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Research Article

Putting family centre stage: Ties to nonresident family, internal migration, and immobility

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Putting family centre stage: Ties to nonresident family, internal migration, and immobility

Clara H. Mulder¹

Abstract

BACKGROUND

Despite research paying increasing attention to intergenerational care and geographical distance between family members, the role played in internal migration and immobility in industrialised countries by ties to family living outside the household has remained understudied and poorly theorised.

OBJECTIVE

I propose a novel perspective on internal migration and immobility that complements existing perspectives: the family ties perspective. This perspective focuses on the role of family outside the household in internal migration and immobility. An agenda for research applying this perspective is also presented.

CONTRIBUTION

I suggest how ties to family outside the household (denoted as ‘family ties’) can be introduced into cost-benefit approaches of migration, and argue how migration and immobility are related to the linked lives of family members. I also put forward ideas on how the role of family ties differs between individuals, between life-course stages, and between contexts. I go on to argue how previous models of internal migration and estimations of effects of migration on individual labour market outcomes might be biased by not taking into account the impact of family ties. Finally, I present an agenda for research on internal migration and immobility that pays due attention to ties to family outside the household.

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1. Introduction

Internal migration – long-distance changes of address within national borders – is a key way for people to improve their living conditions, and is thus generally assumed to be beneficial to individuals and households. It is also seen as beneficial to societies because it facilitates labour market flexibility. Research on internal migration within Western countries has generally relied on the premise that internal migration is mainly related to work and education and typically leads to favourable labour market outcomes, particularly for men. Research using such economic perspectives at the micro level has indeed provided an important contribution to explaining internal migration (e.g., Sjaastad 1962; Fischer and Malmberg 2001) and its labour market outcomes (e.g., Herzog, Schlottmann, and Boehm 1993; Venhorst and Cörvers 2017, for the part self-selection plays in such outcomes). It has also been widely acknowledged that migration decisions are usually not made by isolated individuals. Rather, migration decisions are household decisions. As has been argued in the family migration literature, potential migrants may therefore end up being ‘tied stayers’, whereas some of those who would have benefited from staying end up being ‘tied movers’ (Cooke 2008 for an overview).

However, an additional key determinant of internal migration has been largely ignored, both in the general literature on internal migration in Western countries and in the family migration literature: relationships with family members not living in the household. These relationships might be of great importance to migration and immobility. For those who live close to family, moving away can have important downsides for family networks, as it decreases opportunities for contact and support exchange with family members living at the location of origin. This is particularly problematic because family members tend to be major support providers and important network members (Bengtson 2001; Rossi and Rossi 1990), and geographic proximity is crucial for family support and face-to-face contact with family (Greenwell and Bengtson 1997; Grundy and Shelton 2001; Knijn and Liefbroer 2006; Kalmijn and Dykstra 2006; Hank 2007; Mulder and van der Meer 2009), not only at older ages but also at other stages of the life course (such as childbearing age). At the same time, family members who live far away can become factors that make moving close by attractive, either as the main reason or as an additional factor increasing the attractiveness of the new location. The family networks issue is even more pressing given current population ageing, welfare-state retrenchment, and concerns about the sustainability of pension systems. Furthermore, increasing family complexity (Thomson 2014), the emergence of co-parenting and shared-residence arrangements among separated parents (Bakker and Mulder 2013), and a rise in intensive parenting (Putnam 2015) set a scene in which geographic proximity to nonresident and part-time co-

resident children is likely to gain in importance. Thus, for individuals and societies alike, maintaining close-knit family networks continues to be important – even though it has also been argued that individual autonomy is increasingly valued in Western societies, possibly at the cost of the value attached to family relations (Lesthaeghe and Surkyn 1988; Lesthaeghe 2011).

In this paper I therefore present a theoretical approach to internal migration and immobility that puts family outside the household centre stage, and that complements existing approaches. With this approach I aim to contribute to a more comprehensive explanation of internal migration and immobility, and the individual labour market outcomes of each of these in terms of labour market participation and income, than the literature on internal migration has offered thus far. I go on to argue how previous models of internal migration and estimations of migration effects on individual labour market outcomes might be biased by not taking into account the impact of ties to family outside the household. I also present an agenda for future research in which the family ties perspective will be implemented. From this point onwards, I use ‘migration’ as shorthand for internal migration. The focus is on long-distance moves rather than on residential mobility (which refers to short-distance moves that are frequently related to housing or household change). The term ‘family ties’ is used to denote ties to family outside the household, that is, nonresident family. The family members I focus on in particular are nonresident parents, children, and siblings. However, the family ties perspective can easily be extended to include other nonresident family members, such as in-laws and prospective co-residential partners.

2. Ties to nonresident family in existing migration approaches

A large part of today’s research on internal migration relies on the premise that migration is mainly directed towards centres of job opportunity and higher wages (Korpi and Clark 2015). According to the ‘jobs or amenities’ literature (reviewed by Nedomysl and Clark 2014), migrants are also attracted by consumer amenities, cultural attractions, and nice weather. Particularly for Britain, there is a literature on counter-urbanisation – migration from urban areas to the more attractive countryside (Champion 1994, 2005; Halfacree 2008), connected with what has been coined ‘the rural idyll’ (Halfacree 1995). Furthermore, Fielding (1992) has introduced the concept of the escalator region: a region that attracts migrants who aim to advance their labour market careers (stepping on the escalator) but from which these migrants move away later in their lives (stepping off the escalator; see also Champion 2012). Ties to nonresident family are mostly absent from this literature. It is not unlikely, however, that a considerable share of those stepping off the escalator move towards family members, or

return to a location near family. In other internal migration approaches (see for overviews: Boyle, Halfacree, and Robinson 1998; White and Lindstrom 2005; King 2012), ties to family outside the household have also been virtually absent. An exception is Kok (2010), who paints a broad picture of the role of family systems in historical migration patterns in various countries.

It should be noted that the role of family networks has been emphasised by theorists concerned with international rather than internal migration (Castles, De Haas, and Miller 2013 for an overview), although Liu (2013) argues that this has not happened frequently. The ‘new economics of labour migration’ (Stark and Bloom 1985) argues that decisions on international migration are often made by the family surrounding the individual migrant, whereby arrangements of migrant-to-family remittances play an important part in the decisions. Migration network theory explains the perpetuation of international migration by facilitating networks of (former) migrants in destination areas and nonmigrants in origin areas providing social capital through kinship, friendship, or community ties (Boyd 1989; Massey et al. 1993). The transnationalism literature emphasises how modern transport and communications technology allows international migrants to foster connections with families and communities at home (Portes, Guarnizo, and Landolt 1999; Mazzucato et al. 2004). These theoretical arguments from the international migration literature have hardly been picked up in studies of internal migration – an indication of the gap between theories of internal and international migration (King and Skeldon 2010).

In contrast to ties to nonresident family, ties to family inside the household have been incorporated in migration research for a long time, mainly through work on family migration (reviewed by Cooke 2008). This work emphasises the importance of the nuclear family to internal migration and its labour market outcomes. Studies on family migration have frequently shown that couples and families are more likely to migrate for the sake of the male partner’s career than the female partner’s (e.g., Shihadeh 1991; Bielby and Bielby 1992; Cooke 2003; Smits, Mulder, and Hooimeijer 2003). Other studies have found negative labour market outcomes of migration for women (Cooke 2003; Shauman and Noonan 2007) and particularly for mothers (Cooke 2001), likely because they are frequently tied movers who migrate for the sake of their partner – although these negative outcomes tend to be short-lived (Clark and Davies Withers 2002). In the family migration literature there have been occasional calls for a broader perspective that includes family outside the household (Cooke 2008; Mulder and Cooke 2009).

This is certainly not to say that ties to nonresident family have been completely ignored in the literature on internal migration: several scholars have begun to explore this topic both theoretically and empirically. For example, some studies show that having family members living close by decreases the likelihood of migration (Clark,

Duque-Calvache, and Palomares-Linares 2017; Ermisch and Mulder 2018; Mulder and Malmberg 2011; Mulder and Wagner 2012; Mulder and Malmberg 2014). Kan (2007) finds that having a social network member close by who can help out in times of need – mostly a family member – decreases the likelihood of moving. There are also studies on geographic convergence versus divergence between family members (Michielin, Mulder, and Zorlu 2008; Rogerson, Burr, and Lin 1997; Van Diepen and Mulder 2009). A few other studies investigate moves to live close to family (Pettersson and Malmberg 2009; Smits 2010; Hedman 2013) or moving in with family (e.g., Das, De Valk, and Merz 2017; Smits, Van Gaalen, and Mulder 2010). This previous work has formed an important basis for the family ties perspective outlined below.

3. The family ties perspective: Introducing ties to family outside the household

The proposed family ties perspective rests on three premises, which have been derived from previous empirical work. The first premise is that despite the increasing importance attached to individual autonomy in many industrialised societies, family members are of crucial importance in social networks and support exchange – frequently more so than friends (e.g., Komter and Vollebergh 2002; Mulder and Van der Meer 2009; Rossi and Rossi 1990). This seems to hold despite the occurrence of ambivalence and conflict in families (Van Gaalen and Dykstra 2006). This is not to say that family relations are always positive (Komter and Knijn 2006); it should be acknowledged that sometimes they can even be harmful. The second premise is that face-to-face contact with family is important and cannot fully be replaced by telecommunications or online contact (Larsen, Urry, and Axhausen 2006). The third premise is that geographic proximity is crucial to family support (Knijn and Liefbroer 2006; Mulder and Van der Meer 2009) and face-to-face contact with family (Grundy and Shelton 2001; Greenwell and Bengtson 1997).

From these three premises the general idea can be derived that people will usually value living close to family, and may therefore take into account the locations of nonresident family members in their behaviour with regard to migrating versus staying (as was also argued in Mulder 2007). It could also be that the location of family members forms an additional consideration in migration decisions motivated by work or enrolment in education, leading to preferring a destination near family over other locations. At the same time, it should be acknowledged that there are also circumstances in which people migrate to escape from harmful family ties (Bowstead 2015 on migration in the context of domestic abuse).

The family ties perspective is based on these general ideas and consists of two interrelated elements: introducing ties to nonresident family into cost-benefit approaches to migration, and establishing the role of family members' linked lives in migration and immobility. It also entails ideas on how the role of family ties differs between individuals, between life course stages, and between contexts.

4. Introducing family ties into cost-benefit approaches to migration

Beginning with Sjaastad (1962), many migration researchers have used cost-benefit approaches to explain migration. Whereas Sjaastad argued that the nonmonetary costs of migration (the 'psychic costs', in his terms) should not be considered, later it became common to acknowledge such nonmonetary costs in cost-benefit conceptualizations of migration. An important cost of migration has to do with local ties or, in DaVanzo's (1981) terms, location-specific capital: the social, human, and economic capital that is specific to a location and cannot be taken along to a new location, or only with difficulty. As Kan (2007) has shown, local social capital (social ties to people living close by) indeed reduces the likelihood of migration (See also Belot and Ermisch 2009; David, Janiak, and Wasmer 2010). Clark, Duque-Calvache, and Palomares-Linares (2017) propose viewing ties to family in the neighbourhood as a form of place attachment enhancing people's likelihood of staying in the neighbourhood. Given these considerations, the first way of introducing ties to nonresident family into internal migration theory is to consider ties to family living close by as another type of such local ties, and thus a cost of migration (Mulder and Malmberg 2014).

Besides their potential role as a cost, family ties can also be viewed as a benefit. They may be a source of social interaction and support exchange and may thus be helpful in many ways, including ways that facilitate greater labour market engagement (for example, when a grandparent helps out with childcare; see Compton and Pollak 2014). This implies they may be a social resource. As Lin (1999) concludes from a review of studies on the impact of social resources (or social capital) on status attainment, social resources often enhance the chances of attaining better socioeconomic status. Clearly, for many people, family is important in the social network that provides access to these resources. To a large extent, social resources are inherently bound to a geographical location and are thus important for residential location and relocation (e.g., Thomas, Stillwell, and Gould 2016). Importantly, this implies that family ties to a location can strengthen the advantages of that location if family members help in gaining access to local educational and job opportunities, or compete with such advantages if such opportunities are located elsewhere than the family members. Benefits associated with family ties can be bound to the location of

origin if the family lives there, but also to a distant location if family members live at that location. Thus, patterns of the costs and benefits of staying versus the costs and benefits of moving to various locations can be complex, depending on the spatial configuration of the family network. This pattern is complicated further given the fact that additional parties are involved: not only may the 'ego' consider migrating but also their relatives; family members may live at different locations; and for those in couples, each partner's family members may also live at different locations.

Various hypotheses can be derived from the theoretical perspective that severing ties to family living close by forms a cost of migrating, whereas ties to family members living far away form a potential benefit of migrating towards those family members. Two basic hypotheses are: (1) Having family members living close by decreases the likelihood of migration, and (2) The location of family members living far away is chosen more frequently as a migration destination than other locations. The first of these hypotheses has already been supported in previous research (see references in section on existing approaches of migration). However, many more detailed hypotheses can be formulated based on differentiations between individuals and contexts in the deterring effect of family ties on migration. Adding more detail to the second hypothesis, one could, for example, hypothesize that young adults are more likely to migrate to a particular university town or centre of employment if a sibling moved there previously.

5. Migration and the linked lives of family members

Family ties play a more fundamental role than can be captured by regarding them as just another form of local tie, similar to social ties to friends, colleagues, or acquaintances. As Coulter, Van Ham, and Findlay (2016) have argued, the life course approach to residential relocations (Mulder and Hooimeijer 1999) should be extended to incorporate 'relationality' and the linked lives of others (see also Findlay et al. 2015). The 'linked lives' concept refers to how human lives are embedded in social relationships (Elder 1994). Social relationships with family members are fundamentally different from those with friends, colleagues, or acquaintances, in various interrelated ways. Family relationships stand out because, unlike friends and other network members, family is given rather than chosen. Family members frequently remain important in social networks for a very long time (Silverstein and Bengtson 1997). This is particularly true of the closest family: parents, children, and siblings (Bengtson and Roberts 1991; Komter and Vollebergh 2002). Of these, parents and children tend to have the closest relationship, characterized by intergenerational solidarity (Bengtson

2001; Bengtson and Roberts 1991; Silverstein and Bengtson 1997). Again, it has to be acknowledged that not all family relationships are strong and positive.

An important characteristic of relationships between family members, and particularly parent–child relationships, is the responsibility that family members usually feel – and actually take – for each other. Parents are legally and practically responsible for their children as long as the children are minors, and this responsibility does not disappear after the children reach the age of legal majority. Furthermore, after the children grow up this responsibility is accompanied by filial responsibility, the children’s responsibility for their parents (Lee, Netzer, and Coward 1994). This is embedded in strong social norms (Liefbroer and Mulder 2006). Indeed, as Komter and Vollebergh (2002) have shown, adult children tend to feel a strong moral obligation to help their parents, whereas this is much less the case for friends. The responsibility can be far reaching and can involve decisions about medical treatment or admission to care institutions.

Given the solidarity and responsibility characterizing family relationships, family members may be involved in migration decisions as significant others. Bailey, Blake, and Cooke (2004) indeed conclude, from a small-scale study among dual-earner households, that family care plays a part in the migration decisions of such households. In the context of North-West Europe this involvement will usually take the form of giving and taking advice, financial or practical help relocating, following each other’s example, or feeling an obligation to stay or move close, and may involve (gendered) power relations and negotiations.

From these theoretical ideas, and expanding on them, one could develop a plethora of hypotheses on how, for whom, and under which circumstances ties to nonresident family play a role in migration and immobility (see also next section). For example, given the differences in responsibility, one could hypothesize that ties to parents and adult children are more influential in migration decisions than ties to siblings, and ties to young children living with the ex-partner are even more influential.

6. Differentiation in the role of family ties in migration and immobility

How influential family ties are to migration and immobility will depend on the need for geographical proximity to family, and the preference for it (or importance attached to it) – both in themselves and in relation to other location needs and preferences connected with, for example, educational and job opportunities. In turn, needs and preferences depend on a combination of individual and household characteristics and the

circumstances of the individuals and their family members on the one hand, and the macro context of opportunities, constraints, and social norms on the other.

First of all, the importance of proximity to family will depend on the life course stage and other characteristics of the individuals and their family members. Older, frail, and less healthy people are likely in greater need of practical family support than others. Those with young children are likely to be in need of practical help with childcare from family members – particularly from parents. Grandparents are known to be important providers of childcare (Bengtson 2001; Kalmijn and Dykstra 2006; Bucx et al. 2008; Hank and Buber 2009). Other categories of people in greater need of support than others are the socioeconomically disadvantaged, the divorced, and the widowed. Furthermore, family ties are likely more important to women than men (Rossi and Rossi 1990). They are also likely to be particularly important to those with lower incomes (Dawkins 2006) and more important to non-Western immigrants and their descendants than natives (Zorlu 2009). For these population categories the benefits of being close to family may be greater, or more important, than the benefits of migration. Accordingly, it can be hypothesized that the impact of family ties will be greater for them than for other population categories.

The extent to which family ties influence migration and immobility may also depend on the competing costs and benefits of migration for individuals. Migration is highly age-specific, with a peaking of propensities at young adult ages (e.g., Castro and Rogers 1983; Bernard, Bell, and Charles-Edwards 2014, 2016). The highly educated are known for their much higher likelihood of migrating (Fischer and Malmberg 2001; Lundholm 2007) and tend to benefit more from migration than the less-educated (Korpi and Clark 2015). Logically, those in specialised or spatially concentrated occupations who do not live close to jobs should also benefit particularly from migration. For these population categories the benefits of migrating in the sense of opportunities to build human capital or gain more income might be so great that they outweigh any costs or benefits related to family ties.

Furthermore, the role of family ties in migration and immobility will differ across contexts, and thus across countries or regions. Family ties will likely be more important in contexts where welfare arrangements and support systems put more emphasis on the family, and/or norms of family solidarity are stronger, and/or grandparents play a more important part in childcare (Hank and Buber 2009). It should be stressed that the relationship between welfare arrangements and family support is far from simple. As Brandt, Haberkern, and Szydlik (2009) point out, in this respect there is a marked difference between physical care and occasional help. They find that in Southern European welfare states, which tend to rely more on family for care than Northern European states, adult children indeed provide more care for their parents than in the North (indicating ‘crowding out’ between family and state). By contrast, help in the

household and help in dealing with authorities tends to be given more in Northern than in Southern Europe (indicating ‘crowding in’ between family and state). In any case, contexts are clearly important to the role of family ties, with distances between parents and adult children varying greatly between countries (Hank 2007) as well as between regions and rural versus urban areas (Van der Pers and Mulder 2013).

At the same time, family ties will be less important in countries where migration for education and jobs is more necessary. In certain contexts, pursuing education far from the parental home may be considered important, whereas in others this is much less the case. In some contexts many young adults who pursue high education have to move because universities are concentrated in certain urban centres or differ in quality or specialisation, whereas in other contexts universities are widespread and not very different in quality. According to Faggian and McCann (2009), compared with many continental European and Asian countries, Britain stands out with its high level of long-distance moves to university education. In certain contexts people will primarily use their local social resources to advance occupationally, whereas in others migration is a better way of improving one’s chances in the labour market. For example, in interviews with young Italians and young Germans, Luetzelberger (2015) finds striking differences in these young adults’ views on migrating away from the parental home. While young Germans tend to think it is a good idea to migrate and willingness to migrate will be good for their skills and personal development, young Italians tend to think the best way to establish a career is through personal connections and with the help of family rather than through migration.

7. Possible biases in migration and immobility research when ignoring family ties

The family ties perspective is meant to be complementary to existing perspectives of migration and immobility. An important question, then, is what the biases are and have been in previous research when ignoring this complementary perspective. There will be no omitted variable bias resulting from ignoring family ties if the presence of family ties is unrelated to other predictors of migration (first condition) and if the effects of family ties on migration, immobility, and labour market outcomes are the same among population categories and contexts (second condition). Neither will there be bias if the effects of family ties are small.

It is unlikely that these conditions are met. The highly educated tend to postpone childbirth until they have finished their education (Blossfeld and Huinink 1991; Blossfeld and Jaenichen 1992), to remain childless more frequently than the less-educated (Mulder 2003; Wood, Neels, and Kil 2014), and to live much farther away

from family (Malmberg and Pettersson 2007; Mulder and Kalmijn 2006). This implies there is a strong educational gradient in the extent to which local family ties can inhibit migration. Furthermore, if the hypothesized differentiations in the impact of family ties discussed in the previous section are indeed found, the second condition for unbiased findings is not met either. It is also unlikely that the effects of family ties are small. For example, among couples and families in Sweden, Mulder and Malmberg (2014) find a substantial effect of parents and siblings living close by on the likelihood of migrating.

8. Towards a research agenda on the role of family ties in migration, immobility, and labour market outcomes

In accordance with the family ties perspective, I propose a research agenda that addresses four issues, each associated with several scientific challenges: (1) identifying the role of family ties as a deterrent of migration and key determinant of immobility; (2) explaining migration towards family in relation to migration in other directions; (3) determining to what extent and for whom family-related motives drive migration and immobility; and (4) unravelling how individual labour market outcomes of migration versus immobility differ between (im)mobility related to family ties and (im)mobility due to other factors.

8.1 Immobility and deterrents of migration

An important scientific challenge is to address the deterring impact of ties to family members living in close proximity in much more detail than has been done before. Most previous work has left unexplored who remains close to family and who does not. The exceptions are a few studies pointing to income differences (Dawkins 2006) and ethnic or racial differences (Spilimbergo and Ubeda 2004; Zorlu 2009) in the role that family members living close by play in immobility. Future work could investigate differences in the deterring effect of ties to family living close by with regard to gender (or, more specifically, the gender composition of the family dyad), level of education, household composition, age, health, migrant status, and housing tenure, as well as differences between weaker and stronger family systems.

Another scientific challenge to address is the role of family in long-term immobility (or staying). As has been argued (e.g., Cooke 2011; Stockdale and Haartsen 2018), staying deserves to be studied in its own right because of its possible repercussions for household incomes and the economic vitality of regions. There are, however, few studies on staying, and the role of family in staying has only been

addressed in one small-scale study (Hjälml 2014). Future work could investigate the role of family characteristics (such as occupations in the older generation, including farming) or area characteristics (such as degree of urbanisation) in long-term staying, or explore to what extent long-term staying runs in families or is transmitted between generations.

Furthermore, it is important to address the role that spatial ties to nonresident children play in immobility. Clearly, family complexity greatly complicates separated people's location choices. While the event of separation leads to increased geographical mobility, both upon the event itself and afterwards (Feijten and Van Ham 2007, 2013; Speare and Goldscheider 1987), a disproportionately large share of this mobility is local (Feijten and Van Ham 2007). Moreover, among separated parents, having children has a particularly deterring impact on moving long distances (Feijten and Van Ham 2007, 2013), but researchers have only just begun to explore under which circumstances the migration of separated parents is constrained by ties to nonresident children (Cooke, Mulder, and Thomas 2016, for an exception). Future work could investigate how re-partnering and the formation of stepfamilies and 'blended families' fit into the picture of moving and immobility.

Another issue to explore is what it is about family members that makes people stay close to them (or move towards them – see next subsection): is it frequent contact (Ermisch and Mulder 2018), a good relationship, support received, support given, or something else? This could be explored by introducing measures of contact and support into analyses of the impact of living close to family on the likelihood of migrating.

8.2 Migration towards family

Similar to the first challenge regarding immobility, another important challenge is to investigate migration towards family in much more depth and detail than has been done before. Much is to be learned about how moving close to family differs by gender, socioeconomic advantage/disadvantage, immigrant status, life course stage, and health of family members. Furthermore, the role of family complexity resulting from separation and re-partnering in migration towards family should be explored (e.g., Das, De Valk, and Merz 2017).

Second, it is important to challenge the assumption that people move in one particular direction – for example, to either jobs or family members. In reality, the likelihood of migrating to a particular location for economic reasons may differ according to whether family members live there or not. Future work could, for example, test hypotheses stating that the likelihood of moving to a large city or university town is greater when a family member has moved there previously.

The third challenge is to investigate the role of family in return migration. Return migration has mainly been approached as a means to correct an unsatisfactory previous move (Niedomysl and Amcoff 2011) and sometimes as a return to the region of birth (Lundholm 2012). It has remained unclear to what extent return moves are directed towards family, although Bailey, Blake, and Cooke (2004) have identified couples who returned to live near parents to facilitate juggling care and labour market work, and Wall and Von Reichert (2013) describe how moving back to family after divorce played a role for some of the participants in an in-depth study of returning to rural areas. Future work could, for example, investigate to what extent return migration coincides with moving towards family, or if it is more likely when family members live at the place of origin.

Fourth, attention should be paid to the role of family in the geographical redistribution of immigrants and their descendants after their entry to the host country, and thus in processes of immigrant segregation and desegregation through internal migration. This role might be crucial, but is yet to be identified.

8.3 Motives for migration

To identify the role of family ties in migration and immobility, investigating whether and where people move in relation to the residential locations of family members is important, but insufficient. It could well be that the migration itself is driven by other considerations but that in choosing a destination people have a preference for locations where family members live. A crucial further step is therefore to learn more about family-related motives for migration and immobility.

As noted by Niedomysl (2011), migration is usually assumed to be motivated primarily by employment considerations, but surprisingly little research has been carried out to find out to what extent this assumption is justified. His findings in fact indicate that this assumption is often incorrect. A surprisingly large share of long-distance moves in Sweden (around one quarter) is motivated by social rather than economic reasons. For four Nordic countries, Lundholm et al. (2004) report that the proportion of moves for social reasons is one-third or more. The motivation for a quarter of long-distance moves in the United Kingdom is “personal reasons” (Clark and Huang 2004). In New Zealand (Morrison and Clark 2011) and Australia (Clark and Maas 2015) the proportion with such motives is somewhat lower.

If we are to explain migration and its role in people’s lives, it is important to clarify just what motivates migration and what the trade-offs are between closeness to family and closeness to work and educational opportunities. Motives related to closeness to family and providing or receiving family care and motives related to

moving away from family need to be distinguished from motives related to work or education and other more general social motives. It is also important to determine the extent to which likelihood of migration for reasons of closeness to or support exchange with family differs between men and women, advantaged and less advantaged people, immigrants and natives, and through the life course. Moreover, we need a better understanding across the dimensions of wanting to stay and having to stay. As evidence from Hjälms (2014) small-scale study on stayers suggests, closeness to family could be a major motive for staying. The data used in the previous work, and other data on motives for moving and staying, can be used to further distinguish moves related to family ties from other social motives.

8.4 The labour market outcomes of migration and immobility

Studies on family migration have frequently shown negative labour market outcomes of migration for women (e.g., Cooke 2003). Also, over longer life course spans, having a history of migration tends to be associated with better occupational achievement for men, but not for women (Mulder and Van Ham 2005). Furthermore, as noted above, the positive labour market outcomes of migration are mainly found for the highly educated and much less for others (Korpi and Clark 2015). They are also mainly found among those who migrate for employment rather than other reasons (Morrison and Clark 2011).

Proximity to family members likely plays a role in this complex pattern of positive and less positive labour market outcomes of migration, but the challenge is to find out how. One way of doing this is to develop and test hypotheses on how ties to family might act as a constraint on migration and lead to foregoing opportunities for occupational advancement for some population categories or in some contexts, whereas others, or those in other contexts, might be better off staying near family.

9. Data to be used in the proposed research

The data requirements for the proposed research are huge. This is particularly true for migration towards family. First, because migration is a rare event (at least in a short time frame) and migration towards family is even rarer, very large numbers of observations are needed. Second, detailed information is needed not only about individuals but also about their family members. Third, longitudinal information is needed about individuals' and family members' characteristics both before and after potential migration. Data on long periods, preferably from birth onwards, is needed to

identify long-term immobility. Fourth, detailed geographic information is needed about the locations and relocations of the individuals and their family members, and the distances between them. Thus, very large and complex datasets are required. For detailed analyses of migration towards family, datasets drawing on administrative registers will therefore be the best option. Such register data is now available for the Nordic countries and the Netherlands (e.g., Bakker, Van Rooijen, and Van Toor 2014). Furthermore, for Belgium the census matched to register data has recently become a feasible option. Register data is almost ideal because it contains information about the entire population of a certain country, and thus also about each person's family members – as long as the individuals and their family members are registered in that country. Naturally, for immigrants, let alone the undocumented, this condition is not always met. Random samples drawn from register data will not suffice because it is unlikely that family members of a sample member are also part of such a sample. Another downside of register data is that motivations for migration are not recorded; neither is any subjective information about values, attitudes, or well-being. Furthermore, the registers are only as accurate as the degree to which inhabitants of a country record and update their data. However, the great advantages of register data are a lack of nonresponse and the absence of any burden on respondents.

For analyses of how the likelihood of migrating is affected by whether family members live close by, the numbers need not be as large as those in analyses of migration towards family members. Register data can be used but large panel datasets, or large cross-sectional surveys with some retrospective information or linkage to register data, may also suffice. Data on long-term immobility can be derived from long-running panels such as the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, or the British Household Panel Survey and its successor, the UK Household Longitudinal Study. In these datasets some information about the residential locations of family members is available. However, such studies tend to suffer from panel attrition, which may be related to moving and should therefore be carefully considered.

Analyses of motives for migrating can also be performed using large-scale surveys among random population samples. For these analyses, surveys among smaller samples of recent migrants only can also be useful, particularly if they have been (or can be) matched to register data and include the residential locations of family members. An example of such surveys is the Swedish survey 'Why did you move?' (*Varför flyttade du?* Niedomysl 2011) and the Housing Research Netherlands surveys. Data on motives for not migrating have thus far rarely been collected in surveys, although there are datasets in which such motives have been recorded next to motives for moving: the Survey of Dynamics of Motivation and Migration for New Zealand (Morrison and Clark 2011) and the Survey of Living and Migration Motives 2008 (*Bo- og flyttemotivundersøkelsen 2008*) for Norway (Sørli, Aure, and Langset 2012). It should

be noted that information on motives for actual moves should be employed with caution because it could be distorted owing to post-hoc rationalization. For example, those who are successful occupationally after the move may be more inclined to report employment as a motive than those who are not.

Information on the labour market outcomes of migration towards family versus migration in other directions, immobility, and migration for family reasons versus for other reasons, can be derived from the same types of data as for the other analyses, as long as they also contain information about income and/or labour market participation before and after the potential move.

10. Methodological issues

Compared with other statistical analyses of migration and the labour market outcomes associated with it, there are two specific methodological issues that need to be dealt with in the proposed research. The first is that the data structure will be complex, with individuals clustered in households and/or families and/or in spatial units such as neighbourhoods or municipalities, but not necessarily in a hierarchical way. For example, two individuals can be members of one couple or ex-couple as well as being members of different parental families. This issue can be solved by supplementing standard multilevel models with cross-classified multilevel models and/or multiple membership models (Goldstein et al. 2000) to deal with this non-hierarchical structure. Dyadic models – more specifically, actor-partner interdependence models (Cook and Kenny 2005) – can be used to account for the fact that the characteristics of both an ego and a family member may influence both the ego's and the family member's likelihood of migration.

There will also be issues of endogeneity and self-selection. These issues are relevant to the labour market outcomes of migration (people supposedly select themselves into the migrant or nonmigrant category if they expect this will benefit their careers) but could also be relevant to migration itself. Those who live near their parents could be a selected category of people who value staying put, and their subsequent low likelihood of migrating may be connected to this value attached to staying rather than ties to family. For example, there is some evidence that those who report having had a close relationship with their parents in their youth tend to live closer to parents than those who do not (Gillespie and Van der Lippe 2015). Such selection issues can be dealt with in two ways. First, efforts should be made to account for them in the best possible way. Methods to achieve this are simultaneous equations, two-stage techniques, instrumental-variables techniques, and propensity score matching. Second, discussions of these issues can be part of the substantive story. As a colleague and I have argued

elsewhere, self-selection is not just a technical problem but is an interesting phenomenon in itself that deserves substantive interpretation (Mulder and Van Ham 2005).

11. Concluding remarks

In this article I have proposed adopting a perspective on internal migration in industrialized countries that complements existing approaches: the family ties perspective. I have also presented an agenda for research employing this perspective. This agenda is certainly challenging and ambitious, particularly because of the data requirements. Fortunately, these data requirements have now been met for quite a few countries. However, these countries are mostly Northern or Western European, with part of the necessary data also available for the United States and New Zealand. These countries differ with respect to such contextual characteristics as welfare arrangements and housing markets, so that meaningful comparisons across countries cannot be made. With subtle differences, however, they all belong to the weaker family systems identified by Reher (1998). The proposed research would certainly benefit from availability of data for countries with stronger family systems, such as Italy or Spain, and from availability of data on international rather than internal migration.

Despite the ambitions of the research agenda, it can easily be extended further. Possible changes through time in the role of family ties could be addressed. Expansion of the analyses to international migration would be beneficial, if data were available. Other consequences of migration and immobility than labour market outcomes could be investigated; for example, consequences for well-being or for the exchange of contact and support between family members. It would also be a good idea to address the measurement of motives for moving and staying; for example, by using vignettes in factorial surveys. Ultimately, life course events and trajectories (e.g., parenthood, divorce, retirement, onset of medical conditions, bereavement) of individuals and their family members could be examined in conjunction with their migration trajectories.

A considerable part of the proposed agenda will be addressed in the research project “Family ties that bind: A new view of internal migration, immobility and labour-market outcomes (FamilyTies; see www.rug.nl/FamilyTies),” funded by the European Research Council. Thus, in a few years’ time we will know quite a lot more about the role of family ties in internal migration and immobility than we do today.

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