

# “Careers” Transnational Links: The Ambivalence of Immigrant Remittances\*

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## Abstract

Recent studies on international migration have paid special attention to the transnational perspective, a new branch of the sociology of migration studying the process through which migrants build social fields that link the countries of origin and destination. The economic transnationalism connected to the great phenomenon of remittances—financial, material or immaterial—is one relevant aspect of this field of study. Remittances are ambivalent because they can be interpreted either as a medium of consolidation of transnational ties or as a bond linking migrant women to the country of origin. Our target is, in fact, those migrant women who carry out in Italy a particular work of care: the badanti, or informal caregivers. As such, they constitute an important resource of the Italian welfare system, characterized as it is by an important family component. Any migratory phenomenon is, by nature, complex and dynamic, with different historical, economic and social characteristics. Moreover, it operates changes at many levels. The caring work done by badanti, as well as the transnational links represented by cross-border remittances, takes place and must be read within this broader dynamics. The research question for this paper is (exactly) that whether remittances are mainly bonds or mainly ties for badanti, relative to other migrant workers employed in the care sector. We use qualitative and quantitative data from the Prin 2004 research project<sup>1</sup> concerning nationality, gender and class in new house holding work in Italy. After describing this phenomenon and its peculiarities, we shall analyze the mechanisms that originate it, and establish correlations with the surrounding context.

## Keywords

Transnational Connections; Care; Badanti; Remittances

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\*Although this paper is the result of shared work, for formal purposes, it is attributed to M. Tognetti Bordogna 2,4,5; A. Ornaghi 1,3.

<sup>1</sup>Prin 2005 Researchproject “Nazionalità, genere e classe nel nuovo lavoro domestico. Cambiamenti nella famiglia italiana e evoluzione dei sistemi migratori”.

## 1. Introduction

In Italy, according to estimates by Caritas/Migrantes [1], foreign women represent almost half of all migrants. Among the nationalities with a female predominance, countries with rates ranging between 50% and 90% are both European countries such as Romania and Ukraine, and Latin American countries, for example, Ecuador, Peru and Brazil. Even among Asian nationalities, female presence is important, especially in the case of migration from the Philippines or Thailand.

Since the 90s, the female component of immigration has quadrupled [2,3]. The data reflects a gradual and continuous view of the feminization of immigration in Italy.

Transnationalism as a deliberate choice and strategy [4] pursued by migrants has led to the growing phenomenon of people and families who struggle to keep alive bonding and parental responsibilities.

For nearly thirty years, migration has thus feminized [3]. Over time, the presence of foreign labour has affected women in big cities first, then in province, to meet the demand for care services. There are, in fact, more and more Italian families choose to entrust to the care of their elderly caregivers abroad [5,6].

This is a phenomenon that involves many countries, particularly in southern European countries, including Italy.

The shape silently assumed by our home care system has proven consistent with the welfare model “familistic”, which is typical in our country [7].

Italy seems to have become *badanti* of the land [8].

The extension of this phenomenon has given rise to a lot of debates. One in particular is the tendency to use these services in the absence of adequate public services.

In addition, the need of many elders to receive care day and night, has led many immigrant women to live with their clients, at the same time overcoming the initial problems with accommodation and saving almost all of the salary to be able to send home. Working conditions involving the presence of a fixed working 24 hours on 24, resulting in considerable physical and mental stress, and the restriction of personal freedom.

The “migration of care” [9,10] introduces resources to meet social needs that the national welfare states can not meet internally. While at the same time, the very existence of the “migration of care” has an impact that transforms the boundaries of the welfare and poses new challenges to the states’ society. The role that women migrants are informal in our welfare system, however, poses energy to their family structure, forcing them to strenuous secondments and readjustments and compensation of various kinds, starting from remittances.

## 2. Remittances

Remittances can be defined as that part of the income received by immigrant that is sent to their families in the country of origin, and here for a variety of functions. They, however, also has an economic role assumed for the migrants and their family, it is symbolic of the emotional bond of continuity and solidarity despite the physical distance of the members.

In the past, Italy, which has been a country of emigration, has been able to rely on remittances from their migrants went abroad. For several years, the situation in our country has been reversed: from importers of money, our country has become increasingly valuable for a tank of foreign workers who are citizens in our country [11].

Remittances have an important meaning as well as for individual recipient countries.

In macroeconomic terms, migrant remittance constitutes one of the factors that can lead to growth of less developed economies. According to World Bank estimates, in some developing countries, remittances amount to more than double the total official development assistance [12].

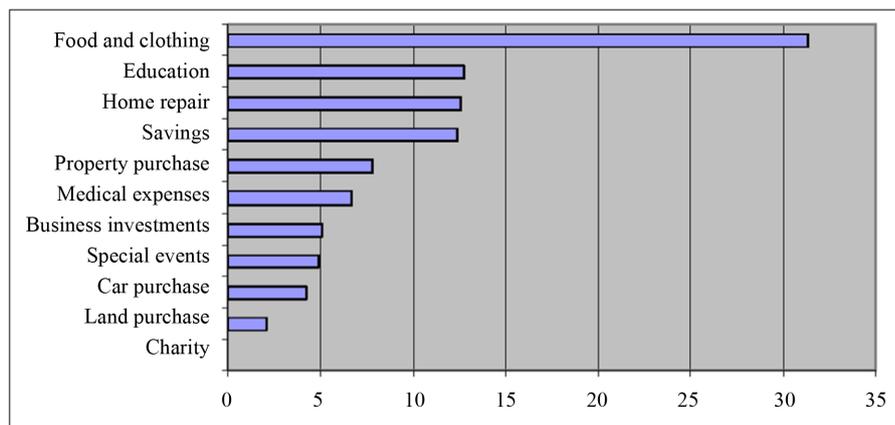
However, there is a certain level of uncertainty about the extent to which remittances actually help the economy of the country of origin of migrants, because as shown by the data, a substantial portion of revenue is often used by family members for purposes of consumption, not saved or invested [12].

In 2004, it was registered from Italy to other countries the sending of 2.094 billion Euros, almost double compared to 2003, when they were 1.167 million. Three times more than in 2002, 782 million and even 7 times more than in 1997, when they were 292 million exactly 10 times more than in 1995, with 108 million [1]. The officially recorded remittances flows includes banks, post office and “money transfer” and does not take into account the sums brought home by the immigrants directly or through friends, so outside of official channels. According to some estimates, in this case, **Table 1** and the **Figure 1** would double.

**Table 1.** Change in annual remittances—remittances ratio/GDP.

Year	Remittances (in thousands €)	Annual % change	Remittances/GDP
2000	588.468		0.05%
2001	749.401	27.3%	0.06%
2002	791.616	5.6%	0.06%
2003	1.167.060	47.4%	0.09%
2004	2.094.000	131.9%	0.19%
2005	3.900.793	44.1%	0.27%
2006	4.527.666	16.1%	0.30%
2007	6.039.255	33.4%	0.39%
2008	6.376.949	5.6%	0.41%
2009	6.747.818	5.8%	0.44%
2010	6.385.874	-5.4%	0.41%

Source: Our calculations on Bank of Italy, 2010, [www.bancaditalia.it](http://www.bancaditalia.it)

**Figure 1.** Spending patterns of remittance.

Early studies [13] thought about that remittances would fall over time, following the integration of migrants in the country of destination, the most recent study [14], however, found that remittances have in recent decades, have also increased faster than migration flows themselves.

Remittances are part of consumption expenditure by households and partly saved or invested. The results of some studies [12] showed that the majority of remittances are used for the consumption of primary goods (food and clothing), the other material item is represented by costs for domestic work. Also according to the World Bank study [12], significant amounts of income from remittances are also used for the education of children and savings.

If we analyse the distribution of remittances to countries of destination in 2007 and 2008 (Figure 2), we can see that most Chinese citizens are followed by the Philippines and Romania to send more aid money to the country of origin.

Going into detail of the analysis, we can observe that although the ranking for provinces in absolute attributes to Rome and Milan, the top two positions in the ranking in absolute numbers then these are clearly overcome by

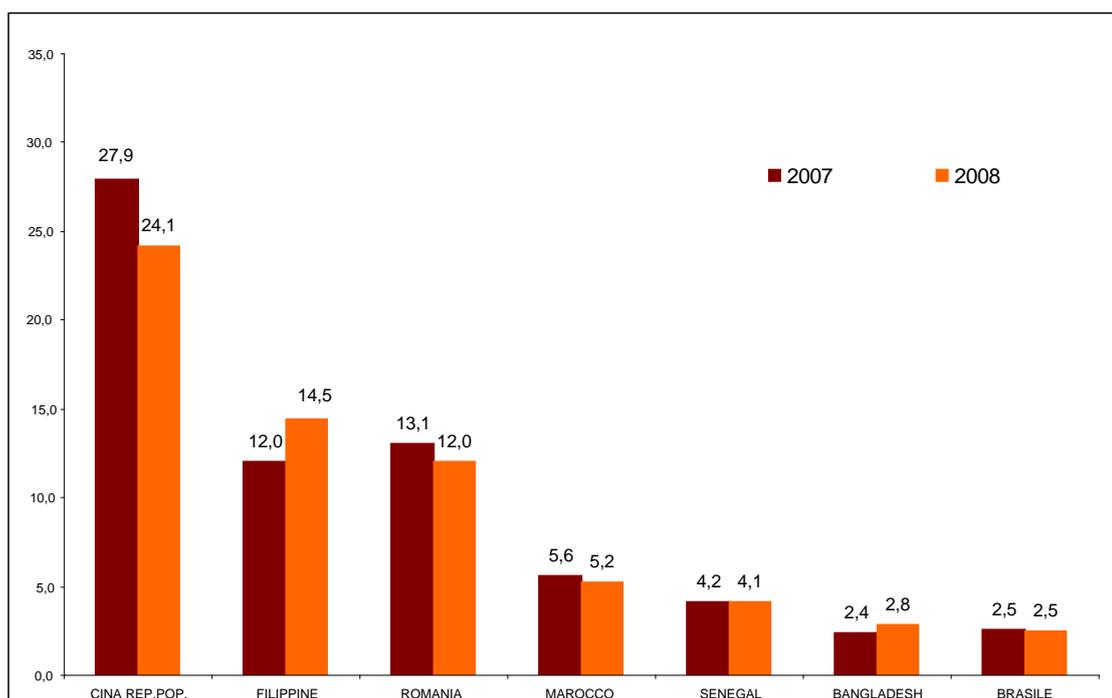


Figure 2. % distribution of remittances by country of destination, Years 2007-2008.

the province of Prato with regard to per capita values and remember that in the province of Prato is the Chinese community more rooted in Italy.

The literature [15] identifies the various reasons underlying the choice of the individual to send remittances:

- Grounds for altruistic: tied to the desire to help his family;
- Motivation linked to self: the shed becomes a tool of investment to ensure the conditions for return;
- Reasons related to the desire to secure and protect their families.

From an economic standpoint, there are several theoretical approaches that attempt to explain the different reasons behind remittances [3,16]:

- Economic neo-classical: the immigrant sees the projected towards permanent settlement in the destination country, so the savings are realized for the migrant in the country of migration and therefore does not send remittances to the country of departure;
- Structuralist view that remittances do not produce a real impact on the development of the country of origin, remain among the family members who often use them for conspicuous consumption;
- New economy of migration: return migration seen as the realization of a migration plan for the short term, therefore, remittances are considered a strategy to protect the interests of the entire family group in the country of origin. Remittances are not simply the result of the agreement between the parties. Affect the financial capital of households, are also insurance risks related to local economic system;
- Approach transnationalism (or network) considers remittances as one of many forms of remittances.

Based on the research literature [2,15,16] the women, respect to men, are more attentive to the needs of the family of origin and send a greater share of their income to the country of origin.

Obviously there income is a different attitude in the sending of remittances, including those who will hold the mechanism of remittances and those who reduce or stop this practice, especially if they have children with them here in Italy.

### 3. The Many Meanings of Remittances

Women more than men tend to their countrymen spend their migration project to social welfare of the family. The fact that many of them are forced to leave their children in the country of origin, increases the social use of

remittances, which are directed at least in part to compensate for their absence [17] and justify their stay in the context of migration.

Remittances also have a very specific meaning, as they represent the turning point in the process of migrant's savings and, above all, the show had paid the debt for the trip.

The system of remittances is therefore an instrument of family development an opportunity to study the children, bring greater prosperity to the family, allowing a different level of consumption and sometimes allow the start of a business in the country of origin.

Remittances are not only monetary, but also materials such as gifts, new technologies, dress, drugs. Symbolic goods as evidence of maternal presence despite the physical distance.

It should be noted that the sending of parcels is not always essential, but so it's symbolic meaning: the tangible sign of a continuous and steady interest and loyalty to his family [3]. It is a clear signal that despite the distance the family still exists and is "alive". Even if the mother can continue to carry away the typical functions of the maternal figure as the purchase of goods necessary for the reproduction of the family [18]. Mothers migrants continue to play their role as family care and to purchase and have control over how remittances are spent and the periodization of when to send them [14]. Also, identify alternative strategies if the agreements are not respected.

Surging remittances primarily the function of maintaining links with the transnational social networks that exchange and donation, which continuously generate active reciprocal social bonds that strengthen and stretch over time, establishing a social hierarchy.

According to the literature [19-21], with the pain of separation from children, mothers make use of three basic answers: the commodification of love, namely the replacement of daily acts of care with material goods, the repression of emotional tensions, based on the denial of the emotional costs of separation and rationalization of the distance, that is the justification that the economic gains outweigh the costs incurred emotional.

The gifts are often expensive, symbolize the absent, certify the effort to know the tastes and needs of those left, testify to the time invested to find the object given [22,23].

The forced separation of family members leads to the development of various strategies to keep the family ties.

Finally, in the country of origin, remittances become acquisition of prestige and transform lifestyles, but also lead to changes in cultural patterns, especially in countries with economies in transition [19,24].

#### 4. The Research: Badanti e Remittances

In the present work will use qualitative data from the Research PRIN 2005 "Nationality, gender and class in the new domestic labour. Changes in the Italian family and evolution of migratory systems", while the quantitative data are our calculations based on data from different sources [12].

The survey involved a total of 682 individuals, of which 596 were women (87.4% of the total sample) and only 86 men (12.6%), located throughout the national territory of which 43.4% is made up of careers, domestic workers by 42.3%, 6.1% held other jobs in the domestic sector and a 8.2% unemployed.

Research has highlighted that remittances do not affect only men but also women who take on specific behaviours because they are more constant and continuous sending of these resources than males (Figure 3).

The continuity of the lesser males sending of remittances is also confirmed in the presence of children (Figure 4).

Our research has highlighted and confirmed the many meanings of remittances deserving material and symbolic.

The most interesting is we believe in the fact that remittances may also have ambivalent character in itself as an important resource for those left to the country of origin, but at the same time a constraint, a liability for those who started. It may limit the autonomy, emotional detachment and material, the distancing from family and country of origin.

The constrain of remittances as an obstacle to the emancipation of those who started, especially if a woman and mother [16,25].

Emerge from our interviews with the different meanings that are attributed by the women who send remittances home.

Mainly the role of remittances buy exchange of affection and emotional, in particular those of type material.

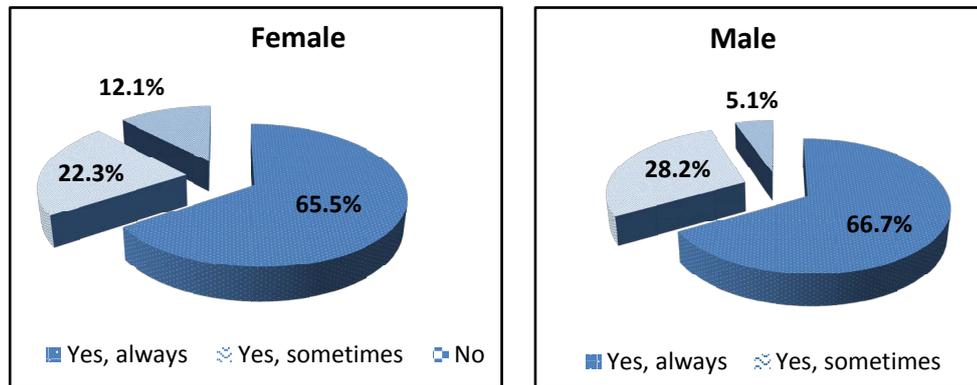


Figure 3. Breakdown by gender and remittances sent to the country of origin (%), Source: Prin 2005.

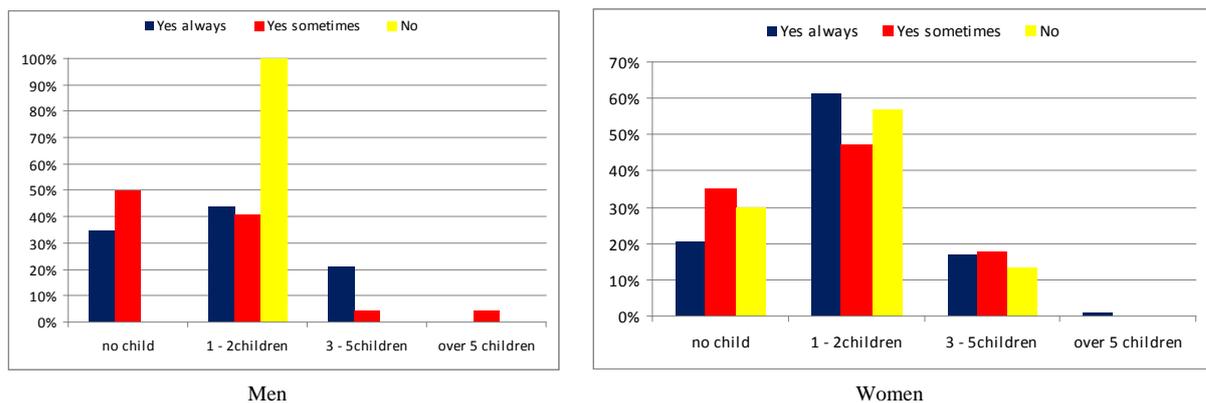


Figure 4. Breakdown by number of children, gender and remittances sent to the country of origin (%), Source: PRIN, 2005.

Our bus arrive leading magazines, I like so much, that we bring money or packages from us.

In Modena? In Modena. You know the Theatre of Passions, beyond that there are large square from Moldova and Ukraine.

So you meet there, get these bus? Yes.

What to bring? Newspapers. For example, if I want something from us, parents want to make a gift for my birthday, they bring there. I can go and take. Or if I send money, I have three grandchildren all birthdays do some gift

(T. Ukraine, woman, 45 years old, in Italy since 2000)

Remain, however, the importance of financial support played by remittances

-Uh... what kind of relationship with your country of origin? For example, the money you earn, what you do send in Ukraine? Eh... if you can save a lot or a little? You can talk about this aspect of... -Uh... I think little.

-can you save? Mmm... what does this word mean? Gain, you earn through work. With this money what are you doing? —Help my children. I always say children do not money we can not live together. So it is not easy. I help family.

Buy also send things? I buy a little bit of things, includes shoes for children. —To his band? I buy for everyone.

(M. Ukraine, woman, 59 years old, in Italy since 2001)

As anticipated, remittances are not only monetary, but often in material goods, gifts or gratuities of any kind,

from the most expensive technological objects, food and sweets in general.

And you sent something else? Yes, I send it. For example, this time I sent 3 doves, because we do not have this thing, and when first sent my daughter loved it. So I already know that the things that like. Then chocolates, I don't know, for example, this time bought a small gold chain for my daughter. Then I bought a ham, because we do not have that too. My daughter also likes.

(V. Ukraine, woman, 32 years old, in Italy since 2002)

Remittances are also useful for health, to support and supplement the welfare of the country of origin for the benefit of those who remained. A little brake to "care drane" [16,23].

In fact it is a separate chapter to health issues and health. Even distant women tend to worry about the health of family members left the country and where possible to help them not only from an economic standpoint, but also with western remedies.

-It is too expensive. So sometimes when there is, say, medicine go to the insurance, I take on my own and send. —send the medicines? Yes, I send the medicines as my mother always need this, for hypertension, but I am sending.

(V. Philippines, woman, 51 years old, in Italy since 1996)

In some cases, however, remittances are seen as an obligation.

Also sent them gifts? —Gifts yes. Always. Now we have decided not to make them more because we pay too much. Before Christmas we make a package, but when it got there, there's still asking for money and costs us a lot. We decided not to do it again.

(E. Romania, woman, 38 years old, in Italy since 2004)

Also, when earn is not enough to buy material, they prefer send the money. They get it in place strategies to reduce costs related to sending of remittances, without being less of a moral obligation

-You can send things at home, have you children? For example packs? —Not always. Festive, Christmas, New Year's Day, for birthdays of my children. Because it costs too much and must also pay for kilo to ship.

(V. Ukraine, woman, 46 years old in Italy since 2003)

## 5. Conclusions

Migrant women are the protagonists of a welfare state that is absent of globle [9,26]. Acquiring professional experience in the care sector is unlikely to be invoked and submerged, and can be spent outside of a gray market. Western and assist families are often the main point of referential and emotional help of children in the country of origin [19].

Regarding remittances, we can say that they certainly have an impact on the development of the country of origin. It firstly has an influence on the migrant's family in terms of greater integration of income and greater access to goods and services.

Remittances have a value that goes beyond their economic significance, symbolizing the persistence of real connection and parental responsibility. Remittances give way to emigration. However, in many cases, this important source for families that remained for the economy of the country of origin becomes a constraint for the emancipation of the individual especially for those women shown in our research [27,28].

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