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“National heroes” or ‘transnational shames’?

Exploring the development-migration nexus in migrant domestic workers and ICT workers

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Abstract

Information and communication technologies (ICT) and domestic work are the two sectors that Germany has recently lifted its general recruitment ban. The recruitment of migrant women and men, either as a domestic or an ICT worker, provides solutions to the alleged 'deficit' in care and in the knowledge economy. In addition, they send remittances back home. Despite these commonalities the existing literature tends to treat these two groups of migrants as separate subjects of research, resulting in "paradigmatic separation". I attempt to overcome this separation by juxtaposing these two flows. I analyze the media and political discourses about them focusing on India and Poland, the major sending countries of the respective migratory streams to Germany. I argue that the mode of incorporation of the two flows into development is far from unitary. I unpack that the discursive constructions rest on their alleged skill levels, which are highly gendered and classed. Whereas the Polish state strategically commodifies its female citizens' reproductive labour on the transnational labour market, India selectively draws on the national identification among (former) Indian migrant citizens in the highly skilled and skilled sectors for the transnational circulation of knowledge and resources. However, these migrant heroes of development are subject to moral disciplining of a transnational shame or blame.

1. Introduction

Information and communications technologies (ICT) and domestic work are the two sectors that Germany has lifted its general recruitment ban at the beginning of this decade, in 2000 and 2002 respectively. Then-German Chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, surprised the visitors of the 2000 CeBIT in Hanover in announcing that Germany would liberalize the recruitment of migrant IT professionals through the “Green Card” scheme. The racist reaction of the anti-immigration front to this policy was “*Kinder statt Inder* (children in stead of Indians).” While the scheme is often being quoted as a ‘failure’ since it did not attract as many IT professionals as the scheme had originally envisaged, it functioned as an important instrument for medium- and small-scale enterprises to quickly place migrant IT specialists (Kolb 2004). One year later, the German magazine, *Spiegel*, carried an article entitled “Green Card for Polish women (*Green Card für Polinnen*)?”² This feature appeared after a large scale police raid on households in Frankfurt am Main at the time when there was still no importation scheme of domestic workers. They caught hundreds of irregular Eastern European migrant caregivers without a work permit and deported them. This incident fired up a highly emotional political debate about the reconciliation of work, family life and elderly home care with a help of ‘affordable’ Eastern European migrant women. The phrase, “Green Card”, was then often used as a potential means to ‘de-illegalizing (*Entillegalisierung*)’ Polish caregivers, who have become the synonym of irregular Eastern European migrant women caring for German elderly (Lutz 2007).

The recruitment of migrant women and men, either as a domestic or an ICT worker, provides solutions to the alleged ‘deficit’ in care and in the knowledge economy. Moreover they send a non-negligible portion of their income back home, thereby improving the standard of living at the household level, and keeping the state coffers afloat. The importance of remittances, both in terms of their volume and stability over the years, has given a rise to creating euphoria about transnational migrants’ positive impacts on development (c.f. Ratha 2003). Transnational migrants who maintain ties with their countries of origin are thus ‘re-discovered’ as potential agents for economic development (Faist 2008, Van Naerssen, Spaan & Zoomers 2008, Skeldon 2008).

² Der Spiegel, 2001, 37, p.50.

Despite these commonalities the existing literature tends to treat the two groups of migrants as separate inquiries of research —migrant domestic and care workers on the one hand, and ICT workers on the other—, leading some authors to speak of a “paradigmatic separation” (Kofman & Raghuram 2005). I attempt to overcome this separation, by exploring discursive constructions of these two flows originating from India and Poland, the two major sending countries to Germany. I argue that the mode of incorporation of the two flows into political and media discourses is far from unitary. On the contrary, I show that the discursive constructions rest on their alleged skill levels, which are highly gendered and classed.

2. “Paradigmatic separation” of highly skilled and unskilled flows from a transnational perspective: an intersecting puzzle of gender and class

Skills have become an important criterion of migration selectivity in a number of countries. Salt (1997) identifies 12 categories involved in international migration such as corporate transferees, consultants, entertainers, business people, academics, researchers and students, and spouses and children of these categories. Despite the heterogeneity in skilled flows, Eleonore Kofman (2000) points out that practically only one stream has so far caught much scholarly attention: transnational corporate professionals. Given the predominant importance placed on technological advancement in the post-industrial, knowledge economy, the highly skilled are largely defined as those who are qualified in science and technology (OECD 2002) and this definition entails a deep-seated gender bias. Highly skilled flows are often equated with migrations of skilled workers in the ICT and financial sectors, which are predominantly male. This has effectively obliterated other skilled migrations in education and welfare, the sectors in which women make up the significant majority (Kofman 2000). Skills required in these sectors are seen as inherent to femininity and ‘natural’ qualities of women, and consequently care and pedagogic skills tend to be considered to be semi-skilled rather than highly skilled or skilled (Kofman & Raghuram 2005). The dominant focus on corporate professionals notwithstanding, in an early stage of highly skilled migration research in particular, the mobility of scientists and students has recently been widening the scope of highly skilled migration research (Ackers 2005, Findlay, King, Stam & Ruiz-Gelices 2006).

Furthermore, the labour shortage in receiving countries often influences the selectivity of migrants. Once identified as ‘labour shortage areas’, the skills required in these areas are elevated. Thus the definition of skilled workers is fluid (Erel 2003) and consequently those

who possess skills and qualification in the ‘shortage areas’ are considered as skilled workers (Kofman & Raghuram 2005).

While admission policy in Western Europe, including Germany, the UK and France, selectively encourages inflows of skilled migrants in labour shortage areas beyond the EU-border, much of the contemporary research efforts in migration studies has been put into investigating less privileged migrants and policy pertaining to them. The issue of ‘integration’ has been central to debating the majority of post-war labour migrants and their next generations, who are in conventional migration studies considered as those stay permanently in the country of immigration.³ The word’s normative usage is thus little applicable to corporate migrant professionals, who move from one place to the next at short intervals.

Furthermore, it is also because of social scientists’ interests in social inequalities (Kolb 2006). A large body of migration literature has focused on less privileged labour migrants’ experience arising from migration processes. The ‘problem-centered’ approach in migration studies, in its benevolent intention to problematize the difficult situations migrants face, has ironically contributed to creating the image of migrants as “deficit-beings” (Thränhardt 2005). Similarly, feminist migration scholarship since the 1980s has been engaging in the issue of social inequalities in relation to gender, ethnicity/‘race’, and class.⁴ Feminist scholarly work has rendered migrant women and the power hierarchies visible not least because it has critically been engaging in the production of knowledge while being sensitive to the issue of location and representation of marginalized groups. Nonetheless, this scholarly endeavour has at the same time led to an imbalanced emphasis on economic and family imperatives in women’s labour migration, often overlooking their career and individual aspirations (Raghuram 2008). Moreover, their focus has largely remained on the ‘low-skilled’ sector such as domestic work, which is highly feminized (Kofman & Raghuram 2005, Raghuram 2008).

It is in this context that Kofman and Raghuram (2005) speak of “paradigmatic separation” of skilled and unskilled flows in migration scholarship. I juxtapose these two flows in order to shed light on the ways in which the two streams intersect at the discursive level. The two flows investigated in this paper must entail a transnational perspective in the sense that

³ However, it is by now well-documented that the majority of labour migrants from CEE to Western and Northern Europe opt for short-term, circular migrations rather than seeking permanent settlement (c.f. Cyrus 2000a, 2000b, Morokvasic 2003).

⁴ Although the word, “intersectionality,” was not used in their article, Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis (1983) have already taken an intersectional perspective in the early 1980s.

these migrants do not make a journey with a “one way ticket” (Phizacklea 1983). Some move back and forth at regular intervals, others travel one place to the next when opportunities arise. Importantly, it is not only migrants that are on the move. It is also heroic and blaming discourses about them and their symbols that travel across nation-state borders, which leads to the emergence of “transnational social spaces” (Faist 2000).

3. “National heroes” or “transnational shames”?

Migration and development studies scholarship, policy makers as well as neo-liberal financial institutions have recently begun to pay attention to the role of transnational migrants as potential development agents of the national economy (Van Naerssen, Spaan & Zoomers 2008, Nyberg Sørensen, van Hear & Engberg-Pedersen, 2002, for a critical and more recent reflection on the ‘hot’ nexus between development and migration see Faist 2008, Skeldon 2008). Whereas the amount of foreign direct investment can radically fluctuate according to the sending country’s political stability and economic performance, the flow of remittances proves to remain relatively constant (Ratha 2003, World Bank 2006). It is largely due to transnational personal and family ties, the relationships which extend crossing nation-state borders (Faist 2000, Glick Schiller, Basch & Szanton-Blanc 1992, Portes, Guarnizo & Landolt 1999, Parreñas 2001, 2005, Hondagneu-Sotelo & Avila 1997, Shinozaki 2003, 2004). For developing countries remittance is often one of the few indispensable sources of stable foreign currency and for some such as Moldova, Haiti, Tonga, the Philippines, migrants’ remittances make up a significant share of the GNP (Mansoor & Quillin 2006). Moreover given the feminization of migration, international financial institutions such as the World Bank began to underscore women’s vital role in labour migration (Schiff, Morrison & Sjoblom 2007). Thus it is not surprising that developing countries have vested interests in facilitating migrants keeping their national identity while they are away (FAZ 2008 for Morocco, for the Philippines see Rodriguez 2002). Symbolically, as in the case of the Philippines, migrant workers can be elevated as high as “national heroes”, who keep the national economy buoyant.⁵

Domestic workers and construction workers from the Philippines are comforted as “national heroes” for their invaluable economic contributions at the expense of family separation and

⁵ The term was first coined by Filipino President Corazón Aquino in the late 1980s and since then it has been widely used in the Philippines’ context to refer to Filipina and Filipino migrant contract workers more generally.

downward occupational mobility. However, the very “national heroes” discourse may equally evoke a “transnational shame.” As Filomeno Jr. Aguilar (1996) elucidates, it is the stigma attached to these “heroes” working in the low- and unskilled sectors, which makes their fellow citizens in highly skilled sectors feel their status compromised. As a result, the feeling of shame leads to distance them from their low- and unskilled compatriots (Aguilar 1996). Thus, the “national heroes” discourse valorizes transnational labour migrants as a singular unit glorifying the shared and “imagined” nationhood. In contrast, the discourse of a “transnational shame” destabilizes co-national solidarity and underscores crucial differences based on social and economic class associated with different occupations. What remains implicit in Aguilar’s (1996) otherwise insightful analysis is the role of gender in the “transnational shame” discourse. I argue that gender as well as class in their intersection plays an important role in making the ‘transnational shame’ discourse.

I consider the discourses of transnational heroes and transnational shames as a useful heuristic device in thinking through the ways in which highly skilled and unskilled flows are perceived and intersect at a discursive level in my analysis.

4. Strategic transnational commodification and transnational circulation of a national pride

Let’s look at two discursive modes of incorporation into development policy in its broader sense. Poland exemplifies what I call “strategic transnational commodification” of unemployed reproductive labour. Since the collapse of the communist regime, Poland has been witnessing a massive exodus to Western Europe in response to the lack of employment. Most of them do not emigrate for good but travel back and forth in order to sustain their livelihood in Poland. The east-bound EU enlargement has created the “opportunity structure”, the freedom of mobility, within the Schengen space, facilitating circular mobility among Poles (Morokvasic 2003). Though difficult to quantify, it is estimated that since 1989 about 1 million Poles have set off to the West, a half of them being women (Coyle 2007). Women work as domestics, nannies and caregivers (Coyle 2007, Morokvasic 1994, 2003), and men in the construction sector (Alt 1999). Poland is by far the major ‘source country’ among the officially recruited domestic workers in German households. Polish job centers assign local private job placement agencies and public vocational schools to offer among others caregiver training courses for the elderly, disabled people and young children in foreign languages (Figures 1 and 2). The agencies operate under governmental authorization with funding from the Euro-

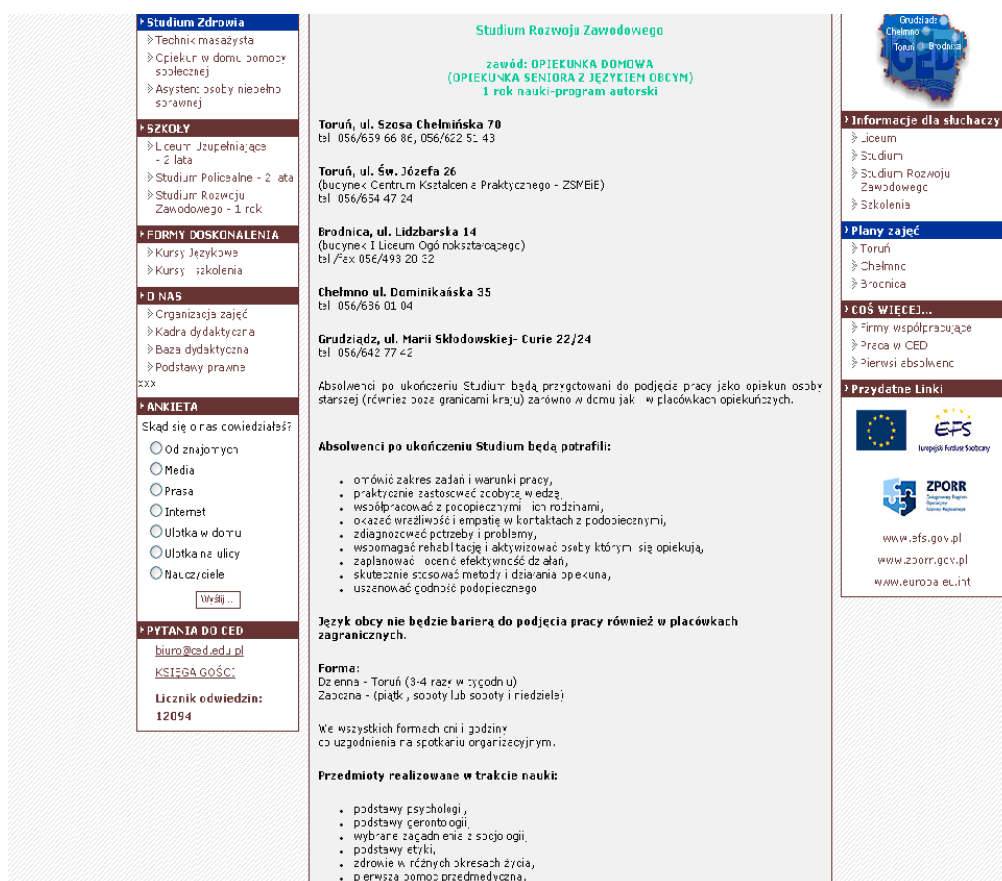
pean Social Fund, which aims to strengthen economically deprived regions. There are two striking things about this example. First, as evidenced in language transmission, this measure clearly indicates that the Polish state sees work abroad as a transnational solution to its acute unemployment problem, which has far more severely hit women than men after the transition (Coyle 2007). It is particularly evident in the vocational school in that the anticipated participants are unemployed women over fifties. Unemployed women of this age group make up one of the most disadvantaged groups with little employment prospect and in this light, it is worth noting that the courses are offered as part of the employment generation measure. Second, the Polish state seems to spot 'shortage areas' such as elderly care in the European labour market and it equips its female citizens with skills required on the job. These skills include housekeeping, care, ethics and basic knowledge in gerontology and psychology although many European receiving states including Germany do not require migrant domestics and caregivers to possess such skills.⁶ The current German legislation keeps care profession closed to new migrants, and yet the conditions of recruiting migrant "domestic helpers" (note not caregivers) tolerate these workers engaging in care work. The non-skill requirement towards de facto migrant caregivers in Germany may have given the sending Polish state an incentive to professionalize their female citizens. Thus, the Polish state is starting to transnationally mobilize and commodify female citizens as mobile reproductive workers, who would otherwise remain unemployed. Such a transnational strategy itself is neither historically new nor unique to Poland: many labour sending countries during the Gastarbeiter period as well as in the present time have resorted to and still resort to the international deployment of workers. What characterizes the Polish and other CEE countries is, however, that the transnational commodification is strategically curved out at the time of the east-bound EU expansion, which promotes human mobility.

⁶ A notable exception is France where public agencies give training courses to domestic and care workers to establish professionalism (Morokvasic & Catarino 2006, for a critique of professionalization, see Scrinzi 2003).

Figure 1 Polish job placement agency⁷



Figure 2 Polish vocational school⁸



⁷ <http://www.agencja.doradca.org.pl/index.php?page=54&lang=pl> accessed on June 1, 2008.

⁸ <http://www.ced.edu.pl/index.php?p=1432>, accessed on February 28, 2008.

Another discursive mode of incorporation is based on the “national pride” pertaining to ICT workers. The largest number of “Green Card” holders came from India to Germany between 2000 and 2004, making up 5,740 out of the total recruited number of 17,931.⁹ Besides Germany, India has been sending ICT migrants, both professionals and students in IT-related sciences, to the US, Canada, France and Japan (Khadria 2001).¹⁰ Currently there are 70,000 to 80,000 software engineers and 45,000 other IT graduates in India, however the number lags far behind the demand in the domestic and international ICT sectors. To grapple with a major shortage of highly qualified technology specialists, Indian government plans to increase the number of admissions to IT-related sciences and new institutions are established. Moreover, the Ministry of Information Technology gives the patronage to more lucrative foreign companies than to its local Indian companies (Khadria 2001). The state’s attitude to serve the interests of foreign companies was met with a fierce criticism that Indian institutions and the state subsidies after all end up producing human resources for foreign companies (Sharma 2000).

How are Indian ICT migrants represented in the political discourse of development? A speech of Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee reads:

Today, India stands on the threshold of a technological revolution in many areas that define the ‘New Economy’ of the 21st century; information technology, biotechnology, agriculture, space and energy. The Indian diaspora, has made seminal contributions to the development of many of these sectors in their adopted countries. They can now play a vital role by making a similar contribution to India in these sectors. Let me give an example: We aspire to make India a knowledge super power by the year 2010: you can help us fulfill this aspiration.

Many of you owe your current success to the quality education which you have received in Government run institutions, be they Indian Institutes of Technology or medical colleges. You now owe it to your motherland to associate yourself with India’s search for rapid and enduring social change and economic progress (Vajpayee 2001)¹¹

⁹ Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2004, *Statistik über die Zusicherung/Ablehnung von Arbeitserlaubnissen für ausländische IT-Fachkräfte*.

¹⁰ Next to these countries, Australia and New Zealand recruit Indian ICT workers and students. More recently Denmark, Ireland and Singapore have turned to India (Khadria 2001).

¹¹ The inauguration of the International Convention of the Global Organisation of People of Indian Origin, http://www.indianembassy.org/special/cabinet/Primeminister/pm_january_06_2001.htm, last accessed on June 17th, 2008.

This passage elucidates that *not just any migrants*, but migrant citizens in the ICT and other 'strategic' sectors, are *selectively* constructed as agents of advancing India's economic competitiveness in globalization. More interestingly still, he calls for the national identification and loyalty among migrant citizens working in the ICT and other strategic sectors *without* asking them to return permanently. In other words, the Indian state has identified "epistemic networks" (Faist 2008) of scientists. Remarkably, transnational epistemic networks were created not from "above", but from "below", to use Luis Eduardo Guarnizo and Michael Peter Smith's term (1999). In contrast to Taiwan and China's strong state initiative to create attractive conditions for their potential 'returnee citizens' in the ICT sector, it was originally a group of Indian ICT migrants that began to liaison with Indian policy makers in order to improve the local work and research environment for Non-Resident Indians who would (re-)locate back to India (Saxenian 2002). ICT workers and entrepreneurs use connections and transnationally circulate knowledge (Saxenian 2002), which the Indian state identifies as resources ultimately contributing to economic development as well as the advancement of science.

The transnational epistemic networks create a 'national pride':

We are equally proud of the fact that people of Indian origin, wherever they may be living, have greatly enriched the society, economy and culture of their adopted countries. The success stories of Indian entrepreneurs abroad are legendary. From hi-tech chip laboratories to curry restaurants, from renowned hospitals to famous educational institutions, from well-known research centres to leading think-tanks – everywhere you will find an Indian who has overcome all odds to establish himself through skill, dedication and hard work (Vajpayee 2001).¹²

In cultivating transnational connectivity, the Indian state underscores the national pride generated from skilled and highly skilled Indian migrants *over there*. Here we can see the incongruity between national identity and territoriality in citizenship (Soysal 1994). Nonetheless, different from Yasemin Nuhoğlu Soysal's study, the discursive rhetoric used in the speech does not suggest postnational membership. Quite the contrary, it strongly draws on national citizenship, whose identity is flexibly stretched out to include a selected group of Indian migrant citizens and former citizens. By so doing it produces and promotes the symbolic value attached to them and this in turn contributes to the *transnational* circulation of the 'national pride' discourse. Notably, the national pride is generated from those migrants who migrate through skilled and highly skilled flows.

¹²http://www.indianembassy.org/special/cabinet/Primeminister/pm_january_06_2001.htm, last accessed on June 17th, 2008.

5. Moral disciplines on migrants: transnational shame and blame

However, to what extent do overall migratory flows constitute the discourse of the national pride? Let me continue with India and Poland. The Indian example suggests that the making of the national pride depends very much on the intersection of gender and class differences. India is one of the major emigration countries in the world. About 400,000 annually leave India to seek employment and some 15 million Indians work abroad (Ahmed 1998). Yet women account for only a very small proportion of the overall migrant labour force. This can be explained by what Nana Oishi (2005) calls “value-driven emigration policies” (p. 80). Emigration policies for men are driven almost exclusively by the economic imperatives. In contrast, emigration policies concerning women are a complex product of economic factors and moral values predicated on the dominant gender norms (Oishi 2005, chapter 3). More generally, India adopts quite restrictive regulations concerning migrant women.¹³ Based on her extensive fieldwork with policy makers, Oishi reveals the patriarchal attitudes of high ranking state officials who play a pivotal role in immigration policy making. According to them, India is not against women’s migration itself but it does not actively promote it either. However, the best way to ‘protect’ women migrant from potential abuse is not to let them cross borders in the first place (Oishi 2005). This is for instance exemplified in the rule, which imposes among others the minimum age of 30 on women job seekers in domestic service abroad. By this age, women are likely to be married and have children, thus from a normative point of view, this would discourage women to independently migrate for work.

Here the assumption is that female migrants work in households as domestics, nannies or caregivers. These occupations often fall into the category of ‘unskilled’ or ‘low-skilled’ flows, hence the values which shape India’s emigration policy pertain to social and economic class as much as gender. Women are the bearers of the national honour thus maintaining the respectability of women is essential to nation-states (Stoler 2002, Yuval-Davis 1997). The moral value attached to women’s respectability is difficult to sustain in female ‘unskilled’ migrations. Domestic workers and home caregivers are most prone to exploitation and abuse (Anderson 2000). If migrant women’s respectability is lost, then it would create a transnational shame on the part of the Indian state, a transnational blame towards the migrant woman. Thus the national pride expressed in Prime Minister Vajpayee’s speech is highly unlikely to be extended to the majority of female migrants from India through ‘unskilled’ flows.

¹³ For example they mandate female tourists under forty to obtain a “sponsor declaration certificate”.

While domestic work and care are most common occupational categories of Indian (and other) migrant women and they are made highly visible in both policy agenda and research, there is at the same time hyper-invisibilization of women in other sectors, such as nursing, medicine and ICT (Kofman 2000, Raghuram 2008). An intriguing issue here would be then, how one can make sense of these highly skilled flows of migrant women in relation to the India's "value-driven emigration policies".

Moral disciplining may also take on a tone of a 'transnational blame'. The ongoing debate about "Euro-orphans" (Euro Sieroty) in Poland is a case in point. This is a neologism made up of two words. The first word, "Euro", stands for one of the strongest foreign currencies, remitted back to Poland, which indicates the material wealth accumulated through parents' labour migration. The second word, "orphans", refer to those children left behind by their parents, who set off to the West for more lucrative jobs. While most children either live with non-migrant parents or are brought under the care of grandparents and other relatives, some are put into orphanages. Taken together, this neologism questions the responsibilities of migrant absentee parents with its morally charged word choice.¹⁴ It is mainly the media that has sensationally been debating the "Euro-orphans" as such in Poland, and scholarly work is following it up.

Capitalism and morality are played out in this new transnational blaming discourse. The Polish weekly left-liberal magazine, *Polityka*, carried a cover story about the Euro-orphans phenomenon (figure 3). The cover story title reads, "Euro-orphans: children are the ones who pay the largest costs of parents' emigration". A girl child firmly holds onto the legs of an adult. Her anguish is expressed in her face, with her lips tightly pressed together. At the same time we can see that she is saddened—she looks as if she were about to cry. This posture with this angle is one of begging, —so together with the cover page title, she appears to beg her parent not to go. Furthermore a class status is at stake here. The girl child is dressed well, which makes the reader speculate on the financial gains brought back through the parent's labour migration. What makes her appearance even more conspicuous is another figure on the cover page, supposedly her parent. S/he puts on a pair of blue jeans and casual, red sporty shoes, which do not apparently represent a professional dress code, but rather suggests a working class or non-professional, stay-at-home status. This leads me to two possible interpretations. First, the parent on the cover page is her/himself a migrant, who can af-

¹⁴ See for example Daily Mail "Polish children dumped by parents heading for Britain" (July 29, 2006) and *Polityka* "Euro-orphans: children are the ones who pay the largest costs of parents' emigration" (November 17, 2007).

ford a good material life for the child left behind in Poland, while the parent her- or himself is going to engage in unskilled work abroad. Alternatively, it could also be that the adult figure is a stay-behind parent, taking care of the girl child while the main breadwinning parent is going away. Interestingly, loose jeans with a pair of red sporty shoes do not reveal for sure if this is her mother or father. But that is perhaps exactly what is important in the “Euro-orphans” discourse. Whereas in the Philippines it is only migrant mothers that are held responsible for “broken families” and “social costs” of labour migration (Asis 1992, Parreñas 2001, 2005, Ogaya 2004), in Poland it seems that migrant fathers as well as mothers who are blamed for “abandoning” the children.

The emergence of the new transnational blaming discourse challenges the hitherto optimistic and celebratory scientific discourse about Poles having benefited from the new opportunity structure of EU-bound mobility. This new debate warrants a further investigation not least because a discourse does not exist in isolation from the lived experiences and has material implications. Discourses create these discursive figures and constructions of migrant women and men, migrant mothers and fathers as a national pride, transnational shame or transnational blame. Paragraphs like this.

incorporation is pragmatic as in the case of Polish female mobile migrant caregivers, and selective and elitist in the case of India, leading the latter to claim the national pride over its highly skilled migrant citizens working in the ICT sector. Nevertheless, the positive discourse about these development ‘agents’ is by no means universally applicable. In fact the moral discourse of a transnational shame and blame disciplines the perceived undesirable migration.

It was beyond the scope of this paper to systematically compare various countries of origin in the two respective migratory flows. This would enable us to broaden our understanding of different types of transnational migration and social spaces in connection to development. Moreover, extending the analysis to the subjective experiences of the two groups of migrants would not only be highly enriching. It would also render the agency of migrants visible.

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