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Female Migration Outcomes II

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Gendered analysis of the outcomes of migration: research agendas and policy proposals

By PARVATI RAGHURAM (Open University)

There is now a large literature on female migration and its impacts on women, their households, on the economy of sending countries and on the households and institutions where they work in the destination countries (Piper, 2009; Piper and French, 2012). Much of this literature adopts a critical edge, showing the difficulties that women face as migrants, in order to outline a set of policy outcomes for addressing these difficulties.

However, the outcomes of migration can be diverse and there are clearly lessons to be learned about how to maximise the benefits of migration for women. With this in mind, this special issue sets out to ask the following questions: What do we do to ensure that women do benefit from migration, whether in terms of enjoyment of rights or successful integration? What are the difficulties or challenges that one faces in ensuring that women do benefit from migration on an equal footing? What enabled women to benefit from migration in certain contexts? And what can be learnt from this?

The papers in this issue address these questions by presenting a variety of circumstances and factors impacting on migrant outcomes. They range across contexts and continents. Unusually for the literature on migration they include both forced migration and voluntary forms of migration. They also highlight the range of actors who can help to impede or accelerate and enhance the benefits of migration. Their findings could serve to stimulate re-adjustments to public sector strategies and policies regarding migration outcomes, notably concerning women. The rest of this introduction focuses on how these issues are addressed in the papers.

The first paper in this issue is by Danièle Bélanger and Giang. Based on a survey under-

taken with 499 migrant returnees who had moved from Vietnam to Malaysia, Taiwan, South Korea and Japan between 2000 and 2009 they show the need for a dynamic and highly contextualised approach to migrant outcomes. The paper points out that moments, types, and levels of precarity differed between women domestic workers, women factory workers and men factory workers. Women undertaking factory work fared worse than domestic workers suggesting that the benefits of working in the formal sector may be outweighed by the nature of the contract depending on the destination. The impacts also differed at different times during the migration process. In the pre-departure phase the issues were of costs, how migrants sourced the money required to allay the costs of migration, training, which sector they worked in and the final destination. During the 'labouring process' the factors influencing outcomes were how long they stayed and what sector they worked in. The authors found that the group least likely to face problems was female domestic workers. One possible reason for this was the role of migrant associations that have helped to improve the experiences of migrant domestic workers in Taiwan. Their analysis on return suggest that an adequate period of stay is crucial for ensuring that the migrant's aspirations are met and that the whole experience is deemed successful. Bélanger and Giang's paper implies the need for more research on migrant women employed in sectors other than domestic work, especially in manufacturing. The large number of variables that influence the outcomes of migration also means that there is need for much more nuanced policy making.

The positive findings about domestic worker migration are also corroborated by the research

presented in the paper 'Making the Most of Remittances: Obligations, Aspirations, and Precarity among Indonesian Women Migrants in Singapore' by Theresa Devasahayam. Based on 25 interviews with Indonesian women working in the domestic work sector in Singapore she shows the benefit drawn from the multiple uses of remittances and how these uses change over time. She too points out that the length of the contract for which domestic workers are employed is a key variable as it takes time to pay off the costs of migration and to have an overall positive balance of outcomes. She shows that given time almost all migrant women did benefit financially and many returned with self-confidence and economic independence.

Further to the impacts on the women themselves, on which the papers above focus, migration has larger scale repercussions. These are addressed in the following paper 'Gender Implications of Care Migration for the Operation of Care Diamond in Ukraine' by Alissa Tolstokorova who shifts the analytical lens from migrant women to the outcomes of gendered migration for the receiving state, communities and families. She draws on 25 in-depth expert interviews and 40 semi-structured interviews (28 female and 12 male) with Ukrainian migrants who moved to provide care in Italy, Germany and Austria. She utilises the concept of care diamond (Razavi, 2007) to elaborate on the prospects and problems of care delivery by the state, the market, community sector and the family, the four corners of the diamond, in Ukraine. All four are shown to be locally specific (Raghuram, 2012) but also inherently dynamic (Kofman and Raghuram, 2009). The market sector has attempted to fill this gap but without a concerted and comprehensive policy on the care demands in Ukraine the effects of the outflow of care-givers on the country are likely to be severe. Tolstokorova points out that although much of the labour migration she investigates is driven by the care demands in Northern Europe, which Ukrainian migrants fill, similar issues of a care deficit compounded by an ageing population are also pertinent in, and important for, Ukraine. She therefore argues for the need to see the outcomes of migration in broad

terms that go beyond the migrants and their families.

Mariangela Veikou in a paper titled 'Integration: a hot button issue. Contextualising Multiculturalism and Integration in Amsterdam' explores the significance of the community sector in shaping migrant outcomes. Based on qualitative research on Muslim migrant community organisations in Amsterdam, and particularly on the intimate stories of migrant women from North Africa, she shows that dominant frames for interpreting 'successful migration', which increasingly call for integration of migrants into the destination society through state-driven prescriptive uniform processes, need rethinking. Her empirical work suggests that the women have identified varied ways of solving problems and have used their initiative to 'integrate' on their own-terms. For Veikou, this 'bottom-up integration' holds promise for improving the outcomes of migration in the long-run as it is much more attuned to the fluidity of interactions at the grassroots level.

Very often, the nature of migration (forced versus voluntary) and the skills of the migrant are assumed to be the basis for successful outcomes. In a knowledge-economy where women and men are expected to move rationally to fill labour-market demands in highly skilled sectors the voluntary migration of skilled workers may be seen as the most successful form of migration. However, as Andrews, Klodawsky and Siltanen show us in their paper 'Soft Skills and Hard Prejudices: Pathways to Improving the Life Chances of Recent Immigrant Women in Ottawa, Canada', the benefits of such migration to the migrant are not always clear-cut. Despite the fact that women (and men) migrating to Canada are sometimes more highly educated than native Canadians they still appear to suffer significant short and long-term labour market disadvantages. Due to what they term 'hard prejudices' women do not necessarily seem to have benefited from migration; in fact, they may even have lost out. The authors provide an example of how this disadvantage, ascribed to soft skills that are place-based and sometimes tacit, may be made more explicit. The paper outlines some ways to address this as part

of a programme of training. Using the example of the City for All Women Initiative in Ottawa they show the elements of a successful programme that has increased the benefits of migration for women. These benefits derive from: meaningful employment and employment-related training, and empowerment and a capacity to measure outcomes. The paper also illustrates how these strategies might be translated into policies and highlights the role of public sector strategies in destination countries for maximising gendered migrant outcomes.

Issues of training and skills development that are discussed by Andrews et al, take a different form in the context of forced migration as Gail Hopkins shows us in her paper titled 'Casamance Refugee Women's Engagement with Development Programming in the Gambia'. Drawing on interviews and focus-groups with rural and urban refugees from Casamance who have moved to the Gambia Hopkins suggests that the level, content and variety of skills, the phasing of skill training and its relation to food aid are all important considerations in ensuring that even in the context of forced migration there is a possibility of having positive outcomes.

The last paper in the issue also focuses on forced migrants. Through the case of Iraqi refugees in Syria Giorgio Heinrich Neidhardt explores the issues facing women who move with and without their husbands as well as those who are left behind. The paper suggests that the independence of women in these circumstances must not be celebrated because it arises out of

social exclusion. Against the grain of much of the literature on migration in this part of the world, this paper suggests that affiliations within the Iraqi diaspora are not primarily based on ethnicity and religion but rather on social and economic factors. One of the paper's key findings is that although the migration may be forced, the ability to move back and forth is vital to enabling migrant families to survive and thrive. This finding has implications for border policies in contested areas. Another implication of Neidhardt's findings is that the support offered by organisations such as the UNHCR should encompass the development of community resources. Families and communities thus appear to be key resources in improving migrant outcomes and the role of the state and of larger organisations should be to support and enable these functioning social units.

Together these papers expand our understanding of the outcomes of migration on men and women but also on families, communities and the state. A key message that emerges thereof pertains to the need to consider migrant women and men as drivers of their own development, not mere beneficiaries, who require specific knowledge and skills to unlock the full potential of migration. Furthermore, the papers provide a set of research questions that will guide future research in this field. They also offer policy proposals for improving these outcomes in diverse contexts. They highlight examples of 'best practice' in policy-making which can be adopted and modified in other contexts in years to come.

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Parvati RAGHURAM is Reader in Geography at the Open University. She has published widely on gender, migration and development. Much of her more recent work explores the migration of skilled and lesser skilled women, particularly those moving from the Indian subcontinent as doctors and IT workers. She has also been exploring the use of 'care' as a concept in social policy, postcolonial theory and feminist ethics. She has co-authored *The Practice of Cultural Studies* (Sage), *Gender and International Migration in Europe* (Routledge) and co-edited *South Asian women in the diaspora* (Berg) and *Tracing Indian diaspora: Contexts, Memories, Representations* (Sage). She co-edits the *South Asian Diaspora* with the Centre for Study of Diaspora, Hyderabad.

Precarity, Gender and Work: Vietnamese Migrant Workers in Asia

By Danièle BÉLANGER (Université Laval) and
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Abstract

Precarity among low-skilled temporary migrant workers in Asia is well documented, particularly concerning migrant women in domestic work in countries of the Gulf region and in East Asia. In this paper, we first examine the intersection of gender and type of work by comparing men and women, but also by comparing women engaged in domestic work and those working in manufacturing. Second, we analyse indicators of precarity through the entire migration process: pre-departure, time abroad, and return. Based on descriptive analyses from survey data collected in 2009 from 499 former Vietnamese migrant workers who worked in Malaysia, Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan between 2000 and 2009, our results indicate differences in (1) moments of precarity, (2) types of precarity, and (3) levels of precarity. This paper unpacks how gender is central to an understanding of precariousness in migration but also how it may intersect with other important variables.

Research on legal temporary low-skilled migration flows has repeatedly shown that migrants are subject to structural precarity, given their limited rights in the destination countries (Piper 2004; Piché 2008; Goldring 2010). Reports of abuse, failure to be paid expected salaries, arbitrary dismissal, and deportation are common in destination countries of East, Southeast and West Asia that import labour (Martin 2010). Structural precarity appears to be particularly acute for migrant women who migrate within patriarchal regimes and gendered labour markets (Danneker 2009). Studies on women migrant workers in domestic work, in particular, contain a wealth of vivid illustrations of the intrinsically gendered aspects of the migration process, migration experience, and migration policies (Constable 1997; Hondagneu Sotelo 2000; Lan 2008; Constable 2010).¹ While gender clearly shapes precarity in

specific ways, we know little about when, how, and who is more or less precarious among these groups of migrants in the Asian context.

This paper aims to address these questions in two ways. First, most accounts rely on the experiences of female domestic workers, and results are then often extrapolated to women migrants in general. Yet, women migrants in low-skilled occupations work in other sectors, such as manufacturing and services. In this analysis, our objective is to unpack how gender matters by comparing not only men and women, but also women working in different jobs. Second, most research documents women migrants' experiences while abroad, while less is known about what unfolds in the two other phases of the labour migration process: pre-departure and return. We therefore analyse experiences during the entire migration process. We pursue these two lines of inquiry as a way to further our understanding of precarity among low-skilled labour migrants within Asia using a gender approach.

¹ In this paper we do not discuss the important question of agency (see, for instance, Sim 2009; Hsia 2010).

This analysis is based on survey data collected in three provinces of Vietnam from 499 migrant returnees (former migrant workers) in 2009. The sample of former migrant workers used in this analysis had worked as domestic workers or factory workers in Taiwan, Japan, Malaysia, and South Korea between 2000 and 2009. Our findings show differences in (1) moments of precarity, (2) types of precarity, and (3) levels of precarity. During the pre-departure period, women surveyed were more at risk during training than men, while men endured the burden of larger pre-departure fees than women. While abroad, women former domestic workers reported the most positive experiences, compared to their female and male counterparts who worked in manufacturing. Routes to return showed that domestic workers were the most likely to complete their contracts and return as planned, while factory workers, both men and women, were more likely to either be sent back early or to overstay their visas. Among women, levels of precarity show that, overall, female factory workers were at higher risk than women who laboured in domestic work. These findings must be situated within the policy and social environments of these migrants' destination countries: Taiwan in the case of domestic workers, and Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, and Malaysia in the case of factory workers. Likewise, precarity prior to migration and upon return is shaped by Vietnam's political economy and social context.

Precarity, gender, and work in the migration process

To examine migrants' experiences through the lens of rights (the objective of this special issue), we find the notion of precariousness or precarity (used interchangeably thereafter) particularly useful. Goldring et al. (2009) suggest that precariousness can be defined as a continuum upon which migrants' vulnerabilities can be examined. Using this conceptualisation, Goldring et al., along with a growing number of researchers, question the dichotomous categories – legal and illegal, documented and undocumented – that are used to classify migrants and claim, rather, that it proves more fruitful to use a spectrum

of precariousness. Goldring and her colleagues argue that:

[...] precarious migratory status, like citizenship, is multi-dimensional and constructed by specific state policies, regulations, practices of policy implementation, activism, discourses and so forth, and that there may be multiple pathways to precarious status, depending on the context at various levels. To explore the implications of precarious status for differential inclusion, we link forms of precarious status to the presence/absence of rights and entitlements (Goldring et al. 2009: 240).

Goldring et al. show how precarity is legally produced by temporary migrant workers' programs, whereby employers and receiving states can easily dispose of migrants. In other words, temporary foreign workers are, in essence, in a precarious state due to their limited entitlement to social protection and their mandatory return, which prevents them from accessing legal and social citizenship. This approach, thus, shows the usefulness of studying migrants along a continuum of 'precariousness', rather than within binary conceptualisations of legality. Moreover, as Raghuram (2010) shows, this precarity is not limited to the lesser skilled. Using the example of migrants skilled in medicine in the UK, she shows how temporariness and precarity are different and how 'precarity and vulnerability, the hallmarks of temporariness, are not limited to the lesser skilled' (Raghuram, forthcoming: 26).

The concept of precariousness, developed from examples taken from the Canadian case (Goldring et al. 2009), and the unpacking of the relationship between temporariness and precarity, in the case of the UK (Raghuram, 2010), are both particularly useful for the Asian context. Indeed, international temporary labour migration in Asia, for the most part, consists of legal migration flows. Migrants are documented and legally enter the borders of receiving countries. Despite their legal status, they face high degrees of precarity that may lead to voluntary or involuntary slippage into the illegal sector (Bélanger et al. 2011). In other words, being legal and documented does not mean that migrants work and live in safe and fair conditions. Compulsory return, combined with limited social protection

and the near impossibility of appealing an early contract termination, create a high degree of precarity in itself. This situation is, in turn, conducive to the development of an illegal sector in which migrants may, in fact, feel freer and more empowered, as illustrated by the research of Lan (2007) on undocumented domestic workers in Taiwan, and by Bélanger et al. (2001) on undocumented factory workers in Japan. In some extreme cases, migrants suffer from forced labour and human trafficking (Bélanger, forthcoming).

Research paying attention to migrants' rights has especially focused on migrants' lives in the destination country where they have limited rights and entitlements (Constable 1997; Piper 2004; Oishi 2005; Le 2010). Temporary labour migrant workers have limited 'bundles of rights' and are often constructed by employers and governments of receiving countries as cheap, flexible, and disposable labour. Lack of respect for labour contracts, arbitrary dismissal, passport confiscation, lack of health benefits, abusive working conditions, physical abuse, and confinement are among the numerous problems repeatedly identified by researchers and migrants' advocates (Piper 2004; Bélanger et al. 2010; Martin 2010).

Studies on women migrants highlight the additional vulnerabilities that women (relative to men) face due to the global gendered job market that confines them to sectors such as domestic work. Women migrants are also situated in a global patriarchal order that often puts them in a subordinate position as aspiring migrants, migrants abroad, and returnees. Studies into the lives of domestic workers, in particular, have underscored the vulnerabilities of those working in private homes, where they can be particularly at risk for various types of abuse. Studies on Singapore (Ueno 2009), Taiwan (Lan 2006), Hong Kong (Constable 1997) and the Gulf countries (Bélanger and Rahman 2013) show similarities, despite differences in the intensity of these problems and the scope for resistance and contestation. In this literature on women migrants, however, quantitative analyses are lacking and a gender approach – rather than a focus on women – is rarely adopted.

In this paper, we push this line of inquiry by exploring the experiences of migrants, both men and women, to unpack how gender is intertwined with other aspects of migrants' experiences. We examine how gender is related to precariousness among low-skilled labour migrants by situating migrants in their family context and life course stage (gender, marital status, and age) prior to and after departure, as well as their workplace context abroad (domestic workers in private homes or factory workers in manufacturing). By comparing women working in factories or as domestic workers and men working in factories, we explore the intersection of these variables.

Studying how gender and type of work shape migrants' precarity requires the study of migrants' experiences in destination countries, but we make a case for also examining the pre-migration and return stages of the process. Migrants' rights can be threatened even before they cross borders. Candidates for migration can be targeted by abusive recruiters seeking victims for exorbitant pre-departure fees and unlawful work contracts that will not be honoured abroad. When aspiring migrants begin to seek migration opportunities, they have to confront a dense and complex migration industry in which they have little or no protection (Bélanger and Wang, 2013). While the degree of vulnerability varies by country of origin, similar problems exist across the region. Precarity during recruitment, for instance, has been studied by Linquist (2010), who shows how recruitment is gendered in Indonesia.

In this paper, 'pre-departure' refers to all the steps migrants have to go through in their country of origin before going abroad as migrant workers. Candidates for migration must navigate complex networks of intermediaries and recruitment agencies, disburse various fees and costs for which they have to secure loans and mortgage assets, undergo pre-departure training, and negotiate their migration at home with family members (Wang and Bélanger 2011). This often treacherous process may last from one to 12 months and, in some cases, even longer. During this period, most migrants are uncertain about the outcome of their efforts and investment in going abroad to work.

Debt bondage is the main mechanism whereby migrants become vulnerable. In order to pay the high pre-departure costs, they have to borrow money at high interest rates and mortgage their assets. Given the frequency of abuse and deception, migrants are at high risk and net economic returns from this type of migration are uncertain. Costs and fee deduction schemes vary between origin and receiving countries, but, overall, the vast majority of migrant workers in Asia have to pay a very high price – often the equivalent of six to 18 months of full time work – for the ‘privilege’ of working abroad (Bélanger et al. 2010; Martin 2010). The way in which gender shapes the pre-departure experience deserves attention. Indeed, fees paid, paths to recruitment, training, and contracts are far from being gender neutral (Linguist 2010). Precarity faced by aspiring migrants differs for women and men, and among women working in different sectors, as our analysis will show.

Return is the least studied ‘moment’ of the temporary labour migration process. Biao (2009) writes about compulsory return as a means of controlling migration in East Asian receiving countries. Return becomes an instrument of power for employers and brokers who can return workers home not only when their contracts end, but also whenever they wish to dispose of workers due to illness, disputes, mismatches or a desire to reduce the workforce. The threat of early return looms large for workers who may not be able to pay off their debt before returning home. As Biao (2009) argues, structurally, mandatory return is a way of controlling mobility by creating more mobility, thus curtailing the formation of networks and ethnic communities. According to Biao, ‘compulsory return places migrants in a perpetually liminal, disposable and transient position, and thus renders the migration flows controllable’ (Biao 2009: 1). A lucrative industry of companies specialising in the organised, escorted and ‘safe’ return of migrants eloquently speaks to the determination of Asian countries to enforce return in order to prevent settlement.

In this analysis, ‘return’ refers to a migrant’s return to the family of origin after working

abroad. The notion of ‘return’ is somewhat open, however, since migrants may return from one contract and prepare to leave for another, for the same destination or a different one. As Liebelt (2010) argues, many migrants do not go ‘back and forth’, but rather ‘on and on’. Despite the openness of the notion of ‘return’, ‘return’ involves re-insertion into one’s family and community after a long absence, so it is a critical moment to assess the impact of migration on migrants and their families. Return may also be orchestrated and shaped by countries of origin that may extend their control over migrants after contracts end. Silvey (2007) documents, for example, how the Indonesian state exerts control over female returnees at the Jakarta airport in the name of security and safety.

Vietnamese migrant workers in Asia

Vietnam began sending unskilled and low-skilled migrant workers to Asian countries in the early 1990s. The four top destination countries are Taiwan, Malaysia, South Korea, and Japan. Agreements between Vietnam and these countries concur on the export-import of labour and establish annual quotas of migrant workers. Figure 1 shows the total migrant workers deployed annually. Relative to other migrant workers’ sending countries of the region, such as the Philippines and Indonesia, Vietnam sends relatively small numbers of migrant workers abroad. In 2012, for example, only approximately 80,000 migrants went abroad. Figure 1 shows that the top destination countries since the 2000s have been Malaysia and Taiwan, and Figure 2 shows how the proportion of females among migrant workers has increased since 1992, with women surpassing men for the first time in 2004. The decline in the proportion of women migrants that follows this peak is likely linked to Taiwan’s ‘ban’ on women live-in caregivers from Vietnam in 2004. Officially, this ban was put in place by the Taiwanese government because too many Vietnamese domestic workers were running away and overstaying their visas. Unfortunately, however, Taiwan’s shift in its migration policy towards Vietnam is likely to have fuelled fake contracts for jobs other than domestic work (to cover up the hiring

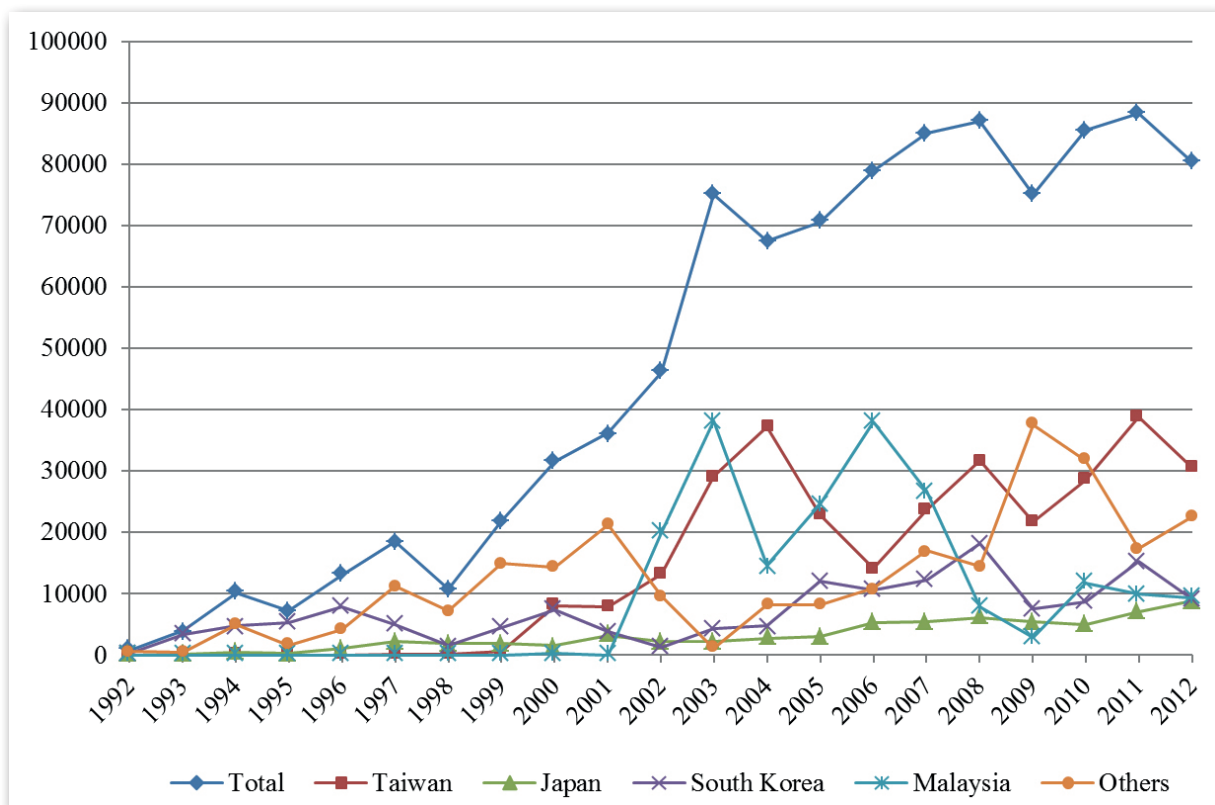


Figure 1. Total number of Vietnamese migrant workers deployed annually, 1992-2012, by country of destination.

Source: Ministry of Labour Affairs (MOLISA), unpublished data provided to the authors

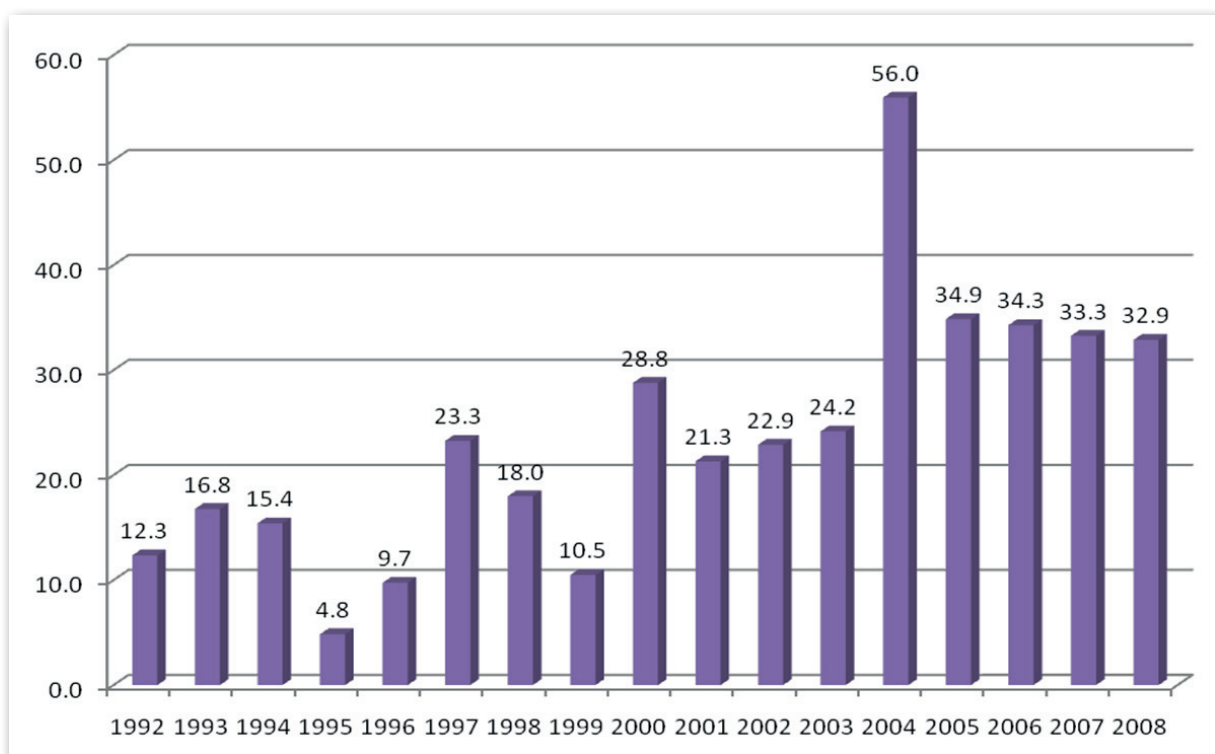


Figure 2. Proportion of women Vietnamese migrant workers deployed annually (among all migrants), 1992-2008.

Source: Ministry of Labour Affairs (MOLISA), unpublished data provided to the authors

of Vietnamese domestic workers) and to have increased trafficking. Women migrants already working in Taiwan at the time of the ban were allowed to stay and renew their contracts. This sudden change in Taiwan's migration policy was harmful for women in Vietnam who saw their migration opportunities significantly reduced.

Data and method

The analysis presented in this article draws on a survey conducted in March and April 2009 in three provinces of Vietnam: Ha Tay and Thai Binh, which administratively belong to Northern Vietnam, and Ha Tinh, which belongs to Central Vietnam. We chose these sites because they were well-known for sending large numbers of migrant workers abroad. Data were collected from 656 migrant returnees, of whom 39.5 per cent were female and 60.5 per cent were male. Migrant returnees were defined as those who had returned to Vietnam for at least six months after having worked in Taiwan, South Korea, Japan or Malaysia. Those who were home on short visits with relatives were not selected. The questionnaire designed for migrant returnees includes nine sections: (1) demographic information on the migrant; (2) destination and duration of stay; (3) networks and recruitment; (4) pre-departure training in Vietnam; (5) travel overseas; (6) work experiences in the destination country; (7) communication with home and remittances; (8) other work and overstay; and (9) return and impact of migration.

This study also included the collection of qualitative data. Through a migrant life history approach, we asked former migrant workers who returned to Vietnam to narrate their story from the day they considered going abroad to the moment of the interview. We interviewed a total of 99 migrants in six localities who worked in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Malaysia about their experiences prior to migration, while in the destination country, and upon their return. As part of our project, we also interviewed brokers, trainers, family members of migrants, and government officials in Vietnam. We conducted fieldwork with migrant workers in their destination countries, particularly in Taiwan, in pub-

lic places, in the workplace, and in one shelter. This paper relies on the survey data, but it is also informed by the ethnographic and qualitative components of the study. We do not present interview data in this paper, but the fieldwork provides context and insight into the interpretation of the survey data.

To select our study participants for the sample survey, we cooperated with provincial-level administrators who provided us with the list of international labour migrants (currently away and returnees) by district and commune. For each province, we purposely selected two districts of Thai Binh and Ha Tinh and one district of Ha Tay that sent large numbers of residents to work overseas. In the next step, in order to ensure an adequate number of individuals to satisfy the estimated sample size, we chose communes where returnees were concentrated within each of the selected districts. The number of migrant returnees obtained from the lists provided by local authorities and collaborators was virtually equivalent to the sample size, so the research team decided to interview all those who were listed. Therefore, apart from individuals who refused to participate in our survey and those who were unavailable at the time of interviewing, the final sample included nearly all migrant returnees in the selected communes.

This analysis uses a sub-sample of our total sample that includes the following groups: female former domestic workers, female former factory workers and male former factory workers only² (meaning the type of work carried out while abroad as migrant workers, not while in Vietnam). In our study, domestic workers, all of whom were women, lived in the household where they worked. They performed a variety of tasks including care for children and elderly family members, food shopping, cooking, cleaning, laundry, and other household chores. Factory workers, both male and female, worked either in large industrial factories or small family-owned shops. Types of manufacturing jobs tended to

² Workers are recruited and trained to work in a specific sector abroad, and, once abroad, they cannot easily change employers or work sectors.

	Female domestic workers	Female factory workers	Male factory workers	Total
Country of destination				
Taiwan	100.0%	13.4%	20.3%	43.1%
South Korea	0	11.8%	23.3%	13.4%
Japan	0	10.1%	6.2%	5.2%
Malaysia	0	64.7%	50.2%	38.3%
Age				
20-29 years	9.8%	47.1%	35.7%	30.5%
30-39 years	49.0%	48.7%	50.7%	49.7%
40+ years	41.2%	4.2%	13.7%	19.8%
Marital status				
Never married	1.3%	24.4%	21.1%	15.8%
Married	89.5%	69.7%	77.5%	79.4%
Other	9.2%	5.9%	1.3%	4.8%
Educational level				
Primary and lower	9.8%	11.8%	6.2%	8.6%
Lower secondary	69.9%	58.8%	63.0%	64.1%
Upper secondary and higher	20.3%	29.4%	30.8%	27.3%
Total %	30.7%	23.8%	45.5%	100.0%
Total N	153	119	227	499

Table 1. Migrant worker returnees from Vietnam. Sample characteristics (n=499).

Source: Authors' data.

be gender-specific. Men generally laboured in automobile, electronic, mechanics, and timber processing manufactures, while women tended to work in textile and food processing factories. In Japan, a small textile shop could be making and sewing car seats. The analysis includes a sub-sample of 499 returnees.³ Table 1 provides information on the characteristics of this sub-sample. In this sample, 30.7 per cent are female former domestic workers, 23.8 per cent are female former factory workers, and 45.5 per cent are male former factory workers. Older, married and less educated women tend to do domestic work,

while younger, single and more educated women and men are more likely to work in the factories. Taiwan was the destination of all domestic workers, while factory workers most frequently worked in Malaysia and South Korea.

This survey is limited in two ways. First, our interviews and questionnaires were only conducted at one point in time, and we asked study participants to think retrospectively about their entire migration experience. This approach relies on participants' memory of their migration and is mostly interested in capturing this point of view. A second limitation concerns non-response and self-selectivity of the sample. It is possible that individuals who agreed to participate in our study are self-selected for their failure or success in labour migration. Since nearly all returnees living

³ The remaining 157 respondents not included in this analysis worked in construction, fisheries, agriculture and services.

in the selected communes took part in our study, we feel this bias was significantly reduced. In addition, overstay is a difficult outcome to measure since many migrants who overstayed may still be abroad. We therefore only measure overstay among returnees who took part in our survey.

Pre-departure

The first step for candidates to labour migration is to be recruited. There are various routes to recruitment with some being more risky than others. Most respondents initiated labour migration by contacting a representative of a labour export company. The remaining respondents were recruited by the People's Committee of their commune or district or by a private recruiter. Among women migrants, domestic workers tended to rely more on recruitment companies than factory workers (68 per cent compared to 59 per cent). Recruitment through a Commune or District People's Committee was most prevalent among female factory workers. Among factory workers, men, more than

women, tended to go through private recruiters from another commune (18 per cent of men as opposed to 10 per cent of women) (see Figure 3).

Recruitment routes and network ties with recruiters play an important role in the type of job migrants obtain abroad because recruiters tend to specialise by job sector and by country of destination. Older and married women migrated more often as domestic workers because they were able to more easily find a recruiting agent for this type of job. Age and marital status were also established by recruiters and receiving countries: Married women with children were constructed as being more appropriate for care work, while single and young women as being more suitable for factory work. Married women typically talked to former domestic workers who would, in turn, connect them with the recruiting agent they had dealt with in the past. Networks of sisters, neighbours and kin members generally led to the connection between the aspiring migrant and the recruiting agent.

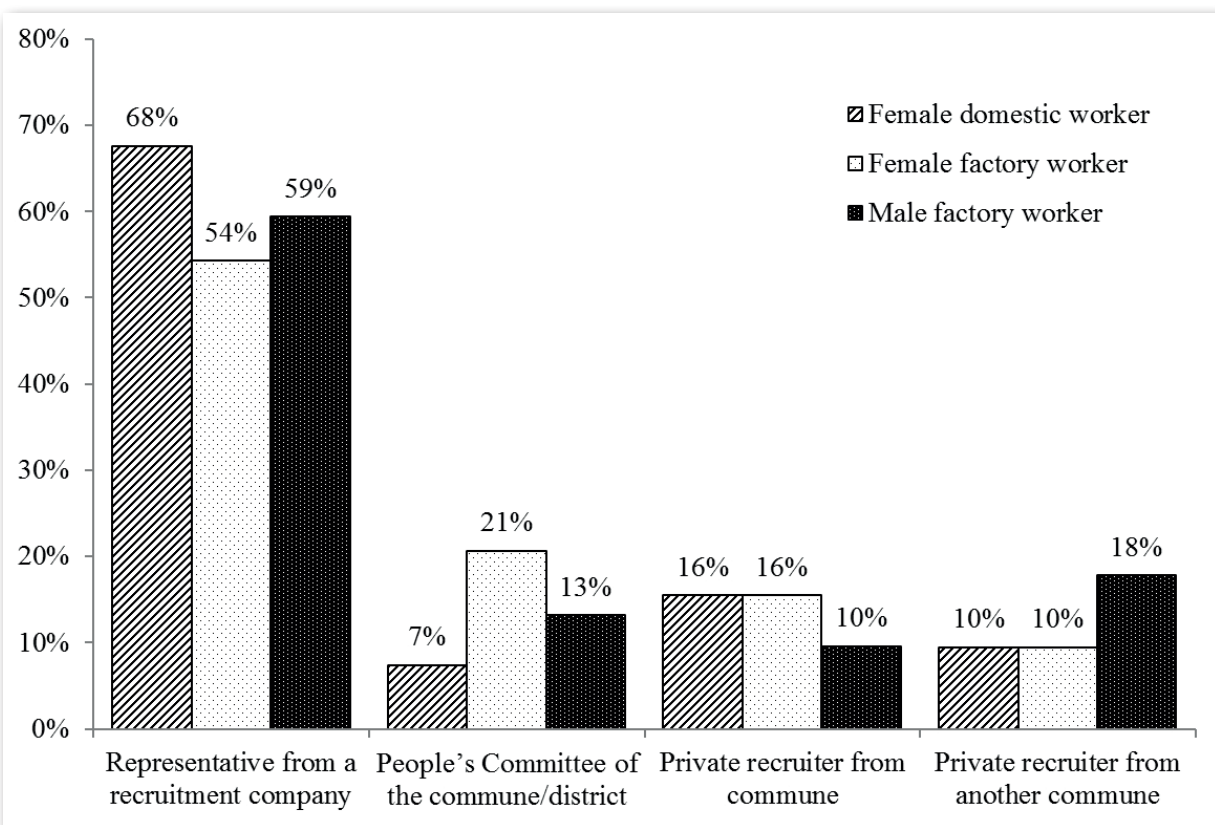


Figure 3: Migrant worker returnees from Vietnam. First contact during recruitment stage.

Source: Authors' data.

Pre-departure costs	Female domestic worker	Female factory worker	Male factory worker	Total
Mean	1,276.85	2,943.66	3,423.37	2,643.58
SD	1,047.80	3,274.68	2,922.52	2,758.44
N	152	118	221	491

Table 2: Migrant worker returnees from Vietnam. Pre-departure costs (in USD) (departures between 2000 and 2009).

Source: Authors' data.

Younger, single people, both women and men, by contrast, preferred to go abroad to work in factories, as they would do in Vietnam if the salary and working conditions were better. They were also the targets of recruiters. They formed their own networks, very much apart from those of married women. Candidates for factory work abroad also connected with young factory workers in their age cohorts, often brothers, cousins or former classmates. They exchanged information about recruitment with the purpose of working in a factory, preferably in Japan or Taiwan.

Overall, access to recruiting agents and personal networks intersect with gender and age in shaping the migrants' destination and type of work abroad. Women tended to go through more reliable contacts, including recruitment companies and official labour export programs, while men tended to connect with private recruiters in other communes and, thus, were more likely to be at risk for deception and high recruitment fees. Recruitment routes and networks are gendered, but they are also segmented by age, marital status, and educational level, variables which, in turn, affect the job sector migrants will labour in abroad and the levels of precarity they are exposed to during the recruitment stage. The worst cases of abuse were mostly experienced by men, in part because of the more risky routes they had taken during the pre-departure period (Bélanger and Wang 2013).

Our survey results indicate that average pre-departure costs were between US\$2,000 and US\$5,600. In general, as shown in Table 2, men had to pay much higher pre-departure costs

than women (average of US\$3,423 compared to US\$1,276-US\$2,943, $p < .000$). Among women, differences also emerged. Those who became factory workers abroad had to pay fees double those of domestic workers (US\$2,943 compared to US\$1,276). Domestic workers, however, have more deductions from their salaries than workers in manufacturing. It should be noted that standard deviations are quite high, especially for factory workers, indicating the great variability of costs reported. For example, a factory job in Japan costs the most, while a factory job in Malaysia costs the least. Not surprisingly, the poorest workers tended to go to Malaysia, while the ones with more income, borrowing capacity, and better connections were able to secure a job in Japan.

In order to finance their migration, nearly all migrants in our survey had to borrow money from different sources. Overall, they had to borrow the equivalent of 97 per cent of these costs, with women borrowing the full amount and men 94 per cent on average. Female and male factory workers have a similar pattern of access to resources. The majority of them (62.2 per cent of female factory workers and 59.9 per cent of male factory workers) borrowed from the bank to pay high pre-departure costs, while only 47.7 per cent of domestic workers did so (results not shown). Domestic workers tended to mobilise smaller amounts from close relatives (19 per cent of domestic workers borrowed from family members and relatives, while only 6.7 per cent of female factory workers and 10.6 per cent of male factory workers did so). The analysis indicates

that the type of job has the greatest influence on migrants' access to various resources to finance migration. Creditors appear to be more inclined to finance workers with factory jobs lined up than those with contracts to work as domestic workers. Earning expectations could explain why the type of job abroad limits or opens up financing possibilities.

Pre-departure training is mandatory in Vietnam due to its export labour law. Training can be provided by the Vietnamese recruiting agency or by foreign companies who train workers on behalf of the Vietnamese recruiting agency. Most workers who took part in our survey enrolled in a pre-departure training program (86.7 per cent), and all of them had to pay for their own training prior to leaving. Over a quarter of our respondents (27.5 per cent) experienced problems during pre-departure training. Compared to women and men who were trained to be factory workers, aspiring domestic workers were much more likely to face training problems: The percentage of female domestic workers who reported problems with pre-departure training was 46 per cent, more than double the number of female factory workers (21.5 per cent) and male factory workers (18.2 per cent) who did so. Frequently, workers were 'not allowed to go out' and suffered from

'verbal abuse'. Only future female factory workers experienced physical abuse during training. Former male factory workers were more likely to have experienced bad living conditions during training than the two other groups (data not shown).

Labouring abroad

The structural conditions of precarity abroad are well documented in earlier studies. Here, we document migrants' own assessments of their experience. When asked about their working conditions, housing conditions, and pay, domestic workers were the most positive, followed by male factory workers. Female factory workers were the least satisfied regarding these three variables (see Table 3).

The survey respondents were also asked whether they encountered negative experiences in the workplace. Results show that about half of the migrants suffered from at least one negative experience at work: Male factory workers were most likely to report at least one incident and domestic workers were the least likely. Verbal abuse was the most frequently reported negative experience for all three groups. This was followed by failure to receive the expected salary, although factory workers (both male and female)

		Female domestic worker	Female factory worker	Male factory worker
Working conditions	Poor	16.3%	24.4%	25.6%
	Acceptable	46.4%	49.6%	45.4%
	Good	37.3%	26.1%	29.1%
Housing conditions	Poor	11.1%	29.4%	26.9%
	Acceptable	49.0%	41.2%	47.6%
	Good	39.9%	29.4%	25.6%
Regular pay	Poor	22.9%	57.1%	51.1%
	Acceptable	54.2%	31.1%	33.0%
	Good	22.9%	11.8%	15.9%

Table 3. Migrant worker returnees from Vietnam. Returnees' assessment of their working and living conditions abroad.

Source: Authors' data.

	Female domestic worker	Female factory worker	Male factory worker
Verbal abuse	31.8%	28.2%	32.2%
Physical abuse	4.0%	0%	3.5%
Not allowed to see a doctor when ill	2.0%	1.7%	3.1%
Failure to receive salary	1.3%	3.4%	0.9%
Failure to receive expected amount of salary	16.6%	25.6%	30.4%
Change of employer without prior notice	2.0%	0.9%	4.4%
Conflict with superior	3.3%	9.4%	8.8%
Conflict with other workers	0.7%	6.0%	6.2%
No negative experiences	58.9%	51.3%	48.9%

Table 4. Migrant worker returnees from Vietnam. Negative experiences ever experienced abroad.

Source: Authors' data.

were much more likely to report this problem than domestic workers. Conflicts were much more often reported by workers in factories, both men and women, than by domestic workers. Overall, men reported a greater number, and more varied types, of negative experiences than women (see Table 4).

Figure 4 shows the mean total income reported for the stay abroad by duration of stay. We note that domestic workers and male factory workers who stayed abroad between one and three years earned the highest incomes. Beyond the third year, however, factory workers (men and women) earned significantly more than

female domestic workers. Staying beyond one's contract seems to pay off more for those in manufacturing (workers who stayed more than three years generally overstayed their visas). For the case of Japan, we noted elsewhere how migrant workers who overstayed their visas and became undocu-

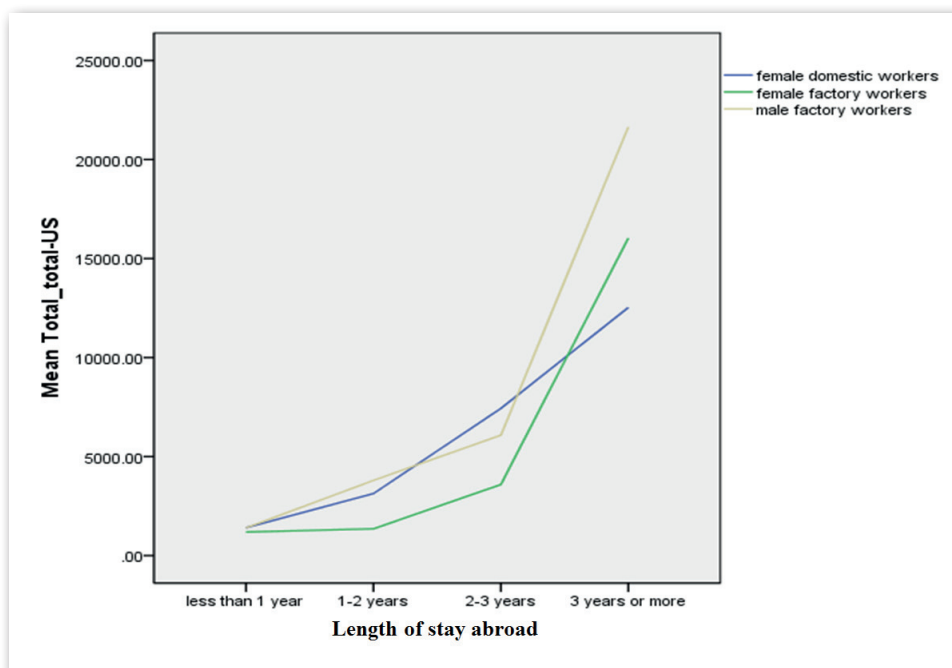


Figure 4. Migrant worker returnees from Vietnam. Mean total income by length of stay abroad.

mented workers tended to earn higher salaries than those in the legal system (Bélanger et al. 2010). This underscores female factory workers' vulnerability in terms of earning lower incomes, compared to other workers, during the first three years abroad. These results should be interpreted with caution, since wages vary by country of destination.

Return

While return is compulsory for all temporary labour migrants, it may occur in various ways. We identify three types of return: early return, timely return, and return following overstay. Generally speaking, the most desirable scenario is a 'timely return', which refers to a return upon contract completion. Table 5 shows the percentage of the three paths of return among these three groups. In our survey, domestic workers were more likely to return 'on time': 68.5 per cent of domestic workers versus 43.6 per cent of female factory workers and 44.3 per cent of male factory workers. In general, workers who returned upon the completion of their contracts were most likely able to reimburse their pre-departure debt and, in most cases, have net income from their stay abroad.

Early return is a widespread problem faced by a large proportion of workers. Among all respondents, 38.3 per cent of workers came

home before the end of their contracts. Factory workers, compared to domestic workers, faced a greater risk of being sent back home before completing their contracts (45.3 per cent of female factory workers, 40 per cent of male factory workers, and 30 per cent of domestic workers). For this reason, the percentage of returnees who had not re-paid their pre-departure loans was much higher among factory workers than among domestic workers (34.2 per cent of female factory workers, 31.3 per cent for male factory workers, and 10.5 per cent for female domestic workers (data not shown). While a few returned voluntarily (i.e. their return was not related to working or living conditions in the host country), most of them were forcefully sent back or had no choice due to particularly abusive working conditions. Early returnees were at the bottom of the local hierarchy: the shorter their time abroad, the worse their position at home and in the community. Not surprisingly, the likelihood of having paid one's pre-departure debt was directly correlated with the length of stay. Our survey results reveal that over three quarters of migrants who returned after less than 12 months abroad had not re-paid their debt; whereas among returnees who stayed abroad three years or longer, 90 per cent had been able to do so (data not shown).

	Female domestic worker	Female factory worker	Male factory worker	Total
Timely return (completed contract and returned home)	68.5%	43.6%	44.3%	51.4%
Early return (returned home before end of contract)	30.1%	45.3%	39.8%	38.3%
Overstay (stayed after contract completion)	1.4%	11.1%	15.8%	10.4%
Total N	143	117	221	481
Total %	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 5. Migrant worker returnees from Vietnam. Route of return.

Source: Authors' data.

Overall assessment	Female domestic worker	Female factory worker	Male factory worker	Total
Success	62.1%	25.2%	29.5%	38.5%
Neutral	22.9%	30.3%	26.0%	26.1%
Failure	15.0%	44.5%	44.5%	35.5%
Total N	153	119	227	499
Total %	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 6. Migrant worker returnees from Vietnam. Overall assessment of experience as migrant workers.

Source: Authors' data.

Overstay often preceded return among our study participants. Since the duration of workers' contracts is rather public and generally standard depending on the country of destination, workers who overstay are quickly identified by fellow villagers. The choice to overstay comes with a severe penalty: the non-reimbursement of the safety deposit, a measure enforced in Vietnam to reduce the risk of workers overstaying their visas. Factory workers were much more likely to overstay their visas than domestic ones (11.1 per cent of female factory workers, 15.8 per cent of male factory workers, and only 1.4 per cent of domestic workers). Our gender analysis does not identify clear differences between men and women; rather, female domestic workers were more likely to return at the end of the contract while factory workers, men and women, were at risk of early return (very precarious outcome) or could overstay their visas (could be a strategy to counteract precarity in order to earn more income). The type of work was a greater determinant in reducing precarity (timely return), increasing precarity (early return, which often translated into unpaid debts) or in providing an opportunity to stay longer and earn additional income if overstay proved to be successful (which was not always the case). As evidenced by the data, the range of precarity is greater among the female and male factory workers than among domestic workers in our study.

On a series of subjective measures of their experience, returnees differed in their sense of

whether work abroad had improved their situation or not. The main finding here is an overall positive assessment from former domestic workers and similar, yet more mitigated assessments from male and female factory workers. Nearly two thirds of former domestic workers considered their experience a success, while less than a third of factory workers did so (see Table 6). We asked returnees to assess the impact of their migration on the following aspects of their lives: loans and debts, savings, employment, income, living conditions, education, and health and social status. In response to all these questions, higher proportions of domestic workers reported positive impacts, while factory workers, men or women, reported similar or negative impacts (results not shown). For example, over 82 per cent of former domestic workers report a positive impact on their level of indebtedness, compared to only 64 and 59 per cent of female and male former factory workers, respectively. Nearly half of domestic workers felt their social status was enhanced, compared to only about a quarter of former factory workers.

Conclusion

Empirically, this paper shows some ways in which precarity among low-skilled migrant workers relates to gender and type of work. First, we provided descriptive results of three separate groups to analyse the effect of gender versus the effect of a migrant worker's position in the labour market. It is often thought that migrant workers

in the private sphere, such as domestic workers, nannies or elder care workers, are particularly vulnerable to abuse and precariousness. In fact, in the case of the migrants studied here, we see that domestic workers are, for many of the variables analysed, in a stronger position than women or men working in factories. On subjective measures where migrants assess their own migration, domestic workers report significantly more positive experiences than factory workers.

In the pre-departure period, from recruitment, training, contract signing, and fee payment, Vietnamese potential migrant workers are at risk of abuse. Although the labour-export program in Vietnam is supposed to be led entirely by state-owned labour-export companies (Wang and Bélanger 2011), in reality, multiple actors – at the national, provincial, district and commune levels, as well as those acting privately on behalf of the multitude of recruiting agencies – are involved. Because exporting labour generates profit, an open discussion of exorbitant costs, frequent abuse and deception is avoided and media accounts often focus on problems abroad, pointing at receiving nations and employers as being the ones mostly responsible for the problems encountered by migrants. Since early 2010, however, some stories of abuse at home have been uncovered and reported by the media. For example, in July 2011, a big case of export-labour fraud went to trial. A total of 111 aspiring labourers who desired to work in South Korea were cheated out of nearly one million US dollars (on average US\$9,000.00 each by six unlicensed brokers). In the end, none of the workers who had paid the fees was sent to South Korea (VTC News 2011).

However, survey results show that the risks differ by gender and types of work abroad. Women who prepare to go abroad as domestic workers pay lower fees and, consequently, hold less debt than their counterparts. While lower fees could be related to subsequent lower income levels, we do not see such a discrepancy in our results. In the training period, however, candidates for domestic work are particularly at risk of abuse.

The strongest discrepancy between the groups observed concerns time abroad when domestic

workers report more positive experiences. The same result emerged from our qualitative data overall. Domestic workers in our sample worked in Taiwan, where there is a strong civil society advocating migrants' rights and government policy aimed at reducing abuse. Some research suggests that when domestic workers have good relationships with their employers, while their structural precarity might not be reduced, their subjective experience may be significantly more positive (Lin and Bélanger 2012). Domestic workers are less likely to return early or late, two routes to return with significantly more risk of increased precarity, although overstay might boost total income.

Our analysis thus shows how precarity differs at each stage of the migration process. Studying each moment of migration reveals how the types of precarity vary by gender, but also by the type of work migrants do. The country of destination, a variable not included in the present analysis, also matters. Working in East Asia is very different from working in the Gulf region. Political, religious, social and economic contexts differ and together shape the migration experience in specific ways. The degree of precarity varies between individuals surveyed in this study. The quantitative analysis provides means, but the narratives we collected provide examples of the range of precarity experienced, including extreme cases of forced labour and human trafficking (Bélanger, forthcoming).

The more positive experience of domestic workers contrasts with the idea that workers in private homes are particularly subject to abuse and precarity. Expectations prior to migration could vary. Domestic workers might have very low expectations prior to leaving and, therefore, express very positive sentiments if their migration went relatively well. Men might expect high earnings and good working conditions, and the realities of their time abroad could foster a negative evaluation. Beyond expectations, however, these results call for more research on male migrant workers and their experience of precarity. Research on workers in fisheries shows the harsh realities of foreign workers on fishing vessels (Derks 2010), but is insufficient. Studies

on female factory workers generally focus on internal migration flows, but the experiences of international migrants in this sector are less studied. Future analyses should also use multivariate analyses to provide a deeper understanding of how precarity unfolds and is experienced by various subgroups of migrants. A gender approach shifts the focus strictly from migrant women to the interplay of gender with other variables.

Overall, conceptually, this analysis reveals that temporariness plays a role in shaping migrants' experience at all stages of the migration process.

Prior to departure, temporariness is defined by the contract duration, which sets the expected time of return. Abroad, temporariness entails such precariousness or precarity that becoming undocumented might be preferable. Upon return, the relationship between temporariness and precarity continues when the preconceived duration of temporariness is not met, and, therefore, a form of social precarity through exclusion and stigmatisation after return is created. These relationships indicate the need to develop migration theories in line with such trajectories and features of contemporary migration flows.

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Making the Most of Remittances: Obligations, Aspirations, and Precarity among Indonesian Women Migrants in Singapore

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Abstract

This paper examines migrant women's decisions around remittance expenditures. Going beyond the productive and non-productive framework used in previous analyses on remittances, the argument here is that migrant labour policies of the labour receiving country aside from migrant priorities need to be taken into account in understanding the kinds of consumption practices migrants and migrant households engage in. Ethnographic interviews with twenty-five Indonesian migrant women working in Singapore in the domestic work sector reveal that while women benefit greatly from migration because it enhances their ability to provide for their families back home, the paper shows that decisions on how remittances are spent are closely linked to the duration of employment abroad. During the time of their employment, these women are constantly reminded of their temporary and precarious work status. While working on several two-year contracts as a result of renewals have become the norm, migrant labour laws tend to place limits on their freedoms and by extension do not encourage these women to stay on. Thus, these women face a dilemma: the desire to continue to work abroad away from their families in order to increase their savings and investment prospects, while facing the uncertainty of whether they can stay in Singapore long term.

Introduction

By and large in Southeast Asia, there are few restrictions on intra-regional migration. Conversely, there has been a gradual movement towards implementing initiatives at the state level to facilitate the safe migration of potential migrants (Ananta 2009; Tigno 2010). Increasingly, however, governments of labour-sending countries in the region are playing a more assertive role in regulating migration, possibly because of the financial benefits accrued to the labour-sending countries. Each year, millions of dollars' worth of remittances are sent back to families and communities by migrants. In fact, labour-sending countries have been eager to encourage migration because of the economic gains they receive. Indonesia, for example, recorded a total of 7 thousand million US dollars' worth

of remittances from its citizens working abroad in 2010 (Manning and Sumarto 2011). The Philippines, by contrast, because of the much larger contingent of professionals and skilled workers it deploys abroad, received an overwhelmingly massive amount of about \$21 thousand million worth of remittances in the same year because of the rising demand for Filipino workers worldwide (Migration Policy Institute n.d.). Remittances have also been found to contribute significantly to the GDP of these labour-sending countries. For example, in the Philippines, remittances contributed 11.7 per cent of the country's GDP in 2009 (World Bank 2011). In Indonesia, although the amount of remittances is relatively small when compared to export earnings, it must be noted that remittance flows have been con-

sidered a stable and consistent source of foreign exchange (Hernandez-Coss et al. 2008).

The literature on remittances, in covering who remits and how much, has spanned the gamut from the reasons for remitting (Lucas and Stark 1985; Lianos 1997; Lubkemann 2005) to the gender dimension of remittances (De la Briere et al. 2002; Semyonov and Gorodzeisky 2005), to the links between recruitment channels and earnings (Shah 2000). Research has also focused on household reliance on remittances (Itzigsohn 1995; Sriskandarajah 2002), how remittances have affected household labour supply (Itzigsohn 1995; Rodriguez and Tiongson 2001; Airola 2008), and the impact of remittances on local income distribution (Stark et al. 1986; Adams 1989). There has also been interest in how remittances have affected the economic, social, and emotional well-being of left-behind families (Salazar Parreñas 2001; Asis et al. 2004).

While migrating for wage work potentially benefits migrant families on the one hand, there have been conflicting opinions on the other hand on whether these remittances have actually led to development and poverty alleviation in the labour-sending countries. One reason for this is because migrant remittances are primarily private money transfers with limited spillover effects in the larger communities from which these migrants come (Datta et al. 2006). Moreover, because remittances are private monetary flows, taxing these financial transfers for the purpose of harnessing these funds for large-scale infrastructure development has been difficult, and thus the impact of remittances on regional growth tends to be unclear. Along the same lines, it has been argued that remittances fail to contribute to economic development at the national level because of the lack of adequate linkages to bring about this outcome (Knerr 2004, as cited in Goldring 2004). The positive impact of remittances on the development of the labour-sending country is not straightforward for another reason. In a country such as Indonesia, where only about ten per cent of the districts have been found to send significant numbers of people abroad (Hernandez-Coss et al. 2008), the impact of remittances sent back tends to be limited to

the households in those labour-sending areas. Besides, the assertion that remittances serve to alleviate poverty is doubtful, since migrants need not represent the poorest of the poor. Additionally, as migration for wage work tends to attract those who are better off and not the poorest of the poor, immigration policies of many labour-receiving countries tend to favour migrants with higher levels of education, therefore such migration does not have the outcome of benefitting those from the lowest socio-economic strata of the labour-sending country.

The fact that remittances have for the most part been private transfers has another related implication: The beneficiaries tend mainly to be the migrants and their families. Research has shown that the impact of remittances at the household level has been significant especially in building household economies. By potentially raising household incomes, remittances have enabled migrants to feed and educate their children, to ensure healthcare for their families and relatives, and to improve the standard of living of left-behind families owing to the higher rate of use of consumer durables (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific 2008). While undoubtedly remittances have had a direct bearing on improving the well-being of left-behind family members at the household level, some scholars have underscored the point that such remittances, when used towards family expenses and confined to the private sphere, are largely 'unproductive' (Kofman 2006: 7) since they are used towards consumption assets, such as durable possessions, consumable goods, and healthcare, rather than 'productive' assets that generate further income (Lipton 1980; Entzinger 1985; Lewis 1986). For this reason, remittances tend to have a limited impact on the social mobility of the migrant family.

On this point, other theorists have asserted that the choices migrants make on channelling remittances into productive or non-productive consumption depends largely on whether short- and long-term effects of migration are considered. In this case, productive investments will only take place once the migrant is well settled in the destination economy and the basic needs

of the left-behind families such as food, health, clothing, primary education, basic household amenities, and debts are paid off (De Haas 2007). Suffice it to say, these assertions have been met by counter-arguments related to the distinction between productive investments and consumption assets and the fact that these binaries are not as distinct as one would assume; for example, in the case of houses, this asset has been regarded to be a productive investment rather than a consumption asset because houses have been seen to possess anti-inflationary characteristics (Adams 1991).

While some scholars have highlighted the futility of demarcating productive from non-productive consumption in relation to remittance incomes, others have challenged this distinction and instead have argued that remittances channelled into improving nutrition, health, and education need not be considered non-productive, but rather considered as 'investments', albeit in human capital (Durand, Parrado and Massey 1996; Tabora 2008). In this case, remittance incomes have been integral towards social development rather than economic development, thereby supporting the development of stronger communities (Nyberg Sørensen 2005). To put it differently, the remittances in this context might be considered 'social expenditure' in lieu of the 'skinny reproductive role of the state' and instead of 'frivolous consumerism' with no real net returns to the family or community (as cited in Kofman 2006: 7). Others have proposed instead a more gender-based approach to understanding how remittance incomes are spent rather than pursuing a purely productive and non-productive framework for understanding remittances (Pessar 2005; Ramirez et al 2005). This point is justifiable, especially since it has been shown that women migrants are more inclined to spend their remittances on consumable goods and healthcare, in addition to education, while men migrants expend their savings on larger investments related to businesses and land purchases (Escrivá and Ribas 2004, as cited in Tabora 2008). In this case, the ways in which remittances are channelled into assets by male and female migrants, however, has little to do with how they

define whether these assets are productive or non-productive. Instead, as Nyberg Sørensen (2005) points out, the uses of remittances are distinctly gendered since men and women engage in migration differently while simultaneously decision-making on how remittances are spent tends to be different between men and women, although migration may generally be regarded to be a household strategy. Moreover, macro-economic policies and development strategies aiming to optimise remittances have reinforced gender asymmetries among migrants, signifying the interaction between gender and migration.

Other remittance scholars have also moved away from distinguishing remittances in terms of whether they are productive and non-productive. One such scholar is Goldring (2004), who proposes the possibility of looking at remittances in three broad categories, that is, family, collective, and investment or entrepreneurial remittances. Her approach is multi-dimensional as she goads us to view remittance expenditures within a complex constellation interspersed by a range of actors from remitters and recipients to the state apparatus, each governed by social, political, and institutional mechanisms. For example, according to her definition, family remittances are monies sent to close kin, relatives, and friends, marked by norms, obligations, and affective ties, the bulk of which are spent on recurrent expenses as well as conspicuous consumption with the sole intent of improving the living conditions and well-being of family members. Moreover, these remittances are steeped in social meaning relevant to the sender and receiver of the remittances. She contrasts this with collective remittances, which she defines as 'savings turned into investment' mostly resembling 'charitable donations than profit-oriented investments' (Goldring 2004: 823). Examples of collective remittances are monies channelled into community projects such as sports clubs or religious associations—institutions which serve a collective benefit rather than being limited to the individuals whom the remitter has kin ties with or a friendship, as in the case of family remittances. While operating within a philanthropic framework, the effects of collec-

tive remittances are felt beyond the family and immediate social network of the migrant. Conversely, the third type of remittance highlighted by Goldring (2004), which she has termed entrepreneurial or investment remittances, has the distinct feature of seeking a profit within a market logic. Unlike collective remittances, however, Goldring (2004) points out that entrepreneurial or investment remittances have been relatively limited in producing sustainable businesses.

In the same vein, others such as Levitt (1998, 2001, 2008) have highlighted the social aspect of remittances, arguing that remittances need not be confined to economic contributions but rather should also include behaviours, ideas, identities, and social capital that migrants export to their home communities. In fact, she claims that remittances sent back to the left-behind families may act as a form of social insurance for some migrants (Levitt 2008). This being the case, remittances may be said to possess both economic and social ends simultaneously where the two are 'inextricably linked' (Levitt 2008: 187). Moreover, Levitt (2001) argues that there is compelling evidence to show that 'social remittances' are equally important as monetary remittances in contributing and advancing national development, including influencing ideas around good governance—an impact migrants have in spite of being abroad.

Following Goldring (2004), Levitt (1998, 2001, 2008) and others, the discussion here challenges the idea that in terms of remittance expenditures a strict division exists between productive and non-productive consumption, as some scholars have argued. Based on ethnographic interviews with Indonesian migrant women working in Singapore in the domestic work sector, the paper presents an analysis of how decisions around remittance expenditures channelled back into their home countries shift over the course of time a migrant worker is employed abroad. Essentially, the narratives reveal that there exists a hierarchy of migrant needs as expressed in the kinds of consumption goods migrants tend to purchase or channel their monies into. The narratives gathered, however, show that while migrant women have benefited greatly from migration because it

enhances their ability to provide for their families back home, decisions on how remittances are spent in the home country are closely linked to how long these women stay abroad; in other words, migrant decisions on remittance expenditures are bound up largely with the duration of employment abroad, as pointed out by De Hass (2007). A general pattern, thus, emerges in the way remittance expenditures are spent, shaped by structural factors in the labour receiving country which in turn have constructed migrant remittance priorities. Taking this idea one step further, this paper asserts that decisions to continue to work in the labour destination economy depends largely on whether these women are presented with the opportunity of remaining in the country for work. Although many would desire to stay for longer periods, migrant labour policies in Singapore restrict foreign women engaged in low-skilled work to short-term contracts of two years. While working on several two-year contracts as a result of renewals has become the norm for many, migrant labour laws, enabling these women to stay on in Singapore beyond their initial two-year contracts, tend to place limits on their freedoms and by extension do not encourage these women to stay on indefinitely for employment. In fact, women migrants who desire to stay on are constantly reminded of their temporary and precarious work status. But should they survive all odds and continue to be employed in Singapore on several contracts, it is only then that the likelihood of remittances being channelled into consumption practices which they would define to have relatively significant returns in the long run would occur. Thus in the case of women migrants in Singapore, it may be said that how their remittances come to be utilised are bound up with the labour policies these migrant women encounter in the destination country. In this case, women migrant workers face a dilemma: The desire to continue to work abroad away from their families in order to increase their savings and investment prospects, while facing the uncertainty of whether they can stay in Singapore long term. Therefore, migrant priorities are not the only factor determining how remittance expenditures are conducted.

Gathering Data

In an attempt to understand the remittance strategies of migrant women workers, the author gathered the responses of 25 Indonesian domestic workers employed in Singapore. These women were contacted through the following non-governmental organisations associated with migrant workers: The Indonesian Family Network (IFN); Kolej Islam Muhammadiyah (KIM); and Transient Workers Count Too (TWC2), as well as identified through friends and colleagues whose domestic workers were willing to participate in the study. Coming from various parts of rural Indonesia, these women ranged in age from 26 to 53 and included unmarried, married, and divorced individuals. Interviews with these women were conducted in public places such as void decks, restaurants and cafes, office spaces, as well as in the privacy of homes. While each interview lasted on average 30-45 minutes, it must be highlighted that the majority of the women interviewed were already known to the author through other research projects in which the same sample of women was approached for their participation. These interviews were conducted over a period of six months in 2011 and 2012. In interviewing these women, the author employed an interview schedule to guide the information collection process. The questions posed to the women included in the sample ranged from their reasons for migrating for work to the kinds of decisions made regarding remittances sent to left-behind families. Most of the interviews were conducted in Indonesian while a handful of them were conducted in English, especially among those who had developed a fair measure of fluency in the English language, having lived in Singapore for several years. In some instances, quotes have been edited for grammatical purposes by the author to ensure clarity, while every effort has been made to preserve the original meaning of the statements.

It must be noted that the women interviewed for this paper represent a sprinkling of the record numbers of Indonesian women currently joining the transnational domestic work sector as migrant domestic workers, heading to countries in the Middle East as well as destination econo-

mies in the Asian region such as Malaysia, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore (Hugo 2004). The lack of suitable well-paid jobs in the villages is a major push factor for migration. In the past, many of these women would have migrated from the rural areas to the urban areas to find wage work. The case of Java has been highlighted to show how younger women took on proactive responses by becoming absorbed into the expanding manufacturing and service sectors as a result of the diminishing employment opportunities presented to them on farms (Silvey 2004). But globalisation has enabled many to seek out employment abroad—employment that affords higher salaries and better opportunities than if these women had stayed in their home countries. The trend of migrating for work is also indicative of how young rural men and women have come to perceive non-farm urban employment over farming (Booth 2004), although migration for work among women from families who own land also occurs, since non-farm work is associated with a regular income.

While remittance expenditures among Indonesian migrants as a topic has been studied fairly extensively (Hugo 1983, 1995, 2004, 2005; Firman 1994; Leinbach and Watkins 1998; Hernandez-Coss et al. 2008; Adams and Cuenquecha 2010; Nguyen and Purnamasari 2011), the discussion here parts company with the larger literature on the subject as it details the choices and decisions of migrant women around how they or their left-behind families use the savings they have garnered from their work abroad. Furthermore, the paper complements the existing literature on women and migration in and from Indonesia, which has dealt with a range of varying topics: The social networks of migrant women (Silvey 2003); the discourses of emotion that frame women's migration to Saudi Arabia (Silvey 2007); migrant women's views of their own families, their role in it, and their consumption desires and practices (Silvey 2006); the tensions and challenges migrant women face in their role as mothers given the spatial separation (Devasahayam and Rahman 2011); how left-behind male members of the household negotiate the village space, their social relation-

ships, and the lack of wage work in the village in the context of migrant women's economic and social successes (Elmhirst 2007); the importance of managing appearances in the context of economic failure and anxieties around sexuality among female migrants (Lindquist 2004); how Indonesian women become involved with the reproduction of patriarchal structures connected to 'traditional' family arrangements as a result of cross-border marriages with Sarawakian men from the Kelabit community (Lindquist 2005); how women working as domestic workers in Singapore navigate the worlds in which they live as migrants in spite of the autonomy they have gained (von der Borch 2008); and how Bugis women who work in Malaysia as domestic workers see wage work abroad as a ticket to financial independence and an opportunity to engage in a consumptive lifestyle they would not have led back home rather than a means to save money and sustain their left-behind families (Idrus 2008).

'A Better Life': The Role of Remittances

In Indonesia, migrating abroad for work has attracted growing numbers of women, the majority of whom take on low-paid and low-skilled work especially in the domestic work sector (Silvey 2006, 2007; von der Borch 2008; Brooks and Devasahayam 2011). The search for a 'better life' is the main reason that propels many Indonesian women to seek work abroad (Yeoh and Huang 1999; Silvey 2006). Usually the families of these women play an instrumental role in migration decisions although individual motivation cannot be dismissed. In fact, the quest to meet family needs and improve household living conditions provides the impetus for working abroad. For this reason, 'migration [may be said to be] an informal familial arrangement, with benefits in the realms of risk-diversification, consumption smoothing, and intergenerational financing of investments, and remittances are a central element of such implicit contracts' (Rapoport and Docquier 2005: 10). Indonesian migrant women spoke openly and explicitly on how their remittances had improved the lives of their left-behind families. Sri, 36, from Cilacap, Central Java, saw it as her onus to migrate in search of income,

having been divorced from her husband for nine years. That her motivation for working abroad was to ensure the well-being of her children was evident in her narrative:

When I came to Singapore, I wanted to improve the well-being of my family ... I wanted to give education to my kids because I don't have the opportunity to do that last time ... [Since I came] I already built a new house ... I got a motorbike for my son ... My son just finished high school ... Until now, I need to furnish my house and to finish up some things.

Often children were the primary concern of these women, especially among those who were married. It is not uncommon for these women to remit funds to educate their children as they spoke about wanting their children to have an education beyond what they themselves had received so that they would secure good jobs and become financially independent (see also von der Borch 2008). In this sense, migrant women wanted their children to have a better life than they had had and, in turn, to 'break out of poverty'—a situation in which many women saw themselves.

Coming mainly from rural backgrounds, these women saw education as a way out of farming or fishing—subsistence activities engaged in by their families. In a nutshell, they were adamant on facilitating social mobility among their children. This was explained by Kartini, 36, divorced, from Semarang, Central Java:

I don't want my children to go into fishing ... I think my youngest son has talent ... So I want him to study ... He is coming to high school ... Start from kindergarten, he always get the best student ... So I don't want him to go into farming or fishing ... I think it is difficult work ... As fishermen, you are always fighting for your life because [it is] dangerous ... You are out there in the sea.

Remitting funds for the education of younger siblings was also not unheard of. In this case, the sacrificial intentions of a migrant woman extended from her own children to that of her own siblings, although usually it was the unmarried migrant woman who took it upon herself to undertake the payment of the school fees of her younger siblings. Priya, 32, from Kendal, Central

Java, felt that helping her younger siblings was her way of helping out in the family:

I came here because I thought I should help my parents when I graduated from high school ... I had a few younger siblings so I thought I should do something to help in the family and to help my siblings out as well ... That's why I decided to come to Singapore ... I came here to have a brighter future for me and my family.

Similar narratives were conveyed by other migrant women. In many cases while the migrant women themselves did not complete their education, they often spoke about not wanting their younger siblings, similar to their children, to follow in their footsteps. For them, leaving their homes to secure wage work abroad was a rational choice although they themselves may not be the direct beneficiaries of the remittances sent home.

Remittances channelled towards children's education also determined the amount and frequency of funds that needed to be sent home. Women with smaller children found themselves sending home larger sums of money and more regularly than those with grown-up children who are already financially independent and are married themselves. Such was the narrative of Indah, 47, from Central Java:

Yes, I send money home ... Last time, for school fees so I sent every month ... Now they are married, I don't send every month ... I do support them though ... But I give only little ... Now my salary is \$530 and I send home about \$150 every month ... I also send now because my mother is not feeling well ... I need to help my mother as well ... Am sending her money for her healthcare expenses ... Before that was for my children's studies and I used to send much more than I send now ... Now I send every month but sometimes I send once in two months.

It was also unanimously voiced that having a better life was synonymous with the acquisition of material goods. Refurbishing the house appeared to be of great interest among many of the migrant women interviewed. The case of Maznah, 39, from Central Java proves this point:

My house is already renovated ... Before when I came, my house is like a kampung (Indonesian; village) house ... Even when we eat, we eat only very

little ... Now I work here for ten years or more, I can rebuild my house ... And then I also buy a motorbike for my son ... I want to buy these things ... Before I came to Singapore even if I save, if I want to furnish the house and make it better or buy a motorbike, that would be difficult.

In the initial years of working in Singapore, Maznah explained how the remittances sent home were spent mainly on educating her children. As her salary increased the longer she worked, her surplus earnings were channelled into renovating the family home. It was only much later that she was able to purchase a motorbike for her son. Much like Sri and Kartini, Maznah had to delay renovating her home in the first few years of having taken up work in Singapore until her initial financial goals were achieved. Similar to her counterparts, Rista, a 29-year old married woman whose family hails from Seragin, Central Java, has utilised her remittances in a number of ways: The money she sends home has been used to cover the daily expenses of her parents' household, pay for her cousin's education and parent's healthcare bills, and later to build a house. Moreover, her father had also utilised her remittances towards buying seeds, fertilisers, and pesticides to keep the family farm going, particularly if the previous harvest had not been as successful as anticipated.

Channelling remittance incomes into healthcare also regularly surfaced in the narratives. Many migrant women saw it as their onus to undertake the payment of the healthcare costs of their aged parents since they had the financial means to do so compared with their siblings who were left behind in Indonesia. Often a portion of the remittances sent home for daily expenses was utilised towards the healthcare costs of their parents. Santhi, 47, from Yogyakarta, Central Java explained:

Whatever I send home, it depends on how much my father needs ... It is for his medication fee ... Also to buy things for everyday ... I have calculated it is about one million rupiah a month so it is three million for three months ... This is only for my father ... Because my other sister is already working and married so I don't calculate for them ... It is only for my parents ... I do send home money to my siblings but it is only once a year.

But should parents or anyone else in the family require major surgery, usually relatively large amounts of money would be needed and, in this case, the remittances sent back on a regular basis would not be sufficient. In such situations, migrant women find themselves having to dig into their savings. Purwanti, 53, from Kederi, East Java, said that some years ago she had loaned a good friend of hers, who had also previously been a domestic worker in Singapore, money because the latter's relative needed urgent surgery. As shown in this specific case, should the migrant woman not have enough savings, she may resort to seeking the help of her close friends.

In the rich narratives gathered, women often provided vivid descriptions of what their lives were before and after having migrated for work in explaining how they and their families have benefitted from migration. Coming from a farming family, Indah, 47, from Central Java said:

Our lives are very different [now]... Before we need to wait for the harvest and wait for the money we get from selling the harvest if we want to buy anything ... But if there is a flood, then the crop is killed ... Since I have worked here, they [the family] get[s] money every month ... They know they have food every month ... There is also left-over money that we can save to build a house ... Like now, the family has three motorbikes ... We have also bought a mini-bus ... We bought it to set up a little business ... For example in the *kampong* (Indonesian; village), when there is a wedding, we rent out the mini-bus ... In the *kampong*, if someone is in hospital, usually a group of people want to go to visit the person ... So a little money comes in when we provide transportation to others.

Acquiring Land: A Safety Net for the Present and Future

The channelling of the remittances these women send home into various purchases at one time is not uncommon. In the case of Indah, having worked in Singapore for more than 15 years has made it feasible for her and her family to make other purchases beyond meeting their basic needs—also possible now because her children do not depend on her as much as they did in the past. In fact, the ethnographic data reveals that

while migrant women tend to be preoccupied with meeting the material needs of their families in the initial stages of their sojourn abroad, the remittance patterns start to shift to what they might call an 'investment' (Indonesian; *penanaman modal*) once their initial financial goals have been achieved.

Land often stood out as a productive asset to acquire once the basic needs of the left-behind family are met. Rista, 29, from Central Java, spoke about her ambition to buy a piece of land in the years to come:

Land is not my own ... Land is someone else's land ... The land is shared ... He [my father] rents the land ... Buying land is much better ... But with the remittances I send back, there are other things that are more important for me to pay for right now ... God willing, I hope to buy land with the money I send my family ... I think it is important ... It is for my future (Indonesian; *masa depan*) ... If I have my own land, I can rent it out to others and I can get money every month.

In spite of having worked in Singapore for more than seven years, Rista's dream of buying land has still yet to come to fruition since the remittances she sends home now are used primarily to sustain the basic needs of her family as well as for her cousin's education. In the same way her father has been renting the land of a neighbour in order to generate farm income for the family, she too hopes to become a landowner in the future.

Often the primary reason for migrant women to purchase land for themselves was to build a house on it on their return to their village. Others saw land as a commodity that had the potential of generating income through activities like rental, such as in the case of Rista, and in this sense, land is viewed as a 'savings' mechanism in that it has the potential of raking in returns either presently or in the future. Generally three different types of land are sought after: *sawah* (farmland used only to grow rice); *ladang* (farmland used mainly to grow corn, sugar cane or vegetables, etc.); and *tanah* (land on which property may be built). The price of *tanah* may be high depending on location; in this case, land closer to a town would be more expensive. Farmland

may also fetch a high price should it be located near a water source (such as a river), main road, or near the marketplace.

Because the majority of domestic workers from Indonesia in Singapore are from the rural areas, it is not surprising that they also couch the productive value of the land in relation to its utilitarian value in how it may be used towards agricultural activities and ensuring the food security of the household. One such response was provided by Purwanti, 53, from Kendel, East Java, who has worked in Singapore for close to 23 years:

I bought land but the land is small ... Can plant chilli ... The land is in my name ... I didn't buy for my son ... I bought the land more than ten years ago ... Buying land is important so that the produce you grow on it can be eaten ... I don't want to sell the land at all at a later time ... I don't think like that ... I intend to pass it on to my son when I am old ... He can use the land to plant vegetables, chilli, maize, etc. that he can eat ... Women here they come and work but they spend all their money ... go to restaurant, go shopping ... In my opinion, that is not good ... They do that for glamour and so everyone can see that they can afford these things ... For me, it is better to spend your money on something that you can keep ... That is much wiser ... For example, buying land is something good because over time, it will always be there.

Among those who had already purchased land because they are away from home, rather than leave the land to stand idle, it is not uncommon that their parents or siblings end up utilising the land for farming activities. Evi, 28 from Nusa Tenggara, explained her situation:

I just bought land last year ... So that next time when I go home, I can build my own house ... Now my brother is using it ... He plants corn, *padi* (rice), green bean and soya bean ... He sells the produce and helps my younger sister studying in high school ... He has also used it [to plant] food for his family because every month, I don't send a lot [of money] ... So he has to help himself from what he gets [from the harvest].

Usually the purchase of the land was undertaken by the families of these women on their behalf. If land was purchased, the migrant woman's name would appear on the title deeds. According to

the civil code, both men and women are granted equal opportunity and rights to acquire a plot of land under the land law and to use the land for their benefit as well as their family's, although there are instances in which the civil code acts more as a guide to the existing customary law (Rodenburg 1997). Among all the women interviewed, none faced any customary restrictions on owning land themselves. Although the land acquired was in their names, arrangements for the actual transfer of the land from its previous owner to the migrant woman's name were usually undertaken by family members. In fact, the migrant women interviewed reported that the idea of purchasing land was usually raised by the left-behind families, since the latter would have been informed that a parcel of land in their village was being put up for sale.

Migrant women also linked the rising prices of land in Indonesia to its investment potential. Santhi, 47, from Yoyjakarta, remarked that rather than letting money 'sit' in the bank, owning assets whose value goes up, such as land, is much more lucrative. She later explained that unlike people residing in the urban areas such as the major cities, land has a greater value to villagers:

For us from the rural areas or small town, land is good to buy ... to buy land means that we can sell it later when the price goes up ... we are different from people in the cities ... for them they go into trading and business like that ... but for people in the rural areas, we can go into farming or plant like teak wood [trees] to make money ... land is something poor people in the villages want as only the rich people have land.

Intan, 36, from Central Java, who has worked in Singapore for close to 15 years, explained that initially she was fearful in purchasing land because of the amount of money she would have had to part with. She said that she had not regretted doing so because the price for the piece of land she had bought had already gone up since the time of purchase. While not all the women interviewed in the study had bought land with the remittances they have been sending home since they started work in Singapore, the majority spoke about their plans to buy land eventu-

ally before they returned to Indonesia for good, although it may take them several years of working in Singapore to save up enough to undertake the purchase.

‘Struggling to Save’: What it means to Migrant Women

However, as salaries are relatively low, with an Indonesian domestic worker reaping an average of Singapore \$350 (US \$284) a month when starting out in this sector, saving money is hardly an easy task for many of them. Migrant women said that they have had to find ways of saving money even if it meant only small sums. When remitting money, for example, it was not uncommon to find migrant women sending larger amounts of money than they would have normally and less frequently in order to save on the remittance fees demanded of them by banks, money transfer agencies, and post offices. Santhi, 47, from Yoyjakarta, explained the rationale behind her actions:

I send three months at a time ... I calculate at the same time ... I don't want to send often because the remittances fee can be added to the amount that I send ... Let's see if I send every month, I have to pay the fee as well ... So if I send three times only once, there is only one time fee ... More money I can send and it is cheaper ... Actually then I can send more money and also the money I pay for the fee is less ... The fee is only \$6 ... about 40,000 rupiah for any amount I send but it is worth for me.

Another ‘savings strategy’ was not taking a ‘day off’. Usually falling on a Sunday, some women explained that they deliberately chose to stay at home instead of going out and meeting their friends because they knew that enjoying the day with their friends would entail spending money. Maznah, 39, said that she usually spends her day off with her cousin who is also working in Singapore as a domestic worker, if she does not choose to stay at home with her employers; she and her cousin would both take their lunch at home and would limit their activities for the day by going to the mosque for prayer and religious classes. She later explained that if she were to go shopping or sight-seeing with her other friends, she would have to end up spending more of her

hard-earned money, which would eat into her surpluses.

The struggles these migrant women face in saving and, in turn, in remitting funds home is heightened when they are new arrivals in Singapore. It is widely known that domestic workers do not receive their full salaries when they first start working. Instead, the majority of new arrivals usually run up a debt for the costs they would have incurred in securing work in Singapore. These costs include the payment for the passage to Singapore; the training undergone prior to coming to Singapore; fees owed to the recruitment agency through which employment was secured, including the costs incurred for the health check-up undergone prior to departure; as well as processing the necessary documents for work abroad. For these reasons, many new domestic workers starting jobs in the destination country do not receive full salaries. The repayment period has been increasing; in the late 1990s, it took an average of three months for the domestic worker to repay a recruitment agency, whereas by 2003, it was close to six months. The period of repayment at the time of writing (May/June 2012) is on average eight to nine months, although periods as long as 12 months have been recorded before (Sim 2005). For the migrant woman, this situation is serious since she is unable to remit money back to her family during that period. In light of this, indebtedness and, in turn, the inability to remit funds home, is a huge concern for low-skilled migrant workers (Lim 2011), generating much anxiety among migrant women. Thus it is not surprising that in the initial years of working in Singapore, migrant women do not consider buying land or other major purchases. Instead, for the majority, the goal would be first to meet the basic needs of their families.

As domestic work generally pays very little, it is not surprising that should these migrant women consider purchasing land, this would only come after many years of working in Singapore. For Priya, 33, from Kendal, Semarang, Central Java, it took her eight years of working in Singapore to save enough to buy land. She described her struggles in this way:

Now they [my parents] have land ... I gave them the money to buy it ... I worked like a crazy woman ... Last time I was working, I have part-time work ... Everything was money, money, money, money ... Every month, I took a loan from my employer, like three months in advance ... And then I sent home the money to buy the land.

It takes migrant women many years to save up to purchase land because land is generally an expensive commodity usually costing up to millions of rupiah. Aside from the cost of the land, there are also transaction expenses involved in ensuring that the piece of land is transferred legally to the new owner.

Making More Money—the Desire to Stay on in Singapore

In the destination of Singapore, it is not unheard of to find migrant women working in the country for several years. By and large, the motivation for staying on in Singapore for work was because their initial financial goals had not been met yet or new financial needs of their left-behind families had emerged. Saving for old age was also a reason for staying on in Singapore, especially among migrant women in their late 40s and early 50s. While a minority, mostly of unmarried women, would say that they like living in Singapore and enjoy the financial independence they have gained from working abroad, among many married migrant women, the stories tend to be very different. Many of them continue to work in Singapore because of the financial needs of their families—sometimes against their own wishes, because if they had it their way, they would choose instead to be reunited with their loved ones.

The decision to continue to stay on and work in Singapore, however, is circumscribed by several factors. First and foremost, these migrant women can only stay in Singapore if they are employed. As temporary migrant workers, migrant women working as domestic workers are employed on work permit contracts lasting for two years subject to renewal once their contracts end. While the majority of migrant women have worked in Singapore on more than one contract, there have been examples of domestic workers working for only one employer over many years, although

the numbers are very small. Most have to find new employers if they want to continue to work in Singapore should their current employer decide not to extend their contract. In fact, the work contract is designed in such a way that the power structure between employer and domestic worker is tipped in favour of the employer (Gee and Ho 2006; Devasahayam 2010). If a contract is not renewed, the migrant woman's only recourse to continue staying on in Singapore would be to secure another employer through a 'transfer', although this too presents its set of problems to the migrant woman.

For example, securing a transfer entails costs for the migrant woman. A decent recruitment agency would charge about a month's salary, whereas there have been others who have been found charging an amount closer to three to four months of a worker's wages. Although transfers of migrant workers has been a thorny issue, reflecting the unequal power relationship between the domestic worker and employer, the state of Singapore has been silent on this labour practice, even though it presents a breeding ground for exploitation on the part of recruitment agencies. Moreover, in all instances of transfer, the domestic worker relies on the goodwill of her employer to write a release letter. But there are instances in which the employer chooses not to and decides instead to repatriate the worker—a right s/he has without giving any justifiable or valid reason. In this case, all the employer has to do is to cancel her domestic worker's work permit and purchase a one-way air ticket to ensure that her domestic worker returns to her home country. But should the current employer decide to write a release letter, according to current labour laws, the migrant woman has only seven days to locate a new employer, forcing her to turn to recruitment agencies for assistance. Should she fail to secure a new employer within those seven days, she is liable for breaking the law because of having overstayed her visa in Singapore (Devasahayam 2010).

Second, eligibility for employment in Singapore depends on the health status of the migrant woman. By law, migrant women are expected to undergo a medical check-up with an authorised

doctor for which the employer pays the charges incurred. While pregnancy automatically bars a woman migrant from staying in the country, being found to be HIV-positive has similar outcomes (Aiyer, Devasahayam and Yeoh 2004; Devasahayam 2010). It has become part of the common-sense framework of migrant women employed on temporary work contracts in Singapore to fulfil these labour law requirements should they wish to retain their work contracts. Related to how these women are viewed according to the state discourse on their sexuality, foreign women who are employed in the domestic work sector are also not allowed to establish marital unions with Singaporean men, although there are a handful of exceptions where dispensations were granted. It could be said that the underlying rationale for these labour laws is that the state views these women as transient and, therefore, they are discouraged in every way from putting down roots in the country.

Third, migrant workers who wish to stay on in Singapore are also expected to possess a blemish-free employment track record. Maintaining a good track record entails abiding by the labour rules that forbid migrant women from engaging in other work outside of the work sector in which they are employed. Moreover, migrant women are only allowed by law to work in the household in which they have been hired; this means that they are not allowed to work in more than one household. In the same vein, working in an office or store, for example, would land a migrant domestic worker in trouble.

Conclusions

Although the labour laws migrant women face in Singapore are beyond their control, 'what these women do have, and can control (while in migration) is their money' (von der Borch 2008: 211). Whether the women save their earnings, remit them, or spend their earnings on themselves, the choice is primarily theirs. In Singapore, however, domestic work is low-paid work. For this reason, many migrant women entering the sector often find themselves having to work in the country over several work contracts in order to fulfil all their material goals; hence, the major-

ity of migrant women usually end up working in Singapore for many more years than they had initially anticipated on their departure from Indonesia, as this paper has demonstrated. In the minds of many migrant women, migrating for work is synonymous with working for a better future. The narratives of the migrant women contacted for this study were rife with examples of how they and their families had benefitted materially from the remittance income they sent home without which their families would have been 'still struggling' (Indonesian; *masih berusaha*) if not for the decision made by these women to seek out wage work abroad. On the whole, these women's perceptions of their migration voyage have been positive: They described at length the advantages and rewards they have reaped as a result of having migrated for work abroad, linking their migration experience almost exclusively to what they term to be a 'poverty reduction' (Indonesian; *pengurangan kemiskinan*) strategy for their households. Moreover, many would not deny that the earnings they have made have been instrumental in enabling them to create a newly-found sense of independence and fulfilment because of having successfully contributed to their families back home.

Scholars of migration and, in particular, migrant remittances have been preoccupied with 'making sense' of the complexities around the decisions migrants undertake when it comes to remittance expenditures. Among many of them, there has been an incessant concern with categorising remittances, leading to various kinds of typologies capturing how migrants utilise remittances. While the thrust of this discussion does not deny that such attempts at categorising remittance expenditures may be necessary in our understanding of migrant remittance behaviour, a more nuanced picture emerges should we seek to explore remittance decision-making in light of structural factors such as the length of stay abroad among migrants. Moreover, the behaviour around remittance expenditures might be said to be tied up with migrant needs, and as one need becomes fulfilled, another emerges to which migrants would then turn their attention. While one could argue that migrants are driven

by a hierarchy of needs, as in Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Goble 2004), it must also be noted that there are some needs that emerge which may not necessarily have been anticipated at the start of the migration trajectory, such as the health-care costs of a member of a family who has been suddenly taken ill. In spite of these 'interruptions' in the lives of migrants, the majority do leave Indonesia with a clear idea of meeting specific

needs in their family. While holding to this mission, many also harbour personal desires of fulfilling their own needs such as saving for their future, including engaging in what they would define to be 'investment' activities. But for the majority of migrant women, placing their own needs appears to come last while desiring to meet the needs of their loved ones often takes precedence.

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Gender Implications of Care Migration for the Operation of Care Diamond in Ukraine

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Abstract

The main goal of this paper is to identify the impact of the out-migration of females from Ukraine on the structure and operation of care services and to analyse its gender implications for the family and society in Ukraine. The key analytical concept used in the study is the 'care diamond', understood as the architecture that explains the relationship between the state, the market, the family, and the community in care provision. The argument of the paper is that the out-flow of women from Ukraine results in a 'care deficit' in the sending society and alters the operation of the care diamond due to the increasing role of the family in its structure, which in turn tends to outsource its care functions to the market while preserving the responsibility for the organisational and financial backing of paid home care. The paper shows that the emerging 'care crisis' in Ukraine results from the strategy of 'crisis transfer' employed by post-industrial nations to shift the burden of multiple crises from the nucleus of the world system to its periphery. In conclusion, the paper offers policy proposals for the development of coherent policy strategies aimed toward covering key sectors of the Ukrainian care diamond.

Key words: care diamond in Ukraine, Ukrainian care migration, gender implications of care drain

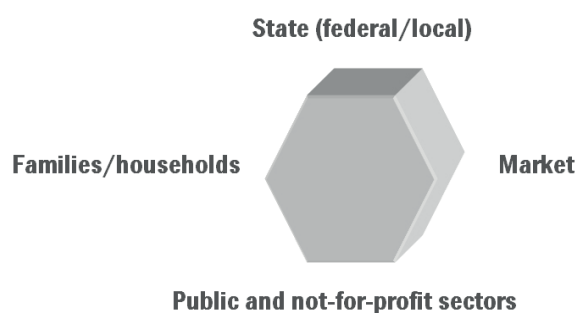
Introduction

The main goal of this paper is to identify the impact of the out-migration of females from Ukraine on the structure and operation of care services and to analyse its gender implications for the family and society in Ukraine. Its social relevance is defined by the social demand in gendered analyses of the dynamics of the 'care economy' in Ukraine under conditions of demographic change and the feminisation of migration fluxes (for more on the feminisation of migration from Ukraine, see Tolstokorova 2009, 2012). This issue has never received focused attention from the academic community in Ukraine or internationally, which explains the research novelty of the current study. 'Care economy' is understood here as the provision for others' needs within and

outside the household without reciprocation and remuneration. 'Care' is regarded as the work of looking after physical, psychological, emotional and developmental needs of other people. Paid care work is viewed as household activities with practical and social dimensions, which may be aimed toward 'caring for', i.e. cooking, cleaning and nursing, and 'caring about' (caring and loving as emotional work and social support) (Lutz and Palenga-Mollenbeck 2010).

The key analytical concept used to study the operation of the Ukrainian care economy in this paper is the 'care diamond' introduced by Razavi (2007) to outline 'the architecture through which care is provided, especially for those with intense care needs such as young

children, the frail elderly, the chronically ill and people with physical and mental disabilities.’ This architecture embraces human services requiring personal and emotional attachment (childcare, health care, eldercare, social work), and explains the relationship between the state, the market, the family, and the community through the ‘care diamond diagram’:



The components of the care diamond are interconnected with each other while the boundaries between them are flexible. Current research departs from the observation that the out-migration of females is likely to alter the operation of the care diamond in that remittances inject finances which may expand the recourse to paid labour and commodification in the families left behind at home and represent some recognition or compensation for caring activities, especially by family members and extended kin (Kofman and Raghuram 2009). That is, earnings made abroad may be used to pay extended kin or a hired domestic worker for outsourced care-giving in the family in the home country. In this way, the care diamond operation is being reshaped due to the increasing role of its market component.

The project draws from the results of a multi-sited field research which consisted of 25 in-depth expert interviews and semi-structured interviews with 40 Ukrainian labour migrants and members of their families (28 females and 12 males), interviewed both at home and in the countries of work (Italy, Germany, Austria). In Ukraine, members of migrants’ families and extended migrants’ networks (neighbours, relatives, co-workers) were interviewed through individual conversations and through two focus

group discussions. Initially, the field research included only females as its aim was to study care migration, which is allegedly a mainly female preserve. Yet, during the focus group discussions with extended families, it became clear that men should be also interviewed, because it turned out that the labour market of care services is heavily divided along gender lines. Interviews showed that migrant males are often involved in care services, although mainly as a part-time and temporary/occasional supplement to their principal employment. Additionally, males are invisible in the research on the care economy, given that they inhabit a different niche in the labour market than females, involving minimal inter-personal contact and less emotional investment. For instance, men, especially at the initial stage of the migratory experience, may agree to work in pet care, gardening, yacht and car care, body care (as massagers and barbers), house care (small repairs, walls/window painting, etc.), dish-washing at cafes and restaurants, cleaning in public places and institutions. Some responders were employed in cleaning train carriages, as was the case in Poland. At the same time, these gender specificities evince the necessity to expand the concept of care work to include the specifically male sector of this labour market.

The interviews were based on a semi-structured questionnaire with open-ended questions that aimed to cover different stages of the migration cycle and to reflect on the gendered experiences of migrants. The interviewing started with existing contacts with migrants and their families, followed by a snowball sampling method whereby new respondents were contacted through preceding respondents. Occasional meetings with migrants or members of their social networks were also used for interviewing. For confidentiality reasons, the names of responders have been changed.

Ukrainian “care economy” in the context of population aging

A growing body of care research evidences the interdependence of different regions of the world through the migration of care workers, given that in response to new challenges spurred

by globalisation, care migration transforms welfare systems in both source and recipient societies (Parreñas 2001; Raghuram et al 2009; Williams 2009; Yeates 2009). Migration enables welfare systems to respond to a growing number of needs, but also brings them face-to-face with the emergence of a parallel market built on a direct and little-institutionalised relationship between migrants and families. In Ukraine, hiring domestic workers has become a fashion among middle-class families, serving as 'symbolic capital' (Bourdieu 1979), which enables them to exhibit the economic superiority of households in a position to employ servants and to consolidate the identity and life-style images of middle-class families. The causality behind the growth of the demand in paid domestic services is the socio-economic polarisation of the post-socialist society, the nuclearisation of the family, and the formation of a new life-style and attitude to privacy among the emerging middle class and the emancipation of its women from domestic chores due to the emergence of the class of 'new servants'. Additionally, the rise of the demand for home carers, child-minders in particular, results from the increase in birth-rates in Ukraine throughout the last few years, which was not accompanied by the expansion of the network of pre-school public institutions, most of which were destroyed during the years of transition to a market economy.

The demand in long-term care for the elderly is also on the rise, as a result of the fact that the share of retired seniors among the general stock of the Ukrainian population has been growing throughout the last decades. Thus, according to the UN world aging rate, which bases its calculations on the share of seniors aged over 65, the Ukrainian population reached the threshold of aging in 1959, when people of this age group amounted to 6.9% of the population. In 1989, when their share reached 11.7%, Ukraine could already be categorised as an old-aged society. According to the census of 2001, this age group had increased to 14.4%, and in 2005 it had climbed to 16% of the population (Stelmakh 2006), rising to 23.9% in 2007. Currently the share of seniors is equal to 24.7% of the

total population (UA Club 2011), while by mid-century this index is expected to rise to 38.1% (Chajkovska 2010). At present, Ukraine ranks eleventh in the world aging rate and is expected to move to ninth place by 2025. At the same time, experts warn that a unified system of state-governed long-term care (LTC), particularly for the elderly, is almost non-existent, and there is no overarching policy or programme specifically addressing LTC (Bezrukov 2002; FISCO 2011).

Hence, the total of potential clients for home care in Ukraine is steadily increasing. The pool of available carers is simultaneously shrinking as a result growing out-migrating of Ukrainian females to employment abroad (Tolstokorova 2009), 11% of whom are professional doctors (Chaloff and Eisenbaum 2008). This mismatch between the increasing demand in home care-giving and the decrease of the pool of potential carers is proof of the emergence of a 'care gap' (Himmelweit 2002) in the Ukrainian care regime. According to a World Bank report (World Bank 2007), this challenge is not unique to Ukraine, but reflects the general trend observed in Eastern Europe. The report raised the alarm regarding the increase in the demand for social and healthcare services in Eastern Europe on the part of the elderly due to a reduced presence of informal caregivers (women willing to care for them) and the simultaneous aging of the population. The high rate of aging of the Ukrainian population renders this country particularly at risk.

An overview of advertisements of employment agencies in Kyiv, carried out for this project, showed that the wage offered for domestic/care work in a private house in the Ukrainian capital noticeably exceeds the expected job remuneration for skilled labourers such as interpreters/translators, sales managers, nurses at public nurseries or kindergartens, or even university professors. Furthermore, the content analysis of employment advertisements showed that throughout the last two to three years, the cost of domestic work has increased by nearly half. The requirements for potential employees, however, have also increased and the job has acquired a very competitive character. A poten-

tial highly paid domestic worker is expected to be 45 to 50 years of age, a professional teacher or a doctor, preferably married and with children, skilled in cooking, especially dietary cuisine, and capable of getting along well with children. Additional requirements include foreign language skills, computer literacy, knowledge of methods of early age teaching, and readiness to provide elementary training to employers' children. Last but not least, the carer's personal qualities are listed: she is expected to be tactful, patient, sociable, and easy-going. However, recruiters contend that currently the key challenge is the qualifications of domestic employees, as there are no educational institutions offering training to potential personnel in this newly emerging sector of the labour market. It is argued that native carers, although well qualified professionally, often lack the emotional discipline necessary for employees in private houses. For this and other reasons, native carers are increasingly disregarded in favour of 'global nannies' (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003) from exotic countries such as the Philippines.

Experts ascribe this preference to a more advanced work ethic among foreign workers. In contrast to native home carers, they are prone to distance themselves emotionally from employers, refrain from intimating their personal problems to them, and prefer to stay invisible, which is valued by the latter (Tyuryukanova 2011). Additionally, as nannies from other countries often enter the country illegally, they are noticeably cheaper than native employees. Due to the absence of a legal status, they lack any access to social welfare and the protection of their human rights. Lacking linguistic skills, they are not in a position to protect themselves and are exposed to exploitation and overexploitation. In advertisements of employment agencies, foreign nannies are portrayed not only as 'servants and slaves' (Anderson 1997), but practically as animals, for instance dogs, who are smart enough to understand and fulfil commands. This trend testifies that in the context of the global care economy, Ukraine is redefining itself from 'the end of global care chain' into 'a new loop'.

Discussion of field research findings. Impact of the out-migration of care labour on the care diamond structure in Ukraine

The state sector of the care diamond

Under state socialism, every citizen was guaranteed free basic medical assistance, health care and insurance from birth to death. Although the public system of elderly care homes existed, its infrastructure was insufficient to meet the requirements of the population. The quality of care provision was so low that it was not widely used by the population. Additionally, traditional culture and public opinion did not welcome families who outsourced the responsibilities of elderly care to public institutions. For that matter, elder-care homes were mainly used by single frail people who were not in a position to provide for themselves. In those conditions, families requiring elder care developed a tradition of informal home care as a coping strategy. It relied on a kind of 'inter-family migration' (Tolstokorova 2011: 241) through which the older generation, mainly single or widowed senior women, after retirement moved to live with the families of their adult children. In this way, dual earner working families could solve three care challenges at one time. Due to this arrangement, grandmothers (less often grandfathers) took care of their grandchildren and assumed responsibilities for daily domestic chores in the household of their working children. On top of that, they themselves were taken care of by their off-spring and could count on their support in case of emergency or health disability. Such care arrangements did not require hired care givers for the young, disabled or older family members. Yet, on the flip side, this strategy relied heavily on the informal and therefore unpaid reproductive labour of women, both of retired grandmothers and their working daughters or daughters-in-law. While in big industrial centres this tradition is gradually declining, it still persists in small towns. In conditions when women as prime-line reproductive workers are increasingly departing for earning money abroad, this creates a 'care gap' in families that rely on this care arrangement.

The constitution of independent Ukraine preserved the rights for free health care, medi-

cal treatment and insurance intact. However, in reality the quality of institutional care provided is dependent on the financial resources of the patient. There is no clear distinction between social and medical care. Social care is generally the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, with nursing centres as the main residential facilities for those requiring external assistance for daily living. Institutional social care is provided mainly in public institutions for dependent groups, including seniors, war and labour veterans, and other cohorts with special needs. After the demise of the USSR, state expenditures on health care tangibly decreased, currently amounting to around 2.7% of GDP, compared to 14.1% in the United States (Ivanov 2009). This level of spending can meet only the minimal health care requirements of the population. In terms of elder care, the situation is especially dramatic. The share of the elderly who have access to medical home care varies from 3% to 40% depending on the region (Amjaddeen 2008); in rural areas this share is noticeably lower than in urban settlements. The demand for institutional elderly care exceeds available possibilities by far, with waiting lists increasing while available beds decrease.

Recently, some municipalities have introduced palliative care facilities (hospices) for frail patients and the oldest of the old. They are usually financially backed by local governments as well as public and religious institutions and are incorporated into the system of the Ministry of Health Care, which allocated them quotas for personnel. However, the network of hospices is only in its infancy and can meet but a small share of the current demand in palliative care, which is growing rapidly. The quality of services leaves much to be desired, especially in regard to emotional and spiritual support to clients. Recently, responding to the needs of its ageing society, Ukraine developed home-based care services including health and personal care, as well as a home-making service.

A serious challenge to the operation of the state component of the care diamond lies in the embedded nepotism, structural erosion and absence of transparency. This was evidenced by

stories of informants in this project. One was a woman whose bed-ridden mother required the services of a qualified nurse to provide injections at home. The woman offered an extra out-of-pocket remuneration for these services, despite the fact that they are a part of the professional responsibilities of institutionally employed nurses.

I asked in the local clinic if they have a nurse who could provide paid home care. Yet my request was turned down. The argument was bad lack of nurses among medical personnel. Soon after that, quite incidentally, I met my ex-schoolmate, a skilled nurse with certified professional experience. It turned out that she was unemployed and her financial situation was rather poor. So, I brought her to the head of the outpatient department at our clinic and told her: 'Here you go. Now you have a qualified nurse in your staff and I have a person to give injections to my Mom at home.' Yet the reply was that it was hardly possible, because the administration of the clinic received an unofficial prescription from top health-care officials to avoid employing nurses with official residence permit in Kyiv, and instead to give priority to those who reside in Kyiv clandestinely. As you understand, the former are usually better educated, know their rights well and are in position to defend them, while the latter are more vulnerable and more prone to manipulation and exploitation and for that matter more convenient for the administration. So, my ex-classmate did not get this job, despite her qualifications and work experience. Soon after that I learned that she had found employment abroad and left Ukraine (Kyiv, 20.05.2010).

A similar experience was reported by another informant, a woman in her fifties and a resident of Kyiv, who decided to quit her work at a publishing house for a while to take care of her new-born grandchild so that her daughter could preserve her well-paid job. When the child was old enough to go to a day-care centre, the grandmother decided to resume working. When she started looking for a new occupation, she quickly found a few possibilities offered for unskilled workers, including in care services:

I bought a huge lot of papers with job ads and started calling to recruitment agencies in response to job possibilities they advertised. Some of them told me: 'All right, we have a job for you, and in

addition we can offer you a placement in a hostel room with four other women for a decent rent. So, you don't have to worry about the place to live.' But as soon as I told them that I am a Kyivite and have my own apartment and don't need housing, they were telling 'Sorry, but if so, we don't need you.' (Kyiv, 17.08.2011).

These interviews show how mercenary motives of top-level state officials create conditions which push out from the national system of health care its best, most skilled and experienced personnel. With few possibilities to find a place for themselves at home, they are forced to seek means of survival abroad, where their work is more required. Due to this, the collapsing care systems of affluent northern economies receive cheap skilled care and nursing labour. It enables tangible budget savings both on wage pay-outs and on the investments into human capital (training of qualified care and nursing personnel), necessary to meet the demands of their ageing population and to raise the competitiveness of their economies. In other words, the so-called 'golden billion' benefit from the dysfunctions of care economies in the 'bottom billion' through dividends received from them. This process demonstrates the emergence of globalised institutional and economic contexts that facilitate corrupt practices and other forms of institutional misconduct among top decision-makers in labour-exporting societies such as Ukraine. At the same time, it demonstrates that the strategy of 'crisis transfer' (Souhorukov 2004a), employed by post-industrial nations to shift the burden of multiple crises in the nucleus of the world system to the periphery, is applicable to the care economy as well. In particular, it confirms the claim that the absorption of unprotected intellectual products and resources from the source countries is one of key tools in the implementation of strategies.

In reference to Ukraine, the 'crisis transfer strategy' may be helpful in explaining how the emerging care gap and the subsequent care crisis result from the care crisis in post-industrial societies, and how the latter translates into 'care drain' from low-income nations via global care chains. As demonstrated by Souhorukov's theory (2004b: 16), crisis transfer consists of

conscious actions of one country with regard to another country (generally less developed), entailing disastrous consequences for the latter, such as profound multiple crises, decrease of competitiveness of the national economy, diminishing exposure to the world market, deterioration of entrepreneurial and investment climate, degradation of social and ecological situation.

Within this framework, the chain transfer of crisis is defined as a consecutive (chain-driven) transfer of crises from better developed societies onto less developed ones, involving more than one country. An illustrative example of this strategy is the so-called 'global care chains', which represent networks, aiming to maintain daily life in the so-called 'transnational households' by transferring care provision from one to another based on power structures, such as gender, ethnicity, social class, and place of origin. In the framework of feminist economics, a near-global trend of massive entrance into paid labour and the acquisition of financial independence by middle-class women in industrialised nations is interpreted as coming at the cost of the freedom of their domestic and care workers. The latter have to sacrifice their own family life and responsibilities to enable their female employers to reconcile career and family life, while their own families are left bereft of care. Through this sort of 'gendered and racialized international division of caring labor' (Ally 2005), the global capitalism and neoliberal economic restructuring have enforced a 'new world domestic order' (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001) that requires the emigration of the so-called 'new servants', i.e. poor women from the periphery of the world system, to provide low-cost care in wealthier 'core countries'.

The claim of 'crisis transfer strategy' as a tool by which 'care drain' is crafted may be supported by observations, highlighting a discernible link between two concomitant processes: a growing demand for female labour in post-industrialised economies, and a concurrent increase in female labour supply from transitional societies after the demise of the USSR. As highlighted by a UNIFEM report (UNIFEM 2006), the connection between these two processes explains the sup-

ply of cheap migrant care-workers to the West. Thus, it was noticed that the process of paid job acquisition and demand for equal treatment inside and outside the labour force by women from most developed Western capitalist societies in the 1980s strikingly coincided with a reverse tendency in countries of state socialism, where women were granted long maternity leaves and started to drop out of paid work for lengthy periods early in their careers. These simultaneous trends converged more pronouncedly in the 1990s after the collapse of state socialism and the related escalation in economic globalisation. Even more strikingly, as the report shows, East European women were forced out of the labour force in unprecedented numbers, *exactly at the time* when their Western counterparts started to take up paid employment at the encouragement of national and transitional governments as well as corporate employers. It explains an oft-repeated phrase in the Ukrainian media that in the early 1990s borders were opened as soon as enterprises were closed down. This enabled the sudden supply of relatively cheap and flexible immigrant labour that has accelerated female paid economic activity in migrant recipient societies (Lyberaki 2008). The obvious connection between these two processes points to the 'Deae ex Machina effect' of the so-called 'just-in-time' women's migration (Karjanen 2008) as well as to a 'prêt-a-porter character' of the emerging 'care gap' in care exporting societies.

The dysfunctions of care systems in sending countries, resultant from the 'crisis transfer strategy', enhance changes in the architecture of the care diamond by relocating the functions of the state and the family onto the market, thus contributing to the 'global commodification of care'. Illustrative of this trend was a personal experience of an interviewer in this project, seeking an official status of a paid home carer for a bed-ridden family member, which requires a document officially verifying that a frail patient is not in a position to take care of his/her daily needs and requires personal home care. Officially, the status of personal home carer entitles a care-giver to a small allowance (less than €10 per month). More importantly, it enables a home carer to

preserve his/her job placement while working at home and to maintain an un-interrupted labour history, with the time spent in home care recorded as paid work. Additionally, a carer may be entitled to some welfare subsidies available for low-income groups, such as reduced rent, etc. Although not wide-spread due to minuscule financial provisions, this care arrangement was required and used by many families.

Yet, it turned out that due to recent legislative amendments, securing a formal status for a home elder-carer has become a complicated venture. First, the category of patients entitled to formal home care provision was markedly reduced due to the scaling-up of the age limit, newly set at 80 years old and over. Therefore the relatives who could afford to sacrifice their careers and incomes to provide decent care to their dear ones aged below 80 had to resign from jobs and interrupt their employment histories, with salient implications for their own financial security in old age. Secondly, the district physician in charge of the relative's medical care was reluctant to confirm that her frail bed-ridden patient was care dependent. In a private conversation, the physician intimated that the personnel of her clinic had received unofficial instructions to avoid issuing such permits by all possible means to clients as long as they were entitled to government welfare provisions. In this condition the remaining option for care-dependent families was to employ a paid care-giver to provide home-based services to their frail relatives, i.e. to turn either to the informal market for domestic services or to the commercial sector for public social services. Interestingly, when the required papers were obtained to apply for the latter, the medical confirmation of the frailty and care dependence of the client was issued without delay. Hence, the 'care burden' (Abe 2010) was forcefully shifted from the family onto the commercial sector by means of the structural pressure of the health-care system on the family, despite the willingness of the latter to shoulder this care challenge through internal human resources. In this way the family was deprived of its 'right to provide care'.

The family sector of the care diamond

As observed by the WHO (2002:19), informal care is by far the dominant form of care throughout the world, while paid services - either at home or in institutions - play a relatively small role, except in a few countries. The results of the current field research confirmed an earlier finding (Tolstokorova 2009) that in the situation when women as principle carers depart abroad, the caring roles are redistributed among members of extended families, being mainly assumed by grandmothers and less often among the community. However, this is more likely to happen in rural areas and in small towns, where family and community connections are stronger, rather than in highly alienated urban settlements, which currently face the challenge of an emerging 'care deficit', exacerbated by the demographic change in Ukrainian society. In urban and less often in rural families, the absence of women for work abroad often entails the redistribution of gender role models among transnationals. The males left behind may assume household duties and often cope well with their new roles. This was intimated by one of our interviewees:

I decided that it is me who has to go [for earnings abroad], because I knew that although my man was not the best possible husband, he was a good dad and my boys loved and obeyed him. Now, I see that although I am away from home, my boys are taken care of well, and all my guys get along well with each other. Now that I am going home for a short leave, I am busy with present-hunting for my ex, to thank him for being a good father to our sons. (Anastasia, working in services business in Monaco, Nice, France, 08.12.2007,)

Another responder commented that such instances are quite common in transnational families, in which the new 'gender contract' with wives as breadwinners is gaining currency:

Here, in small towns in the South of Ukraine, around 40% of men live on remittances sent by their migrant wives and take care of the household. In the West of Ukraine their share is even higher, probably over 50% and since my sister lives in Moldova and I know that there such men make no less than 70% of the total male population. (Varvara, mother of a man working in Russia, Kherson region, 26.07.2011))

One woman assumed that the share of 'househusbands' might be even higher than that, thus confirming the observation that spouses/partners may provide a critical safety net for care-dependent family members (Hoffmann and Rodrigues 2010). However, in our research the caring roles of males, if any, were limited mainly to the care for their children, but seldom extended to assuming responsibility for their own elderly parents, let alone for the parents of their migrant wives. At best, men contributed to elder-care through fiscal support, but not through daily care-giving and emotional work. Hence, the reconstitution of gender role models in 'mother-away families' with fathers left behind occurs mainly while women are absent from home. After the women come back, however, they are expected to re-assume their traditional gender roles of homemakers, while their husbands return to their roles of heads of families, although not necessarily as the main breadwinners.

The non-profit sector

During state socialism the national health-care system was heavily biased towards institutional care, while transition to a free market economy enhanced a shift towards services that are more community centred (WHO 2002). In Ukraine, the network of NGOs involved in care provision is a fairly new development that operates on the national, regional and municipal levels. The Red Cross is an asset in providing informational services and training to families of long-term carers, yet overall, the system of such training in Ukraine is practically non-existent. The operation of this sector of the care diamond lacks state involvement, especially in terms of the scarcity of financial provision and insufficient legislative backing. As the director of an NGO providing care services stated in an interview:

Unfortunately, in this country social services exist only on the state level. This is a monopoly of the state. NGOs have no right to provide social services. Charity activity or support to those who need it is allowed, but it is not qualified as social services. There is no law which stipulates which social services can be provided by NGOs. Therefore

people who really need care services can not buy them. They can hire a person in a private way, but then they do it unofficially. In this case no one can guarantee professional care-service. If there was a labour market of these services at least partly covered by the state, then women would not go to make money abroad. Because currently there is a huge demand in care services in Ukraine (Kyiv, 26.06.2008).

Experts' data were confirmed by the information received through informal communication with members of families seeking home care. Thus, one informant reported that she was unable to find a qualified nurse to provide home care for her elderly mother, who was suffering from Alzheimer's disease. All the proposals for this offer came from people with no experience with frail patients, especially ones with this profile. The informant's experience with families of patients suffering from the same disease suggested that all of them had faced the same care challenge. Being a PhD holder, an experienced social scientist and entrepreneur, she decided to organise training courses aiming to provide skills in home elderly care. She succeeded in finding premises for her classes and invited qualified professionals of this profile who were ready to share their expertise to make her venture work. However, it soon became clear that this goal was a hard nut to crack, because all her enthusiastic attempts encountered indifference if not resistance on the part of decision-makers. As a result, this project has never been implemented, despite the informant's efforts and a demand for such professional activity. This is another example of how bureaucracy and the reluctance of decision-makers create constraints to progressive developments in the non-profit component of the care diamond. Due to this, the national care economy forfeits not only perspectives for development, but also the health and lives of patients deprived of required home care.

The market component of the care diamond

The field research for current project showed that throughout last years the process of commodification of caring labour in migrants' households increased. Some of responders reported

using paid care in their families left behind, as in the case of Marina, a domestic carer in Italy:

When I worked in Italy, my two sons were left behind for the care of my elderly mother. But the boys did not get along well with each other, while my Mom was too old to cope with them. Their frequent collisions exhausted her and had a salient effect on her health, so that she developed a serious disease and became bedridden. As a result I had to hire a woman to take care of her, because she could not help herself any more. Meanwhile my boys had to take care of themselves (Kherson, 20.05.2011).

Although not prominent yet, this process *per se* is significant since it evidences transformations in the operation of the care diamond through its enforcement of the market component. The tendency of outsourcing care from the family to hired care-givers and to the irregular market was confirmed by experts:

The situation is that care services have never been developed here at the level as they are in Western Europe. It's only recently, as I noticed, that care giving started to involve people who are being hired and paid for that. It has not been so before. Traditionally, it was the responsibility of the family. These functions were assumed by family members. (Interview with expert in migration issues, Lviv, 01.07.2008)

It is notable that since the delegation of care provision to the market is a new phenomenon in Ukrainian families, and is often associated with a lack of emotional connection between generations, it may acquire the form of 'concealed care', which is why it is neither clearly visualised nor perceived as a market-based activity. Interviews showcased a tendency among affluent adult children of the elderly to hire care-givers or companions for their parents, recruiting them from close friends or neighbours. In this arrangement the clients themselves are unaware that their carers are paid for, and perceive them as volunteers driven by altruism. This enables a belief that they are required by members of their habitual social networks and are cared for because they deserve love and devotion, and not due to commercial interests involved.

Throughout the last few years, an increase in people ready to work in private homes has been observed in Ukraine, accompanied by the expansion of the network of employment agencies with a home care division. The fact that employment agencies have moved into providing domestic services signals both that a global labour market has emerged in this area and that there is an effort to standardise these services. Additionally, job offers are extended through informal networks and recruiters from amongst those who have experience in this labour market. Thus, our responders related the common practice of 'job selling' by more experienced women-domestics to newcomers.

Very often if, say, a woman seeks a temporal leave from her work, and wants to resume working at the same family upon return, she finds a candidate to take her place for the time of her absence from work.

You see, on the one hand, she insures that her job placement is preserved for her, and on the other hand, she usually takes a fee for offering a job placement to a beginner, who does not yet have connections in the new place and for who it is a lucky chance to get this job. (Inna, a domestic worker in Moscow, Kherson region, 15.04.2011).

The job may be 'sold' if a woman wants to move to another place on short notice and wants to maintain good relationships with former employers. In such instances, she does a favour for both her old employer and a new candidate, and receives remuneration for her services from both sides. Sometimes, after having experience of selling her jobs a few times, a woman may acquire sufficient marketing skills to make such employment brokerage her informal occupation.

The expansion of the pool of available carers owes to a magnitude of determinants, some of them mentioned above. However, interviews showed that one of the reasons why highly skilled women might agree to enter the precarious labour market of low-status care services upon returning home is the experience they acquired abroad. Before they had become involved in foreign employment, many of interviewees held high-ranking positions at home, e.g. as civil servants in municipalities, lectures at colleges and

universities, etc. However, they decided to take the risk of de-skilling by temporarily working in low-status jobs abroad to financially support their high social status at home. Most of them regarded their 'downward social mobility' as a short-term occasional project necessary to sustain the reputation of middle-class belonging. For example, Lilia, a civil servant for a municipality, held a high-status managerial position but had a salary below the level of poverty accompanied by frequent suspense of salary payments. This resulted in a gap between her high social standing and low financial status, which she managed to bridge by developing a strategy of circular migration to domestic work in Germany. Once every two or three years she secured an unpaid sabbatical at her institution to work for a few months as a cleaner in Germany. The earnings made abroad enabled her to purchase a new apartment for herself and renovate that of her retired mother, to furnish and buy new modern appliances for both households as well as to earn for subsistence, sufficient to enable her to resume working in local administration at home.

The fieldwork showed that this 'win-win strategy' was favoured by many middle-class women. Interestingly, some of them became accustomed to their low-status but well-paid jobs and no longer perceived them as precarious since they enabled financial empowerment. Often upon returning home, these migrant women were ready to accept similar positions if they promised a decent income. Importantly, by that time they were already well established on the labour market of domestic services and had sufficient experience, skills, credentials and social capital to ensure better employment opportunities than those they could afford when leaving for earnings abroad for the first time. For instance, Mila, a former civil servant for a municipality, was employed as a home carer in Moscow, where she lived with a few families and throughout two years of employment managed to increase her income to nearly double. After she had decided to stop commuting to Moscow, Mila resumed working in her native town as a deputy head at a local library. Soon, her former recruiter in Mos-

cow called her to offer a well-paid job as a child minder in Odessa (Southern Ukraine), which she agreed to take only for the time-being, until a permanent carer was found for this position. Another responder, Valentina, after a few years of commuting to Moscow as a domestic and having secured extensive experience of 'selling' her job to other colleagues, decided to reinvest her social capital into financial capital. Using her social networks among employers and landlords in Moscow, she organised an informal recruitment business, offering job placements and accommodation to beginners.

These examples show that the Ukrainian market of domestic care services is gradually becoming institutionalised. However, this trend generates new gender challenges in their own right. First, this market is not 'just another labour market', but has its own specific conditions, derived from the social construction of household chores and care-giving as 'women's work'. Second, care workers, whether native or immigrant, are mainly females who are in the lowest echelons of the social ladder. Even when care services are decently paid, the work remains culturally undervalued primarily due to the said association with 'women's work'. This situation is leading to the emergence of a new category of gender inequalities in the Ukrainian labour market that must be addressed in policy-making.

Conclusions and policy proposals

The findings of the current research showed that under the conditions of demographic change in Ukraine, the structure of the care diamond is being reshaped on account of the increasing role of the extended family in care work, which is in line with a Europe-wide trend of the relocation of (unpaid) care work from the public sector to the family. This puts more care pressure on the latter, which in turn starts outsourcing its 'care burden' to the market, while preserving the responsibility for the organisation and financing of paid home care. The role of the market, therefore, is also expanding, although it still functions mainly on the un-institutionalised and informal level. Meanwhile, the contribution of both the state and the public (non-profit) sectors to

care provision, especially in elder-care, remains minuscule.

Ukrainian experts contend that in the context of demographic shifts, the role of the family in caring for the elderly will hardly become the dominant mode of care provision, especially in long-term care. Therefore, the key role in the organisation of care-giving for the elderly should be assumed by the state. However, under the current conditions of chronic budget constraints in Ukraine, exacerbated by the global financial downturn, the state will hardly be able to assume these responsibilities. This increases the pressure on the market and the non-profit sectors of the care diamond, which respectively require more attention from the society regarding the process of home care institutionalisation. Meanwhile, experience shows that when care-giving moves from the private to the public sphere, tensions emerge in technical-professional competencies, relational and emotional skills, etc.

For that matter, the care labour market requires closer attention related to recruitment, skill requirements, admissions, mobility, residency issues, attitudes and expectations of employers and clients, training for care workers, and the discrimination that pervades some of the sectors (IOM 2010). These challenges must be given priority in policy-making. It is necessary to develop coherent policy strategies aiming to cover all sectors of the care diamond, yet with a special focus on the market and non-profit sectors as potential successors able to bear the home care burden. Above all, it is critical to enhance strategic linkages between the key stakeholders in the care diamond to ensure their policy coordination both on the national and local levels and to construct a balance of care provision, enhancing the 'continuum of care' with an optimal interplay of public, home-based and community-based care grounded on the needs of the population.

Secondly, it is imperative to provide a legislative framework for the efficient functioning of the market and the non-for-profit sectors of the care diamond, as the lack thereof creates great constraints to the institutionalisation of non-state care provision in Ukraine. This will enable the creation of public organisations of carers,

empowered to lobby their interests, advocate their rights, and speak on their behalf.

Thirdly, it is of paramount importance to attract the attention of the academic community to the formation of the Ukrainian care economy in the context of the new global division of reproductive labour and the emergence of global care. In this regard, emphasis should be placed on the feminisation of migratory flows from Ukraine and the gender implications of this process for care arrangements and care regimes in the home society. To this end, the launch of longitudinal projects is required, drawing on the accumulation of statistics sensitive to gender, age and other social parameters of the migrant populace.

Importantly, the family sector should be more closely addressed. Currently, the financial benefits for care provision are insufficient to stimulate the stronger participation of individuals and families in self- or elder-care. Yet, it is argued that putting more public money into home care provision for the elderly and disabled might free up more unpaid carers to remain in or return to the labour market, and that those carers would be contributing to the economy via taxation and social insurance contributions. Therefore, the formation of a care labour market should be addressed in terms of the interrelationship between paid work and care-giving and the cost of the care for both care workers and client families.

A necessary contribution to the development of family care is awareness-raising, counselling, education, training and support. This may include the provision of specific skills, emotional counselling through support groups, a 'respite care' aiming to provide caregivers with temporary relief, and the regulation of labour initiatives that may cover laws guaranteeing workers unpaid leave if they have to care for sick relatives. Also, 'pension credits' for informal carers could

be offered, meaning that the level of pension benefits depends on years of paid work, including home care (WHO 2003).

Of particular importance is to attract and retain natives in the care sector, thus minimising care migration and limiting care drain. To this end, public policy should be aimed at the enhancement of a women-friendly labour market, the creation of working places and decent working conditions for women, especially single mothers, enabling them to reconcile work and family life at home without seeking employment abroad and leaving their children behind unattended. Additionally, emphasis must be placed on policies aiming to enhance men's caring roles in ways that break down gender stereotyping and open up possibilities for men to be more actively involved in family care.

Care work is an international market requiring that respect be given to international standards of policy-making in care provision and migration. Therefore, it is necessary for Ukraine to join the European Agreement on 'Au pair' Placement of 1969 and Recommendation of 2004, the WHO 'Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel' of 2010, the ILO 'Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers' of 2011, among others. These documents have to be signed and incorporated into national legislative practices if Ukraine wants to be reputed as a state that upholds the human rights of its people.

To achieve these goals it is critical to make the dynamics of care more central to public concerns and efforts while practices of care should receive increasing attention from activists, researchers, and policy-makers in terms of the recognition of the practical, moral, and political importance of care and generating normative commitments to guide thinking, practices, and public policies through a 'care lens'.

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Integration: a hot button issue. Contextualising Multiculturalism and Integration in Amsterdam

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Abstract

The societal transformations reflecting the increased visibility of migrants in European societies have prompted reconsideration of the theoretical concepts used to analyse and model migrant-host society relationships. Do the principles of concepts such as 'multiculturalism' and 'integration' fit the empirical examples that are meant to illustrate? The paper presents the first set of empirical results of a project designed to study questions of migrant integration by retrieving illustrative examples of experiences in this domain, drawn from Amsterdam.

Much depends upon what happens at the local level and attention to non-state dimensions of integration – such as these that take place at the city neighbourhood level – could illuminate the workings of integration in practice. The study, paying a great deal of attention to the intimate stories of women migrants from North Africa, addresses issues to do with their trajectories of adaptation in Amsterdam. The divergent experiences (and backgrounds) of these migrant women reveal the current city-policy structures and present-day cultures of the settled migrant and native populations as they unfold in practice in everyday life. Following the life experiences of migrants is perhaps one of the best ways of gaining a perspective on the integration model of the society, the processes of 'integration from below' so to speak.

Introduction

Central to the academic and political debates that invoke the notion of multiculturalism are the issues of how to live with the other and the relationship of the individual to the collective. In the present study of multiculturalism and Muslim migrant women in Amsterdam, the same issues will be examined with the view to target the idea of integration. Exploring the way multiculturalism is deployed in the framework of the relations between migrants and the receiving society, as seen in the context of this study, I will discuss how the differences of the other are negotiated with one's own system of meaning and signification.

My aim is to discuss the question of multiculturalism from the perspective of a social sphere other than the institutional, which can make vis-

ible the 'workings' of multiculturalism by looking at the existing behaviours, relations, and practices in a society. Much of the discussion on multiculturalism tends to focus on the institutional conduct towards 'outsiders', while there is a lack of regard for the significance of the ways in which different cultures achieve different dimensions of engagement within particular contexts of society. This study will look at the protocols of multiculturalism in practice, as centred on sites of daily routine and contact. Drawing on participant observation and interviews with Muslim migrant women in the city of Amsterdam regarding the various activities they engage in within the context of women migrant associations, this study seeks to address a specific question: What type of integration processes are migrant

women engaged in? And how can this be understood in the light of dilemmas of integration? The empirical question posed here thus concerns the everyday processes of integration as they unfold on the ground, with a view to subsequently provide a link between the debate on integration and the empirical world. This study suggests that following the life experiences of migrants is, perhaps, one of the best ways of gaining a perspective on the integration model of a society, on the processes of 'integration from below', so to speak.¹

From the point of view of practices of integration from below, the most striking finding concerns the varied types and non-uniform processes of integration the women are involved with, which differ noticeably from the state's official approaches to integration. This finding throws into question the view of integration advanced in institutional mechanisms of the state, one that is primarily concerned with a prescriptive technical view of the integration process, focusing on language learning and abiding by public rules and abstract principles. This integration from below in multicultural politics may lead to certain modifications in the debate on multiculturalism, and especially, on the political necessity to provide a platform for everyday issues about how to live with the other preceding the official formulation of claims. These arguments will unfold first through a discussion of the debate about integration in the Netherlands and then through an analysis of the qualitative material.

About integration

The societal transformations caused by contemporary migration have prompted a reconsideration of the theoretical concepts used to model and analyse immigrant-host society relationships. Conversely, in most western European countries, the various types of policies towards migrants, experimented with by actors and agencies in all sectors of state and society from the end of the 1980s onwards, have attracted a great deal of attention in research (Alba and Nee 1997;

Vermeulen 1997; Joppke 1999; Banton 2001). The earlier generation of scholars in the field can remember a time when older assimilationist ideas informed by post-60s views about cultural difference brought about discussions on the diversity of morals that were suddenly perceived as somehow socially damaging. It wasn't until the end of the 1980s and during the 1990s that different European countries and governments accepted that migration is indeed an unavoidable, if not necessary, condition of today's society, and that the conceptual challenge seems to lie in the question how a society of diverse cultures and interests can agree upon the terms of the debate and a public policy accepted by all.

This has culminated in yet another issue, the question of how deep these cultural differences go, which has made the idea of living together and coping with ever more cultural difference even more acute. Integration has become the preferred term used to avoid the expectation of assimilation, a term that was abandoned together with the myth of monocultural societies (Alba and Nee 1997). When linked to questions about multiculturalism, integration appears to leave room for openness to diversity and recognition of difference. Yet when one looks at policies that are being proposed by governments, sometimes it is difficult to understand where the difference between the two terms, assimilation and integration, lies (Raghuram 2007). Allegedly, integration is a two-way street that involves an opening in the receiving society as well as some effort on the part of the newcomers, and yet when one looks at the different proposals, they focus exclusively on the newcomers and the rules and norms they need to abide by in order to fit in better (Vermeulen and Penninx 2000). The term integration thus bears a similarity to the preceding terms, as it does not provide any clearer picture of the challenges of multiculturalism and instead remains very vague as to what it signifies.²

¹ This paper is drawn from my post-doctoral research supported by two separate Marie Curie Fellowship grants.

² See, for example, Favell (2003) for an analytical exploration of the history of the term integration in relation to the current debate.

Such challenges to do with the recognition of differences should clearly be kept outside of the framework of 'we' and 'them' and should engage in a different logic altogether, which would also address the cultural aspects of integration in a society and not just the socio-economic ones, as is usually the case in politics. So far, we have seen integration interventions on institutional policies of the state (education, health, welfare, labour), whereas the area of culture has been less involved (Vermeulen and Penninx 2000). For example, lately more and more European states, like the Netherlands, which is considered to be a highly state-organised society, have re-introduced requirements for immigrants to learn the national language and accept the so-called national values in order to enable themselves to integrate into the mainstream national culture and potentially obtain equal access to the societal structure. However, the cultural claims of the immigrants have not been addressed in these policies as important issues to do with the workings of the multicultural state, and instead have been assigned to the private sphere of the relationship between the individual and the collective. Such arrangements expose the fact that state-centred, state-organised solutions to integration capture forms of multiculturalism that often lay on some unjust compromises at the expense of the migrant population in society (Favell 2003).

The situation of Muslim migrant women in Amsterdam and the dilemmas created in their attempts to express their cultural individuality within the public sphere is the focus of this article. Discourses of multiculturalism should all be about respect and equality as the guiding principles of human interaction. It is very difficult, however, to actually picture the specific expectations of such respect from all those concerned in the face of cultural differences. For example, in the Netherlands, some people may object to certain Muslim cultural practices, like the wearing of the hijab, while others may criticise these value judgments as operating from a position of a social norm.³ In this case it is implicit that

the idea that Muslim women should not wear their hijab at work is the standard behaviour and that those who feel differently about it simply fall outside of the social norm, which probably means that they are not seen as belonging to the society.

In a multicultural society, however, participants ideally should feel free to introduce into the dialogue their needs, principles, life-moral judgments, and conflicts, and there should be no basis for privileging national cultures over migrant ones. Both groups should be able to respectively accept a set of different values with which they have to come to terms. To paraphrase Benhabib, at any point in time in a society there are competing collective cultural narratives and symbolisations by its members, such that there cannot be a single societal culture (cf. 2002: 60). Benhabib's work, of course, falls into the more progressive integration scenarios, where intellectuals are trying to visualise how western societies are going to deal with their cultural dilemmas, achieving social cohesion under conditions of cultural diversity. Facing precisely this task, many scholars engage in theorising integration from a policy-oriented perspective, which, aligned with theoretical currents in political philosophy and liberal political theory, aspires to construct a fair society in a normative sense (Kymlicka 1995; Kymlicka and Norman 2000; Barry 2000; Bauböck 2007).

Another way of going about the same task – and the key line of thought in this study – is an approach that is interested in the practical everyday discourses that unfold within a given local context in society, the sort of (mis)understandings and meanings which develop about disputed practices in everyday social interactions. These are procedures that so far have not been properly contextualised in research. This article suggests that the societal scene at the local level is the true source of prescriptive suggestions for finding coherent democratic solutions to the integration dilemmas of a given society. However, this scene has been to a large extent

to a western bureaucratic state logic which subordinates and tames difference and, in turn, colonises the social norm.

³ On this very idea, Vron Ware and Les Back (2002), taking the example of multicultural Britain, referred

unexplored.⁴ The official public sphere of policy measures frames the guidelines within which people behave socially, yet this is not the only site of opinion and conduct formation. In fact, it is within the unofficial public sphere that one can document the dilemmas of coexistence among cultural differences and be able to span the range of integration patterns produced, under specific conditions of interaction, particular to a given local context. The need for such an 'inside' perspective persists, and will be explored further in the next section.

Processes of integration 'from below'

Whether cultural differences in a multicultural society can be made compatible, or whether this is a desirable task or not in order to achieve integration, is a contested issue. Undeniably, however, one should recognise that the sites where people come to terms with ethnic or religious difference, at first hand, are the daily, local sites of negotiation of difference (Allen and Cars 2001). The analytical approach in this article follows a line of thought that looks to the encounter between people from different cultures in daily sites (such as work, recreation, spaces of association, public spaces, etc.) within the shared spaces of the city they live in. More specifically, it looks at the issue of migrant integration by focusing on the routines of social interaction in the 'micro' everyday world of Muslim migrant women as they engage in activities within migrant associations in Amsterdam.

The article acknowledges that integration processes in a society are not uniform (Benhabib 2002) and that the outcome that can be expected very much depends on the kind of engagement that is taking place within these sites of interaction characterised as more prosaic and everyday in the sense that they concern informal parts of life experienced in common. These types

of transactions and negotiations as well as the implicit and explicit rules that are being formed therein, determine behaviour and in turn potentially could enable complex processes of social change to unfold (Allen and Cars 2001). However, examples from the empirical world of 'prosaic' interactions have been disregarded for the most part and it is argued here that this disregard has created a gap in our understanding of multiculturalism and its challenges, one that can only be filled through examining the actual everyday practice and form of integration in places understood as common public places.

This article is precisely a preliminary attempt to explore ways in which research on the question of migrant integration might be developed using this very different logic of a bottom-up perspective. My aim is not to review integration policy constructions, local policy agendas and institutionalised structures at the city level. Instead, I aim to show how the existing framing of the integration model can be seen to flesh out new, and perhaps, unexpected dynamics, the closer one looks at the behaviour and identities of migrant populations. Thus the current study seeks to address a specific question: What type of integration are migrant women engaged in? And how can this be understood in light of the current challenges of multiculturalism? The empirical question posed here concerns the opinions of women migrants on a range of issues to do with their actions, cultural behaviour, choices and emotions in relation to the so-called norms of the national population with a view to subsequently provide a link between some of the debates on integration and the empirical world. It was felt that this dimension in research, which traces a small percentage of the population in local contexts to observe their opinions about the different understandings of living together in a culturally diverse society, can possibly register the shape of cultural interaction in a local setting of multicultural relations of exchange and provide a platform for change for the formulation and justification of claims.⁵ As soon as we

⁴ Methodologically speaking, there are very few studies that look at integration processes from a bottom-up, ethnographic perspective. Most of them take a state policy-centred approach and try to measure integration with positivistic large-scale survey work or normative conceptualisations (see Favell 2003 for a detailed discussion on this).

⁵ To seek to study integration along this axis automatically sends the signal that the porousness of

look at the question from this level, it becomes apparent just how much we can learn about migrant integration and especially the domain of cultural integration, which is the one that mostly concerns us here and one of the basic elements of the integration discussion, but that has been very scantily researched.

To 'get to the bottom', then, of the issue of integration and the deeper questions surrounding it, I started by assuming a locally centred reasoning. The study suggests that issues of migrant integration are being developed in very distinct and context-specific ways, within small, specific sections of society across the state, at the city district level. We might learn a lot about integration in practice by examining the specific conditions of interaction particular to the local sites in question. Les Back, in his well-known study on race and urban youth (1996), argues that the sites for coming to terms with ethnic difference are the 'micropublics' where dialogue and 'prosaic negotiations' become compulsory. Within such sites, the question of what it takes to live with difference becomes more pronounced.⁶ In the current study of Muslim migrant women in Amsterdam, the same question will be put forward. Namely, the emphasis will fall on everyday lived experiences and local negotiations of difference, and on the micro-cultures as seen in activities taken up by these women in the context of migrant associations.

Research design and methodology

It seemed to me that a qualitative approach which draws on a combination of participant observation and interviews is better equipped to

cultures and their propensity to change in relation to other cultures is recognised. In other words, cultures are being recognised as diverging, formed in response to the life contexts in which an individual's identity is shaped – instead of being conceived in an essentialistic manner (i.e. treating cultural identities of immigrants, but also of the host society, as badges of pre-determined group memberships) (cf. Baumann 1998).

⁶ Les Back's ethnography of white and black youth identities in two South London neighbourhoods shows how youth race politics are shaped within the everyday local public culture, in sites such as the workplace, colleges, various centres or sports clubs, and other spaces of association (1996).

prise open for analysis ambivalent issues related to discursive practices and insights regarding the actual processes of integration as they occur on the ground. Because participant observation traditionally has been a systemic means to understand and explain cultural meaning, least bound by established institutional frameworks, I naturally looked towards a qualitative understanding of the intimate stories, background, and current experiences of women migrants (first- and second-generation) in moving from Morocco, Algeria, or Tunisia to Amsterdam. The fieldwork was conducted over a period of two years, and consisted of 35 in-depth, face-to-face interviews with migrant women, all of whom are local residents of two district areas of Amsterdam (Amsterdam East and Amsterdam West). The choice of interviewees was intended to reflect the diversity of the sample in terms of ethnic origin, citizenship, generation, cultural traditions, and educational and socio-economic status. The respondents are aged between 19 and 48, of Muslim religion, of Algerian, Tunisian or Moroccan descent; most are married with small or teenage children while the others are single, divorced or students. Some of the women of the study came to the Netherlands at the beginning of the 1970s, as dependents of their marriage partners or of their parents or with family reunification schemes after that. Others are second-generation migrants born in the Netherlands. Most have completed primary and often secondary school education, and the younger women are often employed or have had some work experience in Amsterdam. The older ones are usually unemployed. Interviews took place in both public places and/or people's own homes and were carried out in Dutch and in English, whereas care was taken not to rely too much on snowballing, but to select people from different social environments. The stories of the women reveal the current city-policy structures but most importantly the present-day cultures of migrant and native⁷ populations as they unfold in practice in everyday life.

⁷ The term 'native' used throughout the text is not meant to suggest the existence of a homogeneous native culture versus migrant cultures. Rather, it indicates the difference in the somewhat established

The study focuses on features of integration and the empirical research is roughly structured around four sets of topics: (1) Islam; (2) gender issues; (3) relations between migrants and natives; (4) life in the city. The overall empirical study extends beyond the public sphere to the private sphere and aims to gain insights into aspects of integration related to issues of religion and social life by drawing on people's own accounts about the everyday lived experiences. In-depth interviews were conducted with women attending events at migrant associations on a regular basis, on a variety of aspects about their lives in Amsterdam, their religious beliefs and practices, their hopes and dreams. The study looks at the link between the women's cultural categories of identification and the types of integration they achieve in the city. It does that by reflecting on the women's views, experiences, attitudes, social values, education, social mobility, gender relations, etc. In what follows, I will move on to present the background of the study, or else, to put it periphrastically, in the words of Favell 'what the migrants are integrating into' (2003).

Framing the study

Big cities in the Netherlands, like Amsterdam, have large migrant populations. People of migrant cultural backgrounds inhabit poor inner-city neighbourhoods that are relatively segregated – white Dutch residents are not significantly present in numbers in such neighbourhoods (Kloosterman et al. 1998). These areas provide interesting sites to analyse how inter-cultural relations work. The Dutch official political discourse defines the absence of relationships between inner-city natives and migrants as a problem of social cohesion. In the same official terminology and in everyday speech, migrant populations are defined by their collective identities (i.e. descent and cultural background) as ethnic groups, and, on the whole, they are labelled as 'allochtone-

ous'⁸; yet, these are people who, as is often the case, share a common Dutch citizenship with the 'autochthonous' (the indigenous population). The nuance of the term 'allochtoneous' vis-à-vis the objective of creating conditions of equal rights and participation, non-discriminatory membership, and belonging for people of a migrant background in a multicultural society, as Dutch society aspires to be, is quite noticeable. The whole issue in general terms revolves around the fact that the religious and cultural background of certain migrant groups within inner-city mixed neighbourhoods has led to doubts, according to recent public discourse, about the groups' 'assimilability'.

Schiffauer, in his analysis of civic society as it has developed in western Europe, argues that it is based on the idea that the collective public interest outweighs the particular individual one (Schiffauer 1998:1). By virtue of its form, civic society, he goes on to suggest, is subjecting the 'outsider' within it to various impositions and perhaps exclusions. The outsider, depending on the specific relation between the individual and the collective in a particular political culture, undergoes integration and perhaps discrimination (Schiffauer 1998). But how would Schiffauer's sketch of western European civil society back in the 1990s fit the Dutch case and experience of today? In Dutch political culture, the principle of the collective (the nation) was designed in recent history as comprising cultural particularisms, with a policy aimed at giving equal rights to individuals of different cultural groups (pillarisation)⁹,

⁸ Naming without using inaccurate terminology when it comes to such sensitive and politically loaded issues can be daunting. The Dutch refer to the newer non-colonial migrant groups, such as the Moroccans, Algerians, Tunisians, as 'allochtoneous'. It is a Greek origin word which literally means 'people of a different place'. However, most of them no longer fit the description. The first waves of migration originating from these countries took place throughout the 1960s. Many of their children were never migrants in the strict sense. They were born in the Netherlands and grew up there. Doesn't that gives them 'roots' in the Netherlands?

⁹ The term has been used to describe cases in which different cultural communities were allowed to operate their own distinctive institutions in society. These

cultural (and otherwise) order of things before and after the arrival of migrants in the city. I do not use the term national population as many of the migrants of the study also have Dutch citizenship and thus would also count as such.

a system where different faith groups were kept autonomous and distinct provided that there could be interdependence at the level of the nation-state (Vermeulen and Penninx 2000).¹⁰ However, in later years, with the flow of migration increasing and the number of cultural groups in society multiplying, it became clear that the whole system required re-examination. Pillarisation could not possibly operate for so many different groups in society, it would be too complex. Moreover, the continued distance between different cultures/ethnic groups in society made contact between the national population and the migrants difficult (Vermeulen and Penninx 2000).

Since 1998, efforts have been made to change the political framework for migrant integration. It was taken for granted that the government had a great responsibility in promoting the integration of immigrants. The central government defined the parameters of the integration policy by means of financial support, rules and laws such as the Newcomer Integration Act (WIN 1998),¹¹ but the main responsibility for implementing the integration policy fell to the level of city government, the municipalities (d'Haenens 2009). Notably, from 1990 to 1999 the administrative decentralisation of Amsterdam was completed, resulting in the division of the city into 16 separate districts, which implied a quasi-autonomous formulation and implemen-

tation of immigrant policies at the district level. Many policy fields and tasks (education, health, welfare, etc.) were transferred to the responsibility of the local city and district level of government and among them decrees were passed to encourage, via subsidisation, the initiatives of cultural or faith groups to collectively seek support for representation, and some sort of government subsidy was provided to activities of the so-called 'umbrella associations'¹² (Wolff 1999). These associations did not explicitly serve just one ethnic community, but many simultaneously, and acted increasingly as something of integrationist institutions, with their task apparently being to promote 'social cohesion' (At Home in Europe project, 2010). These policies encouraged the integration of 'allochtone' into Dutch society by making it explicit that the target was not separate migrant communities, but individuals who were considered to be at a disadvantage (physical and/or socio-economic) to integrate in society (Entzinger and Scheffer 2012).

Within these associations migrants come together as a kind of community of special interests to do with social, political, religious and/or cultural aspects of the migrant population.¹³ The acquisition of basic knowledge of the Dutch language and society was encouraged within the associations, as this was thought to be essential for the promotion of integration (cf. *Report on Urban policy and the Integration of Ethnic Minor-*

side-by-side pillars, where everything was separate but equal, were presumed collectively to hold up a united state. Pillarisation was instituted between 1917 and 1970. Though the policy no longer exists, it has left its mark on social institutions until today.

¹⁰ This particular arrangement of the relationship of the individual to the collective had been efficient as evidenced by the positive assessment of the state organisation in Dutch popular culture at that time (Rath et al. 1997). After the disintegration of the system from the 1960s onwards, it was thought that reliance on state efficient operation may have been a factor that brought about weak interaction while maintaining socio-cultural distance between different ethnic groups.

¹¹ The Dutch newcomer integration policy (WIN 1998) was developed during the 1990s as an answer to the continued influx of considerable numbers of immigrants. WIN established the rights and obligations of newly arrived adult immigrants in the Netherlands concerning settlement and/or integration programmes.

¹² During the 1980s, as part of the increasing policy of strict separation between religion and state, the formation of migrant associations was initially established by the state as a way to look into religious facilities for 'ethnic minorities', since it was no longer possible for migrant associations to get government subsidies for religious purposes.

¹³ Until the 1980s the Dutch regime of integration of foreigners conformed rather to a logic of institutional recognition of minorities. When an ethnic group attained the status of an official minority, then the claims of such groups to housing, education, employment and other forms of social support could be met. Such official minority groups then acquired the rights to establish their own cultural, religious, and educational organisations and associations. Consequently, in stark contrast to the situation before the 1980s, policies for the provision of autonomy for separate ethnic minorities were now held back through less subsidisation.

ities in the Netherlands, 2001; Entzinger and Scheffer 2012). But there has been an unforeseeable side-effect: The emphasis on the individual disadvantage in order to promote integration, instead of on an affirmation of cultural heterogeneity, was read by many as clear evidence that cultural difference was not regarded as a source of strength in society, but as a source of weakness.

Migrant women's terms of integration

The empirical work focuses on the discourses and attitudes of the Muslim women themselves about their actual migrant experiences of integration in their city. The empirical findings are briefly summarised under a list of themes. Each theme/heading is suggestive of the issues that were raised in more detail in the course of the study.

Multicultural issues and Islam

The women of this study are Muslim women of different national origins and occasionally women of double nationality (i.e. Dutch-Tunisian, Dutch-Algerian, etc.). They regularly participated in a number of migrant associations in which they designed several activities. The activities pioneered therein depended to a considerable extent, as discovered in the study, on the particular interests of the members. For example, in one association, the women built up several powerful initiatives of a multicultural nature, which defy the often assumed, broadly reiterated themes in the media about Muslim women's 'social isolation', or the 'insufficiency of Muslim women's social insertion' (i.e. *NRC-Handelsblad*, August 2002; van der Meer and Ham 2011). More specifically, the activities began as initiatives to support women who face personal problems (divorce, domestic violence, etc.), but with time the projects of this migrant association became more spectacular. The women moved on to establish an art atelier where they spend a good deal of their time making art, selling their products at fair prices, and experiencing success as artists and entrepreneurs.

Jasmine,¹⁴ the Algerian-Dutch coordinator of a migrant association, spoke about the function of the centre in helping women to integrate into Dutch society. According to her, the city policy of social cohesion has set 'too high standards of expectations to achieve integration'. She believes that 'integration has to begin from the very basics of the mainstream cultural adaptation because this is what the women need.' She describes how, according to the district policy, the local cultural centres for women are there to promote computer lessons, sporting activities, and so on, whereas, according to her, 'other more serious problems need to be tackled with priority', since in the neighbourhood where the centre is located, 'there are women who are facing unemployment, social isolation, etc.' She imagines her job as one to provide 'a kind of bridge' between different cultural values, and one to help 'balance' the membership of migrants and natives in society.

In many ways, then, these migrant associations offer new channels for participation to migrant women and new forms of non-traditional and unconventional cultural activity. As far as their practice is concerned, the migrant women associations represent interests and act as negotiating partners between their 'clients' and the local government by operating on two levels: On the one hand, they offer a certain number of social services (listening centres, nursery schools, training, medical assistance), sometimes in cooperation with local councils; and on the other, they are also engaged in various activities to promote Muslim women's rights within a cultural rights framework ideology.

Each association has its own coordinator who speaks for the migrant 'clients', representing their

¹⁴ A consideration of the ethical implications of fieldwork and representation should underpin any research project, even more so regarding such a sensitive issue which furthermore involves interviews. Interviewing creates ethical dilemmas as the issues covered may enter the personal domain of the informants. It is good practice to ensure anonymity in the written text, so I have 'protected' my informants from exposure they were not prepared for by mixing and matching their names and profiles.

interests in various local bodies. There is no fostering of individual migrant direct access to state institutions. In this way, migrant associations can act as a filter between competing migrant and state interests, managing needs and providing support and advice. Each migrant association is a member of the local Forum (*Stichting*) of each city district, on which they depend for organisational and financial support, information, and advice, and which acts as their 'employer'.

The role of the coordinators vis-à-vis the operation of the women migrant associations is, as can be expected, a complex one. On the one hand, they promote the Muslim women associations' *raison d'être* by campaigning for fund-raising and, on the other hand, they align themselves with ideologies that put high demands of linguistic and cultural assimilation on Muslim women. While, in the context of these associations, Muslim migrant women are officially encouraged to rely mostly on their gender as a diacritical characteristic of identity and less on their culture or religion, to obtain resources and channels for participation and representation of their interests in society, they still feel free and perhaps emotionally compelled to express their culture and their religion in various activities. For example, they often organise lessons to teach second-generation Muslim girls and keen Dutch women how to cook Moroccan style, the meaning of Ramadan, or even how 'to resist (the so-called) Dutch cultural extremities' (the following section will discuss this in more detail), that is, discussions about taboos in different cultures, appropriate cultural conduct, and cultural confrontations among the youth. One such example was a lecture by a Surinamese imam, on the occasion of Ramadan, to a big group of Muslim girls from different ethnic backgrounds who wished to understand the meaning of Ramadan and religious practices during the days of fast and festivity. This kind of cultural activity is not meant as an act of distinct ethnic affirmation. To the contrary, what appears to be happening is a propensity to a homogenisation of cultural practices across different Muslim cultures that bring Muslims together, emphasising religious affiliation at the expense of ethnic divisions. Hadisha, a

32-year-old mother of two boys, makes this point clear: 'I don't want to organise my life around my race or my sex, but around my religion, yes.'

Therefore, in parallel and/or in spite of an apparent official stance promoting integration in the host society in terms of the state tools and agencies for this purpose, there is also another dimension of integration that takes place within the migrant associations of the study. Their members specialise in folkloric art inspired by the cultural traditions of their different countries of origin and strategically use their common religion as a form of cultural identification to promote their chances of assessing funds by the state.¹⁵

Interestingly enough, despite the state's official central design and its expectations of the function of migrant associations, namely that they will focus on integration by making cultural and religious differences non-relevant and thus suppress them, these women migrant associations engage in activities that draw upon cultural traditions in an attempt to refer to a religious community in the new setting. In many ways, the women clients of many different associations organise themselves around a shared Muslim identity: They accommodate special places for prayer or organise Arabic and Koranic courses, and they play a significant role in educating young Muslim women by providing a venue for regular discussions about sensitive issues to do with everyday life dilemmas and/or conflicts that arise between expectations of proper religious conduct and individual lifestyle preferences, etc. It was a significant finding of the study therefore that a broad range of activities was deemed important: activities tackling social isolation or unemployment, non-traditional and unconventional cultural activities as well as more culture/religion-specific activities.

Matters of cultural confrontation

Another theme I stumbled across during the study which also refers to the activities the women develop in the sites of the migrant asso-

¹⁵ A claim to the local government for extra funding is sometimes more likely to be positively reviewed if the applicant is a multi-ethnic migrant association.

ciations, assumes an equally important role. In a civic culture, such as the Dutch, where the separation of the private and the public is rated highly as a condition for social participation, someone who was brought up or socialised in a different culture, like many of the participants of the study, where religion, culture, rituals and sociability are more strongly pronounced, is expected to have some difficulties fitting in. Muslim migrants to the country identify with a religion that tends to keep the public and the private sphere well connected in some ways. This is at odds with the socialisation expectations placed on the individual in Dutch society, where secularism draws distinctive boundaries between the public and religious spheres.

The women often spoke about a strong feeling of self-consciousness, a sense of cultural difference – difference from the past (the country of origin) and difference from the present (the surrounding society) – and a sense of belonging somewhere in between. This is one of the reasons why the women of the study felt the need to meet up in the cultural centre of the migrant associations to talk about Islam and to set up discussion groups and organise lectures about cultural adaptation and the continuity of culture and traditions.

Religious identification seems to serve important social and cultural functions. For the vast majority of the women interviewed, ‘being a Muslim woman’ appears to be one vital element that conditions how they live their lives. For each of them, being a Muslim woman represents a set of values, religious obligations, and a destiny. It also signifies a particular world-view marked by attachment to family and high regard for ethical conduct and offering (hospitality and/or charity). Whether these traits are actually common to all the women is debatable and in many ways irrelevant. But what is relevant is that these women understand these traits as making it possible for them to be a closed, imagined community of ‘sisters’.

Yet, most of the women interviewees who are born in the Netherlands, while considering religion personally important, also feel that some aspects of it intersect with their social life and

need, to a large extent, to be ‘modernised’. These women believe in an interpretation of the Koran free from political ideology, which, they reckon, would allow for respect of their need to feel free to pursue their interests, beyond the sphere of the home and the family. Quite a few young girls reject their parents’ conformity to traditions and religiosity while they, for themselves, embrace a distinction between ‘religion’ and ‘culture’. Jasmine, for instance, a 23-year-old student in a technical school, explained that the relationship with Muslim religion should not in any way be an obligation, and instead should remain a private matter for each individual. Similarly, Nazha, a 21-year-old university student, spoke of her need not to ‘always carry your own religious beliefs in your head’ and to integrate into society by taking an interest in the local-city affairs which are of a non-Muslim character.

According to Nazha, and to other second-generation women migrants, symbols of religious diversity do not need to be attached to personal appearance with bodily signifiers, such as the head scarf. It seems then that, at least among second-generation migrants, social interaction among (migrant and host) cultures, over the years, has encouraged a cultural dialogue and the cultural integration of these women. Regardless of generation, age or migration history, though, it is interesting to note a common thread running through the ideas of the women I spoke to, concerning the wearing of the *hijab*. For them it represents a private act of faith/consciousness and is not a statement of religious fundamentalism or an indication of women’s subordinate status to that of men or any other kind of oppression. In this regard, the women often spoke of the *hijab* and the relevant misconceptions, as they called them, about the position of women in Muslim cultures as seen in the Dutch media and general public opinion.¹⁶ It is this diversity of opinion

¹⁶ The head scarf affair – the Dutch version – remains a highly politicised, controversial subject of heated recurrent debates. The sweep of the debate, in others as well as in this country, ranges from the head scarf’s meaning as a form of empowerment for the woman choosing to wear it, to a means of seclusion and containment imposed by others.

that continues to make the *hijab* the subject of debate in women's meetings.

Social interaction does not lead to changes in preferences in all cases, and in spite of a widespread discourse on respect and tolerance in the Netherlands, the acceptance of other different lifestyles still remains quite difficult. Interesting topics arise in interaction, as will be shown, when there is an awareness of an unresolved cultural boundary. Parts of the study examine the cultural discontinuities experienced by some of the participants. Naturally, when these migrants came to the Netherlands, they carried with them their cultural traditions, i.e. the celebration of national and religious holidays, marriage customs, child rearing practices, family divisions of labour practices, etc. Women migrants were thought to bring with them cultural and religious visibility in the receiving society, more than men ever did. Such cultural practices may still persist to a certain extent in the new environment.

Upon arrival, the migrants in question assessed Dutch society and its political and social values as 'overly liberal' (i.e. weak family ties, dress code, gender relations, etc.). Inevitably, barriers were built between them and the Dutch natives. It became evident that the women of the study with strong ties to Islam may resent, to this day, some 'Dutch values' across a number of issues, particularly those that relate to the family, religion and education. Those attitudes are frequently based not on much direct knowledge, but rather on the generalisations and stereotypes that have accumulated over the years in the absence of social contact with Dutch mainstream society. Even among second-generation migrants there are women that claim that there is a lack of understanding between migrant and native cultural values. For example, when pondering the issue of 'values', some women express stereotypical views about 'Dutch women's' perceived 'moral extravagance and excessive behaviour'. Aisja, a 38-year-old travel agent, suggests that Dutch women 'take manners into extreme', which is 'ill-mannered' according to her, as evidenced by too revealing dressing habits, explicit social manners towards the opposite sex, single motherhood, etc.

Another such example of persisting cultural barriers is expressed in personal relationships. Social contacts with Muslim people acquire a special significance for the participants of the study and they are assigned a great deal of importance. In this regard, Khadisha (a Dutch Muslim mother) shares the cultural confusion of her daughter, Zohra, (a Dutch-Moroccan Muslim girl in her late teens), when it comes to her social life choices: 'She wishes to meet up and go out with boys her age but she would keep a distance from Moroccan boys – the group which actually would be her optimal preference for a future husband/partner – because "with them any relationship would have to be in serious terms".'

Then again, there are other cultural values and practices that have, in fact, been adapted to the new circumstances in the context of the dominant culture. Some participants of the study, for example, adopted the Christmas holiday traditions of exchanging gifts and tree decoration, while similarly, during Ramadan they plan around local workday requirements; all very different experiences, indeed, from the ones lived back in the country of origin. What remains a significant finding is the fact that after many years of living in the Netherlands and subsequent cultural adaptations, religion still seems to serve as an important resource for these women.

Kinds of contact: natives and migrants in the city

Another part of the study examines how the hosting society always positions these migrant women according to their own ways of understanding it. Stereotypical talk is also to be found here: 'We are seen by the Dutch as the "other" and we are treated with suspicion, our manners appear strange, traditional and oppressing to women', says Fatima, a 34-year-old mother of two who works part-time at a restaurant. Stereotypes, misperceptions, discrimination, negative attitudes and behaviours come easier when people have little knowledge of one another. Seemingly, to this day, migrants and natives do not know how to cross the divide. Despite programs of integration, non-migrant Dutch residents and the participants of the study do not get to know one another very much, it seems. For the

first-generation migrants, language difficulties head the list of reasons why they do not spend more time together. Yet, the women of the study claimed that even if they spoke fluent Dutch, the cultural barriers would still remain.¹⁷ According to Amina, a 19-year-old Tunisian girl, 'Since the start [referring to the first arrivals of migrants to the country] Muslim migrants [meaning Moroccans, Algerians, Tunisians] became a problem to be managed.' The majority of women find this discomfiting, but they attempt nevertheless to rationalise it by reasoning as follows: 'Once the country had settled into a set of policies regarding the migrants from the colonies, it was the time of the new migrants/guest workers arriving from the South... Then again new policies had to be arranged for the migrants, which was unsettling for the Dutch...' (Leila, 35, a Moroccan divorced mother of two boys). They do not fail to mention, though, that, in their own opinion, the adjustments were the hardest for the immigrants who arrived in the host country, where almost everything was foreign; starting with the weather, to the food, to people's customs and behaviour, to the organisation of time and leisure, etc.

Against the background of a popular debate structured in this way, it becomes less surprising why 'culture' is a notion that has been gradually silenced in Dutch society: In popular culture,

¹⁷ In recent years, at the level of public debate, there has been endless discussion with regards to relations among natives, migrants and their descendants, as well as the political and socio-cultural impacts of migration. Issues put forward in the media can be summed up as follows: Whether integration can succeed or not, key instances of confrontation between natives and migrants in neighbourhoods where the 'ethnic' percentage is strongest, low education and rising crime among migrants, and the problems 'allochtonous' cultures pose for Dutch norms and values, and so on. Such reports in the press incite open public discussion over these issues, while concerns about integration have come to occupy a central place in the way in which migration sentiments and discontent are being expressed (or rationalised) in the popular mood. Notably, there is a growing political conservative spectrum that seeks to reduce the numbers of migrants and asylum seekers and promotes a rhetoric of exclusion as a solution for the ills that migration causes to the public (Raymont 2011; Kern 2011; van der Meer and Ham 2011).

people have grown uncomfortable to manage in public the talk of identity about 'categories' such as ethnicity, 'race', and religion. Of course, this is merely a popular understanding of culture which, however, matters as a loose indicator of certain values or opinions available in society that play a role in shaping peoples' lives and relations between migrants and natives, in particular.

Integration into the city's life

For integration to work, it needs to actively go beyond stereotyped images that the mainstream public opinion creates about the different cultures in a city. For instance, the stereotypes for 'Moroccans, Algerians, Tunisians' that are often employed uncontested in media coverage is an issue for the women of the study. They discuss the need for these generalised ideas to be challenged by a detailed, clear understanding of the people and their culture. Many of the negative stereotypes about Muslim migrants play on the idea of their 'non-assimilability' into the public social life related to negative discourses about their commitment to sacred religious practices, norms of behaviour, dress etc.¹⁸

The study reveals that these ideas do not represent the reality and diversity in the forms of integration these women achieve in the city. Most of the participants developed and expressed strong identification with the city itself. Interestingly, the city, according to them, is not an integrated place. For them, it is divided into significant, meaning-bearing places. For example, Radja, a 33-year-old shop assistant, explained that she was born in *Mercato plein* (a city district), where she currently works, her children were born, and where she anticipates and hopes to spend her entire life. Karima, a woman in her 40s working as a cook, makes a similar point when she says that her neighbourhood is called 'little Morocco' by its residents because of the high percentage of residents of Moroccan origin, the many eth-

¹⁸ See, for example, newspaper articles about Wilders' party's anti-immigration line with slogans such as 'Henk and Ingrid are paying for Ali and Fatima', which hinge on the supposed failure of these communities to integrate (*De telegraaf*, April 2010).

nic cultural centres, the ethnic store fronts and products, and the number of children of migrant origin in the local primary school. She participates in the area of her district as a resident, a consumer and a service user. Socially and culturally she is satisfied with her networks. Her social world revolves around people of many nationalities and she feels that she is involved, in many local ways, in public city life, but not in the sense prescribed by 'the dominant official ideas of what migrants should do in order to integrate'.

Many of the women of the study live in municipally owned houses in neighbourhoods where a high percentage of the residents is of migrant origin. Patterns of sociability are affected by this, such as schooling. Ramu, a 27-year-old cashier, describes how she thoroughly investigated the issue of to which school she would send her children. She intended to find a school with a large proportion of migrant pupils, but not one stereotyped as a 'black school'.¹⁹ She explained that, in popular terms, the schools identified as 'black' are the ones where the majority of pupils is of Maghrebi origin. 'Surinamese kids go to white schools', she adds. Most of the participants of the study expressed a preference for multicultural schools for the education of their children and preferably schools with high or moderate academic records, but not exclusively Muslim schools.

Evidently, the study found that there is a constant reflection and self-consciousness in matters of religion and culture amongst these women, and the social meanings of categories are detected and negotiated within the safe spaces of the migrant associations. Another important finding is the strong connection felt by the women towards their city and the increased

contact with other groups outside their own ethnic circles, not so much, however, with their native Dutch counterparts.

Conclusion

This article attempted to contextualise migrant integration processes by looking for references in the social reality of Muslim migrant women's everyday choices, actions, and practices within Dutch society. Contextualising is important as we need to humanise and intensify qualitatively what we know about the central themes to do with the sphere of migrant integration in today's societies. This article also tried to show the processes of integration from below with initiatives by Muslim migrant women in the context of migrant associations, designed and implemented to mobilise resources other than the official policies imposed 'from above', based on agendas of the migrant women themselves to satisfy their needs and represent their interests.

When it comes to the question of who sets the terms of integration in this case, the present study does not purport to give any definite answers. We can only describe the trajectories of the women of the study in relation to their integration dilemmas and try to draw some conclusions. However, drawing on the modalities of integration from below in this case, the empirical findings suggest that what happened to these migrant women is more a kind of structural integration in the city's life rather than integration in the mainstream cultural behaviour. In the bottom-up version of integration explored in this paper, it would have been somewhat odd if the success of migrant women's integration were measured entirely in terms of the norms of integration set by the state they live in. The destiny of full integration under these state norms, however, may not be the norm for these particular migrant women. A rather different picture may be emerging. In these less formal conditions, the imperative of integration according to state norms starts to lessen and another integration scenario is offered to these women. If they find the integration offered by the state unappealing, or if they find themselves in negative socio-economic conditions, the women will prove resilient

¹⁹ There is a prevalent divide into the so-called 'white' and 'black' schools in the Netherlands, linked to racial, educational as well as economic factors. This is an issue of concern in the public debate because, firstly, on average children in 'black' schools are performing below par, and secondly because it is feared that the lack of contact between native Dutch and migrant children will lead to strained relations between the high-income Dutch native groups (white) and low-level income migrant groups (black) in the long run (Karsten 1994).

enough to follow an integration path to encompass their self-organised informal activities in the city. The crucial issue of their cultural integration is still a hot button issue for all parties concerned. One is left with a certain scepticism towards how the issues of cultural difference and recognition are dealt with in official policies, as far as the integration of Muslim women migrants of the study is concerned. But aside from the official integration policies there is, now, another operative sphere of differentiated practices of integration, in particular local settings of society, that need to be addressed in the overall integration debate to make it theoretically clearer and politically satisfactory. This new project of integration from below promises some hope but still raises questions on the recognition of cultural difference, not mere acknowledgement of its existence, but respect for its expression.

I shall close by noting that what appeared to be the starting premise of this paper will also be its conclusion: Observing the actual way that these Muslim migrant women try to integrate

in the city where they live, is seen here as contributing to the understanding of the integration debate in its actual, applied – not abstract – terms. The success of the integration process in the host society is confirmed by the behaviour of migrants in it, who are acting as orthodox political actors, pursuing their interests, and adapting the tools and opportunities of the polity to their own ends (Favell 1998). The apparent disregard in official integration politics of these everyday, perhaps prosaic, politics of migrants themselves left a gap in adequately grasping multiculturalism and its dilemmas. These politics, when examined, point rightly to the complexities and difficulties involved in living together with the other by revealing the actual practices of integration in certain parts and contexts of society, and they may provide new insights to conceptualise the puzzling integration questions. In practice, integration is marked by considerable variation, as in the case explored here. Recognising this variation can be an ideal vehicle for designing a more nuanced and liberal path of integration policies.

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Soft Skills and Hard Prejudices: Pathways to Improving the Life Chances of Recent Immigrant Women in Ottawa, Canada¹

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Abstract

The article is a case study of how a community-based organisation in Ottawa Canada, the City for All Women Initiative (CAWI), has evolved in the ways it contributes to improving some immigrant women's life chances. In describing the evolving roles of CAWI, we hope to demonstrate the potential utility of a public sector strategy based on three interrelated aspects: meaningful employment and employment-related training; empowerment; and a capacity to measure outcomes. By situating this description within the context of recent immigration in Canada, the article explains how these three interrelated aspects have been increasingly addressed by the organisation, and how they might be generalised in policy terms. Illustrating the development of these three interrelated activities, we hope to show how this combination of activities came into place and how they work to achieve not only employment objectives, but also social and civic engagement goals.

Introduction

Our title, 'Soft Skills and Hard Prejudices', is meant to signal both a description of the current situation for immigrant women in Canada, and a way forward in policy terms. By using a case study of how a community-based organisation in Ottawa Canada, the City for All Women Initiative (CAWI), has evolved in the ways it contributes to improving some immigrant women's life chances, we hope to demonstrate the potential utility of a public sector strategy that would be based on three interrelated aspects: meaningful employment and employment-related training; empowerment; and a capacity to measure out-

comes. Below, we describe the evolution of the activities of CAWI within the context of recent immigration in Canada, in order to explain how these three interrelated aspects have increasingly been addressed by this organisation, and how they might be generalised in policy terms.

CAWI is a community-based organisation in the City of Ottawa, Canada's national capital and one part of the National Capital Region (NCR). The NCR brings together the City of Ottawa situated in the Province of Ontario, and the City of Gatineau, located in the Province of Quebec. It is important to note that although Ottawa-Gatineau forms one region in terms of labour market and place of residence, the two cities are divided by important provincial jurisdictions that have great significance for immigration policies.

Canada's founding constitutional document, the British North America Act, allocates the issue of immigration as a shared jurisdiction between the federal and the provincial levels of government. Quebec has had, since 1978 and more

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formally since 1991, exclusive control over the reception and integration of immigrants to Quebec (Germain and Trinh 2011: 257). Ontario has in recent years demanded the same type of agreement, but this demand has been rejected by the federal government (Biles et al. 2011: 206). For this reason, the organisation and policy context of immigrant integration is very different within the two provincial components of the National Capital Region. Our story takes place within the City of Ottawa, on the Ontario side of the region.

Ottawa has a population of almost 900,000, which makes up approximately 75 per cent of the population of the National Capital Region (1.2 million in 2011). In contrast to Ottawa's much larger sister city in Ontario, Toronto, where the Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) of Toronto had a foreign-born population of 45.7 per cent in 2006 (up from 43.7 per cent in 2001),² Ottawa has only recently begun to receive a sizeable immigrant population. Ottawa's population is now at about 22 per cent foreign-born, but this level of diversity is quite recent, in contrast to the historical divide of language as the predominant marker of diversity between the English and the French-speaking populations, a divide that continues to be an important dimension of the political context of the City of Ottawa.³ The foreign-born population of Ottawa is very diverse; the major sources of immigration in 2006 were Asia, the Middle East, Europe and Africa. The two largest language groups are Arabic-speaking and Chinese, but in total, over 70 mother tongue languages are spoken in Ottawa.⁴

CAWI was established in 2004, and can be understood as the latest version on the part of

Ottawa-based feminists to make decision-making in the city more sensitive to, and inclusive of, gender. Earlier efforts were inspired by the Declaration on Women in Local Government of the International Union of Local Authorities (now called United Cities and Local Government), as well as the activities of the City of Montreal, where there was a unit of the city administration dedicated to gender equity that had been very active between 1992 and 2006.

In Ottawa, CAWI's mission was, at its inception, to bring together women from diverse communities, to work with municipal decision-makers to create a more inclusive city, and to promote gender equality. CAWI's activities started as offering training initiatives in civic participation to help women learn how to influence decision-making at City Hall, then working in partnership with City of Ottawa staff to create a management training tool called the Equity and Inclusion Lens (CAWI 2010), and still later creating 'women's action forum' meetings to examine the implications of important local decisions and policies, and advocating to the city on issues relevant to its mission. Recent immigrant women form an important part of CAWI's membership and this article will focus particularly on the recent immigrant members of CAWI (Klodawsky et al. 2012).⁵

Two of the authors (Andrew and Klodawsky) are members of CAWI's Steering Committee and have been active participants in CAWI since its creation in 2004, they therefore have an 'insider' perspective, whereas the third author (Siltanen) has an 'outsider' perspective on CAWI and became involved in this research project at the invitation of the other two authors because of her expertise in methodology and her experience in working reflexively in a team research project (Siltanen et al. 2008).⁶ All three authors favour post-positivist perspectives (Naples 2003;

² Census 2006 Analysis Series 97-557 XIE 2006001 Immigration in Canada.

³ For a description of the policy around immigration to minority Francophone communities outside Quebec, see Andrew and Abdourhamane Hima (2011). It is also important to indicate the dimension of the historical diversity as including the relations between the Aboriginal population living in the region and the settler population.

⁴ Demolinguistic Profile - 2001-2011, Census Metropolitan Area of Ottawa-Gatineau, Research Team, Official Language Support Programs Branch, Department of Canadian Heritage, 2012.

⁵ The Klodawsky et al article dealt with the early civic participation training of CAWI and in particular with a CAWI presentation to the Ottawa City Council. It has an entirely different focus from the present text. More information on CAWI can be obtained from its web site, www.cawi-ivtf.org.

⁶ This article deals with an entirely separate team research experience and therefore looks at a completely different research project.

Sprague 2005; May and Perry 2011), which reconfigure the experience of researchers as a resource – and not a problem – for enhancing the quality and rigour of analysis. We are also influenced by authors (Brannick and Coughlan 2007; Doucet and Mauthner 2003) who have articulated the possibilities of ‘insider’ research, including the values of access and pre-understanding (Brannick and Coughlan 2007) and more generally, the possibilities this position can offer to incorporating reflexivity into the research process. We have been very conscious of the need to be reflexive about the specificity of our individual perspectives, but see the overall value of our different situated knowledge providing the possibility of a more comprehensive and integrated account of the experiences we have researched.

Theorising the role of immigrant women’s community associations

There has been a very interesting debate in *Les Cahiers du genre* on the impact of immigrant women’s associations in helping to improve the lives of immigrant women. Erel (2011-2012: 151) argues that it is necessary to understand political activism more broadly and less specifically oriented to formal political participation, in order to understand the vitality of the associational practices of immigrant women. Not only do these associations give women a space to articulate political positions, but this form of associational activity has also allowed, according to Erel’s study, the women’s gendered and racialised identities to be integrated within their overall identities. There may be a number of stages, from the expression of identities to concrete socio-political action, but women’s associational activity at least forms an environment for the development of a less segmented identity than what they may be living in their individual lives, both at work and in the family.

In contrast, Campani (2011-2012) takes a slightly more pessimistic position in her research on immigrant women and their associational activities in Italy over the last 20 years. Although the context is quite different from that of Canada, the measurement of success in terms of significant socio-economic transformation of the lives

of immigrant women warrants serious consideration. Campani recognises the growth of the associations and the work they do to foster a desire for real socio-political participation on the part of the women, but she emphasises that the impact of these activities on the real, lived conditions of the immigrant women is negligible, given the socio-economic structure of Italian society. The associations have been active, but they have been unable to change the systemic trend in which female immigrants and Italian-born females work, essentially in the ‘care’ sector (Campani 2011-2012: 55), with immigrant women being heavily involved in domestic labour. Without an important transformation with regard to the status of women in Italian society – that is, more than simply replacing Italian-born women in their family responsibilities with immigrant women playing the same roles – the vibrancy of immigrant associational activity will continue to be limited in its impact.

Another variation in this debate is highlighted by King and Cruickshank (2012) in raising questions about forms of engagement and making the distinction between community engagement by governments and government engagement by communities. By focussing on developing the capacities of communities to engage governments, the result is the promotion of a longer term vision, a more holistic and systemic perspective, a better understanding of the complexity of communities, and more culturally and appropriately processed knowledge (King and Cruickshank 2012: 9-10).

It is interesting to look at these debates in terms of CAWI and its ability to promote meaningful change. Certainly it has not concentrated on formal politics and encouraging women to run for office, or being on formal advisory boards. CAWI has focussed broadly on socio-political participation, on articulating visions of alternate societies, and also on bringing the reality on diverse women’s lives to the attention of municipal decision-makers (Klodawsky et al. 2012). Much effort has been expended on developing community capacity to engage with municipal government through training activities, careful presentations to committees, arranging meet-

ings with elected officials, and the organisation of activities for women to learn about and organise themselves in relation to current community and municipal issues. There has been some activity related to developing the capacity of government to engage community, notably in the work done by CAWI to propose public engagement processes and policies to the City, but these have been relatively limited as compared to the much greater effort to develop the skills of community women to engage with government.

At the same time, Campani's analysis must be examined seriously in relation to CAWI, even while taking into account the very different contexts and scales of activity. The focus of CAWI's activities has been at the municipal level and therefore on dealing with issues at a local scale. But has CAWI changed the power dynamics in the City of Ottawa? Are women, and particularly immigrant women, regarded as having equal knowledge and expertise qualifying them to participate in and inform council decisions within the City of Ottawa? The pertinence of Campani's analysis is to shift the focus to the larger power relations at play, and to look beyond the level at which the associational activity is taking place. This is perhaps too global an approach for this particular text, but it is an approach that needs to be examined. The empowerment felt by members of CAWI is clear and not to be underestimated, but Campani does remind us that we also need to think on a larger and more structural scale.

Setting the context: The goal of meaningful employment

The immigrant women who have been the most involved in CAWI have been primarily well-educated women, many of whom held important positions in their home countries but who have found themselves underemployed or unemployed in Ottawa. Their experiences of underemployment and unemployment reflect a larger trend in immigrant integration in Canada: Over the last 10-15 years, the rate of integration of recent immigrants (measured primarily in income terms) has slowed down considerably (Sweetman and Warman 2008).

The situation in Ottawa has been exacerbated by the fact that, in the past few years, Western Canada has been a more attractive area for immigrant settlement, owing to a more vibrant, resource-based economy. In addition, federal government jobs, which represent the largest sector of employment in the region, require Canadian citizenship or a landed immigrant status and are therefore basically closed to recent immigrants. Some of the federal public sector jobs also require active English-French bilingualism, which is also a constraint for some of the recent immigrant population (Andrew et al. 2012).

But there is also a specifically gendered account of immigrant integration in Ontario, and it is this story that is particularly relevant to CAWI. Our information on the employment experiences of educated immigrant women in Canada is based on Toronto-area data; but the insights that it provides with regard to the analysis of interactions between educational attainment, age, gender and labour market outcomes are very revealing. The analysis is based on Canadian census data and provides comparisons of immigrant arrivals across three time periods: 1981-1990, 1991-2000, and 2001-2006. These cross-sectional comparisons help to illuminate the impacts of educational level changes of immigrants in relation to their employment outcomes over a 25 year time frame (Preston et al. 2011).

The educational levels of immigrants arriving in Toronto have increased considerably in the most recent period (2001-2006), with 40.1 per cent of female immigrants and 45.5 per cent of male immigrants holding university degrees (Preston et al. 2011: 5), as compared to the period of 1981 to 1990, when only 22.5 per cent of female immigrants and 24.9 per cent of male immigrants had achieved this level of education. This difference between female and male immigrants has remained relatively constant between the arrival period of 1991-2000 and that of 2001-2006.

The levels of university education for both immigrant women and men are higher than those for their Canadian-born peers, yet the immigrants' economic circumstances are con-

siderably lower when compared to the equivalently educated Canadian population. University-educated immigrant women do dramatically less well economically than do both their male immigrant peers and their university-educated, Canadian-born female peers. This disadvantage can be seen in Table 1 below, which shows data drawn from the Toronto Immigrant Employment Data Initiative (TIEDI) and illustrates the differences in earnings of university-educated women and men, foreign and Canadian born, by period of immigration.

Unemployment levels also are indicative of the doubly disadvantaged position of educated female immigrants. Differences in unemployment rates are largest between Canadian-born

is well represented in CAWI. Their decision to participate in CAWI is articulated in terms of an interest to engage with local municipal and community issues and to have women's voices be more clearly present in local decision-making. Membership in CAWI is on an individual basis and is not related to membership in other organisations. Many of the women in CAWI do belong to other community associations, but this activity is not related to their membership in CAWI. CAWI's focus has been its engagement with municipal government, which has been relatively rare for women's organisations in Canada and equally rare for immigrant organisations in Canada. The municipal engagement has been a reason for women being attracted to CAWI and

	Canadian-Born	All Immigrants**	Immigrants 1981-1990	Immigrants 1991- 2000	Immigrants 2001 – 2006
Women	\$44,278.30	\$28,346.00	\$35,777.40	\$27,656.30	\$14,861.60
Men	\$81,416.10	\$44,908.00	\$49,609.70	\$41,782.00	\$25,417.30

Table 1: Average annual earnings (gross: 2005 dollars) for Canadian-born and immigrant university degree holders by period of immigration and gender, Toronto CMA.

** Includes immigrants who arrived before and after 1981

Source: Preston et al. 2010. Data is from Statistics Canada Census of Canada 2006

and immigrant adults with university degrees and, once again, the gap is twice as large for female immigrants with university degrees as it is for their male peers. For immigrant men with university education, the gap in unemployment levels is two per cent compared to Canadian-born men, whereas for similarly educated female immigrants and Canadian-born women, the gap in unemployment levels is almost four per cent (Preston et al. 2011: 12).

As we have said, these figures come from immigrants arriving in Toronto, but the reality of recent immigration in Ottawa is similar. There are an increasing number of well-educated female immigrants who are unemployed or underemployed, despite their considerable efforts to obtain employment consistent with their educational levels and work experience, acquired both in their countries of origin as well as following their arrival in Ottawa. This group

so too has been a more individual preoccupation to gain Canadian experience both volunteer and work-related, as a way of increasing contacts in the search for employment that relates to their work experience and education levels. A lack of Canadian experience has been clearly identified as one of the major barriers to successful immigrant integration in Canada (Sweetman and Warman 2008).

Decent employment is certainly a goal for immigrants of all educational levels, but the increasing number of highly educated immigrant women locked in jobs well below their capabilities, or without jobs at all, does call for new strategies. Immigrant women are more likely than Canadian-born women to have an advanced university degree (Mitra 2010) and they fare worse than either Canadian-born women or immigrant men. Credentials acquired in non-Canadian universities are systematically devalued and over-

looked. As a result, highly skilled immigrant women are more likely to work in low-skilled jobs than are non-immigrant women, while Canadian-born women are more likely than immigrant women to work in managerial, professional, and clerical (i.e., higher skilled) occupations (Tastsoglou and Miedema 2005). These differences are even more striking when comparing the situation in the three largest census metropolitan areas (Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal), where immigrant women earn an average of \$5,500 more than their counterparts in less populated cities and rural areas (Solovyeva 2011).

Human capital can be thought of as the knowledge, skills, and attributes that increase the productivity of a worker. Those with education and workplace experience have by this definition more human capital and therefore, according to human capital theory, should find themselves in better employment. If this is not the case, and as we have demonstrated above, this is clearly not the case for well-educated female recent immigrants, particular constraints are preventing the greater human capital of these well-educated female immigrants from being recognised. Our argument here is that these constraints are, on the one hand, the constraint of lack of Canadian experience and, on the other, the stereotyping of the qualifications of female recent immigrants (Grant and Nadin 2007).

Moving from a sense of empowerment to employment-related training

The evolution of CAWI's activities reflects a growing preoccupation with the issue of meaningful employment, especially for recent immigrant women. CAWI's original mandate emphasised above all else the need to influence decision-making within the City of Ottawa to become more gender-inclusive. However, in the very early period of CAWI's development, the organisation faced a City Hall that was preoccupied with other issues and not receptive to initiating activities aimed at greater participation in City decision-making processes.

In the course of conducting 'baseline' interviews with women in community-based groups, CAWI discovered that the level of knowledge

about, and comfort with, municipal government in Ottawa was extremely limited. This led CAWI to seek and obtain funds for a project to train women from community-based organisations to be involved, as politically engaged citizens, with the City of Ottawa. This orientation towards training was done with a focus on the empowerment of women, motivated by the goal of giving women a clearer sense of their rights as residents of Ottawa to have a voice in the decision-making process. It was also motivated by the goal of building capacity and concrete skills relevant to such an endeavour, including: meeting with elected representatives; making public presentations to council committees; interacting with media; and formulating positions for advocacy.

At a somewhat later stage, CAWI received 'fee for service' funds from the City of Ottawa to carry out public consultation activities in relation to the development of a new Recreation Master Plan. This endeavour involved the need to train CAWI members as animators and facilitators of focus groups with the aim of encouraging the participation of a wide variety of Ottawa residents from neighbourhoods across the City. The City was motivated to support this activity in order to hear from marginalised groups and for going well beyond simply listening to the well-organised sports and recreation groups. The initiative enabled CAWI to understand the significance of such training for CAWI's role as increasing citizen involvement in policy-making work with the City of Ottawa, but also the importance of this work for the women as individuals in terms of their acquisition of useful, and potentially marketable, skills. The earlier civic engagement training had been deemed highly successful largely on the basis of the enthusiasm of the graduates, but also because of the increasing interest of the City of Ottawa to work with CAWI, as illustrated in the example described above. The fact that the City was willing to pay for CAWI's training activity also led CAWI to see the interest of more skill-based training.

This led CAWI to develop a project to carry out community engagement facilitator training. The objectives of this project were both individual

and collective: to enable women to develop marketable skills as facilitators, and to empower them to realise the potential strength of collective action. The training was designed to rebuild the self-confidence they had often lost through the experience of being undervalued in the Canadian job market and, additionally, to give them tangible but difficult to articulate or measure 'soft' skills relevant in Canadian society. Although the training was a small project with a very limited budget, and only involved less than half a dozen trainees, it did allow those who participated in the training to gain specific experience in an area that was both a recognised occupation and one that was well regarded in Ottawa because of the need of the federal government and the NGO sector for facilitators. Without the requirement for specific credentials, facilitation is more accessible to a wide group of female immigrants than occupations stipulating the need for formal recognition of foreign credentials.

The training work of CAWI is regarded as being of value to both individual members and to CAWI as an organisation, but the skill sets being gained are increasingly tied to the opportunity to enhance individual employment outcomes. This has not reduced the collective enthusiasm of CAWI members for the sense they have that CAWI is a real presence in the City of Ottawa, bringing diverse women's voices to the table to be heard by local politicians and bureaucrats. Rather, it adds to the attraction of being an active participant of CAWI.

A recent group discussion with women involved in CAWI's strategic planning activities heard extremely clear statements, particularly by recently arrived immigrant women, about the feelings of collective strength, the sense of conviviality, and the very strong sense of the inclusiveness of CAWI – all characteristics that the organisation is committed to retain and foster. There was strong support not only for the collective aspects of CAWI's work, but also for the facilitator training where benefits accrue more to the specific women being trained. At the same time, the discussion on what should happen next with regard to CAWI-initiated training endeavours illustrates the organisation's vulnerability.

CAWI is entirely dependent on project funding and the weakness of this model is very well known. CAWI has been successful in obtaining funds from numerous public agencies – municipal, provincial and federal – from such places as: Status of Women Canada (federal), the Trillium Foundation (provincial), the Ottawa United Way, Ottawa Community Foundation, and the City of Ottawa. However, this situation means always having to be aware of donor priorities and strategising about how best to fit what one wants to do with the language and priorities of the donors. It also means a huge expenditure of time in the detailed preparation of proposals and often in prolonged negotiations around the details of the proposal. We will come back to this question in our section on measurement.

The vulnerability of CAWI in terms of the evolution of its training-related initiatives also relates to the fact that, as referred to above, 'soft skills' are real and important but difficult to define and even more difficult to measure. Some of them relate to culturally defined practices, such as the assumption in many cultures that it is inappropriate for women to look directly at a male boss when being questioned by him; whereas in other societies (such as Canada) the assumption by the male boss is that the female employee is not being forthright and perhaps even hiding something if she will not look at him directly. Whether or not this specific example is necessarily gender-based, the authors have heard this situation being described and interpreted as gender-based by the female employee remembering a specific situation she had experienced.

But making the more general case about soft skills, the Canadian literature is very thin and yet by the very nature of soft skills they must relate to a specific society and even specific contexts within that society. In general the Canadian literature puts considerable emphasis on the ability to work with others and to develop the complete collection of our social, communication, and self-management behaviours. These are the skills that enable us to work effectively and 'fit in' at the workplace. Examples of soft skills are: demonstrating integrity and ethical behaviour; being motivated and having a positive attitude; and

critically analyzing information (Ryerson University, Toronto. Chang School of Continuing Education. Definition of soft skills).

Another similar example comes from the magazine *Canadian Immigrant* and an article listing 'Nine soft skills no immigrant should be without' (Noorani 2011). The skills listed were: communication skills, local language skills, presentation skills, small talk, leadership and initiative, conflict resolution and negotiation, accepting constructive criticism, flexibility, and, finally, business etiquette. In the messages relating to this article, others added networking, interpretation and interaction skills, the skill 'to be liked', and a comment that,

in Canada people value praising (much more than in other places). What does a "great" really mean in a particular context? What are the messages behind phrases and body language? That's not written in any dictionary but it has to be observed. And it can be the difference of being accepted or not.

A final example comes from the Toronto newspaper, the *Globe and Mail*, suggesting that increasing importance is being given to the development of soft skills.

In the aftermath of the global recession, Canada's corporations have asked the country's business schools to turn out graduates with more abstract leaderships skills – also known as soft skills – because they want leaders that can look beyond the spreadsheets and statistics.

Business schools are aware that it's no longer enough for graduates to say, 'I have an MBA.' Now, a future business leader needs to know how to demonstrate soft skills, such as communication, social awareness and a strong work ethic, to illustrate to prospective employers how and why a person will make a good employee (*Globe and Mail*, 18 January 2013).

Comparing Canadian lists of soft skills with those developed in other countries, Canadian lists do not seem to include as many references to making decisions, commitment to the job or creativity. Soft skills emphasised in the Canadian context seem to relate to communication skills and getting along with fellow workers.

Building the capacity to measure outcomes

The need for more systematic engagement of immigrant women in decision-making as advanced by Campani brings us to the question of measurement and the capacity to measure the outcomes of CAWI's activities. We need to first reflect on why we would want to measure the results of CAWI's activities. Is it not enough that the women come to the activities, enjoy getting together and by their presence indicate that the activities are worthwhile? One could take an even stronger position and ask if it is not counterproductive to ask CAWI to spend valuable time measuring its activities when this time could be more productively used in examining ways to organise future activities or developing messages to be conveyed to some particular committee meeting in the City of Ottawa. However, there are good reasons to measure the outcomes of CAWI's activities, and thinking about this issue allows us to better understand not only why we should measure impact, but also what outputs/outcomes to measure.

Most obviously, CAWI needs to measure outcomes in order to satisfy existing funders and, even more importantly, to find new ones. Being entirely financed by project funding, the need for CAWI to relate successfully to funders is a front and centre preoccupation. In addition, identifying what should be measured might provide an opportunity to think more broadly about what indicators should be measured and the potential benefits of such an evaluation; for example, having certain data could attract funders interested not only in training but in areas such as civic engagement, immigrant employment, and women's empowerment, among others. Activities such as those initiated by CAWI always have multiple outcomes, both in terms of process and content, but each measure can be tied to specific outcomes.

Evaluation is also necessary for policy innovation (Patton 2011; Cousins and Chouinard 2012). It is difficult to lobby effectively for special programming for immigrant women if one cannot demonstrate that the existing situation is producing inequitable results or, at the very least, less than optimal results. Measurement can indi-

cate that, not only would individual immigrant women gain from special programming, but that there would be collective community benefits. This is particularly important for our focus on highly educated immigrant women as it is necessary to highlight this relatively new pool of skilled labour. Accurate measurement of, for instance, the results of training programs, might be used in discussions with employers to encourage them to hire highly educated immigrant women who had successfully completed training, including learning 'soft skills' important for the Canadian labour market. This may help to break down the hard prejudices of Canadian employers who have tended to see female immigrants as uneducated and unskilled, and therefore low paid employees. Without quantitative evidence, these prejudices are harder to counter.

Even more importantly, measurement is valuable to the group itself. It allows the group to understand whether it is doing what it wants to do and to what extent it is achieving its objectives. An important additional dimension to evaluation is that it can reveal to all stakeholders involved that they are achieving objectives they might not otherwise be aware of. Measurement, both quantitative and qualitative, can offer a group insights that allows them to reflect on whether they are meeting their desired goals. For this to be useful, it is important that evaluation be a conscious choice by the group and not imposed from the outside. This certainly has been the case for CAWI, who has on a number of occasions conducted community-based evaluations of its own projects, working in partnership with the Centre for Research on Educational and Community Services (CRECS) at the University of Ottawa. One such example is the 'Formative Evaluation of the Civic Participation Training of the City for All Women Initiative', completed in 2008. It was undertaken by a team of evaluators led by a professor of psychology from the University of Ottawa, who is a specialist in evaluation, one of his PhD students, and three community evaluators from CAWI. CAWI has learned that measurement is important for funders, both for attracting new funders and for establishing positive relationships with existing funders. These

positive relations include brainstorming possibilities for future projects once the competence and professionalism of the community group has been established.

An article by Gaye and Jha (2011) does a very thorough job in reviewing the literature and raising questions about the measurement of women's empowerment through migration. Gaye and Jha focus on quantitative measurement, but recognising the importance of context, they also introduce a space for qualitative measurements. Certainly qualitative measures are a necessary part of any evaluation of CAWI. Earlier in this article, we described the ways in which CAWI members experience a sense of collective inclusion and a sense of being recognised as part of CAWI. These qualitative dimensions of inclusion are important to measure, to better understand in what ways the feelings of inclusion are related to being recognised as an individual, as a member of some particular group, as a member of an intersectional combination of identities, and the ways that individual and group recognition are experienced as identical, overlapping or distinct. Another qualitative dimension relates to specific examples of feeling included or recognised and might include examples of the kinds of mutual recognition or civic conviviality described in the writings of Charles Tully and Paul Gilroy (Tully 2012; Gilroy 2004).

Yet another qualitative dimension that could be investigated relates to an interest in CAWI's prefigurative activities (Siltanen et al. 2011). This could take the form of exploring qualitative dimensions of CAWI's ability to live the values of the society they want to see established. It would be extremely interesting to try to get CAWI members to reflect on this question and on the challenges in trying to operate in this way in the here and now. One possible resource might come from a project on real utopias, currently being developed by Erik Olin Wright (Wright 2012). One example that Wright has given of a real utopia is the public library, where knowledge is free, easily accessible, and available to all. Thinking about real utopian spaces and discussing why they are seen as such might be a way to get glimpses of the pre-figurative aspects of CAWI's activities

and to understand the ways in which these activities have influenced its members.

The question of what should be measured also relates to the distinction between measuring process vs. measuring outcomes. In recent writings there have been increasing calls to give more importance to the measurement of process. Whitzman's article (2007) examines four feminist planning organisations based on four criteria for success that are basically related to outcomes. However, the article ends by according considerable importance to the longevity of the organisations and to the capacity for learning from other organisations as well as from their own successes and failures. As Whitzman states, these process issues become 'a challenge for researchers concerned with real life planning practice, and the theory deriving from that practice' (Whitzman 2007: 224). This interest in examining and theorising process can also be seen in Mizrahi (Mizrahi 2007: 51), with the emphasis on process as a way of highlighting the link between the individual and the collective, and in Bacchi and Eveline (2010), with the politics of 'doing' based on a greater attention 'to the practices, processes and procedures associated with developing these initiatives' (Bacchi and Eveline 2010: 314).

Conclusion

This article has outlined the evolution of the approaches that CAWI has put into place in its efforts to improve the situation of the numerous immigrant women who arrive in Ottawa with high levels of educational achievement, and often significant work experience, but who have found themselves under- employed if not unemployed. The question remains: Has CAWI's evolving strategy been successful, or more prudently, are there indications at the present time that this strategy of training, empowerment and measurement is leading to better outcomes for

at least some recent immigrant women? As we described earlier, the training component of CAWI's work has become increasingly focused on job-related training. The present facilitator training was set up to incorporate an element of enhancing employable skills, linked to the rationale that government departments and national NGOs in Ottawa require the use of facilitators in many circumstances. In addition there are CAWI members who have obtained employment through their engagement with CAWI.

While the goal of offering activities leading to meaningful employment is still in development, CAWI's work on empowerment has had a tangible impact. The coordinator of CAWI has done a great deal of capacity building on an individual basis with CAWI members. Capacity building activities have included carefully preparing members for chairing meetings, working with those selected to present CAWI reports to municipal council committee meetings, and helping members prepare for interviews with journalists. These efforts help to empower the women and rebuild their confidence, which has often been shaken from their early experiences of being undervalued in Ottawa. In addition to the individual work, CAWI group processes, as described earlier, have also increased members' sense of empowerment, both on a personal and collective basis.

We have described the vulnerability of CAWI, both in terms of its capacity to measure results in ways that funders are interested in financing and, even more difficult to influence, in terms of the changing priorities, and procedures, of the funding agencies. However, despite this vulnerability, the development of CAWI over time has shown the potential of a public sector strategy of training, empowerment and measurement to improve the economic, social and cultural lives of recent immigrant women in Canadian society.

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Casamance Refugee Women's Engagement with Development Programming in the Gambia

By Gail Hopkins

Abstract

In situations of protracted displacement, integration is often the only viable option. Regaining independence and self-reliance is key to medium and long term re-establishment of lives in exile. Where the receiving country is a developing country, the practical challenges of integration are compounded by the existing context of poverty into which refugees arrive. International and local agencies work to provide support through assistance programming including skills training but face diverse challenges which impact on outcomes for refugee women. Whilst displacement may bring positive social change for some, gains can be eroded by shortcomings within assistance programming.

Through the lens of gendered experiences of forced migration, this paper discusses how Casamance refugee women in The Gambia engage with development programming such as skills training, their access to programmes, and to what degree the refugee women are able to successfully translate training into sustainable livelihoods.

Introduction

Refugees from the Casamance region of Senegal continue to enter The Gambia as a result of what is Africa's longest running conflict (Evans 2004). Mostly residing in Gambian border villages with a minority continuing to urban areas, women and girls form more than half of this refugee population. As Mehta points out, whilst displacement may bring positive social change, which may reorder social and gender relations and previously experienced social and cultural restrictions, programming fails to minimise the loss encountered during displacement (2011: 1). The potential gain on one hand and the loss on the other limit the potential particularly of women and girls and traps them in vulnerable situations, albeit different ones. This article discusses how Casamance refugee women settling in The Gambia as a result of the continued instability in the Casamance region access and engage with assistance programming such as skills training, and to what

degree the refugee women successfully translate training into sustainable livelihoods and, if they do not, what the barriers are to doing so. How do these women see their futures and those of their daughters now that their traditional livelihoods as subsistence farmers have been disrupted and replaced with the uncertainties of farming poor soil in Gambian host villages or, for example, taking in washing in the urban areas, or adapting to learning new skills? What sense do they make of food and material assistance and of skills training in moving forward their displaced lives? Through the lens of gendered experiences of forced migration, this article considers the effectiveness and stumbling points of assistance programming as experienced and reported by Casamance women, and explores whether programming in The Gambia meets refugee expectations. The aim is to employ the approach to assisting refugees in The Gambia to inform approaches in other develop-

ing country contexts, particularly in situations of protracted refugee situations (Crisp 2003), and to highlight which facets of assistance programming would be useful to develop or alter. Standard or long-used methods of “dealing with” or approaching the “problem” of refugees are logistically difficult to change. But if, as is the consensus, assistance programming has the intention to ultimately recreate self-reliance, independence, and to restore dignity (Crisp 2003; Hunter 2009; UNHCR 2011), then methods that are currently only partially effective warrant revision. This article argues that the evidently limited success of assistance programming in The Gambia results in women’s lives being constrained or diminished and that this is particularly apparent regarding the translation of skills training into sustainable income generation. Such limitations negatively impact the women’s ability to regain self-reliance and their integration, and generate continued reliance on assistance rather than facilitating a pathway from assistance to independence. Where repatriation is unlikely in the foreseeable future, as it is in the case of Casamance, the “forgotten” solution of integration (Jacobsen 2001) must be fully and effectively engaged with by international organisations, their local partners, and by refugees in order to support refugees in rebuilding lives.

Competing forces such as traditional social and family expectations of gendered lives and life potentials, material desires generated by the media and urban experience, and the awareness that continuing a subsistence farming lifestyle in exile necessarily requires support, influence Casamance refugee women’s attitudes to their present and their future. Women’s expressed experiences of the past and present and their hopes and desire for an improved future – or at least a self-reliant future – in the face of current deprivation and vulnerability, must underpin policy related to women refugees in developing country contexts. This is particularly so in situations of protracted displacement where local integration is the viable option, such as with Casamance refugees. Testimonies such as, “My father forced me to abandon my education and marry. I don’t want my daughters to have the life I had,

they will have education”, provide evidence that women have a vision of an improved future for their daughters if not for themselves.

Those who are involved in the design and delivery of assistance and programming are in some ways also guardians of access to a changed and, as Mehta notes, a positive future. However, as Hunter (2009: 2-3) points out in a criticism of UNHCR and its policy toward self-reliance, the potential benefits to refugees of a policy which encourages self-reliance are undermined by accompanying reductions of material assistance due to reduced UNHCR budgets. According to Hunter, “The effects are paradoxical. Refugees are expected to exercise rights they do not have to achieve a degree of independence which is not even expected of local populations in the same context and without access to the bare minimum of resources.” Going further, she states that “refugee self-reliance is not possible within the current framework of UNHCR responses to refugee situations.” The presence of adequately supported programming by UNHCR is crucial not only with regard to the present requirements of establishing refugee livelihoods, but to the reconstruction of futures for refugees and to finding long-term solutions for those displaced, particularly in protracted situations.

It is useful to note at this point that borders between The Gambia and Casamance have been, and still are, porous, with little or no official regulation. Cross-border trade and marriage have been common and members of the same families have settled on both sides. Some women respondents in this study were born in The Gambia and moved to Casamance upon marrying a Casamance man. These women then fled across the border with their husbands and children. Whether these women can be called refugees is debateable: On the one hand, they feel that they are, on the other hand, they acknowledge that they have ties to The Gambia which assist their relocation. Their possession of Senegalese ID, with which they may acquire a refugee identification card and access food aid and other assistance available to refugees, is one challenge faced by aid organisations.

A brief outline of the fieldwork and methodology is presented which forms the basis of the data discussed here, followed by some background information on the Casamance conflict and refugees in The Gambia. The article then continues with an empirical discussion of the presence and effectiveness of skills training and outcomes from the view of Casamance women refugees in The Gambia.

Methodology

Fieldwork was conducted in several phases from January 2010 until April 2012 in both rural and urban locations of The Gambia. This article is based on data gathered from rural locations from summer 2010 to February 2011, from urban locations during May-June 2011, and on combined rural and urban fieldwork through to April 2012.

Interviews were held with Casamance refugees and refugee leaders, along with discussions with staff members of international and national agencies working with refugees, such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Programme (WFP), the Gambia Red Cross (GRC), the Gambia Food and Nutrition Agency (GAFNA), and the Gambia Immigration Department (GID). GAFNA is the current implementing partner of UNHCR and has personnel in the rural Foni districts where around 80 per cent of Casamance refugees are settled. The GRC was formerly the implementing partner of UNHCR with GAFNA until summer 2010. Discussions with staff members of international and national agencies and departments working with Casamance refugees formed the background of the research in terms of the conflict and its impact on The Gambia, past and present food and material assistance, livelihood programming, and locations of refugees.

Interviews comprised a mixture of individual interviews and group interviews, but interviews were mainly at household level. This was for practical reasons as it was common for people to "join" an interview when visiting another's compound, and this was difficult to control without causing misunderstanding. For this reason, very few men- or women-only interviews were car-

ried out. It was also common to find two different households present in the same compound because word had travelled that a researcher was visiting. In total, nine focus groups in rural areas were conducted, 32 household interviews, and ten individual interviews. It is difficult to say how many respondents took part in focus groups and household interviews as some respondents wandered in and out of both. However, there were a total of approximately 45 respondents in urban areas and approximately 60 respondents at household level in rural areas. On-going interaction and participant observation complemented the interviews. Women were encouraged to speak out during interviews and to put forward their experiences. In fact, they did not appear reluctant to talk once I commented that they were very quiet and actively asked them to give their view,¹ and men willingly allowed women to speak once the differences between "men problems" and "women problems" were highlighted and acknowledged.

The UNHCR Assessment March 2010 informed the selection of areas for interviews and access to respondents was initially through GAFNA office and field staff and GRC staff, who made introductions to refugee leaders, after which snowballing methods were used. The rationale for selection was to largely avoid villages and urban areas which had been visited for the UNHCR Assessment in an attempt to avoid rehearsed answers, and to cover a wide geographic area rather than focusing on one village or area.

All interviews were recorded with the permission of respondents.² Interviews were mainly in Jola or Mandinka and a male and female research assistant acted as translator from Jola or Mand-

¹ In previous rural interviews, both men and women were likely to keep quiet when an *Alkalo* – village leader – was present: He was allowed to speak for others, or when refugees spoke, their information was measured and diplomatic. Responses were more free when the *Alkalo* was absent. Similarly, in urban areas, respondents would initially let the refugee leader speak first, after which refugees would speak for themselves.

² Ethical considerations were guided by the advice laid down by The Oral History Society www.oralhistory.org.uk/ethics.php.

inka to English where necessary and appropriate. At times, English or French was used or a combination of languages. For the sake of anonymity, names of respondents have been altered.

Gambia and Senegal and the Casamance Conflict

Gambia is geographically West Africa's smallest state, a 48-kilometre-wide strip of land following the River Gambia and running east to west through Senegal. 52 per cent of The Gambia's 1.8 million inhabitants live in urban areas and 48 per cent in rural areas (CIA 2012). The Casamance region of Senegal is to the south of The Gambia, while the capital Dakar, where the government of Senegal is located, lies in the north of Senegal.

The geographic separation of the Casamance region from Dakar has produced some long-term tensions regarding the marginalisation of the south and a perceived exploitation by Dakar of the south's resources without a corresponding provision of financial, material and infrastructural input. The unrest stems from an unkept promise for the independence of the Casamance region said to have been made by the President of Senegal, President Senghor, at the time of independence in 1960. Dissatisfaction and frustration developed amongst the Casamançais as a result of a lack of progress on this matter, and for the past 30 years the people of Casamance have continued to want independence from Senegal. Expressed at first by popular protest during the early 1980s and then by guerrilla war from the late 1980s to the early 1990s (Evans 2002), the tensions continue to date with intermittent incursions along the Casamance/Gambian border in the Foni districts, particularly since 2006.

In 1982 the separatist Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de Casamance (MFDC) was formed and resulted in armed conflict between the MFDC and Senegalese military forces. Over the years, MFDC forces fragmented into two main groups which then divided into smaller splinter groups (Evans 2002, 2004). The possibility of opposition forces speaking with one voice in a peace negotiation presents a fundamental challenge to lasting peace, and numerous

attempts at brokering peace have failed to produce long-term peace and stability.³

The Casamance conflict has been characterised by sporadic fighting between the MFDC and the Senegalese armed forces as well as by factional fighting. MFDC-led attacks on villages thought to oppose MFDC aims, plus Senegalese military-led raids on villages considered to harbour MFDC members, have made the conflict treacherous for civilians who are suspected by all sides. In 2006, the Government of Senegal increased its military presence in an attempt to eradicate opposition activity and restore stability. After an initial lull, this presence actually served to increase instability, and the peaks and troughs of fighting and attacks on villages continued.

Since 2006, the previous pattern of refugee flight and return has largely been replaced by a permanent movement of refugees into The Gambia. The shift to permanent displacement since 2006 was recognised by UNHCR and the Government of The Gambia by the issuance of refugee identity cards to Casamançais. Hostilities peaked again in 2009 (see Home Office 2010: 16)⁴ and again in 2010. Throughout the period of the 2010-2011 fieldwork, fighting occurred most nights in border areas. Refugee influxes continued through 2011 and early 2012.

While Casamance remains the most fertile area of Senegal, farming livelihoods in this region have been severely disrupted by the conflict and by the presence of land mines.⁵ Refu-

³ 1991 Peace Treaty between MFDC and Senegalese Government signed in Guinea Bissau; 1992 Casamance Peace Commission held in Guinea Bissau; 1993 Peace Treaty signed in Ziguenchor; 1998 crisis meeting held in The Gambia between Gambia, Senegal and Guinea Bissau; 1999 peace talks in Banjul resulting in the short-lived January 2000 Resolution; 2003 peace talks resulting in peace deal and amnesty for MFDC; 2004, new MFDC leader rejects Senegal's amnesty; 2007, ECOWAS produces a conflict prevention framework. The more recent attempts at peace were supported by President Jammeh of The Gambia and President Wade of Senegal and mediated by Guinea Bissau and ECOWAS. (Sources: Gambian newspapers 1982-2007.)

⁴ This report provides a useful chronology of events of the Casamance conflict.

⁵ There continue to be occasional instances of death and injury by landmines in Casamance despite

gees are reluctant to return to Casamance and are fearful of opposition groups and of Senegalese forces who occupy their villages of origin and individual compounds, having appropriated or destroyed houses, land, crops, and livestock, which formed the core of village livelihoods. Refugees' thoughts of return are countered by fear of inadvertent association with opposition forces and possible punishment by Senegalese military or other opposition groups.

Refugees in The Gambia

According to GID registration data and a UNHCR-WFP Joint Assessment Mission (December 2009), there were 8,241 registered refugees from Casamance in The Gambia in March 2010 (UNHCR 2010). At the time of writing, no assessment mission had been conducted since December 2009, but GID and GAFNA field officers constantly log new refugees who arrive at border villages. This figure does not include unregistered Casamance refugees who were absent at the time of the registration exercise. Local estimates of the total number of Casamance refugees (registered and unregistered) living in The Gambia are thought to be between 11,000 and 12,000 (GAFNA and GRC February 2012). Casamance refugees represent the largest refugee group in The Gambia, with smaller populations originating from Sierra Leone (134), Liberia (665), and Côte d'Ivoire (207). At the end of 2011, the total of all *registered* refugees in The Gambia was 9,390 (GID data December 2011).⁶

The majority of rural refugees reside in Gambian host villages in the Foni district adjacent to the border with Casamance. Most of these villages are between 500 metres and five kilometres from the border. A handful of host villages are 15 to 20 kilometres away. The number of host villages varies constantly as refugees move from

one village to another or to urban areas should they, for instance, discover they have a family member elsewhere. Drawing on figures from the UNHCR Assessment 2007, the UNHCR-WFP Joint Assessment Mission December 2009, and the UNHCR Assessment 2010, and on current records of UNHCR, GID and GAFNA, the number of villages that currently host, or have hosted in the past, Casamance refugees is 83.

Approximately 21 per cent (1,747) of registered Casamance refugees live in urban areas of the Gambia and are spread over a wide area (UNHCR-WFP 2009) within 30 minutes of Serrekunda, and in Brikama, The Gambia's second largest town. The current urban figure is thought to be closer to 2500 when unregistered refugees are included (conversation with GAFNA representative, April 2012). This larger number is supported by the fieldwork in urban areas, where at least half of all respondents were unregistered. Refugees remain unregistered for a variety of reasons, including being absent at the time of a rural registration exercise, or the cost of going to Banjul to register at GID. Some of the respondents without a refugee identification card had acquired Gambian papers.

In rural areas, Casamance refugees stay with family members if they can locate them, or with local villagers. Being host to a refugee family increases poverty and vulnerability in terms of food security, health, and housing for the hosts themselves, and many refugees in rural settings move several times looking for family members or when tensions become too much between host and refugee family. Some rural refugees move to urban areas for work or to improve their housing situation or to find independent housing. Others go directly to the urban areas when they know of a family member already there. The result is a highly mobile refugee population in the first few years after arrival, but especially in the three to 12 months after arrival as they seek family connections and independent housing.

Most Casamance refugees in The Gambia are subsistence farmers, but there are a few exceptions in both rural and urban areas, such as those engaged in work as mechanics, carpenters, fishermen, or tailors. However, it is true to say that

de-mining programmes. For example, Jeanie Waddell-Fournier, an ICRC delegate, was killed in September 2006; in May 2008, a man was killed and 20 passengers injured when a bus drove over a landmine (<http://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/feature/2009/senegal-feature-231209.htm>).

⁶ Due to cessation on 30 June 2012, Liberians were offered assisted repatriation or permanent local integration assisted by UNHCR.

the large majority of refugees are from a farming background and have had limited education, particularly amongst women and girls. Those who attended school in Casamance experienced interrupted education due to the conflict and repeated flight and return before 2006. Since 2006, financial constraints in The Gambia have formed an additional barrier to completing education for many refugees.

Assistance to Casamance refugees in The Gambia

After the increase in refugees permanently displaced from Casamance to The Gambia after 2006, international agencies responded by providing refugees with the support of food aid and basic material items. Later, assistance was expanded to include host villagers in recognition of their own consequent vulnerability. In co-operation with UNHCR, WFP provided food assistance from September 2006 until July 2009, with a limited distribution until February 2010 to clear warehouses. During this same period, UNHCR, via GRC and GAFNA, supplied items such as latrines, water, sleeping mats, mosquito nets, and basic clothing items. After the final official WFP supply in July 2009, the focus of assistance switched from food aid and material items to sustainable livelihood programming, which continues to date.

In addition, from September 2006 until the time of writing, all Casamance refugees in The Gambia are entitled to refugee identity cards which allow them the freedom to live and move within The Gambia. The card provides the right to work, but this right is effectively limited to casual work due to an employment tax levied on foreign nationals, including ECOWAS citizens such as the Senegalese. The refugee identity card also entitles payment by UNHCR of refugee children's school fees up to a prescribed limit and allows access to free or reduced cost medical care at government hospitals and clinics upon referral by the UNHCR clinic. Possession of a refugee identity card removes the requirement to buy an annual residence/work permit and alien card. Refugee identity cards also allow access to sustainable livelihood programming, including skills training.

Livelihood programming in The Gambia

Largely, livelihood programming for Casamançais in The Gambia has focused on initiatives aimed at restoring farming practices in rural areas. Refugees in almost all rural areas are given land to farm by the village *alkalo*, although this land typically is on the edge of the village and is the least fertile. A significant element of livelihood programming was the distribution in May 2010 and May 2011 by UNHCR of tools, animals, and ground nut seeds to refugee families. The goal of the initiative was to develop the land refugees had been given, but success has been varied and limited by the numbers of animals and tools distributed, which was sufficient for only 400 refugee families on the basis of 4 families sharing one set of animals/tools.

Another related initiative is the establishment in larger rural settlements of community gardens. These are predominantly run by women on land given by the village and have been successful overall. However, in one location visited during fieldwork, it was reported by refugees that the garden initiative did not work well due to disputes over ownership of the produce and arguments with Gambian villagers who, on seeing the success of the garden, wanted to reclaim it. Where gardens have worked, the result is miraculous by comparison with the "kitchen" gardens many women try to plant next to their houses, which fail largely due to lack of hand tools and poor soil.

Refugee livelihood programming in The Gambia has also focused on capacity building for communities and individuals. Strengthening existing, or teaching new, competencies is key to the support offered to refugees to restore independence, but it has not always been successful. An example of community building for rural Casamançais is a bakery project run by refugees. Assisted at the outset with UNHCR funding for renting premises and purchasing raw materials for first production, the project foundered due to insufficient business knowledge among participants, despite some UNHCR managerial input (conversation with *Alkalo*, bakery co-operative members, and GRC representative, April 2011). The project has been restarted with a new purpose-built bakery

built on land donated by the village. Initially only men were involved in the bakery (conversation with bakery project chairman, February 2011), but the new project now also includes women committee members (GAFNA, August 2012).

Capacity building for individuals has focused on teaching refugees in both rural and urban areas new skills that can be a sustainable income-generating alternative to farming. Skills training opportunities vary from rural to urban settings and those available in rural settings are fewer in number but better accessed by refugees, whilst those in urban settings are more varied but have limited accessibility. The variety, access and engagement of these initiatives will be further discussed later in the article.

A further livelihood programming initiative has focused on micro-credit. At the request of UNHCR, the National Cooperative Credit Union of The Gambia (NACCUG) provided a micro-loan facility for all registered refugees aimed at small business start-ups. Refugees were asked to put forward a simple plan for their business and to state the amount of money required. This facility failed in 2010/11 due to the non-repayment of loans by refugees. UNHCR and the micro-credit facility came under heavy criticism by refugees who demanded grants, not loans, and this may partially explain the non-repayment. A further reason for non-repayment could be dissatisfaction on the part of refugees because in some cases only part of the money requested was actually given. Respondents stated that the money provided was not sufficient for business start-ups and so was instead spent on rent or food. GAFNA, on the other hand, observed that those refugees who "use the money to invest in business are doing well, whilst some have absconded and others use it in other ways" (conversation with GAFNA representative, August, 2012). In 2012, GAFNA had plans to train 100 urban refugees and to link them with NACCUG micro-loans, but at the time of writing this scheme had not yet started.

Other international donors are active in The Gambia in relation to refugees, including Concern Universal, who operate cross-border programmes, and USAID, whose emphasis is in Casa-

mance itself, while a number of local NGOs provide support at the local rural and urban levels.

Women and livelihood programming

Possession of a refugee identity card provides access to all sustainable livelihood programming, therefore it is important that refugees not only possess a card, but that they are also able to access programming.

Field work showed that the general benefits of having a refugee identity card seemed not to be known to all respondents, and interviews routinely became a forum for informing refugees of this. Due to the fluidity of interviews at household and group level, it is difficult to say exactly how many respondents were aware or unaware of the benefits. However, there was a clear impression that a significant number were not aware. An estimate would be that over 50 per cent of respondents in urban areas and 20 per cent of rural respondents were unaware that possession of a refugee identity card gave them access to free education and free or subsidised health care. Although the system of providing education and health care is not perfect (Hopkins forthcoming), this assistance is able to help reduce financial concerns of refugee families, leaving more money available for food, which all respondents expressed as their primary concern. The subject of livelihood programming and skills training as a further benefit of the refugee identity card was lost on many respondents, especially those who went directly to urban areas, almost all of whom said they had not received food supplies or any other material items since arriving in The Gambia. Their reasoning that no further assistance would be forthcoming since no basic assistance had been given could be seen as sound.

It could be argued that for rural refugees there is less of a need to press home the benefits of the refugee identity card, since livelihood programming and the information about it comes to them in the village in which they live rather than them having to seek it out. For urban refugees who are more dispersed and less visible (Hopkins forthcoming), being informed about programming is less certain and relies on social networks and being in contact with refugee lead-

ers. The effective dissemination of information could therefore be argued to be more crucial in their case.

Furthermore, access to programming goes beyond the possession of a refugee identity card and beyond the actual existence of programming and training to include logistics, knowledge, and psychological and physical health: knowing of the existence of programming and training, knowing where it is, having the money to travel to the place, knowing how to be a part of it, having the good health and motivation to travel, and being emotionally able to participate.

As noted above, the main focus of livelihood programming for Casamançais in The Gambia is on re-establishing farming practices in rural areas. However, the quality and quantity of land Casamance refugees are given by their hosts in The Gambia does not compare with what they farmed in Casamance and they cannot produce, even with seed and fertiliser assistance, a comparable crop. Their previous knowledge of soil and methods of maximising its potential cannot be applied to the land they have in The Gambia. Furthermore, the refugees had to leave behind their cattle, which provided fertiliser for crops. Thus refugees' attempts at regaining self-reliance through farming may face failure even before they begin.

Hunter (2009) finds similarly when she argues that UNHCR self-reliance policy is erroneously based on the idea that subsistence agricultural livelihoods will lead to refugees becoming self-reliant and that policy is structured to facilitate agricultural production with the aim of achieving refugee food self-sufficiency. As she points out, the ratio of provider to dependents is important and refugees must meet not only food needs but also non-food needs, and the "expectation that refugees can meet these needs through subsistence agricultural production is fundamentally flawed.... even refugees who have previous farming experience may struggle to adapt to new conditions in asylum countries" (Hunter 2009: 27-30).

Therefore if the likelihood of Casamance refugees being able to regain self-reliance through subsistence farming is unrealistic – and as Harrell-Bond and her team (1986: 262) observed,

"many people in settlements were unlikely *ever* to be able to grow enough food to support themselves" (emphasis in the original) – then provision of, and access to, alternative livelihood programming is evermore important, as is its successful transition to sustainable income-generation. The next sections discuss the alternatives currently available in The Gambia.

Skills training – what and where

Elements of livelihood programming available to Casamance women in The Gambia are community gardens in rural areas where gardens are predominantly run by women, training in soap-making and tie-and-dye in the urban area and in 20 rural communities, and hairdressing in urban areas. GAFNA provided IT skills courses in the urban area to train refugees in the basics of IT. This training was available to both men and women; however, problems with the continuity of funding proved the main obstacle and the training closed after three months despite considerable interest from refugees who registered for the course. With the support of UNHCR and GAFNA, the NACCUG micro-loan scheme is hoped to again be available to all refugees who can apply in rural areas and in the urban area of greater Banjul. The scheme encourages small business start-ups and forms an important part of UNHCR's strategy to rebuild refugee self-reliance because of the reluctance amongst banks to lend to refugees due to their mobility.

No women respondents reported accessing IT training, NACCUG micro-loans, or hairdressing training. Training and support in bee-keeping is available to men and women in 20 rural communities, but no women reported being involved in this programme either. In five rural communities, UNHCR/GAFNA has instigated bio-gas projects aimed at improving soil fertility and animal capital in rural communities (conversation with GAFNA representative, August 2012). Whilst this is open to women, none work on this programme.

The programmes women reported taking part in were community gardens (rural) and soap-making and tie-and-dye training (rural and urban). In village locations, training in soap-making and tie-and-dye were brought to 20 rural communi-

ties and women from surrounding villages would join. In urban locations, training is held at the UNHCR Centre to which women travel both for initial information on training and for the training itself.

Factors governing access and uptake of skills training

Fieldwork suggested women were not proactive in seeking out skills training either in urban or rural locations. In urban areas this may be partly explained by their background as farmers used to working their own land and engaging in activities within a small radius from home, leading to their reluctance to travel for training. However, many urban-based Casamançais were unaware of skills training and those that were aware of it thought training was only open to refugee leaders, a finding that was replicated in rural areas as well. Again and again during fieldwork, especially in urban areas, we found ourselves informing refugees of the *existence* of skills training in the urban area. Hawa, an older lady living with her brother in the urban area of Kotu whilst recovering from tuberculosis, explained through her brother:

Did you have any skills training from UNHCR so you could do some work for yourself.

Brother: Sometimes, but they stopped that now. The time she was in Kampant [village], they selected a number of people to go and have skills training in Kampant, but she was not part of them. The refugees were too [many] and everyone can't be part of the skills training, so they select only the eldest – the leaders – to represent you. When they were taking people, she was here [in Kotu] so they can't take her while she is here, paying fare every day.

There is skills training here – did you know that?

No. I didn't know.

The skills centre is not far.

I don't know the place.

Haddy, a woman living in the urban area of Kasaikunda, was another example:

There was skills training like tie-and-dye. Did you do that?

Yes it was in Bulock [village] but the time it was there, we were here. So this skills training, we were not part of it.

Have you ever been to the UNHCR centre?

No, none of them have been there. It's only the leaders who have gone there.

It's open to anybody.

They didn't know it.

In both urban and rural locations, Casamançais realised that farming was not possible or was not sufficient to provide for all their needs and that supplementary activities or UNHCR assistance was required. When WFP food aid ceased and emergency food interventions by UNHCR and ICRC were seen to target only new influx refugees, refugees felt abandoned and did not know whom to turn to since, to their understanding, UNHCR were there to assist them. However, the change in assistance from food aid to livelihood programming did not drive Casamançais women to seek or to take the opportunity of other skills as alternatives or additions to subsistence farming, even when they were aware of the existence of skills training.

Amongst those who did participate in skills training, especially in rural areas, it seemed almost as though women engaged in training partly as a social activity rather than as a commercial alternative to a farming lifestyle. This raises questions around motivation: Are women taking up the training in order to turn it into a sustainable livelihood, or do they engage in it because they understand they are expected to do so as part of "programming" and as part of the "assistance bargain", or do they take up the training as a social activity with a side benefit of learning a skill which is of personal use in the household?

In urban areas women were more likely to seek paid work washing clothes or as maids or to cook and re-sell food than to engage in training. In rural areas, paid work is scarce, which may also partly explain why women are more likely to take up training. But another explanation of uptake in rural areas is that training is brought to the village instead of women being required to travel to a training centre. Travel to a training centre in urban areas incurs costs in terms of money and time, and urban respondents found the cost associated with training to be outweighed by possible earnings from casual employment.

Furthermore, travel to the training centre relies on participants' good physical and emotional health to make the journey regularly and to engage with what is being taught. The effort entailed in making the journey to a training centre may discourage those who are ill, traumatised or who are more concerned with establishing their family's whereabouts and safety. Hawa in Kotu was interested in the training but had concerns:

I want to go but I am not much well, and to pay fare every day up to there I will start disturbing my brother. This training is good, I can do my own soap making and go there. But one thing that is disturbing me is my mind. If my mind is not steady I cannot be comfortable.... Cos everything I had inside my house they take it, our corrugate iron they take it too. When I think of that I am sometimes frustrated.... Cos I am going to think of all those things I have lost.

For refugees to take up skills training is to accept change. Changes in family life, structure, and gender relations, which Mehta (2011) refers to as an empowering factor of forced migration, present opportunities for change which women respondents embraced. Talking of her own lack of opportunity, one woman is able to plan a different future for her daughters now they are in The Gambia: "My father forced me to abandon my education and marry. I don't want my daughters to have the life I had. They will have education." But a future with education is not necessarily a future of farming, and she continued to tell us how she hoped her daughters will make use of their education to perhaps become teachers.

However, other pathways to changed lives and women's empowerment through displacement are not taken. The reason women do not take up all the opportunities offered to them may rest partly with their own motivation or their perception of the outcome, partly with male members of the rural community deciding what women may do, or with the strangeness of the activity being so far out of the range of experience so as to be irrelevant, for example IT training for populations with no or limited literacy skills. Considering that Casamance women are predominantly rural farmers, they may not see urban-relevant

skills as important or conceivable even amongst those who have settled in urban areas, and they may be unable to imagine a positive or practical outcome from undertaking such training. Activities which can be learnt and practiced around the home are more in keeping with their lives prior to flight, and may be another factor in why soap-making and tie-and-dye training sees more uptake than other training.

For refugee women to embrace the change that displacement has presented them with – to move away from primarily subsistence farming to other money-generating activities or a mix of activities – it is important that such changes minimise the impact on lives in order that changes be seen as conceivable or as appropriate to their lives. Supporting this change is important to do in a way that feels sufficiently familiar to them to allow them to engage readily in a new activity and to see a relevant future in it; conversely, too much change, too quickly, may feel alien and risk non-engagement or a limited outcome.

Translation to sustainable livelihoods

Translation of skills training to sustainable livelihoods partly relies on women undertaking the training with commercial gain in mind. If some women undertake the training as a social activity without also seeing it as a route to income generation, the objective of skills training may not be fulfilled.

The limitations of community gardens and soap-making and tie-and-dye in terms of income generation were clear during visits to communities. Some of the produce grown in community gardens is set aside for re-sale, but most of it is consumed by those involved in maintaining the garden. Soap can be both used and re-sold at local level, but generates a small level of income similar to buying and re-selling produce from the market. Tie-and-dye holds promise as a source of income and women were enthusiastic about this potential. However, women expressed frustrations regarding both soap-making and tie-and-dye initiatives.

After UNHCR/GAFNA training, women were given the materials with which to make soap. Once the soap was made they sold it and were

happy with that result. However, they said that they now required the raw materials again if they were to make further batches of soap. The difficulties inherent in this initiative become clear in this excerpt from an interview with Jatu in Bijilo:

Even now the wife can do soap-making. It's because of the money the husband can't buy oil for her to make the soap.

How much is it to buy the oil for soap-making?
[calculating] ... So 1400 dalasi [£28]

With that money you can make soap. How much profit will you get from it?

You will make every time 500 [£10] profit. What I do when I make the soap I borrow [money] from people.

So are you doing that now?

No, now I am not doing it cos oil is expensive. A cup of oil costs 10 dalasi. I cannot make profit out of it now.

Asked what happened to the money from the first batch sold, the women said that money was spent on daily needs.

Tie-and-dye generates different problems. UNHCR/GAFNA skills training is provided up to a basic level. Whilst women said they were happy to receive this training, they added that the finished product was not suitable for re-sale as it was not of a high standard. When asked if there was a sufficient market for tie-and-dye, the women responded positively saying, yes there was a market, but that the quality of their products had to be better. Different groups of women reiterated this point, saying they required additional training to improve their basic skills.

If translation of skills training to sustainable livelihoods relies in part on women having commercial gain in mind, it also rests on the degree of training and on having rudimentary business knowledge. As the women's experience with soap-making shows, creating a viable business requires understanding that money for raw materials needs to be deducted from sales revenue if they are not to return to being once again reliant on UNHCR for raw materials.

Throughout the interviews, most women expressed interest in engaging in some sort of business, whether it was soap-making, tie-and-

dye, cooking to resell, or setting up as a tailor, as noted by Haddy in Kasaikunda.

If there were two things that could make your life easier, what would those two things be?

For her number one is business, someone to help her with money. The other woman says if they can have these sewing machines and be trained for sewing and selling.

Potentially linking in with the NACCUG micro-credit facility, these women had the desire to create businesses but not the resources to make them a reality – either in terms of actual finance or in terms of skills or business knowledge. Furthermore, the lack of accurate information about who may obtain micro-credit prevented many from even trying, as became apparent when speaking with Mariam in Brikama:

Yes we once thought about it if there is any credit place where we can work and pay back. The husband has not seen any. The only place we see is where credit is given to people who have a government job.

[To interpreter] Have they assumed that or have they been there to ask?

They sometimes think about it but the husband realises that [he must] have something so that if they defaulted they can take it or sell it. They have not. Cos he has not a compound. I don't know if there are other avenues for borrowing.

The skills training element of livelihood programming in The Gambia therefore seems not to have gone far enough in terms of the content and the level of skill taught, and accurate information about access is not widely enough disseminated, especially in urban areas. Whilst the intention of the training is to provide skills that will enable women to be self-reliant as they were in Casamance, the reality is that it gives women only part of what they need to achieve this, leaving them in a position of dependency and vulnerability – perhaps worse off than before the training because they have been shown the promise of a future that cannot be fulfilled.

The two examples above of soap-making and tie-and-dye are relevant to both rural and urban contexts where similar stories were reported

by respondents. The additional potential barrier in urban areas to translating skills to sustainable livelihoods is the distance to training centres and the cost of getting there, as Hawa in Kotu Quarry explained above. This example was not an isolated incidence, nor did it apply only to urban areas. In one village, Sutusingjang, women were aware of skills training in Bullock, but the 5km walk was too far and too tiring on top of the women's household responsibilities. Distance and cost acted as demotivating factors, exacerbated by depression, disheartenment and trauma related to the experiences and uncertainties of flight, and both women and men opted for casual work or petty trading instead of training because the need to earn money to eat today did not allow many to enter into training for tomorrow.

Making sense of assistance and programming

Livelihood programming aims to facilitate self-reliance and establish local integration, therefore it is important to understand what sense women make of assistance and skills training in moving forward their displaced lives. Is assistance and training relevant to them and appropriate for their needs, or does it confuse and frustrate them?

Food distributions were, and still are, a lifeline, even though they have now ceased for Casamance refugees in The Gambia except for emergency interventions for new influxes of refugees. Food is awaited, anticipated, hoped and prayed for. The shift from the distribution of food and material items to livelihood programming is a shift from dependence to hopelessness for many respondents who said they now did not know what they would do. Life became a futile wait for those who are too old or too traumatised to adapt to new livelihoods, and for others life has become a struggle to learn new skills and the necessary commercialism to translate them into sustainable income.

During interviews, trying to counter their feelings of hopelessness with a discussion of what they themselves could do to help their situation, particularly women in rural areas appeared to prefer the relative certainty of food assistance.

However, when directly asked what they would prefer: food, money to buy food, or a way to make money to buy food, the answers were complex and conditional and provoked much discussion. As a reflex, some women in the group interviewed replied "food". Other women in the group contradicted them, saying money was more useful, as exemplified in the following household discussion in Lamin:

If they received assistance, what would be the two most important things for them?

The most important thing is food. For money they can try to have contracts. But food ...

Interpreter: They are debating. She says food number one. But the other says money, 'cos if you don't have money where will you have money to buy fish? They decide money is the second thing, you can buy books for your children to go to school.

So when they say money as their second, can I understand that to mean work?

He said fine, but money too. If they have the money they help each other to make a business. For her, as a lady, if you give the money to the man he says we have to divide the money. This, you have to let me keep it, this one I can use it to make a business. So you can take that money and go to the shopkeeper, buy oranges, bananas, come and sell it again to gain profit. That's why she said money. Something to start a small business.

The outcome of this discussion was not certain, but what was certain was that women thought about what they needed and how they would use it. They were not impassive, but, when presented with the question, gave careful consideration to what would be best for them. Although they hoped my presence indicated some food might be forthcoming, when asked what they would like, except for food, it was clear they had thought about this already and indicated they appreciated the question because no-one had asked them before.

Respondents acknowledged food assistance could not be a permanent solution and agreed that a way to earn money was preferable to simply being given food or money. But how to make this transition was not clear to them and left them in confusion and disarray. Many refugee respondents reported the "sudden" halt to

food assistance. Although UNHCR and WFP had informed refugees over a period of time of the approaching end, refugees could not understand what was to replace food assistance if they were not to starve. Whilst education and health were also concerns, the immediate and overriding need was for food – a need that had to be immediately satisfied. Therefore, whilst new skills were useful and were welcomed, food was needed now, today, and women's attention on tomorrow necessarily had to be secondary. For women respondents, their need was for food *and* for training simultaneously. This suggests over time a combination of effectively delivered new skills could replace or complement subsistence farming as a livelihood.

Conclusion

It was clear from the fieldwork that if livelihood programming was to fulfil the objective of providing new skills for income generation, those skills had to be delivered at a level suitable for commercial gain and in conjunction with basic business knowledge, and information regarding access to training had to be improved. Fieldwork also showed that UNHCR as well as its implementing partners and GRC and GID were all active in the dissemination of information about skills training; however, there were still serious gaps that had an impact on women's (and men's) capacity to establish new livelihoods.

As Conway wrote in 2004 about refugees in The Gambia:

there is often a strong desire to engage in income generating activities, but there is a lack of outside technical assistance from UNHCR and/or its partners. A common misconception is that income-generating projects can be developed and sustained without such assistance, prompting people to invest energy and resources into a non-viable project. Often the result is that without effective input and guidance, the refugees find it much more challenging to establish and sustain what are already vulnerable businesses (2004: 9).

Little seems to have altered since then. Livelihood programming still does not go far enough or provide sufficient or appropriate technical input to support refugees in the transition from

food assistance to self-reliance through gaining new commercially viable skills. Whether reduced UNHCR funding is the cause or whether this is due to inadequately researched and implemented programmatic use of funding, the result for refugees is the same.

The impossibility for most Casamance refugees in The Gambia to start or build livelihoods whilst also adequately supporting their families with basic food necessities, not to mention other needs such as healthcare, is supported by Conway, who states that a "common finding in all locations was the refugees' inability to preserve assets and accumulate savings, as most were just barely getting by with what little resources they had or were given to them" (2004: 2). Again, this is still the case nine years later and refugees are still unable to plan for tomorrow. The development of programmed solutions such as food assistance alongside structured skills training that takes refugees to commercial skill levels, including basic business guidance on establishing sustainable small businesses, would be a useful step.

Discussions with GAFNA, which administers skills training, showed that the organisation recognised the requirement for higher skill levels but is limited by funding and by the requirement to include as many refugees as possible in available training. Bearing in mind budgetary constraints, providing a higher level of training to fewer, selected women could be an alternative if those women then passed on their higher level of skill to other women in their area under guidance from UNHCR/GAFNA. In urban areas this strategy may address the demotivating factor of travel cost and time and effort spent travelling to the training as women could establish informal groups in their own neighbourhood. Enabling trained women to pass on their skills in this way also recreates the social aspect that appears to be a positive factor for rural women. Reducing the burden on UNHCR and NGOs and transferring the responsibility to refugee women may assist in creating greater feelings of participation and ownership of the training amongst those women.

Actively including women in the planning stages of phasing out food assistance and phas-

ing in skills training may be beneficial in order to ensure refugees understand what is happening and when it is happening. Whilst UNHCR and their partners informed refugees that WFP food assistance would cease for Casamance refugees in The Gambia, the shift from food assistance to livelihood programming and refugees' position in that change had not been understood by refugees in a way in which they could make sense of the change and of their position in it.

Finally, it is important that the general benefits of having a refugee identity card, which gives access to free education, subsidised health care, and to sustainable livelihood programming such as the skills training discussed in this article, are known to all refugees. Conversations with refugees during fieldwork revealed a large proportion claimed to be unaware of the benefit, which is of concern, but is in conflict with conversations held with staff members of UNHCR, GAFNA, GRC and GID throughout the period of fieldwork, who stated that refugees were told about the refugee identity card again and again. Given that financial constraints limit refugees' ability to buy food, pay rent and visit health clinics, possession of the

refugee identity card is a vital component of support which has the potential to relieve much of the financial pressure of education and health. Since the organisations responsible for refugees in The Gambia aim to inform their audience of the benefits of holding a refugee identity card, either something somewhere in the chain of informing refugees is breaking down, or refugees are actively choosing not to have a refugee identity card. Interviews do not support the latter since refugees showed considerable interest and asked questions about how and where to obtain a card and stated they now planned to visit the relevant office in the coming few days.

Lessons drawn from Casamance women refugees in The Gambia can inform similar situations of protracted displacement elsewhere where local integration is the viable option. However, integration depends on a successful transition period from dependence on assistance to independence through well thought-out and delivered livelihood programming that fits with the needs of beneficiaries and introduces change in a manner that refugees are able to perceive as attainable and relevant.

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Engendering refugees' livelihood strategies: the case of the Iraqi diaspora in Damascus

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Abstract

This study looks at the gender dimension in Iraqis' livelihood strategies in Syria in the period immediately before the present uprising and repression. It suggests that the lack of resources in Syria has meant that Iraqis have 'activated' resources elsewhere, outside Syria and outside the environment of institutional humanitarian assistance, and examines the implications of these transnational practices for Iraqi families and their networks. In the first part of this paper I analyse the characteristics of the host country, starting from the urban milieu in which the refugee communities are situated. I note the relative unimportance of ethnic and sectarian affiliation within the Iraqi diaspora in Syria, and focus on the more significant social and economic constraints on recent refugees following the enforcement by the Syrian government of stricter regulations on entry and stay, and the subsequent separation of families between Iraq and Syria. In the second part I examine the dependence of Iraqi refugees in Syria on family networks to cope with the restrictive measures of the host country on the one hand, and with the conflict in Iraq on the other, in order to comprehend how gender in the Iraqi diaspora in Syria constitutes a determining element with respect to livelihood strategies.

Introduction

Since 2003 debate has grown among both practitioners and academics on urban displacement and gender in the Iraqi diaspora. On the one hand, the urban character of displacement – and the inherent higher mobility of the displaced – were a subject of study for their fluid and elusive nature, which posed important challenges to the provision of humanitarian assistance (Chatelard 2010). On the other hand, the gender dimension of displacement has been predominantly examined in relation to the vulnerabilities of Iraqi refugees, notably Iraqi women and girls.

If read through a positive lens, the relation between 'mobility' and 'gender' – as opposed to 'urban displacement' and 'vulnerabilities' – may be conducive to the constitution of livelihood strategies. In other words, mobility – to be

understood as the circulation of people, representations, ideas, goods and services across and within national boundaries (Dahinden 2010) – may enhance social resilience and capabilities, as it could represent an opportunity to diversify resources while involving women and leading to 'new gender roles' (Loughry 2008).

To access these resources, refugees often rely on family members and friends in the areas of origin and destination through a complex series of interpersonal relationships that constitutes a transnational network. Family ties are commonly the primary link between these constellations of individuals (Massey 1988). Transnational family networks are among the most frequent means among displaced people to mobilise financial resources, such as remittances, as well as the

social capital and the information used to enable trade and relocation between the country of asylum, the homeland, and third destinations. Iraqi women and men may have different roles in accessing these networks, a difference that challenges institutional humanitarian assistance and policies as well as customary patriarchal hierarchies and structures.

There is growing evidence that transnational livelihood strategies through family networks – including remittance sending as well as knowledge-sharing – may be equally relevant in situations of forced displacement as they are in situations of economic migration (Horst 2004). It is a distinctive feature of Iraqi forced migration in Syria that economic constraints in the country of asylum mean that remittances are sent from the country of origin, opposite to the usual trend of sending remittances from the country of asylum to the country of origin (Doraï 2007).

Following an overview of livelihood terminology and some relevant definitions, I intend to examine how gender has influenced transnational livelihood strategies among Iraqis who took refuge in Syria, whether the lack of resources in Syria has led to the need to ‘activate’ resources elsewhere outside Syria and outside the environment of the regime of humanitarian assistance, and how gender might be important in such an attempt to retrieve available resources.

The Iraqi diaspora in Syria, especially since the fall of Ba’thist regime, has been characterised by a high level of freedom of choice in the place of settlement, with three out of four refugees living amongst the civilian population in the country of asylum. In 2005 the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) calculated that 10.6 million Iraqis were living amongst the local population, compared to the 3.6 million Iraqis living in refugee camps or centres (UNHCR 2005). Despite stricter entry measures adopted by the Syrian government in 2007, the absence of camps implies a relative increase in decision-making for refugees, which in turn allows us to reflect on the variables which determine their movements. Gender is an important variable alongside ethnic and sectarian affiliation (Al-Ali 2007). In contrast to the situation before 2003, most Iraqi refugees

registered by the UNHCR in Syria are Sunnis. On the other hand, demographic data collected by UNHCR show that in Syria females constitute half of the refugee population, with female-headed households making up 30% of the cases (UNHCR 2008). Field research conducted in Syria and in Iraq suggests that ethno-sectarian divisions and family structures that shaped life in the country of origin have undergone changes in the diasporic context. Despite patriarchal opposition, women seem to play a determining role in anchoring family members in the recent diaspora and provide livelihoods through family networks.

Despite being one of the largest refugee producing countries, until recently Syria used to host the majority of displaced Iraqis in the region. While Syria is experiencing its own crisis, the Iraqi displacement situation is far from being solved. By relying on the participant observation research method, this paper seeks to provide new ways of understanding the conditions of the Iraqi displacement and possible solutions to it. This research was, however, undertaken in the period before the current instability in Syria. Any short or long-term solution to the Iraqi refugee situation needs to be read in light of other displacement situations in the region, which now includes thousands of displaced Syrians.

A note on terminology

Livelihoods are defined by Chambers and Conway (1992) as comprising ‘capabilities, assets – including both material and social resources – and activities required for a means of living.’ This definition is widely accepted in the discipline of economics and development studies. For the scope of this paper, however, Jacobsen’s definition of livelihoods in situations of displacement may provide a better framework (Jacobsen 2002). As she argues, the pursuit of livelihoods in the context of forced displacement encompasses ‘how people access and mobilize resources enabling [refugees] to increase their economic security, thereby reducing the vulnerability created and exacerbated by conflict.’ While displacement can result in new forms of gender and age vulnerability, it can also lead to the creation of new strategies to access and mobilise these resources, with

new forms of social organisation and networks forming as a result of having to cope with different hardships related to forced displacement. Within this context, refugee men and women may use different means to access resources and pursue livelihood activities, actively navigating the opportunities and constraints of their social worlds. To qualify for assistance from humanitarian organisations, however, women might be pushed to adopt identities such as 'single mothers' or 'women at risk'. In reality, women's statuses might be more complex, as their spouses might be residing in another location with the knowledge of the woman (Gale 2006). A single woman with children in Damascus who fits in the vulnerable category might have a husband in Iraq who supports the family via remittances. In each case the woman would be termed 'vulnerable', but her situation would clearly vary, depending on the resources available to her, including those from diasporic family members. Old hierarchies of authority may also be challenged in the refugee context with significant implications for men's roles as husbands, fathers, protectors and breadwinners, along with their loss of formal power networks. Gale's approach may call into question conventionally applied categories of vulnerabilities and open up possibilities for a more nuanced understanding of the situation in which refugees find themselves.

As illustrated in the cases examined below, vulnerability should thus be analysed as a dynamic concept intended to capture households' ability to respond to perturbations or shocks. At different stages of the displacement cycle, the capacity to cope with shocks may vary along with the extent and degree of refugees' vulnerabilities. Diverse sources of income – for instance, through different income earners in Iraq and Syria – are an important basis for refugee families to pursue livelihood security. The existence or lack of such income sources is in turn a key predictor of vulnerability. However, cash income is not sufficient to ensure livelihood security. This is most evident when refugees are forced to rely on negative coping mechanisms such as child labour and trafficking, two aspects that result from and contribute to the vulnerability of refugees.

A note on methodology

This study is the result of field research conducted from 2007 to 2011 thanks to the support of the UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration, and Intersos, an international non-governmental organisation. The analysis – ethnographic in nature – is based on 45 semi-structured interviews, including 29 with refugees and asylum-seekers, 12 refugee returnees, and three displaced Iraqis who were not registered with UNHCR. The interviews were conducted in Damascus at the UNHCR registration centre in Duma as well as in the refugees' houses. Interviews with returnees were conducted in Baghdad and Basrah, mainly at the NGO's premises. Three follow-up interviews were also conducted via phone. In addition to semi-formal interviews, I used participant observation as a research tool throughout my engagement with the Iraqi refugee community over several years. Additional quantitative data were extracted from the two surveys conducted by Ipsos in 2007 and the 2005 assessment by the UNHCR–United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) World Food Program, as well as various UNHCR polls conducted at the border and in Baghdad in 2010. The persons interviewed include persons coming from higher and lower socio-economic backgrounds according to their previous employment in Iraq. Questions regarding the faith of the interviewees were left as optional, in order to avoid further stigmatisation of this element, which is a frequent ground for fleeing the place of origin (Jacobsen and Landau 2003).

The perception of refugee women was limited by the western origin and the male gender of the author. Not all refugee women were alone during the interview but were instead accompanied by male relatives who may have influenced the answers given during the interviews. On the other hand, interviews with male adults were favoured by a higher level of intimacy, and at all times, trustworthiness was communicated and the informed consent of the respondents was asked before starting any interview.

The interviews were conducted in Arabic directly by the author. Avoiding the use of interpreters favoured trust-building as the inter-

viewees – whether males or females – may feel ashamed speaking or more embarrassed to talk about stigmatising subjects that are proscribed in their culture in front of someone from the same culture and instilled with the same moral codes. Respect and sensitivity in communicating with the respondents were of paramount importance to minimise cross-cultural tensions.

To reduce the risk of bias, interviews were also conducted outside the institutional milieu, drawing on different clusters of interviewees, including both UNHCR-registered and non-registered Iraqis, as well as aid organisations and shop keepers from the host community, thus minimising the faults of the snowball approach and the accumulation of information based on only one source of information. To diversify clusters, interviewees were also selected in Iraq for referrals to diaspora members residing in Damascus. The numbers of respondents in the country of origin were, however, limited due to security constraints.

Distribution of the Iraqi population in Damascus: a reflection of continuity

Urbanization of the diaspora and chain migration

Exile –consists first of an uprooting followed by a process of reterritorialisation. This reinsertion into a new context may generate a special meaning for the exiles. Within Iraq, the post-2003 uprooting resulted in the division of the territory on an ethno-sectarian basis. By way of contrast, displacement to locations outside Iraq led to the creation of a new and diverse social setting (Cambrezy 2001). In Syria, as in Jordan, Iraqi refugees do not reside in camps, but amongst the local population in rural areas and particularly in urban areas; hence the separate definitions of urban refugees and rural refugees. The notion of urban refugees stems from an increasingly recurrent global phenomenon characterised by a decline in the use of refugee camps, of which Damascus is an emblematic example. The decreased use of refugee camps has provided researchers with the chance to observe the paths of a diaspora within a host territory, as refugees are not subject to the limits of move-

ment represented by camps (Al-Sharmani 2003; Grabska 2006). Moreover, the absence of camps implies an increase in the decision-making process for refugees, and allows us to reflect on the variables which determine their movements. The following section will examine some areas in Damascus where a higher concentration of Iraqis was found and will then provide an analysis the modalities of settling employed by the Iraqi community in exile.

Based on the available information, it appears that Damascus is the preferred destination for the majority of Iraqis: over 50% of Iraqi refugees have settled here since the beginning of 2007. Most Iraqis in Damascus originate from Baghdad; the number of Baghdadi Iraqis in this city rose from over 50% in May 2007 to 78% in November of the same year (IPSOS November 2007). Thus, this is a migratory track from and to the largest urban centres in the countries of origin and destination. This tendency remained unchanged until 2012 (UNHCR 2012). Iraqis chose Damascus as their destination initially for the lower costs of living compared to Amman (UNHCR 2006), but later this does not seem to have been the reason for the decision: In 2007, just 3.7% of refugees decided to reside in Damascus on the basis of its lower costs (Ipsos May 2007). The increased costs with an inflation rate which reached 10% in the same year partly explain this change in decision-making. However, many Iraqis continued to choose Damascus as their destination. In the second half of 2007, over 55% of refugees claimed that they chose Damascus primarily because of the presence of parents and/or friends (Ipsos November 2007). As Haifa, a mother of 5, put it:

We arrived here [in Damascus] because my brother-in-law, who has been living in Jaramana since 2005. He bought a house here. When I arrived, he helped me to settle me and my children and I've now rented a house nearby his place.

The Syrian capital remained the major centre of attraction despite the considerable increase in prices. The major pull factor – the initial low cost of living – was replaced by bonds of family and friendship, a phenomenon known as chain migration.

The major concentrations of Iraqis were in the peripheral areas of the capital, mainly in the quarters of Sayyida Zaynab, Jaramana, Qud-saiyya, Yarmuk and Masakin Berzeh (Ipsos May 2007). When one takes the history of these areas into consideration, some interesting details emerge. Often these quarters were the same sites where previous generations of Iraqi refugees had settled. One of the largest concentrations is found in Sayyida Zaynab. A Shiite Iraqi community started to settle here in 1970 and 1980, when individuals were deported because of their alleged Iranian origins (Babakhan 1996). Sayyida Zaynab is one of the major pilgrimage centres of the Imamite Shiite community. Thousands of people pay a visit (*ziarah*) to this site where the daughter of Imam Ali Ibn Abu Talib is said to be buried (Mervin 1996). Today Sayyida Zaynab is important not only as a pilgrimage centre, but also for being one of the centres of the exiled Iraqi community. Shiites as well Sunnis live in this area. The original Shiite character of this quarter and the presence of an equal number of Sunnis confirm that sectarian differences do not necessarily determine where Iraqis decide to settle, even though those who took refuge in Syria were escaping from the sectarian violence which was dividing Iraq. As Khadija explained:

We fled from the sectarian violence [*taifiya*] in November 2007. I settled in Sayyida Zaynab because here I had some friends who had fled Baghdad for the same reason.

The Iraqis living in Syria are often well-educated and previously belonged to the middle class. Before the fall of Saddam Hussein, Khadija used to work together with her husband in the Ministry of Culture. Because such Iraqi refugees are themselves the victims of sectarian conflict, they are unlikely to cause a spill-over of the conflict in the country of asylum (Leenders 2008). The high presence of 'mixed' heads of households among Iraqi refugees, i.e. belonging to both sects, corroborates this thesis.

Muhammad, a Sunni Arab, is married to Jwana K., a Sunni Kurd woman. Like many other interviewees, he had initially hesitated to mention his ethnic and religious affiliation. In fact, 69% of the

people interviewed by UNHCR in a recent survey refused to specify their faith – saying simply that they were Muslims. Such a trend may be the result of the stigmatisation of their affiliation.

I don't understand why they need to keep asking if I am Arab, Kurd, Shiite or Sunni!? I am Muslim and I am Iraqi. I already had to pass through this in Baghdad. So why they keep asking me?

Secondary moves by Iraqi families within Damascus suburbs and rural areas were also observed. These seem to be dictated by the financial constraints faced by Iraqis who initially relied on savings and saw their depletion in the face of high inflation. Muhammad continues:

We had to move from Masakin Berzeh to Yarmuk because we could no longer afford the price of living in Masakin Berzeh. The apartments there are way more expensive.

New patterns also appeared after the intensification of violence in Syria following the unrest of March 2011. Since then many Iraqis have been secondarily displaced from conflict-affected areas like Idlib, Homs, Hama, Aleppo and Dar'a, while others who used to live on the outskirts of Damascus, most notably in Sayida Zaynab, Harasta, Arbeen, Barza and Duma, had to relocate to safer areas within the city – particularly Jaramana, where an increasing number of internally displaced Syrians also converged.

As pointed out by Lassailly-Jacob (1996): 'Contrary to widespread stereotypes, the first groups of refugees are not fleeing randomly, but they follow familiar routes.' Lassailly-Jacob's research confirmed that, after the fall of the Ba'th regime, the Iraqi diaspora has followed migration patterns similar to those of the pre-2003 diaspora, despite the considerable change in the sectarian composition of the refugee population. Ties of kinship or friendship, as well as economic and security factors, significantly contributed to the continuity of this migration process, and prevailed over sectarian differences.

At the same time, the higher mobility of exiled women in the new urban context was often found to exacerbate the anxieties of their husbands, who remained rooted in their traditional

patriarchal views. For displaced Iraqi women, the experience of conflict as well as the hardships posed by their exile and refugee status often introduces a new structure of opportunity and constraints into a changing social, political, and economic landscape.

The dispersal of family members

Syria has not ratified the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, nor its Protocol. The government allowed the entry of Iraqis, adopting a relatively open borders policy until October 1st 2007, when it decided to limit access to Iraqis, blaming the illegitimate war led by the United States and the negative repercussions on Syria resulting from the large presence of Iraqis (Saleh 2007). With the closure of the border, family members were separated between Iraq and Syria. When interviewed, Basima, a young married woman from Baghdad who lived with her older son in Sayyida Zaynab, had been separated from the rest of the family in Iraq.

My husband had registered with UNHCR in Damascus, but then he had to return to Iraq for work and now he cannot leave the country. Every once in a while I manage to talk to him via phone. He had tried to get a visa from the Syrian embassy to return to Damascus, but it's so hard.

Nevertheless, growing numbers of family members decide to take the risk of returning to Iraq with no guarantee of being allowed to re-enter the country. The Syrian government later softened these entry measures by allowing a limited number of Iraqis to obtain a visa at the border. Despite this change, surveys indicate that only in 63% of cases is the composition of the family unit the same as prior to departure from Iraq (Ipsos 2007).

The reasons that push Iraqi refugees to return home vary. For instance, Zaynab, who lost her husband when he was assassinated in his police car, claimed:

I want to go back to Baghdad together with my daughter Hala, to look for my son who has been kidnapped.

The risk of not being able to return to Syria did not prevent her from going to look for her son.

In a phone conversation a month later, Zaynab explained:

I had to go back but I could not find my son. Now we are stranded here in Baghdad and we cannot go back to Syria because we do not have a visa.

The largest proportion of returns has been dictated by the socio-economic constraints the refugees faced in Syria (UNHCR 2010). As *duiyuf*, or 'guests', Iraqis in Syria are not allowed to work. In order to have access to regular employment, it is necessary to have a work permit, which is obtainable when a long-term residency permit (*iqamah*) is issued. The latter may be very difficult for Iraqi refugees to obtain, thus limiting access to work.

Syrian authorities have generally tolerated the irregular staying of Iraqis. Nevertheless, they posed severe limitations on access to the formal labour market. In addition, Iraqi employees are vulnerable to regulations that withdraw their work permits if they are found to have committed offensive acts in respect to *šaraf* (honor) and *adab* (decency). These acts are considered crimes (*jinayah*) and reporting them to the authorities is entirely at the discretion of the employer (Saleh 2007). The considerable competitiveness to find employment – most notably in the informal labour market – further reduces refugees' chances of obtaining work with decent wages.

As a result, Iraqis are left with few options but to rely on their savings: These constitute the primary form of support for 41% of refugees (Ipsos May 2007). The high cost of rent together with the lack of earned income can soon exhaust savings, leaving no alternative but to seek resources in Iraq (UNHCR May and December 2010). The case of Muntadhar, who had spent over a year in Damascus with his family without finding employment, is emblematic:

Since we left Baghdad because of the threats of the Shiite militias, we've lived in Damascus only thanks to our savings. In Baghdad I used to work as a taxi driver, while in Syria I had to spend most of my time at home. My wife Noora obtained her residency permit only thanks to her mother who is Syrian.

Muntadhar is despondent that he can no longer fulfil his role as breadwinner. He used to have stable employment before he was forced to leave Baghdad, together with his family. Pushed by the lack of work opportunities, he decided to go back to Baghdad, where he now works and occasionally sends remittances to his wife and children.

Despite the regulations which limit their mobility, Iraqis manage to find ways to return, for example, by renewing their residency permits prior to return to Iraq. Muhammad explained:

I cross the border periodically; I verify the situation and the conditions of our goods in Al-Mansour, Baghdad. We've rented out our place there, and the rent is our major source of income in Syria. I still try to go back as little as possible. There are too many risks and threats as we've first experienced fleeing Baghdad.

As a mixed family, Jwana and Muhammad had to move to Syria in order to save their lives and to preserve their family unit. However, the division of their family, and the temporary return to Iraq of some of the family members, is now the only way left to compensate the lack of resources in Syria.

Livelihood strategies and the feminisation of the diaspora

De-constructing family networks

For many Iraqis, the solidarity between community and family members is one of the few ways of coping with the lack of financial resources. At the beginning of 2007, 86% of those Iraqis who received assistance did so from family members, most notably through family networks (Ipsos 2007). When Syria introduced stricter border regulations, there was a radical change in the way that family networks operated, with remittances to the Iraqi refugees coming mostly from Iraq. Refugees' perceptions of threats to physical security, together with Syria's adoption of stricter border regulations, have led to a gendered dispersal of the family unit, with a new structure emerging in order to foster means of activating resources. The majority of family members who decided to stay in Iraq are male adults, while the children and the wives tended to anchor in Syria. This trend is corroborated by data col-

lected by UNHCR (UNHCR 2008). As Muhammad explained:

Reluctantly I had to leave my wife in Damascus together with my children, while I've returned here [to Baghdad] to check on our properties and try to gain a living. I could not let my woman and children live here. Here in Baghdad there is no future for my family.

Even though the risks associated with return remains high, men often shuttle between Iraq and Syria to preserve the 'duty' – as Muhammad puts it – of the head of the family:

When I go back to my family [in Damascus] I bring the money I earn with me; otherwise I send them to my wife through hawalat bankiya [bank transfers]. It is not much but it is vital for them to keep living there.

Family networks, commonly known to be a channel to send remittances from the country of asylum to family members in the country of origin, thus tend to be upset by the livelihood constraints in Syria. Iraqi husbands who are unable to find resources in Syria decide to look for them back in Iraq, and are thus temporarily separated from their wives and families who remain in the country of asylum. As illustrated in the cases above, the migration of displaced Iraqis is often circular across a wide area, as a result of a strategy of managing risks through the dispersal of family members along family networks and gender lines.

Resettlement and family reunification

Although few Iraqis are said to benefit from humanitarian assistance, the referral mechanism for resettlement managed by UNHCR does have a significant influence on the livelihood strategies of refugees. UNHCR uses measures based on positive discrimination in identifying those who are eligible: Women at risk and female-headed households are amongst the most vulnerable categories according to UNHCR and therefore the most likely to be referred for resettlement to a third country when no alternative solutions are available (UNHCR 2010). The number of resettled Iraqis from the Middle East to industrialised countries rose from a few hundred in 2006

to approximately 50,000 in 2010 (UNHCR 2010). The vast majority was resettled to the USA. In Syria the numbers of admissions to the USA declined in the following years because foreign state officials found it impossible to process the refugees' claims.

From May 2007 to December 2012, 10,784 Iraqi female refugees arrived in the USA from Syria, thus representing over 52% of resettled refugees by sex. Following the criterion that single women and women at risk are more likely to be resettled to third countries, Iraqi women often choose to separate from their husbands in Syria in order to be considered for such resettlement. Living in a transitional situation defined as a 'limbo' (Danış 2007), Iraqis have high expectations of asylum in third countries. 27% of Iraqis surveyed by Ipsos claim that resettlement is the only reason they want to register with UNHCR, as in the case of Umm Husseyn, an elderly Shiite woman who resides in Sayyida Zaynab:

I fled the quarter of Salama [previously known as Mintaqat Saddam] because a Sunni armed group persecuted me. I've then moved to Qamariyyah together with my daughters who are married to Sunni husbands. I've managed to come to Syria but my daughters had to stay in Iraq because they had problems with their passports. I do not want to go back to Iraq, and neither do I want to stay here. I want to start a new life in Ireland as a human being with dignified life, without having to go to the Suq and seeing dead bodies on the streets.

Although growing numbers of Iraqis have managed to depart for resettlement, the majority of refugees have to wait up to a year before their cases are processed by the resettlement countries. Pending resettlement screening, many Iraqis are unable to secure the resources needed to cope with their increasingly precarious situations in Damascus. At the same time, Iraqis who attempt to return are disqualified from obtaining refugee status and resettlement to a third country (Chatty and Mansour 2012). Hence a high proportion of Iraqi families anchor in Syria to secure the processing of their cases, while other families decide to split along gender lines between Syria and the home country.

Bearing in mind UNHCR's policies on resettlement, many Iraqi women decide to remain in Syria to secure their departure from Syria to third host countries, while husbands go back and forth from Syria to increase access to resources (Reliefweb 2012). Once the women are resettled, Iraqi men, as well as other family members, may try to join them in a subsequent step. Family reunification is promoted by UNHCR according to the right of a family to live together. In 2009, 6,122 women who were identified by UNHCR as at risk were admitted for resettlement in various hosting countries, while 922 followed for family reunification (UNHCR 2010). The US, the major resettlement country in the world, issued a special priority procedure to allow refugee family members to reunite with their Iraqi relatives in the USA. As with movement from Iraq to Syria, chain migration from Syria to industrialised countries was found to be a decisive factor to pull Iraqis across remarkably different gender lines.

Forced marriage and trafficking

Although its actual magnitude is unknown, arranged marriage is another frequent method used by Iraqi women to foster mobility and access to resources. This is particularly evident in the Arab world, where the relevant regulations about polygamy are less restrictive than in Europe. Such a marriage may be the decision of either the male or the female head of the family. An example was given by Fatima, the mother of Rana. Fatima moved to Damascus following the wedding of her daughter to a Syrian man. The mother declared:

With considerable efforts, I've managed to give my daughter in marriage to Husseyn. I did it in her interest after my husband died of cancer last year [2006]. Now, Rana tries to take care of me.

Family networks are often at the core of these transnational cross-border strategies, to enable access from a first to a second country of asylum. For example, in her interview, Aisha, who lived in Baghdad alone to complete her studies before joining the rest of her family in Syria, confessed

to be eager to marry her cousin in Canada. The degree of coercion in these situations often varies and may be subtle.

A frequent and serious phenomenon – although more often unreported – is represented by the trafficking of women for prostitution. This may be managed by criminal organisations, however, family networks are also a pathway for sexual exploitation (USDS 2011). Despite being officially prohibited, prostitution is often condoned by local authorities with a *rešwa*, or bribe. Young women are invited to Syria by their relatives and offered employment, but are then coerced to work in brothels. A typical case is that of Rizan, who was married when she was still 16 to Ahmad, a Sunni man:

After the escalation of violence in 2006, my son and I fled to Syria to my husband with forged passports. Once we finished our savings, my husband decided to use our place as a brothel. Ahmad was running the business together with a Syrian guy; he forced Iraqi women into prostitution, while we resided in the same apartment. When I tried to convince him to leave this activity, he beat me. So I left him and I returned here in Al-Maqal [Basrah], where I live with my parents.

The Syrian authorities are often silent about these episodes, but not always. Women accused of prostitution in Damascus can be deported to Iraq, with serious threats to their physical safety. Although the actual scale of trafficking in women and girls is unknown, this phenomenon – together with arranged marriages – certainly represents a common cross-border strategy for Iraqis in Syria. Negative coping strategies become more frequent when few other options are available in a protracted situation. Exploitative sexual relationships were found to be more wide-spread among the poorest segments of the refugee population, who are often the ones who have fewer means to survive. The cases examined reveal a consensus among women and youths that selling sexual favours, whether formally for cash or on the basis of a kind of patronage, is a function dictated by unequal power relationships and lack of alternative prospects.

Education and Residence

Since the 2003 war, Syria is the only country in the region which has provided access to basic services to Iraqis, including access to primary health care as well as to primary and secondary education. Registration at school is one of the few solutions left to obtain a residency permit in Syria. An example is a family of five. In Baghdad, the father used to be the director of a business, while the mother was a ministerial employee. The father was threatened, but the police did nothing, so the family fled to Damascus, and now live in Mašru' Dummar. The parents obtained a residence permit thanks to one of their daughters, who has enrolled in school in Damascus. Because enrolling in Syrian schools is a means to obtain the residency permit, the highest peaks of refugee arrivals in Syria coincide with the beginning of the academic year (UNHCR 2010). According to the Syrian Ministry of Education, only 26,124 Iraqis are enrolled in schools, equivalent to 13.5% of the Iraqi population in Syria aged between 6 and 14 years (Williams 2007). This may be because not all families were initially aware of the possibility to enrol children in school. Often the credits acquired in Iraqi schools were not recognised by Syrian schools, as they have different educational curricula, and frequently school certificates had been left in Iraq. Moreover, formal access to education does not imply actual attendance at school. According to the same source (Williams 2007), the majority of Iraqis dropped out of school after the first month of the academic year, mostly because of economic constraints. According to a 16-year-old who now lives in Damascus together with his mother and his younger sister in a flat in Sayyidah Zeynab:

I used to go to school but the Syrian shebab [kids] always looked for trouble. My mother does not earn enough money to make a living. Then I went to work in a factory where they produce gasoline heaters. I used to earn 200 lira a day [4 USD] working 12 hours. The owner of the work then fired me saying I was Iraqi. My father is still in Iraq with the family of his second wife. So I had to help my mother to find a living, otherwise we won't pay the rent.

Although the parents in Iraqi refugee families are often well educated, work by minors is in fact common. With average wages of only 50 lira [1 USD] per day, children are generally exposed to work exploitation. The opportunity to complete their education is not in fact taken up once the residency permit is obtained. Isolated from the local communities, Iraqi children are thus left with their mothers to find a living. Girls are often left at home to take care of their younger siblings, whilst the mothers may have occasional work as maids. According to Iraqi women, authorities may close an eye when sons are found to be working, but the authorities do not do tolerate their husbands working without the work permit. On the other hand, most well-off families expressed anxieties in letting their children go to school, fearing that the school's environment may not be safe and that their children may be victims of bullying.

Redesigning the family structure

Often forced to leave Iraq for Syria without their husbands, Iraqi women find themselves taking on unprecedented roles. Abdallah, a former aeronautical engineer and Ba'ath member who graduated from university in Paris, now suffers from senile dementia. His wife Fatima and her daughter take care of him. While I conducted the interview, Abdallah pretended to be interviewed instead of his wife, and asked the reason why the questions were not addressed to him. The elderly man needed medical treatment. At that time, the family was living from their savings and from the money they had managed to earn by selling their assets in Baghdad. The wife and daughter faced an uncertain future that would require paid employment by one or both of them, as they were no longer able to count on Abdallah's work.

While women become the main wage-earners in the refugee context, men often suffer from the loss of role and authority, which becomes evident in feelings of frustration. This primarily stems from an evolving role of women in the mobilisation of resources through a higher degree of autonomy. The latter includes the involvement of Iraqi females not only in generating income,

but also in increased freedom of movement. This may cause resentment among male adults and lead to acts of domestic violence against their wives and daughters. Such episodes of gender-based violence are likely to go unreported.

In the essentially patriarchal structure of Iraqi families, the male head of the household often withholds the passports of the other family members. The difficult circumstances of exile in Syria, however, challenge such traditional behaviour, as does the process for accessing asylum. UNHCR's procedures for registration require that the asylum-seeker be present at the interview, even though it usually takes place several months after the first appointment with the UN Refugee Agency. While male heads of the families often have to go back and forth between Iraq and Syria, the women settle more permanently in Syria, and can register with UNHCR Syria as asylum-seekers and follow the procedures required to obtain the refugee certificate. Leaving women alone in Syria stimulates male anxiety about perceived threats to female modesty and sexuality. This is significant in the case of Mustafa, who lost the chance to register as refugee because he was going back and forth between Syria to Iraq:

When we first approached the UNHCR, I applied for the interview under my name. I knew I would have had to go back to Baghdad – but you know – I could not let my wife to do the interview alone before the UNHCR. My wife is a simple woman. Alone she could not have done the registration. On the other hand I had to go back to come back here [to Baghdad] because it is the only place where I could find work.

In the end, neither Mustafa nor his wife registered with UNHCR. Mustafa stays in Baghdad to work and only occasionally manages to visit his wife and children, while his wife renewed her residency only thanks to her children's enrolment in school. However, not showing up at the UNHCR interview and the subsequent lack of registration means losing the opportunity to obtain refugee status. For this reason, a large proportion of men have had to renounce their exercise of monopolistic control over the rest of the family, leaving female family members to take on new roles and deal with authorities to ensure the fam-

ily's future. As observed by Özyeğin: 'Patriarchal opposition to women's waged work, rooted in deep-seated anxieties about perceived threats to female sexuality and modesty and to men's honour, drastically limits the sort of work women can perform and the contexts in which they can work' (Özyeğin 2001). However, the severe limitations following exile have introduced a radical change in the involvement of Iraqi women in access to resources (Danış 2007). During the interview, Khadija explained how her husband, who used to be a sergeant until the fall of Saddam Hussein, is now unemployed in Syria:

We are here [before the UNHCR registration centre] looking for treatment. My husband has got a problem... He drinks too much. Now I try to gain a wage working as a carer in a Syrian family. Though, I can't take care of my children who are just 7 and 10 years old.

A large number of women, who prior to displacement belonged to the Iraqi middle class, today work in the informal labour market in Syria. While only those with sufficient financial resources manage to flee Iraq, over half of UNHCR-registered Iraqi refugees have now been in Syria for over five years, and their progressive destitution is continuing because of the depletion of their savings, the lack of stable income, and the high level of inflation affecting the country of asylum.

As a result, even the most well-off families were pushed to undertake unskilled work in the informal labour market. Marie, a 50-year old Iraqi woman, provides an example of this recurrent phenomenon. She claimed:

I am an artist. In Baghdad I used to do taşkil zinai [plastic arts]. I now live in Masakin Barzeh, in Damascus' outskirts. I left my place in Al-Mansur at the beginning of 2007: my 18-year-old son speaks English well, so he followed a British company in Basrah to find employment. Together with a couple of friends he was instead kidnapped by the militias. His friends' parents phoned me to inform me that the militias had requested a 20,000 USD ransom to release them. We paid and then moved to Sulaymaniyya [Northern Iraq] together with my second son. We lived there for a while and then I left to Syria while my two sons were stranded in Habbur between Turkey and Iraq, and eventually

had joined me here in Damascus. Here I sometimes work as a cleaner for Syrian families, and I volunteer to decorate the church, but it is not enough and I am now finishing my savings.

The remittances and other assets sent by Iraqi men are irregular and insufficient to secure the livelihoods of their families. Thus most of the women interviewed – from different socio-economic backgrounds – undertake different kinds of labour, mostly low-skilled casual work for modest wages, while their children are also often compelled to find supplementary sources of income. The previous gender- and age-based roles of family members have therefore been transformed as a result of the conditions in exile.

Conclusions

Through the process of chain migration, the recent Iraqi diaspora followed pre-2003 patterns, characterised by solidarity networks made up of family ties rather than ethno-sectarian elements. At one level, therefore, the diaspora is marked by continuity. However, socio-economic constraints in Syria and the subsequent adoption of stricter entry regulations by the Syrian government in 2007 greatly influenced Iraqis' livelihood strategies and led to considerable changes to the roles of men and women. The cases here examined show how Iraqis adapted to the norms which regulate their mobility – registration and resettlement criteria, family reunification, and access to education – in order to activate different resources.

Gender was found to be a critical factor in determining who moves, how those moves take place, and the resultant ability of displaced women and families to access available resources after the division-of the family unit (Boyd and Grieco 2003). The redirection of remittances from Iraq to Syria implied an increasing devolution of authority to women as heads of households who channelled resources and developed some local ties, thereby allowing male family members to stay mobile.

As pointed out by Chatelard, breadwinners are ready to take some degree of risk to look for work, but access to work and other services may still be too risky for other household members

(Chatelard 2010). Pushed by their traditional role to comply with this duty, male heads of the households tend to undertake such risks. Despite the reluctance of their husbands, wives are subsequently anchored in the host country together with their children. Such cases illustrate a challenge to the traditional family structure because of their conflict with its patriarchal character. Such a change – which often affects wealthy as well as poorer families – should not be romanticised. These alterations appear to be disruptions rather than positive evolutions. In fact, women are often forced to undertake roles which are far from emancipation, but are rather the result of social exclusion. What the long-term consequences of such a redesign of family roles will be – for example, whether the displacement will become an opportunity leading to women's empowerment – remains to be seen.

All too often humanitarian organisations have viewed freedom of movement only as a challenge in terms of reaching those needing their assistance. However, freedom of movement, including cross-border movements between and within the country of asylum and the country of

origin, is also an international human right and a means for the displaced to access resources. Institutional humanitarian assistance should build upon this by supporting community-based projects aimed at enhancing these capabilities and social resources. A holistic approach should also be adopted by paying equal attention to the needs of male heads of households, who often undertake dangerous journeys to their home compelled by their traditional role of breadwinner, and who may be subject to frustrations dictated by the loss of role in the country of asylum.

The Iraqi displacement has reached a critical stage. International interest in Iraq is declining. Yet the lack of security, continuing civil conflict, and economic uncertainty make it unlikely that a mass Iraqi return will occur. More likely, Iraqi refugees will remain in neighbouring states under increasingly difficult circumstances. As their savings diminish and their circular movements into and out of Iraq to enhance their livelihoods become more precarious, it is likely that onward migration will become more necessary and urgent.

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