

## The change of normative gender orders in the process of migration: a transnational perspective

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## **Abstract**

In this paper, the question of social change for women as actors of migration is examined. Apart from feminist theory and international gender studies, this topic is located in migration studies and social theory as well. It is proposed to analyse the transformation of gender norms in processes of migration in connection with the changes taking place in the domain of labour, namely the increasing tertiarisation in post-industrial societies on the one hand, and a globalising economy and international distribution of labour following from this on the other. A concept for transnational gender orders is outlined, proposing that, along with these economic and structural processes, normative requirements and ascriptions for social actors are emerging as well. They target the gender performance of women as actors of migration, insofar as an assumed universal gender socialisation as women is becoming a qualification and resource in an international distribution of labour.



## 1. Introduction

In public debates and media discourses, the emancipation of migrant women in post-industrial societies is a much discussed and symbolically charged topic. Especially women belonging to cultures that are identified as different in some way, with reference to religion or social practices, are the targets of this exchange. They are perceived as cultural protagonists of entire religious denominations, of national and regional populations and their communities. Their behaviour is seen to symbolise the extent of progress of particular societies, relating to a universal paradigm of development. This concept of development has been questioned extensively, because it has often included the idea of the superiority of “the West” representing the universal by symbolising the civilised in relation to the barbarian, modernity in relation to tradition. Apart from this, it has been criticised as a teleological concept, determining the outcome of possible dynamics shaping social processes. The linkup of development with migration has been exploited in various ways, recently in order to tie it to migration control (Faist 2007).

Taking up an open concept of societal development based on the interrelatedness of human action which cannot be entirely foreseen in its outcome, as has been designed by Norbert Elias (2006), allows one to pose the question of how social change is taking place without connecting it to the claim of superiority or evading its essentially dynamic character. In a globalising world, the migration of women contributes vitally to social change in different respects, in the region of origin of migration as well as in the region of destination. From the perspective of feminist theory, the question also needs to be raised how the scope of action changes for women as actors of migration: in what respects is the scope of action enlarged for women, in what respects is it narrowed? This, of course, is also of central interest in migration studies as well as social theory.

Thus, instead of taking a culturalistically narrowed perspective, which locates the reproduction of gender norms exclusively within the migrant ethnic community, and moreover remains bound to an individualistic ideal, if it is limited to a matter of emancipation, I propose to analyse the transformation of gender norms in processes of migration in connection with the changes taking place in the domain of labour, namely, the increasing tertiarisation in post-industrial societies. The question of how changes in the mode of production in post-industrial societies affect migrants has not yet been extensively raised. I propose to analyse this question in connection with the changes in normative gender orders that women experience when migrating between societies.



## 2. Women in international migration and social change

In international feminist theory and gender studies, to what extent migrating women experience social change has been the focus of much controversy. Women have an important share in international migration, a migration that has undergone changes in its quantitative as well as in its qualitative shape since the end of World War II, particularly since the 1980s (Castels/Miller 1998). Processes of migration are significant in structuring the regions of origin as well as the regions of destination. Recapitulating the discussion in terms of the reproduction of social inequality, it can be concluded that the economic enhancement of women as actors of migration, i.e. the social mobility of migrant women, does not necessarily coincide with a change in the symbolic gender order. On the one hand, for example, Saskia Sassen states that migrant women have experienced an increase in autonomy in the wake of globalisation and growing international migration (Sassen 1998). In many families, women become the “breadwinners” through migration, gaining economic independence and moreover emancipation from the woman’s role as caretaker for family members. On the other hand, these effects in migration are evidently ambivalent, as some authors point out. For example, Eleonore Kofman argues that the gendered division of labour is emphasised in international migration. This is caused by immigration policy through which women less often receive employment contracts prior to migration, and by the gendered and racialised restrictions of the labour markets in post-industrial societies (Kofman 2004: 655). Morokvasic-Muller shows that migration from post-socialist countries to states with capitalist market economies is becoming gendered on the sex-segregated labour market. Although many women were qualified as scientists in post-socialist countries, at the beginning of the 1990s only a small proportion (20 per cent) of migrant scientists employed by German science institutes were women, (Morokvasic-Muller 2003). Finally, Parreñas presents the hypothesis of the “gender paradox” accompanying the increasing migration of women and transnationalisation of families. Normative ideals of femininity tying them to family tasks were transgressed in the process of migration, but nevertheless the “ideology of women’s domesticity” was reproduced (Parreñas 2005: 92 ff.). Even across long distances, mothers were the ones responsible for the organisation of family tasks. Moreover, in the countries of origin, these tasks were relegated to other women. These findings were proven true in recent research on domestic work in Germany as well (Lutz 2007; Rerrich 2006).



### 3. The change of normative gender orders in an international distribution of labour

The assumption that the domain of labour is elemental in the structuring of social hierarchies is a well established approach in gender studies, labour market participation of women being a measure for women's economic participation. The labour market is only one institution amongst others determining the social position of social actors. Still, in this paper I want to focus on the idea that the reproduction of gender norms takes place in the organisation and distribution of labour to a substantial extent. With reference to migration, the question emerges concerning how the international distribution of labour enabled by migration is structuring social inequality and determining the social position of migrant women.

The concept of normative gender orders goes beyond that of gender norms. It relies on the concept of gender order developed by Connell (1987), which aims at the “macro-politics of gender” comprising the “conflict of interest” on a “society-wide scale, the formation and dissolution of general categories and the ordering of relationships between institutions” (Connell 1987: 139). Emphasising its dynamic character, gender order can be understood as “the current state of play in this macro-politics” (ibid.). By locating gender norms in the dimension of societal order, one can see the vital share gender order has in the shaping of social hierarchies, and at the same time differentiate it from the micro-level of face-to-face interactions. It implies a comprehensive organisation and structuring of single norms, depending on societal institutions and their current state of play, as Connell puts it.

Birgit Pfau-Effinger has shown the importance of culture in the structuring of labour force participation of women. She defines “gender culture” as ideals referring to the societal integration of women and men, the gendered division of labour, and ideals concerning “relations between generations of the family and obligations in these relations”. These ideals are institutionalised as norms. In her study, she compares national development paths of “gender cultural models”, which can also vary between different regions of a country (Pfau-Effinger 2004: 42 f.). Following Pfau-Effinger's concept, I want to define normative gender orders as a historically specific complex of norms and cultural ideals that refer to gender roles, to a gendered division of labour, and to sexuality, which are reproduced in institutions like the welfare state, the labour market, the family, and the educational system. The normative gender order furnishes the symbolic reproduction of inequality between the sexes. By understanding it as an institution itself, gender order can be differentiated from other social institutions, though it is reproduced by and through the other institutions and contributes to their reproduction as well. This conception of a relative autonomy of the normative gender order permits the



analysis of the persistence as well as the change of gender norms independent from other institutions. It follows Bourdieus conception of the relative autonomy of symbolic power relations compared to economically founded power relations, which he analyses with reference to class inequalities (Bourdieu 1984), but also with reference to gender relations (Bourdieu 2001). Margaret Archer, too, emphasises the necessity of distinguishing between “Cultural System integration”, referring to the “logical consistency” of “components of culture” such as values, ideals, and other cultural ideas, and “Socio-Cultural integration”, referring to “causal consensus” about a certain culture and its components in a specific socio-historic context. Socio-cultural integration thus aims at the level of social practice and social as well as structural interactions, which can be distinguished from integration on the level of the cultural system for the analysis of cultural change (Archer 1996: 4 ff.). Using this distinction, one can analyse, for example, how certain ideals of gender relations may change in a specific historical context, but are not inevitably reproduced in social practice. At the same time, economic relations between social groups may change, without this change necessarily being reflected in a change of values and norms.

Pfau-Effinger puts forward the longevity of cultural value systems, maintaining that they cannot be easily altered in social practice and in the struggle of social groups concerning dominant cultural values. Following Archer’s theory, Pfau-Effinger argues that cultural change takes place when integration on the level of the cultural system as well as integration on the levels of social practice and structural interactions – interactions between social groups – is low. In this case of weak “causal cohesion”, cultural change is probable, depending on the degree of contradictions developed between social groups in the struggle of dominant values, and on the low “logical consistency” of the elements of a cultural system: i. e. when the constellation of interests changes (Pfau-Effinger 2004: 40). In her comparative study between gender cultures in three European states, Germany, Finland and The Netherlands, she shows how collective actors, like the women’s movement since the 1970s, play a vital role in causing cultural changes, but at the same time certain national “development paths of gender cultural models” have an important influence on the shaping of values and ideals concerning gender relations.

Returning to the topic discussed in international feminist theory and gender studies, the social mobility of migrant women contrasting to little change on the cultural level may be analysed as two modes in the reproduction of inequality, one taking place on the level of economics and the other on the level of the symbolic power relations, the latter being relatively autonomous from the former. While there may be a social change in the labour market par-



ticipation of women through migration, accompanying an enhancement in their economic as well as social status, this may not coincide with a change in normative gender orders.

Pfau-Effinger's concept is concerned with an international comparison between cultural gender cultural models. In the case of migration, one also has to ask how the transformation in normative gender orders occurs if social actors do not remain in one society, but migrate between societies. The actors may thus be acquainted with possibly strongly diverging gender norms and ideals. They are integrated not within the social exchange of only one society, but at least within two. As a result, there are different societal institutions they experience, the labour market being one of these institutions, others being the family and the shaping of the welfare state, in a more general sense institutionalised state instruments to decommodify the effects of economy respectively, as well as the educational systems. This comparative model is apt to take into account the fact that migrants are located within certain national societies and their nationally determined institutions at the same time they are migrating between them.

Beyond this, it is necessary to develop more comprehensive approaches that deal with the international distribution of labour, enabled by economic globalisation as well as the migration of geographically mobile people. These are social actors who transgress territorial boundaries in the pursuit of offering their labour power. With technological progress, the possibilities to participate in more than one society has also increased and changed the forms of migration. Migrants are integrated within nationally determined societies and their institutions, but they participate in a labour market that can be termed supranational if it is enabled by such free-trade areas as the EU or NAFTA. It can be analysed as an international labour market if there are few or no forms of organisations independent of the nation state.

In international gender studies, Sassen has put forward the hypothesis "of the possibility of systematic links" between economic globalisation and the increase of migrant women from developing economies furnishing the regions of origin of migration with revenues and profit, accompanying a rise in unemployment and debt in those economies (2003: 59 ff.). Diane Elson argues that a globalised economy has made "available a new and cheap source of female labour", migrant women working as maids in Western Europe and North America, as well as in the newly industrialising countries of East Asia (Elson 2007: 42). Most female migrant workers are employed in "traditionally female occupations" (UN 1999; cf. Elson: *ibid.*). A considerable welfare gap between the region of origin and the region of destination of migration seems to be one of the prerequisites for a particular international distribution of labour caused by economic globalisation amongst other factors. It is one of the powerful forces determining the participation and allocation of migrating women within nationally located labour



markets. The (often informally) emerging labour market can be analysed, thus, as an institution on a supranational level, one being determined by the creation of free-trade areas. The role of such global players as IMF and World Bank must be considered in this process as well as. It is characteristic, though, for this supranational labour market that the influence of national governments and institutions is even less than on the labour market at a national level.

The concept of normative gender order permits the identification of influences on gender norms and ideals for migrant women on the macro level. In the case of a (possibly) emerging supranational labour market, however, one has to take into account that it is shaped at various levels. The concept of normative gender order has to be thought of as a multilevel approach, including the national levels of state of origin as well as state of destination of migration, and a supranational level determined by economic processes on a global scale and international institutions like the IMF and World Bank. Assuming the influence of normative gender orders on these levels, I want to put forward that processes such as economic globalisation and such structural relations as a strong welfare gap between states and societies of the North/West and South/East do not solely work on an economic level, but go along with specific normative requirements and ascriptions for the social actors involved. My hypothesis is that migrants experience these normative requirements as they respond to the opportunities created by economic forces and processes to enhance their social positions through migration. Concerning migrant women, international gender studies has argued that they are being structurally gendered, finding an employment mainly in jobs for which women are thought to be particularly apt, including cleaning and caring for children and the elderly. I want to add the hypothesis that, along with this structural gendering in the labour market, normative requirements and ascriptions can be analysed aiming at the gender of migrants. An assumed universal gender socialisation as women is transformed into a resource in the international distribution of labour – and on supranational labour markets respectively.

#### 4. Changing labour relations in post-industrial societies

Changes in the mode of production in industrial nation states have been discussed since the 1960s, focusing on the increase of knowledge-based work in relation to industrial work that is declining in its quantity but not in its economic significance. This phenomenon of tertiarisation concerns the organisation of work within a growing third sector, including such occupations as services in different branches, scientific and other cognitive work, and a decreasing second sector, namely industrial production and other forms of manufacturing. These changes



have been brought about by technological progress. Meanwhile, these changes in the world of labour have also been discussed regarding their limiting and disciplining dimensions for social actors. With the growing possibilities of objectifying labour, engendered by technological innovations, employees and their individual capacities for cooperation, warranty and creativity have become increasingly important for the organisation of work, as Christoph Deutschmann puts it (Deutschmann 2003). The potential and qualifications of social actors acquired outside the job are being integrated in processes of rationalisation in and outside the company, the subject being at the centre of this restructuring of labour called “subjectifying work” (Baethge 1999; Moldaschl/Voß 2002; Lohr/Nickel 2005). Employees are confronted with requirements of “self-control”, “self-rationalisation” and “self-economisation”, possibly a new type of labour power, which Jürgen Pongratz and Günter G. Voß call “self-entrepreneurial” and characterise as the ideal type of the “entreployee” (Pongratz/Voß 2003). Apart from this, these processes are analysed as “delimiting of work” (Gottschall/Voß 2005), concerning spatial and time dimensions, a restructuring of the limits between work and home, between company and market, and a restructuring of hierarchies within companies. While the significance of wage work for the classification of social actors remains unquestioned, the meaning of work is being fundamentally challenged at the same time, with growing unemployment and precarious employment becoming characteristic of the information age (Castel 2003).

This is the situation migrant women encounter in post-industrial societies as regions of destination of migration. The question has not yet been raised extensively how the de-institutionalisation of work is affecting migrants offering their labour power across nation states and their borders. How are they experiencing the specific requirements being analysed in the wake of the changing world of labour, in which is described, for example, the ideal type of “entreployee” going along with the need of self-control, self-rationalisation and self-economisation? How are changes shaped for women as actors of migration thought to be typical for the information age, namely, the “historically unprecedented concentration of human labour on functions that cannot be formalized” (Deutschmann 2003: 477) ?

Migrating women who are primarily employed in care work and cleaning are doing the kind of work which cannot - or at least not entirely - be formalised, to take up Deutschmann's argument. They are fulfilling tasks not integrated in the process of objectifying by technological means, because the subjective motivation and persistent need for decision making is characteristic for this kind of work. In the sociology of labour, this kind of work is usually not integrated into considerations about the changes in the organisation of labour. In particular, it has not been reflected that migrating women are increasingly doing this kind of work in post-



industrial societies. Consequently, the unmixing of labour functions in some that can be formalized and some that cannot be formalized, which is regarded to have reached a historically high degree in post-industrial societies (Deutschmann 2003), goes along with the attribution of some of these jobs and tasks – namely those in cleaning and nursing in the private household - according to sex and ethnicity or race.

For migrating women in post-industrial societies, gender socialisation as female constitutes one of the potentials and qualifications acquired outside one's job that is being increasingly yielded in the process of labour. Thus, for women as actors of migration, specifically between nation states with a considerable welfare gap, female gender socialisation is becoming a resource on an emerging supranational labour market and in an international division of labour between nation states with developing economies and post-industrial nation states. While some of these labour functions are apt to formalisation through technical innovations, others remain reliant on subjective motivations and decisions. Some of the tasks in care work and cleaning are externalised on to geographically mobile migrating women, going along with specific requirements aiming at their gender performance.

## 5. A transnational perspective on emerging normative gender orders

Returning to the argument that a globalising economy creates a supranational labour market going beyond the labour market located in the nation state, while being realised on the level of the nation state at the same time, normative gender orders emerging within these economic processes can be sketched, assuming a transnational perspective. As such, this outlook goes beyond the nation state and a comparative perspective, without evading the national level of analysis. As indicated above, a multilevel approach is necessary, one that distinguishes between the levels of nation state and region on the one hand, and a further level emerging within globalising economic processes and forces as well as with the experience of social actors migrating between societies on the other.

Ludger Pries takes up the concept of “figuration” to analyse these kinds of processes. This term was coined by Elias to emphasise the interrelatedness of human actions, distinguishing it from other sociological concepts such as function, role, structure, and particularly the opposition of society and individual in sociological theory (Elias 2006). Transnational figurations are outlined as “pluri-local” and relatively durable (Pries 2008: 166). They can be distinguished from other forms of international exchange. “Diaspora-Internationalisation”, for example, is another mode of constituting a pluri-local social space, but in comparison to trans-



national figurations, it clearly has a “centre-periphery structure” (ibid.: 134). Similarly, the analysis of processes of transnationalisation differs from a comparative analytical perspective focusing on the nation state and society defined at the level of the nation state. These transnational interrelations contain “social practice, symbol systems and artefacts”. They can have a “predominantly economic, social, cultural or political dimension”, being “interrelated in a complex way” (ibid.: 166). Analyses of processes of transnationalisation refer to interrelations in everyday life, “cross-border interactions” of single as well as collective actors, profit as well as non-profit organisations, and “emerging transnational institutional structures” (ibid.; cf. also Pries 2007: 14 ff.).

Against this background, the concept of the transnational normative gender order can be outlined as follows: It is constituted on a macro-level as an institution, emerging with the creation of a labour market on a supranational level as well as economic globalisation processes. It can be distinguished from the labour market and other institutions. The concept of transnationalisation is limited, though, to the constitution of self-contained social spaces between nationally defined societies, while relying on the latter at the same time. In this paper, the emergence of transnational gender orders is assumed with reference to supranational social spaces created by such free-trade areas as the EU or NAFTA and the economic processes of globalisation launched thereby. On the level of the nation state, the transnational normative gender order is reproduced in relation to other institutions such as the labour market, the family, educational systems, and the welfare state. On the level of the supranational labour market, transnational gender orders are reproduced as institutions in relation to globalising economic processes. Other institutions that are determined by the nation state are suspended on the level of transnational exchange, i.e. the institutions of the welfare state and educational systems. These institutions cannot be fully tasked in the social practice of migrants in the region of origin of migration, because of temporary or long-term absence, nor in the region of destination of migration, because social rights are usually only partly granted to migrants, if they are granted at all. Consequently, it seems to be characteristic that economic influence is predominant in the reproduction of transnational normative gender orders, while institutions of the nation state as agents of this reproduction are partly or fully dismissed.

Assuming the influence of normative gender orders on a transnational level does not preclude the idea of the existence of an integrated society across territorial borders sharing the same norms and ideals. Society-wide shared norms and ideals are certainly hard to prove on a national level as well. Processes of community building could be located on a meso-level, according to Pries’ classifications (2007; 2008). One task for empirical research is to analyse



to what extent community building is taking place in historically specific contexts. In this paper, I have been concerned with the macro-level of economic processes. I have put forward the argument that the emergence of structures of economic and social exchange and dependencies that are being enabled by institutions and organisations such as the establishment of free-trade areas as well as the globally active IMF and World Bank, determining a specific international distribution of labour, go along with certain normative requirements and ascriptions aimed at social actors. These normative values are experienced by social actors on the level of social practice.

Apart from the macro-level, gender orders are reproduced on a micro-level in the social practice of migrants and in interactions between migrants, as well as between migrating and other social actors. The scope of action that is enabled in the course of migration can be identified at the level of everyday life and social practice. Following this, it is obvious that social practice is dependent on the decisions of women as actors of migration, but at the same time is influenced by institutions. My intention in this paper has been to sketch the influence of the international division of labour within an emerging supranational labour market on the scope of action of migrating women. My hypothesis is that, along with these economic and structural processes, ideals and values are shaped that are determined on the level of the nation state, namely the nation state of origin as well as the nation state of destination of migration, and furthermore are determined at an emerging transnational level, which I conceptualised as transnational normative gender orders in this paper. Speaking of them in the plural relies on the premise that they may vary, depending on the specific transnational figuration that is being constituted in the process of migration and social exchange. As such, the concept of transnational normative gender orders is an object of empirical research. Moreover, it has been my intention to point out that the values, ideals, and norms emerging with an international distribution of labour on a supranational labour market are requirements and ascriptions focusing on the gender performance of women as actors of migration. With gender socialisation becoming a qualification and resource within a supranational labour market, the scope of action is narrowed for many women, while they may experience an enhancement of their economic and social status at the same time.



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