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Mothers, Migrants and Markets

Re-Thinking the Link Between Motherhood and Work in the Global Economy

Contemporary scholarship assumes that employers' construction of the "ideal worker" is incompatible with motherhood and, as a result, mothers face discrimination in recruitment and hiring. Scrutiny of labor practices in the global economy undermines this assumption. Rather than facing significant barriers to paid work, in some contexts mothers have become the very ideal workers that global employers seek. This paper reviews and critiques the dominant approach to understanding the link between motherhood and paid work for its Western professional bias. Next we analyze an emergent guest worker program in Spain that allows agricultural employers to recruit migrant workers on the basis of motherhood. Employers prefer to hire mothers because they believe that their emotional and financial commitments to children will ensure their obedience as workers as well as their return to their home country after their contract expires. Rather than viewing the absence of commitments outside the workplace as ideal, employers actively recruit and hire mothers because they believe such commitments facilitate labor acquiescence. We conclude with a call to scholars to attend to the complex links between motherhood, work and migration in the global economy and we identify a number of fruitful directions for doing so.

Contemporary scholarship on the relationship between motherhood and paid work has focused overwhelmingly on the penalties mothers face in the labor market in terms of recruitment, hiring, wage setting and promotion (Budig and England; Correll, Benard and Paik; Korenman and Neumark; Lundberg and Rose; Misra, Budig and Moller; Ridgeway and Correll; Waldfogel; Williams). The dominant theoretical framework used to explain motherhood penalties defines motherhood as a status characteristic that is incompatible with employers' construction of the "ideal worker" (Benard and Correll; Correll,

Benard and Paik; Ridgeway and Correll), defined as one who is uninhibited by commitments outside of the workplace (Acker; Blair-Loy; Correll, Benard and Paik; Hays; Williams). What this approach implies is that discrimination against mothers is constant and ever-present. Mothers simply do not fit employers' construction of the "ideal worker." This conclusion assumes that employers' constructions of motherhood and the "ideal worker" are constant and not context-dependent.

Scrutiny of emergent labor practices and migration trends in the global economy, however, undermines these assumptions. Indeed, when we consider the link between motherhood and paid work more broadly, beyond Western professional settings, we begin to see the serious shortcomings of this theoretical and empirical approach. Rather than facing significant barriers to paid work, mothers have, in some contexts, become the very "ideal workers" that global employers seek. In fact, several employers are increasingly seeking mothers because they see mothers as easier to manage and discipline. Thus, motherhood is being constructed as consistent with the "ideal worker" in sectors ranging from services to agriculture.

In this paper we review the dominant scholarly approach to understanding the link between motherhood and paid work. We critique this literature on the grounds that the concept of the "ideal worker" is based on a Western professional model that fails to describe employers' emergent labor needs in many sectors of the global economy. We argue instead that employers construct the ideal worker based on highly variable contextual factors, including the available labor supply, the political context, and perceived or actual labor costs. Thus, rather than a single "ideal worker" model, employers rely on a variety of factors to shape their demand for labor.

To support this argument we analyze a guest worker program in southern Spain, which is being touted by policy makers throughout Europe as the future of 'ethical' labor migration (Martin 2008). This program, which emerged out of bilateral agreements with several poor countries, allows Spanish agricultural employers to recruit temporary guest workers on the basis of motherhood. The majority of migrant workers who participate in this labor program are mothers of dependent children. Employers prefer such workers because they believe that their emotional and financial commitments to dependent children will ensure their obedience as workers as well as their return to their home country after their contract expires. Thus, rather than viewing the absence of commitments outside the workplace as 'ideal' as the literature on motherhood penalties would suggest, employers actively recruit mothers because they believe such commitments facilitate labor acquiescence. In the concluding section we identify a number of fruitful directions for re-thinking the link between motherhood, migration and work across a variety of contexts.

Theory and Evidence of “Motherhood Penalties”

In recent years a great deal of scholarly attention has focused on employment-based disadvantages faced by mothers (Budig and England; Correll, Benard and Paik; Korenman and Neumark; Lundberg and Rose; Misra, Budig and Moller; Ridgeway and Correll; Waldfogel; Williams). Net of other factors, American mothers face a 5 percent wage penalty per child compared to childless women (Budig and England; see also Anderson, Binder and Krause; Waldfogel and Meyer). Experimental research suggests that such penalties are due to employers’ tendency to evaluate mothers as less competent, committed and capable workers (Cuddy, Fiske and Glick; Correll, Bernard and Paik). These penalties are not limited to the U.S. Motherhood penalties have been documented throughout North America and Western Europe (Glass and Fodor; Harkness and Waldfogel; Misra, Budig and Moller). These penalties are in fact so robust that some scholars have argued that motherhood penalties account for most if not all of the existing wage gap in these countries (Crittendon; Glass).

The implication of this body of work is that motherhood penalties are pervasive and universal. The tendency to view motherhood penalties as constant and independent of context is exacerbated by the dominant theoretical framework used to explain such penalties. The most sophisticated theoretical explanation of motherhood penalties to date is the work of Shelley Correll and colleagues. In a series of papers (Benard and Correll; Correll, Benard and Paik; Ridgeway and Correll), Correll and colleagues develop a status characteristic framework to explain motherhood penalties. This framework emphasizes the tensions between cultural constructions of motherhood and paid work to explain why mothers tend to be devalued in workplace settings compared to non-mothers (Correll, Benard and Paik; Ridgeway and Correll). According to the authors, while mothers are constructed in cultural terms as prioritizing the needs of children and families above work, the “ideal worker” is one available to work long hours, devote themselves fully to paid work and uninhibited by commitments outside of the workplace (Acker; Blair-Loy; Correll, Benard and Paik; Hays; Williams). According to Mary Blair-Loy, the “ideal worker norm” creates expectations that workers will “demonstrate commitment by making work the central focus of their lives” and to display a “manifest singular ‘devotion to work’, unencumbered with family responsibilities” (cited in Williams 33).

Thus, according to this framework, employers draw on broadly defined “contemporary cultural beliefs” regarding mothers and workers (Correll, Benard and Paik 1306). And, in both experimental and audit-based studies conducted in the U.S., Correll, Benard and Paik found that mothers are penalized in a variety of ways, including discrimination by employers in recruiting and hiring due to biased evaluations that construct mothers as less competent and committed

than others workers. In Correll and Stephen Bernard's most recent work, even when evaluators are presented with evidence that mothers are competent, they are evaluated negatively, as "less warm, less likeable, and more interpersonally hostile than otherwise similar workers who are not mothers" (616).

Critique of Western Professional Bias in Existing Research

Taken together the major empirical evidence and the dominant theoretical framework suggest that motherhood penalties are generalizable and universal, thus not necessarily shaped by the specific economic, political or institutional context in which employers design and carry out employment practices.

The empirical scholarship on motherhood penalties overwhelmingly focuses on aggregate macro-outcomes in Western employment contexts (Budig and England; Harkness and Waldfogel). Very little work has tried to disaggregate macro-data by occupation, profession, sector or industry, approaches that might begin to tease out the conditions where discrimination against mothers is weaker or stronger (for an exception see Harker-Armstrong). Even less work has incorporated meso-level contexts—specifically firm-level processes—where normative orientations as well as structural opportunities and constraints are translated into actual recruitment, hiring, promotion and wage-setting practices (for an exception see Glass and Fodor). And, most importantly, very little work has explored how mothers fare cross-nationally, particularly in contexts outside of the U.S. and Western Europe (for exceptions see Lee; Salzinger). Thus, while we observe motherhood penalties at the aggregate level we do not know the mechanisms that produce them, nor at what stage of the employment process—recruitment, hiring, wage setting and/or promotion—that these disparities are most likely to occur. Finally, because of the lack of comparative international research in this field we do not know whether similar processes are at work in non-professional contexts throughout the global economy.

Our strongest critique however is of the assumed relationship between the "ideal worker" described in the literature and employers' recruitment, hiring and wage-setting practices. The concept of the "ideal worker" is based on a Western professional model. Therefore we are skeptical whether this norm necessarily shapes employers' perceptions of their labor needs in the global economy. Instead of relying on a constant model of employee fitness based on a Western professional standard, we expect that employers construct the ideal worker based on highly variable contextual factors, including available labor supply, political context, and labor costs. Thus, rather than a single ideal worker model that by definition excludes mothers, we predict that employers rely on a variety of factors to shape their demand for labor.

Motherhood and Migration in the Global Economy: The New “Ideal Workers”?

There is mounting evidence that women are fast becoming the preferred source of cheap labor globally and a major fixture in cross-border migration circuits (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Cranford; Sassen). Though gender has not been central to macro-level analyses of international migration, a number of scholars have identified ways in which gender relations increasingly shape the ways states structure international migration patterns (Pessar and Mahler; Mahler and Pessar). Unfortunately, while most temporary migration programs draw explicitly on gender constructs (Martin 2003; Tierney), only a handful of studies have explicitly examined how gender ideologies—including ideologies regarding motherhood—inform temporary labor migration processes and practices (important exceptions include Preibisch; Silvey 2004; Sim; Yeoh and Annadhurai). Within this emergent scholarship, scholars have begun to note interesting trends with regard to women workers, including mothers.

Employers who rely on immigrant labor draw extensively on gender constructs to make decisions about whom to recruit and what types of work they should perform (Parrenas; Silvey 2004). Gender intersects with race in this respect, with employers relying on gender *and* racial hierarchies to recruit and discipline workers (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Munoz; Parrenas; Preibisch). As Sarah Mahler and Patricia Pessar note, “employers and recruiters’ ideas about who make ideal laborers for different jobs sculpt the labor force and shuttle workers into different employment niches that reflect ideologies of gender, race, class, and civilization” (49). What is important to note is that employers’ ideas about the “ideal worker” do not necessarily coincide with the ‘ideal worker norm’ that dominates the literature on motherhood penalties. Instead, scholars have identified the ways in which femininity and motherhood increasingly shape employers’ construction of ideal workers. Employers see women in general and mothers in particular as acquiescent to labor management and discipline and willing to work for lower wages (Elson and Pearson; Fernández-Kelly; Lee; Ong; Safa; Standing 1999; Wolf). As a result, employers and national governments are increasingly framing mothers as ideal migrant workers.

For instance, scholarship on labor-exporting countries, often in the developing world, has found that states actively promote mothers’ out-migration as a national development strategy, constructing labor migration as a women’s moral imperative to their families and their nation (Parrenas; Piper; Sim; Tyner). In her study of Filipina migrant workers, Rhacel Parrenas finds that although mothers transgress gender boundaries by seeking work abroad, the state has come to frame these women as heroines for the remittances they send back to their country to support their children and extended families. Other scholars

have focused on labor-importing countries, wherein states take proactive (or passive) roles in monitoring migrant women's bodies, including their fertility, and employment relations in accordance with prevailing gender constructs (Chin; Salih; Silvey 2004). According to Kerry Preibisch, state-level temporary migration programs often maximize employers' ability to hand-pick their desired labor force according to gender, racial/ethnic and parental characteristics, thereby allowing employers to recruit and hire without constraints imposed by national anti-discrimination or labor laws.

Scholarship on employer recruitment, hiring and labor management practices have focused on the ways employers attempt to secure and discipline low-wage migrant workers. Profit-maximizing strategies have created a demand for women migrant workers in manufacturing, service, and agricultural jobs (Cerrutti; Mills; Standing 1989, 1999), leading to a process of the 'feminization' of global labor (Standing 1989, 1999). When interviewed, managers of global assembly plants in the developing world explain that women are the ideal workers because they have naturally nimble fingers and are more obedient, traits that developing countries go so far as to market to potential investors (Elson and Pearson; Lee; Ong; Safa). Research suggests, however, that employers' preference for women and mothers is also shaped by labor management goals. Rather than "natural ability," women's socialized obedience to fathers, brothers, and husbands transfers easily to the factory, where they toil under the watchful eye of often native-born male managers (Elson and Pearson; Fernández-Kelly; Lee; Ong; Safa; Wolf).

Scholarship has also identified the diverse ways in which employer recruitment practices shape the labor force. Leslie Salzinger's work shows that when employers recruit and hire women workers, they do not rely on a single "ideal worker" model, but several. Her work on recruitment, hiring and labor management in Mexican maquiladoras shows that different employers rely on varied ideals of femininity; while some employers prefer young single women, others prefer married women with children. Similarly, in Ching Kwan Lee's analysis of feminized factory production in China, one production regime exploits women's roles as wives and mothers to increase managerial control, while another emphasizes women's maiden status. This research suggests that the ways in which migrant women are brought into guest worker programs and managed as temporary guest workers may differ substantially by migrant group, even when they are employed in the same industry, labor market, and workplace.

Taken together, emergent scholarship on motherhood, work and migration in the global economy challenges the empirical and theoretical assumptions of existing scholarship on motherhood and paid work in fundamental ways. To support this critique we now turn to an analysis of a novel European guest

worker program, which is being touted by policy makers throughout the West as the future of ‘ethical’ labor migration (Martin 2008). This program allows Spanish agricultural employers to recruit temporary guest workers on the basis of motherhood. As a result, the majority of migrant workers who participate in this labor program are poor mothers of dependent children. Thus, rather than viewing the absence of commitments outside the workplace as ‘ideal’ as the dominant literature on motherhood and work would suggest, employers actively recruit and hire mothers because they believe such commitments facilitate labor acquiescence.

Spain’s “Ethical” Migration Program

Since the 1990s, the Spanish government has successfully pursued bilateral labor agreements with Morocco and Romania to recruit temporary workers for its strawberry harvest. Strawberry harvesting is extremely labor intensive and done exclusively by hand. With the justification that “strawberries are very delicate produce, requiring delicate hands for harvesting,” employers have demonstrated a marked preference for women workers (Dominguez and Delgado 11). In particular, women with young children are preferred because policy makers and employers believe that these mothers will be easier to manage and discipline and more likely to return home to their children after the harvest season. This focus on mothers clearly shows how the state and employers draw upon ideas of gender in general and motherhood in particular to target and recruit these workers. Spanish officials and the European Union (EU) have lauded the program as an ethical approach to migration because it resolves Spain’s demand for low-wage agricultural labor while preventing a drain in human capital from labor-exporting countries and providing jobs to poor women with children (Martin 2008). But more importantly, policy-makers and employers are using gender constructs, including ideas of women’s biological nature and their maternal devotion, to secure and discipline a low-wage labor force.

Spain produces and exports between 225,000 to 300,000 tons of strawberries per year, a figure that represents 32 percent of the EU’s production and nine percent of the world’s production of strawberries (Wellpict-European). About 95 percent of this production is concentrated in the southwestern province of Huelva. Like the United States, Spain has had difficulty filling its demand for low-wage farmworkers with native-born Spanish workers (Matlack). As a result, it has looked to various countries and populations to meet this demand. The strawberry industry has relied heavily on women migrant workers from Morocco and Romania in particular. These women are brought into the country under bilateral labor agreements that enforce their return home at the end of the strawberry harvest. At the height of the harvest season, which begins in

February and peaks in May, approximately 50,000 workers are directly engaged in picking fruit in the Huelva region. As of 2008, approximately 30,000 of these workers are foreign workers contracted through various guest worker agreements. The remaining 20,000 are either Spanish citizens or foreign workers with legal working status (Plewa).

Moroccan and Romanian women constitute the vast majority of strawberry pickers in Spain (Rural Migration News). They are both heavily recruited as mothers, whose children in Morocco and Romania, respectively, act as a kind of “collateral” to ensure these migrant women’s return. In the case of Morocco, the Arab and Imazighen (indigenous Moroccan) women recruited for strawberry picking are considered racially distinct from European whites. By comparison, the majority of women migrants from Romania are members of the Roma minority, who are also racialized, albeit in different ways. In addition to being constructed as very different racial others, these two groups are situated differently in terms of citizenship in the EU. Moroccans are not part of the EU, while Romania gained full labor mobility within the EU when it joined in 2007. This distinction offers employers—as well as the state—a mechanism by which they can enforce segregation and differential treatment.

In 2004, when employers in the Huelva region recruited its first group of Moroccan women workers, fewer than half of the workers returned to Morocco at the end of the harvest. Thus, in 2007, the focus of recruitment shifted to Moroccan women aged 40 and younger with dependent children. In addition to having their children in Morocco as a built-in incentive for the women’s return, the women migrants were provided some guarantee that they would be rehired the following season if they returned to Morocco at the close of the harvest. According to a Spanish strawberry farmer whose company actively participates in the labor migration program: “We are looking for [Moroccan] women with family responsibilities, so that when they finish their work and collect their money they will want to go back to see their family, their children” (Gerson). Thus, rather than viewing mothers as incompatible with their recruitment and hiring goals, employers in the sector view mothers as “ideal workers,” willing to work hard for low wages and meet the political requirement of returning home after their contract expires. It is mothers’ perceived emotional and financial commitments to children that make them attractive to employers in this program.

The stipulations put in place in 2007—namely, that only women 40 and under with dependent children should be hired—appeared to work, as more than 90 percent of the workers returned that year to Morocco at the end of their contract. In general, there has been a steady increase in the number of Moroccan women migrating to Spain to pick strawberries, from 1,700 in 2005 to 16,000 in 2009 (Touhari). Morocco’s National Agency for the Promotion

of Employment and Skills (ANAPEC) assists with the initial recruitment and application process. Employers are required to pay half of in-bound transportation costs and provide free housing. Wages and working conditions are regulated by contracts, although not all contracts are translated into workers' native languages. According to Sarah Touhari, the women earned the equivalent of US\$47 in 2007 for a six and a half hour shift, plus US\$8 for each additional hour. Although initial recruitment focused on northern cities in Morocco, by 2008, it had extended to southern areas (e.g. Ouarzazate province) as well (Petrzelka).

Romanian women have also been a major source of low-wage migrant labor for Spain's strawberry industry (Silasi and Simina). The Romanian government established the Office for Labour Force Migration (OLFM) in 2001 with the aim of pursuing bilateral agreements with Western European nations to place Romanian laborers abroad (Sandu, Radu, Constantinescu and Ciobanu). In 2002, Spain and Romania signed the bilateral "Agreement for Labor Exchange." This agreement allowed Spanish employers to recruit Romanian workers for up to nine months of seasonal work in the agricultural sector. Although there is no quota on the number of workers Spanish employers can recruit from Romania, the agreement does require all migrants to sign an agreement to return once their contract has expired (OECD). Between 2002 and 2004, over 34,000 Romanians were issued temporary work contracts in Spain. Ninety-five percent of these contracts were for women, and over half were issued to women between the ages of 26 and 55, the result of what scholar Ana Bleahu (2004, 2006) terms a policy of 'women first' recruitment practices.

The majority of Romanian migrant workers are recruited directly by the Romanian government or by private employers from three southern and eastern Romanian regions—Muntenia, Oltenia and Moldavia—(Bleahu 2004). As with the Moroccan workers, employers rely on gendered constructions of the ideal worker when recruiting Romanian laborers. According to Maria Garcia Bueno and Jorge Garcia of Sindicato de Obreros del Camp, a Spanish trade union, the "Eastern European women are [considered] ideal as they are far more docile and do not protest when obliged to work above the prescribed number of hours. The Spanish authorities ... specifically seek young women with considerable economic difficulties but also with family responsibilities as they are more likely to return home after the season" (Bell). Once again we see that employers' construction of the "ideal worker" in this context includes mothers, who are presumed to have a financial and emotional connection to children that motivates their compliance with labor expectations.

Since signing the bi-lateral agreements with Morocco and Romania, the Spanish government, along with five employer organizations (Freshuelva,

ASAJA, APCA, COAG and UPA-CORA), have established labor recruitment offices in Morocco and Romania (Plewa). Job applicants in both countries must fill out a questionnaire, provide medical and criminal records, and complete an extensive interview about their work experience, family structure and future plans. Workers who successfully completed a previous harvesting cycle are given preference in the selection process. The program has been deemed so successful that in 2007 the European Commission Vice President began encouraging other countries to adopt the model (Gerson).

Although Spain's current economic crisis has caused decreased hiring of migrant workers and increased hiring of Spanish nationals, the industry shows every sign that importing working mothers from Morocco and Romania will continue (Touahri). As the largest strawberry producer in southern Spain explained in 2010: "Even with unemployment, we have to come to Romania because Spaniards don't want to work in agriculture" (Wesselingh). In addition, the Director of the Local Employment Observatory at University of Huelva suggests that unemployed Spanish nationals may bide their time, collecting unemployment for up to two years rather than participating in the low wage, labor-intensive work of strawberry picking (Kingstone). Thus, the economic situation has only slowed, not stopped, the migration of Morocco and Romanian mothers to Spain.

Mothers, Migrants and Markets: New Directions for Research

As our brief review of the emergent literature on migration patterns and our analysis of Spain's new migration program reveal, employers construct notions of the "ideal worker" in various ways depending on the available labor supply, the political context and labor management needs. Far from being excluded from employers' "ideal worker" model, women and mothers are increasingly in demand by employers seeking a cheap, flexible, and manageable migrant workforce. What this suggests is that scholars must move beyond existing theoretical frameworks that assume that employers construct the "ideal worker" irrespective of context. To do so, scholarship on motherhood and paid work must look not merely at whether mothers face a penalty in terms of recruitment, hiring, promotion and wage setting but must also examine the conditions under which mothers are constructed as "ideal workers."

Broadening the scope of scholarship on motherhood, migration and paid work would allow for better theoretical specification and respond to calls by leading migration scholars to study emergent international migration patterns comparatively and at multiple levels (Burawoy; Fitzgerald; Mahler and Pessar; Massey, Alarcon, Durand and Gonzalez; Parrenas; Portes). Specifically, research must analyze the relationship between motherhood, migration and

labor markets the macro-, meso- and micro-levels to compare the recruitment, management and subjective experiences of different groups of migrant workers. Below we outline three profitable directions for future research that would respond to the need for comparative and multi-level analyses.

At the macro-level, scholars should identify the ways in which regional, national and state-level governments and institutions facilitate the recruitment of migrant workers in gendered ways. Scholarship has suggested various ways in which gender relations shape states' approach to labor migration programs and states' management of migration circuits (Pessar and Mahler; Mahler and Pessar). However, according to Tines Davids and Francien Van Driel, scholars have paid less attention to the ways globalization systematically relies on gender constructs, how these constructs become institutionalized through state policies, and how gender relations are embedded in intersecting axes of inequality, including those based on race and citizenship (Mahler and Pessar; Munoz; Parrenas). Indeed, though temporary migration programs draw explicitly on gender constructs (Martin 2003; Tierney), very few studies have examined how gender ideologies—including ideologies about motherhood and mothers' emotional and financial commitments to families—inform temporary labor migration management (important exceptions include Preibisch; Silvey 2004; Sim; and Yeoh and Annadurai). Greater attention to macro-level processes would allow better theoretical specification of the ways in which motherhood shapes migration and labor markets in the global economy.

At the meso-level, scholars must broaden analyses of employment practices that motivate the migration of workers across borders. While employers' increasing preference for women migrant workers is well-documented, migration research all too often assumes that migrants themselves choose when and where to migrate. In reality, however, global employers play a critical role in generating labor flows through active recruitment practices (Abella; Mahler and Pessar; Preibisch). While the manner in which migrant women and mothers are brought into guest worker programs and managed as temporary guest workers may differ substantially by migrant group even when employed in the same industry, labor market and workplace (Salzinger; Lee; Munoz), it is clear that employers play a major role in motivating and managing global migration patterns. Scholars must engage in analyses of the mechanisms employers use to recruit, hire and manage workers, the cultural constructions they use when defining the "ideal worker", and the contextual factors that shape their practices and preferences. Such scholarship would begin to specify the conditions and terms under which mothers are excluded or incorporated into the desired labor supply.

Finally, scholars should devote much greater attention to the micro-level consequences of contemporary labor migration projects. As women in general

and mothers in particular are drawn into global migration circuits, scholarship must seek to understand how they experience migration as well as the impact of migration on their families and communities. While some research suggests that women migrants gain status and power in the household as a result of their migration (Grasmuck and Pessar; Mahler; McKay; Pedraza; Pessar), other scholars find that women's secondary status in the household and community is reinforced by their migration status (Baker; Elmhirst; Erman; Kurien; Menjivar). Women's sense of themselves as women, mothers, wives and as workers may change radically or remain static as they leave their countries of origin, migrate abroad, and return to their communities of origin (Barber; Donato et al.; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Parrenas; Silvey 2000; Yeoh and Huang). The key concern at the micro-level is how migration and work transform the subjectivities of migrant workers, and women migrant workers in particular, as well as how the 'care drain' of women from sending communities impacts children, family structure and community life.

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