.

An example of this trend is the development of policies for formal parenting training (see, e.g. the UK National Academy of Parenting Practitioners [www.parentingresearch.org.uk/Aboutus.aspx](http://www.parentingresearch.org.uk/Aboutus.aspx)), or the widespread diffusion of informational material with parenting advices (see the “Parenting” section of the US national Health Institute [www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/parenting.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/parenting.html)). Private agencies offering training in parenting are blossoming, as well as online websites on parenting (see, e.g. of English-speaking websites, [www.parenting.com/](http://www.parenting.com/) and [www.parenting.org/](http://www.parenting.org/)), while television reality-shows such as *Nanny 911*, *Supernanny*, *Little Angels* depict parenting aficionados across various cultural contexts.

Parenting therefore is not just a diverse and innocent term for defining child rearing. Rather, it implies a set of new meanings and political implications. In the last decades within the global north, the meaning of parental responsibility has shifted from parental authority to parental accountability (Reece, 2006). This also implies a shift in what is considered parents’ responsible behavior; that is, from being responsible for children to being responsible to external agencies. As a consequence, good parenting is more than a set of prescribed behaviors: it is first and foremost a specific attitude. Good parents can fail, but they have to be well informed. They must take on the responsibility to actively search for advice, which is typically casted as scientific knowledge. Stemming from disciplines such as psychology and pedagogy, parents are “scientifically” instructed on how to parent.

Given such premises, good parents ideally must be relatively well educated in order to seek out, understand, and endorse expert advice. Parents should also be well socialized in the language of psychology and pedagogy. These disciplines refer to a particular, and not universally shared cultural domain: Western science. Good parenting is therefore becoming increasingly restricted to those with appropriate social, educational and cultural backgrounds.

Another implication of the new culture of parenting is the crucial importance of the early stages of a child’s development, given that parents have the maximum degree of influence on a child during this period, and are therefore held most accountable. In pre-school years, the child relies most on the parents’ model and educational choices because she/he is not yet significantly influenced by external models of socialization. Parenting therefore starts now with conception (or even before), as opposed to child rearing that started only after the child’s birth.

Despite the very specific definition of “good parenting,” and the fact that many global parents are left outside its reach, how current understandings of parenting merges within the context of variations across cultures and ethnicities has yet to emerge as a popular topic of inquiry. Migrant parents are a special target for normative attitudes, but few studies have analyzed the implications of these attitudes on migrant parents’ life, practices and perceptions. Although there are a few notable exceptions (see Jayasane-Darr, 2013; Jiménez Sedano, 2013; Challinor, 2012), social scientific studies on current “intensive parenting” have privileged white and Western parents as object of study. Instead, migrants’ parenting, intended as a matter of social security and community health, has mainly been the domain of psychologists and biomedical practitioners.

### *The biomedical literature on migrant’s parenting*

Parenting practices in migration contexts have been mostly analyzed through a psychological and biomedical lens (Barlow *et al.*, 2004; Garcia Coll *et al.*, 1995). Biomedical work aims to establish parents’ level of “acculturation” (Bornstein and Cote, 2006; Driessen *et al.*, 2010) as a “predictor” of parental behaviors in relation to diverse issues, such as oral health, diabetes, discipline, respect, physical punishment, sudden infant death syndrome, breastfeeding and nutrition, child growth and sleeping patterns (Meléndez, 2005; Ispa *et al.*, 2004; Schulze *et al.*, 2001) and as a predictor of a

child's psychological wellness (cite?). Migrant families are often represented as knowledge deficient, dysfunctional or in need of training or education in order to ascribe to normative notions of child rearing (Bornstein and Cote, 2006; Garcia Coll *et al.*, 1995; Fraktman, 1998). In the journal *Pediatrics*, for example, Bornstein and Cote (2004) write "gaps in parenting knowledge have implications for clinical interactions with parents, child diagnosis, pediatric training, and parent education" (p. 557). It has been observed (Meléndez, 2005) that proceeding from an ethnocentric perspective, this work does not question the nature of those "gaps," neither is it self-reflective about which knowledge has been taken as reference.

Beatrix Whiting (1963), as well as her husband and colleagues (Whiting and Child, 1953) analyzed child rearing practices in a variety of cultures[1] in light of Freudian theories of children's stages of psychosexual development (weaning, toilet training and sex training). They found that their order and value was not universal, and that most cultures promote the learning of interpersonal instead of bodily functions. Similar comparisons followed between American parenting standards and those of the Japanese (Caudill and Weinstein, 1969) as well as Gusii mothers in Kenya (Le Vine *et al.*, 1994). This gave way to the creation of dichotomous pairs of parenting styles (authoritarian/permissive, pedagogic/pediatric, etc.), based on a culturally biased perspective (Ochoka and Janzen, 2008). The differences between parental ethno-theories, defined as "parents' understandings about the nature of children, the structure of development, and the meaning of behaviour." (Harkness and Super, 1996, p. 2), were explored in relation to the environmental and cultural context (Levine, 1977, 2003; Levine and Norman, 2001; Small, 1998; Keller, 2007), at times with specific attention to issues such as language learning (Ochs, 1982; Ochs and Schieffelin, 1984) and discipline and respect (Rae-Espinoza, 2010; Hamilton, 1981; Hewlett, 1991).

Another strand of this literature proceeds in the opposite way by strongly promoting cultural competence in pediatrics (Brotanek *et al.*, 2008). It suggests medical practitioners adapt to migrants traditional practices (Liamputtong, 2002), which are interpreted as intrinsically good and/or better. One of the implicit assumptions of much of this work is that migrant mothers embody the archetype of "motherness." As members of cultures where traditional knowledge is transmitted from generation to generation, migrant mothers are described as fully competent and confident. This is a clear idealization of the migrant mother as an archetype femininity, suspended in an immobile and indefinite past. The actual reality is more nuanced: many migrant women migrate at an early age and have no opportunity to learn traditional knowledge about child rearing, they often lack the direct support of family members, or had migratory paths which included long periods of material and social deprivation (as is the case for refugees) which resulted in poor knowledge of traditional practices. In addition, some migrants may regard traditional practices with suspicion (Gálvez, 2011), the residue of a backward mentality that stands in opposition to the modernity found in the new context. The uncomplicated celebration of ethnic styles of child rearing does not account for social change, thereby risking cultural essentialization (Harwood *et al.*, 1999) and ignoring possibilities of hybridity or empowerment.

There is a need to reframe interventions in pediatrics with regard to cultural diversity. First of all, there is a need to recognize the wide variation within the same cultural group (Vasey and Manderson, 2010), so culture does not necessarily define parental practices (Ochoka and Janzen, 2008). Second, there is evidence that some parenting practices are consistent across migrants and local parents (Pomerleau *et al.*, 1991) since cultural assumptions and practices are not immobile, but are negotiated and subject to change over time (Sanagavarapu, 2010; Fortin and Le Gall, 2007; Lambert, 1987). Personal factors of instability in regard to migration can cast taken-for-granted cultural assumptions into doubt, forcing the migrant parent to engage in a new meaning-making process. The encounter between pediatrics and the migrant family is not a site where bounded meanings crash against each other, but it is a cultural practice in and of itself, in which meanings are co-constructed and reflect "who they [migrants] are, or who they are becoming" (Hirsch, 2003, p. 251). Immigrant families' patterns of hybridization are a complex articulation of culture, structure and agency (Foner, 1997), affected by different variables such as cultural assumptions of an ethnic group studied, demographic composition (which influences marriage patterns, couple relationships and community openness/closure) and structural conditions (which provide new economic and legal opportunities and limits). This is not to say that culture does not play a role in how parents decide to take care of their children. Of course, culture

matters, especially considering that parenting is a result of both biological and social reproduction. But many other factors influence parents decisions, and this paper is a call to explore their significance and to acknowledge “the actual rather than the perceived” (Kelaheer and Manderson, 2000, p. 4) cultural difference of migrants’ parenting practices and knowledge.

### *Migrants’ domestic dimension*

This gap can be filled by ethnographically assessing the intimate and domestic sphere as a meaningful site for the analysis of migratory processes. This section reviews work that has dealt with this aspect of migration and also indicates potential paths of further investigations, especially with regard to the processes of resistance, hybridization and social reproduction in a transnational perspective.

In the social sciences, parenting has been analyzed focussing on the role of the mother, especially from feminist scholars (Gordon, 1990) who have critiqued this role (Chodrow, 1978), and contended the existence of a real “maternal instinct” (Gieve, 1990) or of a “normal motherhood” (Phoenix and Wollett, 1991; Brown, 1994). Feminist interpretations of child rearing (Ribbens, 1994, Richardson, 1993) have focussed on mothers’ identity and how it changes throughout motherhood and over time and space (Crouch and Manderson, 1993; Maushart, 1997; McMahon, 1995; Rich, 1977). Motherhood has been also described as a social and cultural reproduction of patriarchal and biomedical norms (Rothman, 1989) and an ideology which discourages attempts to accommodate work/society demands (Lupton, 2000; Hays, 1996). It has also been illustrated how motherhood has become a new object of consumption (Taylor *et al.*, 2004).

Within works on motherhood, some authors have given attention to the experience of migrant mothers (Glenn *et al.*, 1995; Bhopal, 1998; Liamputtong and Naksook, 2003; Liamputtong, 2003, 2006; Liam, 1999; O’Reilly, 2004; Tummala-Narra, 2004). This work illustrates the complexity of being a migrant mother and its associated vulnerability; that is, the stresses of becoming a mother add to that of migration and resettlement. Aside from the extreme cases of refugee women (McMichael and Manderson, 2004; Gibson *et al.*, 2010), who are more likely to live in a state of isolation, lacking the social support granted at home, this work gives a partial picture of the experience of migrant motherhood, simply emphasizing weakness against resilience and resistance. It remains to be explored how mothers creatively make sense of the hegemonic culture of parenting and adapt it to their cultural background and routinized practices. The experience of being a migrant mother remains, however, poorly analyzed in comparison to the analysis of mainstream motherhood.

Most of the work on migrant mothers has concentrated on the experience of pregnancy and birth (Stülb, 2010; Liamputtong Rice, 2000; Fortin and Le Gall, 2007; Allotey *et al.*, 2004; Gálvez, 2011). This topic is tangential to the study of parenting, but it deserves attention because it has attracted much scholarly and public attention[2] and therefore constitutes an important backdrop for the study of migrants’ parenting. Research on migrants’ birth and pregnancy practices is part of the larger literature on reproductive health. Certain studies (Liamputtong, 2006) cover a large span of time of the life of a woman (from sexual maturity to menopause), but the issue of parenting lies outside of the scope. Parenting is generally considered a social consequence of a reproductive event, not a reproductive modality in itself. Parenting, however has to do with reproduction as well, as it too is beyond biology and linked to social reproduction. This is especially true with regard to the migration experience of a family, in which cultural reproduction is a goal in itself above and beyond survival (Keller, 2007; Decimo, 2008; Sims and Omaji, 1999). Therefore, another aspect to be explored is how parenting modalities among migrants incorporate the social reproduction of the family.

The theme of social reproduction has recently gained momentum with the increased mobility of entire families. Migrant families have become crucial for migration policies and public opinion (Grillo, 2008). The notion of the family has become politicized as a trope, a site of expression of diverse moral orders and sets of beliefs, values, ideas and practices to which migrant groups are identified. In many Western societies, public discourse typically represents immigrant families as “problematic,” whose cultural practices are deemed unacceptable for pragmatic or ideological reasons. In migrant families, traditional gender roles are often undermined

(Pessar, 2003; Degni *et al.*, 2006). Often women find jobs more easily, leaving men to stay at home to take care of children. This happens also in cultures where traditionally the man is the breadwinner, thus subverting wider cosmologies and values (Pribilsky, 2004). Migrant families can also disrupt the traditional idea of family (Grillo, 2008). Furthermore, migrant families often are composed by single parents, or – on the contrary – are enlarged families with children raised by grandparents or family members (Bhopal, 1998). Other times, migrant families perform transnational parenting, as family members are dislocated transnationally. The study of families that are “here,” but have many and solid connection with a “there” and/or have some family members “there,” has attracted increasing attention in scholarly debate (Chamberlain and Leydesdroff, 2004; Gardner and Grillo, 2002; Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002; Le Gall, 2005; Menjivar, 2012; Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002). Less attention has been given to how transnational processes interact with parenting in the case of the migration of the entire family. The role of transnational means of communication in supporting the flow of symbolic, social and knowledge capital, for example, has been mostly analyzed in instances where the parent-child relationship is done from a distance (Baldassar, 2007). There has been little attention given to relatives left behind who are support migrant parents in the host country. This gap is surprising, given that most migrant families can be defined transnational even if children and parents are not apart. Transnational character is not only defined by the physical spaces in which family members live; that is to say, movement is not *sine qua non* to the experience of being transnational (Levitt and Glick Schiller, 2004). Parents migrating with children can be considered transnational in all respects because they maintain frequent and meaningful exchanges with those who stay behind. They are transnational also because the advice they receive from home have an impact on their daily conduct in the site of migration (Olwig and Sørensen, 2002; Smith, 2006). Bonds with home have been also enhanced on a very practical ground by immigration laws that situate parents and children who have migrated “in temporary spaces that include removal (or exclusion from society’s benefits) at any time” (Menjivar, 2012, p. 318). Therefore, it would be very interesting to further investigate how transnational influences interact with current understandings of appropriate parenting.

## Conclusion

In this paper I have explored the genealogy of parenting studies and the diverse sources of insights on the topic. Early kinship studies, starting from the observation of the function of specific ways of relatedness, have developed into studies that have given increasing attention to the meaning of such relatedness. Anthropological studies of childhood and child rearing have specifically targeted this issue, revealing the extreme variability among cultures in parenting practices. The narrow focus on the child has, however, limited a wider appreciation of the complexities implied in being a parent. This issue has been explored by feminist studies of motherhood. More recently, it has been taken up by sociologists who are exploring emerging parenting culture(s) in the global north. It requires parents to be open and able to learn how to parent from experts, usually (bio)medically trained professionals from the global north. This opens up a series of problems regarding the statute of expert knowledge and its transferability, as well as the fragile balance between parental authority, parental responsibility and state control. These issues have started to be taken up in mainstream populations, but little or no research has been conducted to understand how migrant families react and interact with this hegemonic parenting culture they find in their place of settlement. Good parenting, and associated critical studies, seems to be a social and ethnic privilege.

The paper proceeded by reviewing the current state of socio-anthropological research on migration and parenting, which is limited and is only tangential to other research foci. A first strand of research has focussed either on the mother or on the family as the privileged site of analysis. Research has focussed on migrant mothers who have been depicted in their double burden of learning to be parents and learning to be citizens in the host society, or as carriers of exotic birth and neonatal practices. Another approach has been to target migrant families, who are studied as a politicized trope that produce and reproduce diverse moral orders and practices. The study of transnational families is also an emerging perspective within family migration studies, but so far it has not accounted ethnographically for how transnationalism matters in migrants’ parenting. A second strand of research is linked to medical and psychological research, within which two



approaches are identifiable. One is naively ethnocentric in that it highlights migrant parents' fallacies and knowledge-gaps, suggesting the establishment of information campaigns and training for migrant parents. The other approach is apparently less ethnocentric and endorses an idealized and static view of cultural difference, keeping traditional knowledge and values as the standard to which medical practitioners should adapt. Both approaches have a narrow view of "culture" (seen as something negative for the former and positive for the latter), and neither takes into account the many variables which constitute the experience of being a migrant parent.

This paper has reviewed existing studies of migration and parenting with the aim to call for future ethnographic work on the experience of migrant parents, exploring how they interact with the global north parenting culture of supermothers, superfathers, supernannies and superdoctors. Shifts in the meaning of parental responsibility from authority to accountability are indeed exacerbated in the context of migrant families, which are suffocated by the central power of nation-state legislations in exerting their agency. The paper draws attention to the problematic aspects of using a Western, scientific lens of the global north to assess and discuss immigrants' parenting philosophy and practices. There is indeed a need for research that features the voices and experience of migrant parents and children in the parent-child dynamic to understand their tensions and subjective experience in a transnational context.

Possible future paths of investigation include (but are not limited to): the influence of local politics and migration policy on parenting; migrant parents' access to health care facilities for the health of their children; ethnographic accounts of how the new culture of parenting is negotiated within migrant families; the role of transnational sources of information and/or of transnational means of communication in this process; parenting as a part of a "transnational living" (Guarnizo, 2003) broadly defined; and how migrant parenting practices change following maturity as a parent, the number, age, gender and personalities of their children, as well as their cultural and religious backgrounds, and how these factors intersect and are altered within various settings and among various groups of migrants.

## Notes

1. Data derived from the Human Relations Area Files (HRAF), an extensive database of ethnographic information created in 1949 by George Murdock at Yale University, have been used to make statistical cross-cultural comparisons.
2. This can be partly explained by the fact that pregnancy is a bounded concept in comparison to parenting, so data can be managed more easily, and also explained by the salience of the theme among feminist scholars.

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### About the author

Roberta Raffaetà obtained a PhD at the University of Lausanne with a Study of Allergy, in which she explored issues of medicalization and medical pluralism. She is the Post-Doc Research Marie Curie fellow at the Trento University and a Member of Max Planck Institute for the study of religious and ethnic diversity, working group on medical diversity. She was also a Visiting Fellow at the Unit of Social Science and Health Research, Monash Melbourne University. Her current project is on migration and parenting. Her main areas of expertise include and integrate anthropology of health and body and anthropology of migration. These issues are analyzed through a perspective which emphasizes embodied and affective dimensions. Roberta Raffaetà can be contacted at: [roberta.raffaeta@gmail.com](mailto:roberta.raffaeta@gmail.com)

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