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Gendered strategies of mobility and academic career

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ABSTRACT

In universities, being mobile and international has become ever more important for academics' career prospects. This article explores junior and other insecurely employed researchers' experiences of geographical mobility in relation to their personal life, career, employability and value as scholars. The aim is to discover the gendered strategies researchers use to combine mobility with intimate relations and personal life. Furthermore, what gendered ideas of mobility, employability and career success do researchers themselves construct? These aspects of mobility, particularly focused on gender, are analysed in three cases: Finland, Italy and the United Kingdom. These states are all (currently) members of the European Union and have implemented its internationalisation policies. The data consists of qualitative interviews gathered in 2009 and 2010. We suggest that the value and capital of academic labour are evaluated differently in the three different locations. Additionally, gender, age, academic age and life situation motivate different mobility strategies.

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Introduction

When we did our doctorates in Finland, it was self-evident that we would visit a university abroad at some point. One of us stayed in the US and another in the UK for one semester. We thought of this not in terms of mobility but as opportunities for academic exchange and study, although we noticed that 'being mobile' – meaning geographically mobile and thus international – had become a buzzword in academia. We felt that it was quite easy to be mobile as women without children. Our experiences motivated us to ask how young scholars' mobility is conceived in academia today.

The 'entrepreneurial university' demands that its researchers be mobile and have international careers. Although this policy only started officially in the 1990s, to some degree it has always existed (Hakala 2009; Teichler 2009). In the 'traditional university', it coexisted with the idea of universal science and the globality of disciplines (Clark 1986, 28–32). Now mobility forms part of the policies for national competitiveness implemented by European

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governments (Costas, Camus, and Michalczyk 2013; Fernandez-Zubieta, Geuna, and Lawson 2015). Whereas traditional academia emphasised disciplines and global connections, the new policies emphasise the geographical mobility of individual academics. Internationalisation is a global concern, although it is applied in diverse ways in different parts of the world.¹

Successful competition in the global market is one of the main concerns in the formulation of higher education policies in the European Union (EU) and its member states (e.g. Kreissl et al. 2015; Stein et al. 2016). As Joanna Latimer and Beverley Skeggs (2011, 400–401) suggest, the ‘progressive modernisation of the academy’ is materialising in the monetary value of research. Internationalisation and mobility are part of the strategy for winning the economic competition in global markets. Future academics – as well as other highly skilled workers – should be mobile, international and entrepreneurial in order to boost competitiveness and global economic progress. Although the EU’s higher education policies on mobility and internationalisation also have other goals, such as to develop the quality of education and research, and to support cultural openness and tolerance among students and scholars (Nikunen 2017; Zgaga 2017), these are often less emphasised than financial goals.

Different European countries domesticate the idea of internationalism and mobility in different ways. This can result from their relationships with academic centres, for example. Furthermore, resources vary and are allocated in various ways (e.g. Callan 2000; Morano-Foadi 2005, 2006; Stein et al. 2016). These policies are implemented differently in specific cultural contexts, often relating to the existing gender order (Blackmore, Sánchez-Morano, and Sawers 2015).

Among the countries we focus on in our analysis, Finland is on the academic periphery, due to its location and language; the UK is a centre; and Italy is somewhere in-between. The three countries have different gender regimes: the numbers of women participating in paid work, and the way relations between work and family/intimate life and care are ordered, differ in each case (see Walby 2004). An important factor for young academics with children is the public provision of childcare. Finland has high public spending on childcare compared with Italy and the UK, but UK spending on early childhood education is higher than in Finland or Italy. However, early childhood education is not a solution for the care of young children (OECD Social Policy Division 2014).

One important aspect of spatial mobility is networking as a way of living. Anthony Elliott and John Urry (2010) suggest that in the globalised world, who you know is more important than what you do or can do. Indeed, many higher education researchers have argued that academics are increasingly becoming akin to business elites and networking professionals (e.g. Tienari 2012; Lund 2015, 145; Jöns 2011). In addition to networking, longer stays are seen as beneficial. Researchers are expected to gain valuable experience and knowledge in different research environments (Fernandez-Zubieta, Geuna, and Lawson 2015).

In universities today, positions of power frame academics’ ways of being mobile and international. While academic elites form their own networks, mobility is also expected of those whose positions in the academy are fragile if they wish to succeed in the competition – the race – for more permanent positions. It has been claimed (Müller 2014) that postdoctoral scholars, especially in competitive disciplines, live their present working lives concentrating on activities to benefit their future success and neglecting other

activities. Policies seeking to increase academic mobility are often directed at junior researchers, using both incentives and deterrents.

In this article, we analyse junior and other insecurely employed researchers' experiences of geographical mobility in relation to their personal life, career, employability and value as scholars. By junior researchers, we mean both PhD candidates with employee status and postdoctoral researchers. Insecurely employed researchers, by our definition, are those on short fixed-term contracts; they may be senior researchers in junior positions. We ask what gendered strategies researchers use to combine mobility with the demands and attachments of personal life and career plans. We are interested in the gendered strategies of mobility in three cases: Finland, Italy and the UK. The data consists of qualitative interviews gathered in 2009 and 2010. First, we will briefly discuss our theoretical background, then present our data and analysis, and proceed to our findings. In our conclusion, we suggest that the value and capital one might bring to the academic labour market are evaluated differently in the three different locations. This evaluation is made in accordance with gendered strategies in which gender, age, academic age and life situation motivate one's social relations with mobility.

Justification and value as a scholar

Lisa Adkins (2008) suggests that in the new economy, one's value as a worker, or the value of one's work, does not simply stem from the capacities one has acquired. The futurity or future potential of what one can do is more important than what one is already able to do. The value of one's work depends on expected gains, and so does the value of the worker. In the academic context, this is most visible in the case of junior researchers (e.g. Lund 2015). The recruitment of young researchers usually involves senior staff contemplating who has potential (e.g. Pietilä 2013, 308). At the next stage, the potential is proven by productivity: it is of utmost importance to publish internationally. Potential is also proven by being international spatially: networking and visiting esteemed universities (located in academic centres) is important. Futurity aligns differently with different bodies that have different habitus (Bourdieu 1990; Skeggs 2004). Performing oneself as 'world class' has been described as a masculine act which suits men better than women (Blackmore, Sánchez-Morano, and Sawers 2015; Lund 2015; see also Clegg 2008). For instance, Rebecca Lund (2015) states that men conceive of the language of excellence – that is, boasting – as a legitimate resource for presenting oneself as an ideal academic, and that men also feel more comfortable utilising such language than women.

Talk of capacities and futurities corresponds with ideas of employment, employability and academic careers. Employment requires that an employee with the right skills and qualifications find a job; employability means being able to show one's potential for success in the job (Morley 2001). In the course of an academic career, there are many phases during which one's potential is appraised. It is common to conceive mobility as one key to being academically employable (e.g. Müller 2014).

Being mobile as a person, and being capable of reflective action in order to gain value as a worker, is one current demand in working life (Skeggs 2004). Skeggs (2004) highlights that diversely intersecting differences are inscribed in bodies so that some actors can use certain categorisations such as race, class and gender as resources for their aims and actions, while others cannot. We pose this question of difference in relation to mobility:

which categorisations and properties are named in strategies of spatial mobility? Mobility as a person is more easily recognised for middle-class white men: they are regarded as the most skilful at obtaining qualities of ‘the other’ – at displaying feminine qualities or using feminine strategies in academic leadership (Søndergaard 2005) – and they are rewarded for doing so (Adkins and Lury 2000). Spatial mobility is often presented as a central way to gain employability – to be socially upwardly mobile (Nikunen 2017). It is a sign of not being too locally bound, stuck in some marginal or dead-end region; a sign of personal mobility and potential. However, if you are already in the academically valued centre, you are not required to prove your potential to move (Hakala 2009).

Not every kind of mobility is good for employability, and not every mobile person can turn their mobility into employability and person value. Following Skeggs (2011), our interpretation emphasises the importance of accumulated value, which builds on dispositions that are preloaded with value. This embodied value grants researchers differential access to different capitals, which may get converted into ‘further value [...] where people move into imaginary (possible and plausible) futures’ (Latimer and Skeggs 2011, 402).

Privilege and agency also affect hierarchies of mobility. Not all geographical mobility is conceived as valuable. Those who are forced to move are at the bottom. Those who have the best opportunities to move wherever they want are at the top (Elliott and Urry 2010; Nikunen 2017). There are hierarchies of mobility, and academic mobility is no exception. The division between centres and peripheries – and one’s place within that division – is one example of this stratification. The value of the receiving country should be higher than that of the sending country (Fernandez-Zubieta, Geuna, and Lawson 2015). This dimension is also revealed in other academic practices. For example, publishing often reflects the position of English as the academic lingua franca. Valuations that turn into practices are often unconscious – as, for instance, when a referee asks an author to contextualise Finland as a deviation from ‘the norm’, the latter being the UK or USA (Meriläinen et al. 2008).

Furthermore, the resources allocated to academic workers differ from one country to another and from one discipline to another. Therefore we must take into account that although academic mobility is often about employability, it may also be about livelihood. So how is being mobile linked to context and gender? This will be discussed next.

Mobile academic actors and gendered strategies

Today’s internationality is the combination of an old academic ideal and the ideal of ‘globals’ – an emphasis on networking and spatial movement (Elliott and Urry 2010). There is a ‘game’ one is required to play in order to achieve the goal. Playing it requires that one has a sense of the game, that one is recognised as a competent player, and that one’s achievements are recognised as such. It requires that one’s body should fit into the game (Bourdieu 1990; McNay 2000). Dorte Marie Søndergaard (2005) claims that recognition, i.e. visibility as an academic, is an intersectional process relating specifically to academic positioning, age and power, and to the ways one ‘does’ these differences.

In our feminist understanding, gender is connected to the structures of power. We have approached gender as a concept that grasps social structures and individual actions,

creates (academic) cultures, and constructs identities and subjectivities (Nikunen 2014; Lempäinen 2015). In this analysis, we also discuss gender on the basis of interviewees' ideas about it, although we maintain a critical distance from belittlements of gender ('gender doesn't matter'; 'we are all equal'), thus compelling a feminist interpretation. Gendered strategies of mobility refer to the choices that actors make from specific gender positions that they themselves define, e.g. the position of a working mother, single woman, man with a partner, etc. Gendered strategies also include resistance. Actors might not want to perform as expected by academia: they might choose to forego mobility as a way to increase capital, and prepare themselves to adapt to the consequences. On the other hand, as our own experience shows, actors might comply and go abroad with a sense of following 'the rules of the game'. The possibilities and restrictions of gendered agency are at the core of this study (McNay 2000; Madhok, Phillips, and Wilson 2013). It is claimed that resistance to geographical mobility is easier for men, since they can rely on networks and mentors (for instance, during recruitment) and are not expected to prove their international potential (e.g. Costas, Camus, and Michalczyk 2013).

While women are often stereotyped as less mobile than men (Costas, Camus, and Michalczyk 2013; Nikunen 2014), there are real obstacles to combining work and family that affect women more than men. According to Louise Ackers (2004), women are especially mobile during the junior phase of their career because they have fewer family responsibilities than in the later phases. Vabø et al. (2013) found that women academics with full-time working partners and children were less likely to take part in international research collaborations than male academics in similar circumstances. Dual-career relationships – which are more common among academic women than men – complicate participation in academic mobility much more than single-career relationships (Ackers 2004; Jöns 2011; Zippel 2011; Vabø et al. 2013). Zippel (2011) even claims that family supplement policies (for instance in Finland, Germany and Switzerland) can unintentionally support the male breadwinner model, since the policies are not designed for dual-career needs.

From a global perspective, there are several aspects that affect geographical mobility: (1) how pronounced internationalisation through geographical mobility is, on the policy level and in practices of academic employment and career advancement; (2) whether permanent positions in the academy are plentiful or scarce; (3) the fact that intellectual centres attract people from peripheries (in terms of reputation and rankings); (4) the status of the English language as the current lingua franca of the academy, which attracts people to countries where it is spoken (see e.g. Meriläinen et al. 2008; Hakala 2009; Kim 2010; Zippel 2011; Costas, Camus, and Michalczyk 2013). It has even been argued that these factors – especially the language issue and the question of centres, which are usually situated in the global North, Western Europe and North America – are a form of post-colonialism (Connell 2012).

Many researchers throughout Europe have written about the division of researchers into two categories of power: those who are 'leaders', and those who 'do the dirty work' (Lempäinen 2012; Nikunen 2012; Kreissl et al. 2015). In this article, we suggest that this division also reflects the ways mobility is conceived and affects individual careers and the mobilisation of gendered strategies. Resistance to and compliance with the geographical mobility agenda depends not only on whether you are willing to 'do

the trick', but also on how your actions are interpreted as a gendered subject. Next, we will present our data and method of analysis.

Data and analysis

Our informants are primarily junior researchers and those in insecure university positions. They are for the most part finding their feet in academia. As secondary data, we use expert interviews in which mobility issues and postdoctoral students' situation are discussed.

Nikunen's data consists of interviews conducted in Finland in 2009 (with 15 women and 16 men; 10 from humanities subjects, 11 from natural sciences and 10 from technological science disciplines/units). This data was gathered as part of a research project on the effects of temporary employment on the combination of work, family and well-being. Lempiäinen's observation material and interviews were obtained in the UK in 2009 (with five women and five men) and Italy in 2010 (with four women and six men), with expert discussions in both places. Each project had separate national funding.

When bringing the two data sets together, we concentrated on mobility, a common theme discussed in all interviews. The data was also constructed with an awareness of the higher education reforms in each country, the UK setting the stage for changes in Finland and Italy. There are both differences and similarities in the three countries' research policies, and our data allows us to compare and contrast the ways research policy recommendations are reflected in practice. The restructuring of universities has meant at an everyday level not only cuts in faculties and disciplines but also a more forceful grip of academic capitalism and the so-called new management model in the UK. During the time frame of the data, both Finland and Italy were on the verge of change, Finland giving universities independent legal status as public corporations or foundations at the beginning of 2010, and Italy phasing in 'riforma Gelmini' (a university reform programme named after the Minister of Education, Mariastella Gelmini), which was obscure to most academics (Lempiäinen 2015).

In what follows we ask what gendered strategies of mobility, employability and career success researchers themselves construct. How do researchers combine work responsibilities such as mobility with intimate responsibilities and affective attachments? How do they meet the expectations of academia?

Nikunen's data framing in terms of work-family balance affected the answers regarding the ways that mobility is often connected to parenthood. Additionally, since the Finnish data arose from three different university departments in different parts of Finland, the division between applied and basic research was more accessible here than in other parts of the data. Lempiäinen used mobility as one of the interview and discussion themes. The UK and Italian interviewees were recruited from different phases and areas of academic careers, and they all had first-hand knowledge or experience of mobility. The interviewees came from various disciplinary fields, and these are indicated together with their gender at the end of each extract.

We approached our interviewees as colleagues with whom we could interpret the research themes together (Odendahl and Shaw 2002). Our analysis method was thematic qualitative analysis (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). We carefully looked through our materials and sought out passages where mobility was discussed. We used keywords – 'travel', 'visit', 'foreign', 'abroad' and 'exchange' – to find interviewees' accounts involving these themes.

Then we evaluated which ways of talking about mobility were the commonest in which context, and how gendered strategies were presented in the talk.

We start the analysis with Finland – a country on the academic periphery, with a Nordic gender regime and a dual-career model – which is the most familiar context for both of us. In our study, it acts as a reference point in relation to which other ways of being mobile are considered. Next, we analyse Italian mobility, which is affected by the male breadwinner/female caregiver model, the scarcity of resources to support mobility, and Italy's midway position on the continuum between academic centres and peripheries. Lastly, we turn to the UK to investigate mobility from the perspective of an academic centre with a growing emphasis on dual careers.

Gendered strategies of mobility and employability in 'gender-neutral' Finland

In Finnish universities, ideas about mobility and internationalisation are not uniform. There is variation tied to the practices of different fields, over and above the perceived values of particular fields or universities.

A great deal of technological research is applied and conducted in cooperation with businesses (see Ylijoki and Hakala 2006); therefore business travel is a typical type of mobility. Academic mobility involving longer visits abroad was presented as an activity for ideal researchers, however. Work in private-sector companies was an alternative career option, but several interviewees commented that their family commitments made it easier to work in universities, since international mobility and long hours were not mandatory.

The arts and humanities researchers talked mainly about international academic mobility and longer visits; many talked about research mobility they had experienced, or had not been able to engage in, mainly for family reasons.

For the natural science researchers, being international was a basic condition of research and a career. Postdoctoral researchers were expected to be internationally mobile. Unlike other Finns, natural science researchers could envisage leaving Finland as a good move for their academic careers, and employment markets were better elsewhere – especially outside academia.

In Finland, geographical mobility forms part of the expected activities at every stage of one's academic career. Doctoral and postdoctoral phases are the most common times to become a visiting scholar. Additionally, mobility is expected to be 'circular', from the 'sending' country to the 'receiving' country and back again (Fernandez-Zubieta, Geuna, and Lawson 2015). However, problems may arise if one is geographically mobile in other ways – for instance, if one organises one's visit independently, without support from a powerful mentor or (often masculine) network, or if one stays too long (e.g. Morano-Foadi 2005; Leemann 2010; Costas, Camus, and Michalczyk 2013).

Despite the differences between the disciplines, gendered strategies among Finnish academics focus on family and children. Although in Finland the university is generally seen as a good workplace for parents because of its spatial and temporal flexibility, trips and longer visits abroad are considered problematic for academic parents (Nikunen 2014). Finland, like many other European countries, has policies to encourage academics with children to travel abroad, such as a family supplement to funding from the Academy of Finland as well as some other funders (see Zippel 2011). Nonetheless,

academic parents have to be innovative when arranging their trips, negotiating with their families and minimising the time they are away.

No, it [travel] hasn't suited me. I haven't been to a conference or anything like that. It just doesn't suit my life situation. So you asked about [combining] career and family and such, so maybe this is a minus and can have an effect, because you haven't got an opportunity to go to conferences or longer training courses and so on. You just have to live an eight-to-four life here so that you'll manage matters at home. (Woman, technological sciences)

Personal ties can also restrict men:

Well, if you think about work [and career], I might have thought about going abroad, for an exchange [as a visiting scholar] or suchlike, but my children are quite young, and so I have put aside these ideas, at least about longer visits. [...] Still, I haven't thought that it is a big sacrifice for the family, since in my book family comes first, and work only after that. Even though others may think that it should be the other way around. (Man, humanities)

The statement above was almost echoed in another man's account.

I specifically wanted to go abroad on an exchange, but my wife's current employment relationships have been such that it has not been possible to go with the family. And at least so far I have not become so bored with my wife's face that I think that I have to go. (Man, technological sciences)

Both of these men are actually in dual-career relationships, but for some reason, the first man focuses only on his children (Nikunen 2013). He does not conceive being mobile with the family as an option. In the second case, the wife's precarious employment situation and her efforts to establish her career are described as affecting her academic spouse's career choices (see also Jöns (2011) on visiting researchers and dual-career effects on academic men).

Some researchers had previously worked in the private sector, and preferred university because they did not have to travel as much as in the business world. However, those who travel are seen to have better employability. An interviewee from the technological sciences commented on mobility:

It is more if you like it [being mobile], it is not forced. But maybe it is, it relates to ambitions and suchlike, if you want to [be mobile] or not, so it is sort of an obligation, since it is not very likely that you can conquer the world from your homeland. [...] And if you have that kind of collaborative project with businesses, then you have to visit them. But I do not know, maybe you just get used to it, and then some are weeded out and the group that enjoys it [travel, being mobile] stays the course. (Man, technological sciences)

Elliott and Urry give several examples of men and women living at long distances from their families. There is a choice whether to put one's career before family or vice versa. If family comes first, one risks being seen as too localist (Elliott and Urry 2010). In the vocabulary of the academic mobility discourse, it is a form of underperformance (Costas, Camus, and Michalczyk 2013). Our Finnish interviewees thought that being spatially mobile would benefit their careers, but some of them were still reluctant to do so.

Being localist is easily connected with parenthood. It is staying in your comfort zone, not taking risks:

Maybe it is more like a mental barrier for yourself if you have a child or not. For instance, if you think that you'd go on researcher exchange or something like that, I think some people would

then [by having a child] get an excuse that it cannot happen, but I think that if you want it to succeed you just have to organise it. (Man, technological sciences)

On average, women have more family responsibilities than men. Nonetheless, in Finland, academic women are as mobile internationally (and nationally) as academic men (European Commission 2015). There are many explanations for this. Finnish attitudes to gender equality might be one explanation, especially the widely recognised importance of women's financial independence and participation in paid work; in some other countries, such as Latvia, women are significantly less mobile than men (European Commission 2015). Another possible explanation is that it takes more for women to prove their employability: they have to offset their perceived gendered potential for localised caregiving against their mobile potential. If mobility and being 'world class' are seen as masculine, women have to be 'hyperperformative' in order to be recognised as such (Clegg 2008, 219). The third explanation relates to women's greater mobility than men at the national level: men do not have to be mobile because it is easier for them to gain positions at their home universities (Ministry of Education 2006; also Costas, Camus, and Michalczyk 2013).

Still, when the Finnish interviewees talk about mobility in general, possible difficulties are linked to parenthood and intimate partnerships. Women are presented as less capable of being mobile and international, even though being a woman and a researcher is treated as ordinary. On this general level, most of the Finnish interviewees talked about reduced mobility in gender-neutral terms, referring to 'parenthood'; many talked about parenthood as an obstacle for women, but no one gendered it as a problem relating to fatherhood or men (Nikunen 2014). Thus women suffered at the attitudinal level by not being seen as potentially international academics. However, both men and women with children talked about difficulties in organising mobility, and the effects of spouses' careers. Men are supposed to live up to the masculinity of careerism and sacrifice their personal commitments (Lund 2015), while that is not seen as suitable or expected for women (with children).

The managerial push towards internationalisation, especially through trips and longer visits, was recognised by both men and women (see extracts above). Even those who think that it is possible to have a career without mobility, or who resist it in their own lives, see that immobility can do harm: not travelling is a minus, and can affect your career; even though it is not obligatory to travel, you risk not being one of those who stay the course; and you have to acknowledge that some might think that putting family first is a sacrifice career-wise.

The Italian way of mobility

In Italy, public expenditure on higher education has stagnated for a long time. The scarcity of employment opportunities is not only a concern for academic workers; the precarisation of the labour market is a structural weakness of the society in general. Scholars have written extensively on 'the Italian brain drain', which includes academic migration and mobility (Morano Foadi 2006). Thus the 'mobility mantra' among academics is as well known in Italy as it is in Finland. Mobility as academic migration refers to the possibility of employment (Carrozza and Minucci 2014, 490–493).

At the University of Milan-Bicocca, geographical and spatial mobility was discussed in terms of short visits, employability and changes in academia. The growing instability of academia and diminishing state funding concerned not just PhDs without posts, but also senior researchers with posts. There was a general awareness that collaboration with foreign partners would be valuable, but the time, money and resources available for that were seen as inadequate. Many professors used their sabbatical to go abroad, but this was only possible roughly every five years, and obviously benefitted only those with permanent posts. The division between permanent staff and precarious postdoctoral researchers was sharp.

For over 30 years the Italian government has recommended that PhD students should spend six months at another university abroad. Many of our young researcher interviewees had been abroad for either their MA or PhD studies. The ban on recruitment in Italy at the time of the study in 2010 made it impossible for researchers to find jobs in other universities in that country. Then again, the institution and the state could not support enough young researchers to go abroad. Thus mobility required extraordinary effort, and not everyone who wanted to move could do so. Geographical mobility also varied by discipline, so that in some fields, such as the social and natural sciences, mobility was considered valuable and self-evident, while in others, such as educational studies, there was less expectation that people would move.²

The discussion of mobility as part of the changing Italian university system was connected to the overall ethos of doing research. Roberto Moscati (2008) points to a change in academic culture. There used to be space for individual choices in the establishment of one's professionalism and work identity. This culture had structures and norms too, albeit in an internal and informal sort of way; but now external social forces are trying to make the rules.

The changes are taking place too quickly [...] It's very difficult for us [...] all these changes are time-consuming and energy-consuming, because you never know if what you're doing is good or not ... It's not only Italy, it's a general, European, and perhaps also extra-European ... disenchantment ... also depends on the fact that our society and our cultures are changing too quickly ... Changing mentalities ... it's not about the Italian people going out, but also other people coming in. (Woman, humanities)

Mobility here sparks a discussion of new mental worlds. Mobility is not just about concrete geographical movement, but also about additions to academic quality, and about culture as a whole. Although gender was brought up in this interview as in others, it received little response. However, the masculine culture of academia was commented on during discussions with feminist colleagues, such as sociologist Carmen Leccardi and political scientist Maria Calloni.

Not all interviewees felt the need to go anywhere. In fact, in some subject areas, people considered their field to be already at the top, so they encountered more incoming scholars and did not necessarily feel a need to go elsewhere themselves. Short trips were seen as natural in one's academic trajectory, but mobility towards Italy was also seen as self-evident 'in an old field like mine' (man, natural sciences). When discussing young researchers' spatial mobility, one male social science professor underlined that in the Italian system 'all the rules have been in favour of the professors' career.' The problem is that the university system does not sufficiently support mobility, as is reflected in these young scholars' responses:

The situation in Italian universities is very negative, both money and jobs, and the other possibility is to get tenure at university, and in Italy you have to participate in a public selection ... recently I participated in some selections, and there can be four or five people, there are few opportunities, the money is finishing, the time is now. [...] I will try to go abroad, even within Italy to other universities. (Man, social sciences)

It's a problem not only for me but for all young [scholars], for all people, and to go to the rest of Europe to find a job. (Man, social sciences)

I would like to continue to do research but it's quite difficult in Italy, so I have to do something else. My possibilities here are not good, the old things are locked up, stuck. (Man, environmental sciences)

These three male interviewees see their futures in Italian academia as precarious, but they see this as part of the national employment situation. They have no children, which might make it easier for them to imagine a future abroad. The academic trajectory is ideally constructed for men, since academic organisations' requirement that one commit oneself to a career can still be seen characteristically androcentric (Bataille, Le Feuvre, and Kradolfer Morales 2017, 314). Compared with the situation in other countries, precarious staff such as postdoctoral researchers receive little protection from the law in relation to parenthood (Rapetti, Murgia, and Poggio 2015). At Milan-Bicocca it was possible to postpone a postdoctoral grant for five months due to pregnancy, but in any case, young female scholars were not particularly keen to start families early in their careers:

The other half of me is saying forget it [university post] – look for a real job. There is always an uncertainty in life which stops you having children. (Woman, social sciences)

One of the gendered strategies is to postpone your own life plans, such as having children.

In the talk about mobility, one can read an expectation that other European countries have better supportive structures for researcher mobility. But there were bigger obstacles, such as the bad housing situation, especially for young scholars on fixed-term contracts. The pay for such posts is small, and without their parents' support it was hard to make ends meet – never mind visiting abroad and covering all those expenses. The bad prospects for mobility seemed to be equally felt in different fields of research, although they were not equally met. As a generalisation, researchers wished to go to a foreign university in the early phases of their academic trajectories. One female PhD graduate had been at a highly respected university abroad during the early phase of her doctoral studies:

I decided a few years ago, actually when I came back from the UK, this is a real thing, they asked if I wanted to stay there and do my PhD ... I decided no, I would like to go back ... not only 'cause at that point I had a long-term relationship, but the life you construct. At the moment I have the choice to stay here and find whatever job, underpaid probably ... or try to find a really good job anywhere. (Woman, social sciences)

Here the interviewee resists the call to mobilisation because she already has international networks. Life situations actively shape the construction of academic trajectories. Another relevant factor that Italian interviewees mentioned was the uncertainty of earning a livelihood, which raises questions about plans for the future (Lempiäinen 2015). The importance of family, relationships and private life, in general, has been found in women

scholars' reflections on the desire to work abroad. In Rapetti, Murgia, and Poggio's (2015, 18) analysis at Trento University, periods of mobility such as working abroad and participation in conferences were mentioned as creating problems with partners. In Italy, child-care provision is poor compared e.g. with Finland, so grandparents and other relatives take care of the children. Informal care and the market for private care have quickly grown hand in hand (Da Roit and Sabatinelli 2013). Another interviewee (man, environmental studies) said that if the opportunity arose he would go to another country with his family or partner. This was an exceptional statement in the sense that he did not discuss any difficulties. His disciplinary field may have been more advantageous for mobilisation than, for instance, social sciences or humanities, which partly explains the absence of gendered strategies. His main stated difficulty was lack of money, rather than the gendered structures of society as such. By way of explanation, he stated that the Erasmus mobility programme did not acknowledge postdoctoral scholars, and that his university's travel allowance was quite modest.

The interviewee below had collaborated in Germany and Spain, and said that 'theoretically' mobility and moving abroad were possible. However, staying in Italy was his option for the immediate future:

I want to stay here because I have stayed here a long time, so I want to continue here, it's like my home, [although] here there aren't many opportunities. I work very hard in a good way doing research. I don't know what my position will be in a year's time. (Man, economics)

This interviewee also explained how Italy could learn from other European countries to create new 'openings', referring to both mobility and employment prospects. As a career move, going abroad was regarded as a natural step, but not an intellectually and socially necessary one in all fields, as it is in Finland. We suggest that the young Italian researchers were somewhat more certain than their Finnish colleagues of their own academic value and capital without any specific 'internationalisation', although their employability prospects were poor with or without the added value of mobility.

The UK: already in the international arena

The interviewees at the University of Liverpool had varied relationships with mobility. Some had completed each of their degrees at different universities and different countries. When talking about mobility issues, many discussed conferences. Because the academic world functions first and foremost in English, UK-based researchers had a huge advantage in the 'game' compared with their Finnish and Italian colleagues. Collaboration and recognition are obviously needed after PhD work:

I was invited as honorary scholar in another university in the UK, and this university was linked in this research area with a university in Germany and one in Italy, and so I went across the conferences and gave a paper here and there, and had many collaborators. (Woman, social sciences)

Another interviewee (man, social sciences) explained that two of his colleagues were currently visiting as honorary scholars abroad. As part of his job he participated in teacher exchange programmes in Europe and was 'sometimes staying a bit longer to do research'. Mobility was also mentioned by administrative staff as being greatest

among postdoctoral students, who ‘tend to be on fixed-term contracts to deliver a particular project’.

The young researchers were asked if they would like to visit another country after their PhDs and whether this was a real option in the future.

I think I would like to. (A2: Where would you go?) I don’t know. I would’ve liked to do it in the past, I think now I wouldn’t know how it would fit with a partner and ... being settled with my home ... I really wished I had done it when I was younger. (Woman, social sciences)

Mobility is thought to be an early career practice which is not so alluring after PhD work and especially after one has settled down. Gendered strategies in private life affect mobility. Elsewhere this interviewee also comments on the maleness of academia itself and the unfair expectations of single women – that they should be available and working all the time.

In discussions of PhD students’ mobility the issue changed into one of employability, which was the more acute thing experienced by these young researchers:

Yeah, also the other meaning that people don’t go abroad, this is the meaning of mobility, while they are studying here they should go, let’s not say to Finland but to an English-speaking country and then come back, that kind of mobility I have not seen much here. (Woman, social sciences)

If the market is looking for a sociologist to do research in another country, it doesn’t matter, they can also go to Finland or in Africa or in Asia, it depends on the market, if you are giving a high salary, good facilities or good opportunity for research, then you can live anywhere. (Man, social sciences)

This interviewee used the word ‘market’, which highlights mobility as a sort of business deal. However, imitating the ‘globals’ way of life requires material, social and cultural assets. Life on the market requires investment – living in a diminished present in anticipation of future career success (Müller 2014). In addition to their research capabilities, young scholars finding their feet might particularly use language skills when moving from the UK to other places. The interviewed man above had a family, but he did not see any difficulties about mobility in principle.

In Liverpool, attitudes towards geographical mobility were positive, but the need for internationalisation as a career move and person value was less visible. Mobility was a topic they recognised in university policies, but it was not seen as imperative for employability. Instead, it was conceived as self-evident and good for one’s research. This finding emphasised the existence of academic centres and peripheries in Europe.

Some of the interviewees were suspicious of the questions and themes – which perhaps sounded as if they had come straight out of EU higher education policy reports – and of the very notion of ‘mobility’. They also criticised the ‘restructuring process’ and the way universities, in general, had failed to introduce new public management in the UK. One interviewee (man, social sciences) answered the question about mobility with just one word: ‘conferences’. The other form of mobility he mentioned was ‘visiting professors coming’ to the university. There was a reluctance to respond at all.

As elsewhere, the possibilities of an academic career were seen as restricted:

Eeh, I find it [continuing in academia] competitive, I need to do a lot with my application and a lot of thought where I would go, and I might go to another place ... and I don’t know if I ever

will get out there, but I think especially funding is an issue, and I can't pay it myself, so I have to apply for funding and it's very competitive. (Woman, political sciences)

Employability, mobility and livelihood are here linked together. What is interesting is that mobility is connected neither to gender nor to person value as such – which is understandable when one is already an 'international' agent. Gendered strategies included resistance to the expectation to mobilise after PhD, and also ways to make internationalisation periods short enough to fit into one's life (see Lempiäinen 2012).

Conclusion

In general, our analysis can be crystallised into findings on investments in one's career, expectations of the academic environment, and ways to understand mobility as increasing person value. Our analysis shows that both women and men are willing to make sacrifices in order to gain international academic experience and person value. However, the role of geographical mobility in creating an impression of internationalism and adding person value varies from country to country.

In relation to geographical mobility, both women and men who have children can face difficulties organising trips and longer visits abroad because of their ties to their 'sending' country, such as spouses' jobs and children's education. Thus, difficulties usually relate to dual careers. In this situation, some organise mobility with the help of family supplements, if available. Some researchers choose to 'put family first' and risk being seen as localist. Their strategy is resistance – a gendered strategy based on family values – and trust that there will be career positions available without their being mobile. However, previous research implies that this strategy may work better for men than for women, since men have stronger local networks that are valuable during recruitment (Costas, Camus, and Michalczyk 2013).

Nevertheless, the dual-career problematic was not explicit throughout the data. Finnish interviewees without children saw having children somewhat straightforwardly as a potential problem for mothers. Among Finns with children, men were more likely to regard dual-career difficulties as a hindrance to their career than women were. It might be that some women with children (e.g. there were two lone mothers) found it too all-consuming even to ponder the possibility of international mobility. In the Italian data, young researchers tended to be single or in a relationship without children. The possible difficulties of geographical mobility were linked to money, and not very directly to gender or social relations. In the UK, young researchers saw what was expected of them in mobile academia – for instance, as a single woman or a family man – but they had very different ways of dealing with those expectations, ranging from denying them to partially or completely accepting them.

When it comes to career investments, Finnish academics seem to invest in local employability by being mobile. Italian academics also emphasise the global labour market and employability, although they do not see their prospects as very bright in any direction. Young UK researchers discuss national and global mobility equally.

Expectations and practices differed from one place to another, and this was reflected in gendered strategies of individual actors. In Finland, the push towards internationalisation was quite clear, and researchers could get at least some financial support for their visits

abroad. There was not so much resistance to internationalisation policies/politics, which might be explained by the precarious positions of the respondents and the general acceptance of internationalisation policies (Hakala 2009). In Italy, a push towards mobility could be detected, but there was a little financial means to move. One of the gendered strategies was to resist the postponement of starting a family, and to rely on the internationalisation acquired by other means than long-term visits. In the UK, mobility was seen as a self-evident part of the academic competition, and postdoctoral visits could be paid to the city next door. Gendered strategies were related to the everydayness of ‘internationalism’, which in turn was linked to collaboration.

Notes

1. In this paper we focus on geographical mobility as physical movement between countries. On other forms of mobility, see Zgaga (2017).
2. According to Roberto Moscati’s expert interview.

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