

## PREFACE

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The competition for talent and highly skilled migrants is increasingly the subject of discussion at international conferences. Skilled migration and brain drain have in fact been on the agenda to a varying extent for five decades. Yet despite the longevity of this preoccupation, scant attention has been paid to the role of the family, personal relationships, spousal employment and caring responsibilities, how these differ according to gender, and what impacts they have on policies designed to attract highly skilled migrants. At the International Metropolis conference in Tampere, Finland in September 2013, it took a (female) member of the audience to raise a question about the relevance of such considerations for successful policies in this field.

The absence of the role of the family in studies of this type of migration is probably not surprising given that the subject of skilled migration is normally depicted as a disembedded male working in globally valuable professions, such as IT, engineering, management and finance, in pursuit of economic priorities. Yet it has been increasingly recognised, at least by feminist scholars, that female migrants are also skilled (Boucher, 2007; Kofman, 2000; Iredale, 2005). Whilst many fill shortages in female sectors, such as nursing, teaching and social work, we should not ignore those in more male-dominated sectors (Raghuram, 2008). In addition to labour migrants, many circulate through family migration and refugee flows (Kofman and Raghuram, 2006; Jungwirth, 2011; Liversage, 2009; Riano, 2012), and hence the need to distinguish between skilled migration and skilled migrants.

The problem of equating female migration with less skilled labour is what I and Parvati Raghuram (2005) have called a paradigmatic separation between the highly skilled male, on the one hand, and the less skilled female, on the other, in our narratives of contemporary migrations and global political economy. This division also reflects different approaches to our study of male skilled

migration and female less skilled migration. In these perspectives men are divorced from familial preoccupations which over determine the lives of women.

However there is increasing evidence (see Kofman, 2012; Varrel, 2011; Verges Bosch and González Ramos this issue), that family life, broadly defined, affects both women and men. Personal relationships, education, parenting and caring shape the decisions of women and men to migrate in the first place, remain in their new place of destination, move on to another place or return to their place of origin (see Fernandez-Zubieta et al. this volume). It may be, of course, that men are less likely to admit to these factors influencing their mobility and migratory decisions or it may result from the questions never having been asked in the first place.

As Cox (2008) has pointed out in a paper outlining the major factors impeding mobility, it isn't just parenting and child care which may prove to be a barrier but personal relationships as well. This is born out by the interviews conducted by Verges Bosch and González Ramos amongst mobile Spanish researchers and foreign researchers in Spain. Their conclusion is that women are now more active in international mobility and that the negative stereotype of the trailing spouse may represent a much more complex reality where the spouse may take advantage of opportunities for training and further study or find work (Raghuram, 2004; Roos, 2013). Thus family considerations at different points of the life cycle (Kou et al., 2009) need to be taken into account in the formulation of public policies which seek to encourage international mobility.

Indeed the European Commission has been promoting labour mobility, including that of researchers, for which it has developed programmes such as the Marie Curie Fellowships. Whilst the ability to be mobile is extolled as a measure of success, the pursuit of mobility produces gendered outcomes (Ackers and Gill, 2008). As Ackers in this volume argues, mobility has been conceptualised too simplistically as long periods of absence and the exercise of it equated with excellence. However studies of researchers highlight the diversity of mobilities (conference, placements, short intense stays, longer periods in another country) of varying durations and how these are deployed in the conduct of research and contribute to the development of international reputations. Mobility should not be reduced to physical and geographical movements. Furthermore, the traditional longer period of absence is likely to be more difficult for the maintenance of personal relationships, parenting and caring responsibilities and a greater barrier to career development for women than for men.

New approaches to skilled migration (Freitas et al., 2012) also include a deeper understanding of the contribution of diasporas to development (Meyer, 2011) and the experiences of skilled migrants

upon return. Though varying by country, there is evidence that skilled women tend to migrate in general to a greater extent than men (Docquier et al., 2009; Dumont et al., 2007), but that their experiences are overlooked in discussions of how the diaspora (Meyer, 2011) and returnees contribute to the development of a country. Yet whilst schemes are set up to channel remittances to small and medium enterprises (see Spadavecchia this volume), there may be little appreciation of the experience of female returnees (Amazan this volume) and the attitudes they confront from both men and other women in a society which has still to acknowledge the multiple activities women undertake. It is therefore time to give women a voice and recognition in the societies to which they have returned.

The papers in this special issue on Women on the Move provide new insights into skilled migration derived from evidence-based studies in Europe and Africa. In particular, all of these articles point towards the need to bring together the economic, social and political dimensions of skilled migrations, both in sending and receiving societies. They also offer a more nuanced perspective on skilled migration which should be used by policy makers to enable women and men to benefit from mobility without having to be torn between career and family life.

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