Migrant Women’s Transnationalism: Family Patterns and Policies

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ABSTRACT

Whereas current policies on migration and integration are beginning to recognise family reunion as one of the most legitimate reasons for acceptance by a host society, they in most cases still do not account for the growing trend of feminisation of migration, and even rarely do they address specific migrants’ needs. As currently constituted, the integration bills envision a one-way process that places migrants into a position where they cannot question, but only accept and fulfil the predetermined requirements of integration plans. But who are the women that migrate, what influence do their transnational experiences have on their families, and how do migration policies envision the reality of increasing transnationalism? This paper focuses on biographical interviews with migrant women in Slovenia as a valuable method to question current integration measurements, applied here to explore female migrants’ experiences in transnational family life and social networks. A gender sensitive approach is applied that critically evaluates the specificities of family reunification policies, which define women migrants as dependent family members. We discuss life trajectories of women migrants, focusing the debate on their own experiences in and with family life. This new empirical material is used to theorise gaps in contemporary migration research. Women migrants’ own reflections of transnational family ties show a great variety of experiences and their narratives are a unique window into motivational, political, as well as legal dimensions of migration.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary studies of global migration patterns note the “feminisation” of migratory flows (Castels and Miller, 1993; Phizacklea, 1998) and despite the difficulty of establishing the exact accurate figures, it is estimated that women represent at least half of the world’s migrant population (Phizacklea, 1998: 22). It is becoming common practice in Western European countries with unfavourable demographic situation to hire migrant female workers, while population aging further influences the organisation of everyday family life. The actual demand for female migrant domestic workers, as well as their engagement in the service industry, agriculture and tourism, coupled with the traditional migrant labour demand in the “dirty, dangerous and difficult” sectors of the labour market is nonetheless poorly reflected...
in the European states’ migration regimes. Moreover, current migration policies remain engrossed in finding ways to “manage” migrations, while integration bills – despite their declaratory statements – demand adaptation of migrants and hardly leave room for deliberation over integration measures (Pajnik, 2007).

Based on the empirical study – biographical interviews with migrant women in Slovenia – we argue that policies in the field of migration and integration lack a more active approach that would allow going beyond purely formal, jural analyses, but rather take into account differing positions of individuals, as well as discrepancies in these positions that arise from categorical definitions by gender, nationality, ethnicity and class. Moreover, the paper provides a gender sensitive analysis by critically evaluating the specificities of family reunification policies, pointing out the problems that migrant women encounter in practice when their status defines them as dependent family members.

The contemporary challenges of multiple identities, migrants’ transnational experiences, and diasporic realities point to the fact that there is no simple trajectory along which a simple, logical model of a consistent migration policy can be projected, since migrants’ practices emerge as a reality of multiple existences. In the last decade, several attempts have been made to thematise post-national (Soysal, 1994; Habermas, 2001), or, more recently, transnational notions of citizenship (Balibar, 2004; Vertovec, 2004), which consider post- or transnational changes in structural conditions, and also take into account individual biographies of migrating populations. Migratory patterns indeed show that we are faced with a new kind of de-territorialised politics that has the potential to generate new modalities of political membership, which evolves beyond the ideals of privileged membership in a nation-state, since it addresses shifting identities, and legitimises transnational modalities of living. Argued from a feminist standpoint, contemporary migratory patterns require the process of “engendering” migration policies, that is, their evolvement as “a politics of difference” (Young, 1990) or as a “transversal politics” (Yuval-Davis, 1997) that accommodates diversity and difference, and does not ignore these in the name of some supreme universal and formal claims.

Our research suggests that women migrate for a myriad of reasons. Migration being a result of a set of different causes and motives, accessing the labour market, though a prominent factor, is only one among the reasons, as is so-called “marriage migration”. Reflecting multifaceted goals of the migration project, the women in our sample speak of their migration being connected to intimate relationships, as well as economic incentives to earn more money; they may speak of having only short-term migration plans, or a purposeful action to settle. Nevertheless, due to imposed quotas on work permits and entry visas, which limit particularly migration possibilities of “third country nationals”, many find themselves relying on family reunification policies as the only legal means of entry. As the rare research in this field (Phizacklea, 1998; Westwood and Phizacklea, 2000) has shown, these policies tie a migrant woman’s residence status to a male relative who is considered the primary applicant. As a consequence, women on family reunification entry visas are often prevented from working legally, and are confined largely to privatised spheres of work (i.e., domestic service, sex industry), which are bounded by a racialised sexual division of labour. For women who enter under family reunion regulations, migration laws largely act to reproduce “a very traditional notion of woman’s dependency within a male-regulated private sphere” (Phizacklea, 1998: 29). The patterns of entry thus generally define many migrant women as family dependants without an independent legal status of their own. Women are usually cast as the followers, since they tend to be understood as family-formers (Raghuram, 2004), narrowly relegated to nurturing and reproductive roles, even though they have always been active in the labour market as well. In contrast, our empirical research points to the fact that it is wrong to see women’s migration simply as a secondary migration in relation to male labour migration, proving the fact that migrating women do not “simply follow men”. Biographical
interviews show that women have their own independent migratory aspirations and projects, which points to the necessity to take the different positions of women migrants into account and study who the women, who migrate, are, how migration affects their lives, what influence do their transnational experiences have on their families, what are migration policies and how they should envision the reality of migrants’ increasing transnationalism.

Acknowledging the complexity of family migration, which includes marriage or so-called family formation migration, as well as migration of the entire family, we use the category of family reunification, which refers to the process of bringing in immediate family members by the primary migrant (Kofman, 2004). Our concern with family reunification as a policy of legal entry refers to the situation when the absence of integration provisions turns migrant women into dependent family members. Though a prominent mode of entry, “family reunification” is only one of the possible ways in which women choose to migrate. Increasing numbers of women come to Slovenia on temporary work permits that secure short-term employment, particularly in deficit professions. Using tourist or student visas also represents possible modes of entry. Additionally, some flee from persecution in their country of birth, and others engage in non-documented border crossings. Different modes of entry affect the position of migrant women, whose statuses are consequently defined in accordance with relevant policy provisions (e.g., working migrant, asylum seeker, refugee etc.). We here focus our analysis specifically on a critical evaluation of family reunification policies.

The first part of the paper analyses family reunification policies based on the exploration of how women migrants experience accentuated vulnerability because of the implicit gendered effects of the public/private divide (Freedman, 2003: 9), which reinforces the prospect of their positions being insecure and dependent on a male relative. In the second part, we look more closely at the migrant women’s experiences in transnational family life and social networks, discussing life trajectories of women migrants, and focusing the debate on their own experiences in and with family life. As our sample reflects, migrant women engage in multiple family patterns, including lesbian partnership, separated transnational families, and single-parent families. This new empirical material is used to develop a frame for rethinking current migration policies in ways that would address shifting transnational family patterns.

METHODOLOGY

Recognising emerging migrant women’s transnational patterns of life (cf. Buijs, 1996; Westwood and Phizacklea, 2000; George, 2005), this paper focuses on biographical narrative interviews with female migrants in Slovenia as a method to question current migration bills and integration measures, applied here to specifically explore female migrants’ experiences in transnational family life. We put forward a thesis that the narratives are a unique window into individual migration experiences and reveal motivational, political, as well as legal dimensions of migration, and transnational modalities of living that point to the shortcomings of contemporary migration and integration policies, still predominately oriented to preserve and secure “the national” and sustain the family as implicated in gendered ideologies. Focusing on qualitative data, we also respond to the calls that have recently been made to study the human agency of migrants, which is lacking in quantitative-based studies of migration (Smith, 2004).

Our data is drawn from 26 biographical interviews with female migrants who have migrated to Slovenia in the last 15 years. Country of origin was determined by birthplace: 7
respondents are from the former Yugoslav republics (3 from Croatia, 3 from Kosovo, and 1 from Bosnia and Herzegovina), 4 from Kazakhstan (3 women participated in a joint interview), 3 from Ukraine, 2 from China, 2 from Moldova, and 1 from Russia, Uzbekistan, Japan, Peru, Colombia, Thailand, Lithuania, Turkey, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. Our respondents are between 22 and 48 years of age and have various socio-economic and educational backgrounds, come from different geopolitical contexts, and live and work in differing social situations. The interviews were conducted in Slovenia between October 2006 and June 2007.4

The ethical issues related to protecting the respondents and the data were given our full attention. Every effort was made to secure respondents’ anonymity. Concerns related to issues of trust and anonymity were especially pronounced in smaller towns where the smaller number of migrants makes them much more visible and thus exposed. Most of the interviews were conducted in Slovene; on several occasions the interviewees partly used their Slavic mother tongues (particularly Bosnian, Serbian and Croatian). The possibility of using a translator was always offered, for the ability to speak Slovene was never considered as a prerequisite. Interviews were thus also conducted in Chinese, Russian, Thai, English and Turkish.5

Based on this qualitative empirical material, we are able to point to the various transnational migratory experiences of migrant women, and to utilize individual experiences as grounds for proposals for policy change that would benefit both the migrants and the receiving society. The narratives help us understand the migrants’ transnational family ties and networks and they shed light on their motives and life plans, as well as inform us about their actual needs in terms of access to labour market and integration with their new temporary or permanent communities of stay. Using the life stories of female migrants we thus address the transnational situations and experiences with family life of migrant women, as well as their coping strategies and orientations. Our objective is to understand the transnational experiences as these appear in the narratives, to identify the impact of policies on integration processes, and to identify the patterns and processes that facilitate, as well as those that hinder integration of female migrants.

IN THE GRIP OF MIGRATION POLICIES

Most migrants to Slovenia come from Yugoslavia’s successor states, which represent approximately 90 per cent of the total foreign-born population. This is true for both men and women migrants, and reflects historical legacy of inner migrations within Yugoslavia since the 1950s. The processes of industrialisation and urbanisation made Slovenia one of the popular destinations for economic migration from the south-eastern regions of the Yugoslav federation particularly in the 1970s. Geographical and socio-cultural proximity was also a factor in the early 1990s’ wave of “forced migration” from the war-torn zones of the collapsing Yugoslavia. Labour market demands for unskilled manual labour in recent years have increased the need for male migrant labour particularly in construction, while a steady rise in tertiary sector of Slovenia’s economy is reflected in the demand for services, where migrant women may find work. The overall demand for personal services and domestic work characteristic of Western Europe can hence be observed in Slovenia as well, particularly when taking into account the informal sectors of work that elude official statistics.6 Current trends of migration show that migrants make up over 3 per cent of Slovenia’s population – and about 25 per cent of foreign citizens are women. The proportions of female migrants are significantly high especially in the cases of the Dominican Republic, Philippines, Colombia, Thai-
land, Ukraine and the Russian Federation, where migrant women are overwhelmingly in the majority. The statistics, however limited in their scope and explanatory potential, also show us how the first migrants from a particular region might entice and encourage other compatriots to follow. Specific populations find specific employment, as may be inferred from the growing number of Chinese restaurants that create a demand for Chinese migrant labour (e.g., cooks and waitresses, but in the future possibly also Chinese food market purveyors etc.). Similarly, Thai women find work as masseuses in Thai massage parlours that are becoming increasingly popular because of their common location in the spas and health centres that are mushrooming around Slovenia.

The Employment Service of Slovenia issues various types of work permits for “foreigners”, affecting primarily the so-called third country nationals, whose access is the most limited. “Employment permits” and “permits for work” are more restrictive and allow a migrant to work only for a specific employer, tying the residence permit to the validity of the work permit. Such permits must be obtained before entering Slovenia and are subject to quota restrictions. Quotas take into account the labour market situation and non-existence of domestic unemployed labour force. The highest number of foreign workers is defined by law as maximum of 5 per cent of Slovenia’s active population. In opposition, “personal work permits” are exempt from quota restrictions and allow their holders to move freely between employers, thus formally equating the migrants’ position to that of the domestic labour force. Personal work permits are only issued after a prescribed period of time spent in Slovenia. No specific gender provisions apply, though the data shows that only a handful of work permits are issued to women (less than 8 per cent of all valid work permits were issued to women in 2008), which reflects the fact that male migrant workers dominate Slovenia’s labour market for the time being.

Residence permits and work permits are separate documents issued by different authorities. For migrants entering with intent to work, a valid work permit is considered a prerequisite for a residence permit, which is issued for the duration of the former by the relevant administrative unit. A temporary residence permit is initially issued with the maximum duration of one year, whereas permanent residence awards more rights and privileges in terms of socio-economic and political provisions. Foreigners with permanent residence or those with temporary residence for the duration of at least one year have the right to family reunification with “close family members” as defined by law. This implies easier access to residence permits when entering Slovenia for reasons of family reunification. This is because the Aliens Act exempts “temporary residence permits issued for purpose of family reunification” and “temporary residence permits issued to family members of Slovenian citizens” from quota restrictions on residence permits. The act stipulates that in the case of family reunification the “applicant alien” must secure “proof of sufficient funds for the livelihood of family members who plan to reside in the country”. This represents another obstacle for migrants whose spouse is either without regular employment or whose income may be insufficient to satisfy the legal stipulation.

The integration bills and migration policy in Slovenia fail to account for migrant women and their specific needs. As currently envisioned, family reunification policies are built on the assumption of a gendered division of roles; migrants who are “immediate family members” are considered as “dependants” even though they are formally listed as a category that enjoys a priority in the issuing of new work permits. Yet, even if granted work permits, the “family member” migrants cannot find employers for a substantive period of time, during which they are expected to rely fully on their family for support. Marrying a citizen of Slovenia or following their husbands who are considered the “primary migrant” marks just one of the female migration patterns, though a significant one. By focusing our attention on the position of migrant women, we contribute to filling the gap in the literature that largely ignores experiences of accompanying spouses (cf. Ho 2006, 512). In terms of “marriage migration”, migrant women either choose to live in their husband’s country...
(often also because they decide to see this as an adventure and a welcome change of scenery), or because their husband’s job is in Slovenia and they decide to join him. The narratives speak of the women’s experiences of problems upon migrating to Slovenia. Even though “marriage migrants” are entitled to provisions that allow them residence permits and though they enjoy the advantage of being able to count on their spouse’s support, at the same time they remain in the grip of the family reunification policies, which prevent them from fully enjoying their individual rights. Their status is tied to their spouse as the primary party responsible for their economic well-being. Female migrants in our sample thus complain about the obstacles they encounter when trying to obtain work permits, to ensure the recognition of their education, or to arrange separate social benefits. One of our interviewees was even denied permanent residence despite being married to a Slovene citizen, because his status of a “freelance artist” is not recognised as sufficient to grant that his spouse will be financially secure, since his employment is not considered regular – a condition for a migrant spouse to claim permanent residence.

Since the Employment and Work of Aliens Act defines the restriction on the number of “foreigners” on Slovenia’s labour market, being issued a work permit and finding work is particularly difficult for migrant women whose status depends on their spouse. The terms stipulated in the family reunification policy are considered to rely on the spouse as a provider for the family “dependants”. Hence, women in our sample who are categorised by the policies as family migrants complain about the total absence of provisions that would allow them access to the labour market, even though they experienced fewer problems in terms of residence permits, which – depending on their husbands’ status – were in general issued through a fast and uncomplicated official procedure. Article 6 of the Employment and Work of Aliens Act names “immediate family members of aliens with personal work permit for indefinite time period” and “immediate family members of aliens with a temporary permit” as being entitled to priority in processing their work permits. Despite these legal stipulations, migrant women still experience difficulties in getting work permits and even more problems in finding work, as exemplified in Frosja’s case:

“I went to the Employment Service […] They explained straight away that I’m here for family reunion and have no right of work. I don’t have work visa, no work permit, no right to work. To have right to work, you first need work permit. This means that I first must find job, and if some Slovene employer wants to take me, I can get work permit, but only if no Slovene applies for that job. That’s how they explained it to me and I understood I practically didn’t have chances to find job. I tried moonlighting, as cleaner or similar. (Frosja, 45, Moldova)

In cases where the husbands entered Slovenia first and arranged for their wives or entire families to follow after some time, the migrant women have to rely on their husbands’ support. While their husbands have different statuses, depending on the duration of time spent living and working in Slovenia – a permanent residence and personal work permit representing one step short of enjoying full citizenship rights – they remain for the most part excluded from citizenship and immersed in work. This may lead to notable social exclusion of migrant women; hence their desire to work may not necessarily arise out of financial needs, but could also be their strategy to expand their social contacts (cf. Westwood and Phizacklea, 2000).

Citizenship through marriage: a strategy to overcome exclusion

Six migrant women in our sample have obtained Slovene citizenship. However, their narratives show that they continue to feel like “foreigners” in Slovenia, despite their formally
equal status. Their transition to the status of a citizen was, of course, long, protracted and not without problems. Migrant women apply for citizenship for various reasons, yet it is common that citizenship is seen as a convenient solution to end the constant preoccupation with and anxiety about extending various permits and arranging numerous documents. It is important to note that all the migrant women in our sample who have Slovene citizenship – with the one noted exception of “extraordinary naturalisation” – have husbands with Slovene citizenship or ties to Slovenia. When marrying a Slovene citizen and settling down in Slovenia, most migrant women consider applying for citizenship as an important next step, which is expected to bring significant changes in their status. The narratives show that women are well aware of the fact that marriage to a Slovene citizen has profound consequences for a migrant’s status – even if they never had any actual plans to settle in Slovenia, let alone to marry. Current policies and laws therefore construct marriage to a citizen as an important strategy in changing migrants’ status of “foreigner”. Since both the Aliens Act and the Employment and Work of Aliens Act stipulate special provisions for “foreigners” who are immediate family members of Slovene citizens or of “aliens” with particular status in Slovenia, marriage is constructed as a strategy for overcoming several bureaucratic obstacles.

Because that, when you must make documents every three months, and that’s lots of paper, you cannot do that every three months, and also work permit, and residence, all, and that every three months, that’s too much. So he said: “OK, we’ll get married!” I said: “Yes, yes!” I mean, it is something you must risk, I love him, he loves me too it seems, hey, why not! We were already together some time, and I said ok. (Katarina, 44, South America)

For me, to go into relationship, I mean, to be married, I didn’t want at all. Because I’d like to live like that, I’m afraid it’d be the same like with my mummy and daddy, like [...] I don’t trust men. But my husband said, he said, he told: “Lilia, you know what, these visas all the time, that’s a lot of money”. (Lilia, 27, Ukraine)

Then I lived in Ljubljana, I don’t know, maybe one year without papers and I couldn’t work because of that. I had those, those ordinary problems, say, I couldn’t find any work, eh, nobody wanted me because of that, so I decided that I had to do something. So I married, fake marriage, to get status and some basic rights without which you can't go on, can't live in another country. [...] Because of that I went through that experience, there was no other way but to get married. Because, I could, I thought a lot about it, I studied that Aliens Act, to see what options I had, and I realised that it was the only option. (Ana, 35, Croatia)

In Katarina’s case, she was required to extend her documents and permits every three months, so her boyfriend, who apparently also tired of the long and tedious bureaucratic procedures, one day suggested that they get married. Even though it appears clear from Katarina’s narrative that her marriage is based on mutual respect and love, she reports the marriage proposal as having been more a pragmatic than an emotional decision. The marriage also made her aware of the fact that her stay in Slovenia would be permanent. Even though she does not report her prior plans and desires, she makes it quite clear that her intention was never to move and live abroad permanently. Yet settling down and starting a family made her reconsider.

Katarina’s story reveals strong correlation to the narratives of other interviewed women who married Slovene men, most of them emphasising the fact that “family member” status improved their situation and contributed to easier integration when defined as quality of life and formally becoming a member of the Slovene society. Lilia’s narrative also shows that the marriage decision came as a proposition from her partner, who rationalised marriage as a
way of circumventing lengthy and expensive administrative procedures. As a child of a bro-
ken marriage that pushed Lilia into poverty at a young age, she was very cautious about
entering into marriage, distrusting men in general. She maintains that she did not have a
wish to get married at all. Nevertheless, her narrative reveals that she has formed a close
bond not only with her husband but also with her in-laws, whom she calls “mummy” and
“daddy”, illustrating the wider implications her marriage has for her, giving her an anchor-
age and a social circle of intimate bonds. Still, her narrative reveals that she continues to
struggle in the labour market as “migrant for life”.

In comparison, Ana’s narrative shows that her decision to get married to a Slovene citizen
was a result of a carefully planned action that was to ensure her a regularised status. She
claims to have studied the laws carefully and to have reached the conclusion that, as a
migrant woman and a lesbian, marriage was not only her best strategy but also her “only
option”, considering the non-existence of other alternatives. Her husband’s professional sta-
tus caused further problems when she attempted to secure a permanent residence, which she
was unable to do for quite some time. Her strategy of entering into a fake marriage, though
carefully planned and not easy to accomplish because it relied on the substantive help from
and “good will” of another person (i.e., the man who agreed to enter into an arranged mar-
riage with her), actually had an ambivalent outcome. On the one hand, she was able to claim
certain benefits as a spouse of a Slovene citizen. On the other hand, she experienced further
difficulties that she did not envision when embarking on this process, as a result of the regu-
lations that require the spouse to offer proof of having enough regular financial means to
support the “foreigner” wife – as, in her case, was not the case:

After the wedding it started, these requests, that is, applications for temporary residence, for
permanent residence, all that. And that whole process in my case took around four years,
and [...] the biggest problem was that the man who I married, [...] didn’t have regular job,
actually, was a freelance artist, which was not good enough for the state, because they [...] didn’t have proof that he could take care of me in the material sense. That was quite a big
problem. Because of that I couldn’t get status um, permanent residence and [...] as regards
getting these documents, it was a painful process for me, I didn’t even know that I’ll go
through it. (Ana, 35, Croatia)

Yet the narratives of other migrant women who also married Slovene men confirm that
they came to perceive marriage to a citizen as a strategy for overcoming many obstacles. In
comparison to single female migrants, those married – especially if to a citizen – can have an
easier way to arrange their documents, particularly temporary residence permits and health
insurance:

3rd of May was one important turning point, on 3rd of May 2003 we married, here in Slove-
nia, and from that time we were a married couple, meaning in my opinion it was one point
which made also easier for me many things, if I compare with other girls, regarding various
documents, and papers and suchlike stuff, because all things I needed I arranged after 3rd of
May, it means temporary residence, um, I don’t know, health insurance, all that was necessary
to live here, in fact, the most important was temporary residence, that I registered, and, and
that I had health insurance and that I found doctor, eh, here. Actually, there was no problem
with temporary residence because I am married to Slovene man, eh, and because he is, has
permanent residence here, and I only registered at that address and that was it. (Anuška, 31,
Slovakia)

Moreover, Mariana reports that marriage not only affects her status in terms of giving her
more rights as a family member, but also provides her with a certain security from having a
male presence, perceived in the traditional role of a provider and protector. As she explains, no longer having to go through life as a single foreign woman, having a husband gave her additional “credibility” and improved her status in the eyes of people who would potentially try to take advantage of her if she were still alone and thus presumably more gullible and exposed:

But now, when we got married, I feel more strongly that it is more ... When you have a husband, it’s different, isn’t it. When you’re alone it’s like [...] Here you can see that you’re married. Saying “I have a husband.” People right away – “I must talk with my husband, you know.” And then they say, “Ah, she’s not alone.” But when you are one little Mariana, small and very like happy, you know, inside in your heart and very like, you believe all, they can. They can cheat you, or whatever, eh. On the one hand it helps, that you’re, that you have husband, that means you’re not alone any more, you know. Definitely. I felt that really. (Mariana, 32, Peru)

While gaining citizenship is a strategy often expected to significantly improve a migrant’s possibilities, several women speak of how their predicament remained the same, and how they were still unable to find a job. The potential tension between women’s life plans, strategies, and the actual outcomes is often related to the fact that the society continues to view and treat them as “foreigners”.

MIGRANT WOMEN’S TRANSTATIONAL EXPERIENCES

The study of transnational families has been most fertile in North American and Asian-Pacific research, whereas it has only recently entered the European research agenda (e.g., Bryceason and Vuorela, 2002a; Westwood and Phizacklea, 2000). Narrowly defined, transnationalism refers to migrations across borders of national states, when individuals establish and maintain connections in more than one state. Notably, transnationalism also encompasses short-term mobilities (Morokvasic, 2003). As a myriad of recent research has shown (e.g., Parrenas, 2001), due attention should also be paid to its gendered aspects. An important dimension that emerged from the interviews in relation to migration paths and patterns concerns the transnational experiences of female migrants, as well as their internal migration. Several of the women explained their migration in terms of multifaceted and transnational pathways. Some had experienced several other countries before coming to Slovenia, most often in search of work opportunities, while others picked Slovenia as their primary state of destination. A considerable difference can be delineated between those migrants who chose a country as their destination in search of work, or because it was a country where their husbands lived or where they found work, and, on the other hand, the asylum seekers, whose narratives show that they had less autonomy in making decision about the course of their migration path, which was less planned and more accidental, sometimes even entirely dependent upon outside actors (e.g., state institutions). In addition, the narratives illustrate that some of our respondents have also migrated within their countries of birth (e.g., from small rural villages to towns in order to study or work), while several migrate after coming to Slovenia, as well. These movements speak of the female migrants’ continual desire to improve their positions and the quality of their lives. The narratives in our sample hence speak of different trajectories of migration, all following a transnational path, be it coming to Slovenia because a job was offered, or they decided to join their partners, or for other reasons. Significantly, the number of residence permits issued in recent years illustrates the centrality of family reunification policies for legalisation of migrant women’s status and the effects this has on their
integration in Slovenia. In 2008, 66 per cent of temporary and 70 per cent of permanent residence permits under the “family member of a third country national” category were issued to women; thus reflecting that family reunification provisions define notable concessions regarding entry visas and residence permits.\textsuperscript{14}

It is a truism to state that the reasons and aspirations connected to migration patterns of female migrants vary greatly, as all individual choices are always in a way unique. Invariably, the aspirations about migration are expected to relate to more or less defined goals of “personal success”, be it in terms of financial gains or more broadly as the expectation of upward social mobility, especially considering the hopes of parents for better lives of their children.

Keeping in touch has been made easier for transnational family with the changing technologies and reduction of costs in travel. Nevertheless, the maintenance of contact with family members remains strongly influenced by income level and material assets, as the cost of international telephone calls, postage and travel expenses often represents a barrier to communication for low-income transnational families (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002b). Information and communication technologies are more available for some people than for others in general (cf. Wilding, 2006).

Except for one migrant woman in our sample, who notes that her relationship with her parents at home is not relaxed because they refuse to accept her lesbian life partner, and another one, who explains that she felt it necessary to disengage herself from her parents’ expectations for her to lead a “boring” (“traditional”) life, the women all speak favourably about staying in touch with their friends and family in their countries of birth and about the various strategies of how they keep in contact. Their narratives demonstrate the various ways in which they stay in contact with people at home, but also in other countries. Telephone and email are the most prevalent modes of communication. Short text messages are used as a strategy to keep in regular and frequent contact despite the expensive costs of stationary and mobile telephone calls; emails are quite common among the younger migrant women, who use the internet to stay in touch. Visits to their relatives are practised especially by those migrant women who have their own means of transport (i.e., cars), whereas our respondents whose home countries are more geographically distant are reliant on air travel, which is too expensive to allow frequent visits.

\textbf{Transnational intimacy and parenting}

Though reasons and motives for migration are always multifarious, we here focus on women whose decision to migrate might be understood as reasons of intimacy. The patterns of male-initiated migration have been widely documented (Shihadeh, 1991; Yeoh and Khoo, 1998), hence we here point to the problematic association of women’s migration with dependency and the private sphere rather than with autonomy and work (cf. Kofman, 2004). Our interviews illustrate that it is often women who leave everything behind when they migrate in order to follow their husbands, however, this is only one of the patterns of female migration. A good half of our interviewees speak of either migrating to Slovenia together with their husbands or following them after some time. They illustrate how the family reunification policies affected their lives by assigning them the “family member” status. Even when the migrant women’s entry patterns are classified as family migration, they usually actively search for employment. Their choice to migrate may also be based on economic reasoning that the husband’s pay would allow them a better life, especially if they also have children. Moreover, they may decide to migrate in order not to live apart for extended periods of time, putting family life before financial gain and personal plans. It may also be that following the husband is a “traditional” priority, to which they succumb, as was the case for Kim:
I was a student. Wu, who is a restaurant boss, wanted to return to China when he was 24, to find a wife. His father and my father are friends, and when Wu came to China, his father came to my school to look for me. Then we met, wrote letters, spoke on the phone. That was when Wu went to Europe. Many people, many Chinese, choose Europe because they imagine that it is very developed, and many go to Slovenia, too, because people are friendly. Then, when we married, Wu again arranged a visa and went to Slovenia. Then he arranged a visa for me, too, and I followed him to Slovenia. (Kim, 28, China)

This summer it will be four years since I’ve arrived here with my two kids. My husband has been here for seven years. At first he was here alone, working, but three years later we thought about it and decided to move, too. The reason was that the money he sent didn’t have special significance. He was here, his family was there. The kids grew without seeing their father. So we decided to move. And another reason was because they allowed us to be here, they said that family reunion was possible. (Frosja, 45, Moldova)

These two narratives speak of migrations being connected to intimate relationships and the decision to move in order to share one’s life with loved ones, thus basing migration on family ties. Kim and Frosja speak of family reunification. In Kim’s case, she married her husband and eventually followed him to Slovenia, where he had already worked for some time before. In Frosja’s case, she initially lived the life of a transnational family; she lived with the children in Moldova and her husband apart from them – working in Slovenia, financially helping his family at home. This, however, did not work for more than three years, as Frosja eventually decided to join her husband in order to keep the family together. Though they were financially looked after by her husband sending home remittances, Frosja describes this arrangement as taking too high a toll on their family life.

Contrary to understanding motherhood as a “necessarily in situ relationship between mother and child” (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002a: 27), many women who migrate leave their children behind, which questions the hegemonic discourses about mothers as the primary caregivers (Erel, 2002). The children are predominantly left in the care of the relatives, be it grandparents, older siblings or the extended family. Studies show (Parenas, 2001; 2005) that the effects of separation are emotionally heavily demanding, especially because the migrant women are often entangled in transnational mothering and emotional care at the same time as performing demanding care work for their employers. Though most of the literature examines transnational parenting in female-headed transnational families, our sample shows that transnational separation of both parents from their children is also quite common, especially when both engage in working long hours. Recent patterns of husband-and-wife migration show children are left in the care of the relatives (Yamanaka, 2005).

In our sample, three migrant women left their children behind under the auspices of their extended family, notably grandparents.15 Down migrated to Slovenia without her son, who remained in Thailand. Her wish and goal was to support her family back home through remittances, allowing her son to study at a university. Though her son’s untimely death painfully cut into Down’s life plans, she continues to support her remaining family members in Thailand. Similarly, both Xan and Kim are separated from their children, who live with their grandparents in China. The separation happened at a younger age for their daughters, who are looked after by their grandparents. The fact that Xan and Kim’s parents are retired allows them the necessary time to raise their grandchildren. Xan is intent on bringing her daughter to Slovenia, particularly because she feels that the Chinese educational system is too demanding, and she would therefore like to allow her daughter to enjoy her youth more, without the incessant need to engage in school work and peer competition. Kim’s daughter goes to kindergarten and is expected either to start school in China in order to learn the Chinese script, or to join her parents in Slovenia in order to start learning the Slovene language.
Her name is Luna. She is now 4 and a half. Since I have no other choice, because I work every
day and cannot take care of her, I sent her to China to my mum and dad, so they can be
together. [...] They retired a little while ago. That's why they can look after her. (Kim, 28,
China)

My daughter is now in Shanghai, in fourth grade, and going to school in China is hard and
exhausting for kids. [...] As regards the Chinese school system, I think it burdens children too
much, in the sense that then they can endure a lot of learning. [...] After giving it a lot of
thought, he [husband] decided that going to Slovenia was a priority, because you get to know
a new environment and perhaps live better life, so he went. I stayed and looked after the kid.
That is actually the most important. It is true that earning money is also important, but what
do you do then with that money, you give it to your kid, don’t you, kids are very important.
If kids are fine, everything is fine. Because of that importance I stayed in China, did house-
wife work and raised my daughter. When the kids grew up, when my daughter grew up, I,
too, thought that it was necessary to go out and see if life abroad, in Slovenia, was so differ-
et, better, if you can start living. [...] I’d like to see my daughter coming here, I’ll bring her
here, so that she goes to school here, it’s better for her. (Xan, 33, China)

These cases show that the migrant parents cannot afford the time for childrearing because of
the long hours they put into work. Kim’s story in particular illustrates the work ethic of the
Chinese migrant community, as those involved in the restaurant business dare not allow them-
seves a day off in order not to be beaten by the competition. The situation for migrants in
Slovenia is specific in terms of their smaller numbers. Whereas in other countries the Turkish
or Chinese migrant communities, for example, are of substantial enough size to enable the sup-
port of either relatives or co-ethnics more generally, in Slovenia this is not the case.16 Rather
than being able to rely on social networks of other migrants from their country of birth, the
migrants may find themselves secluded from other people with transnational migrant experi-
ences altogether. Migrant women are much more exposed than the “native” population pre-
cisely because they have limited social capital in terms of helpful family networks and can only
rarely count on any help from their environment.17 The lack of extended family is of crucial
importance for migrants, who find themselves reliant only on their own resources. The loss of
family and social support networks also means that they must take sole responsibility for
household work. This has been shown to result in “feminisation” as the women may find
themselves redefining their role and identity, accepting a more traditional female role (Ho,
2006), though occasionally migration may also lead to a reversal of gender roles, as is the case
with migrating mothers as the sole breadwinners, whose male partners take on the childrearing
responsibilities.

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS POLICIES ADDRESSING TRANSNATIONAL FAMILY
PATTERNS

Whereas current policies on migration and integration are beginning to recognise family
reunion as one of the most legitimate reasons for “acceptance” by a “host” society, they in
most cases still do not account for the growing trend of feminisation of migration that
would require the “engendering” of policies. Our empirical findings confirm that the multi-
ple realities of migrant women’s experiences are not reflected in the gendered nature of wel-
fare provisions that, too, prioritise women as carers, accentuating their role as providers of
welfare both through their paid and unpaid work (Kofman et al., 2000: 2). The interviews
show that despite the differing realities of migrant women’s projects, their different needs
and aspirations, and despite the changing patterns of family life family reunification poli-
cies still define the narrow concept of nuclear family, leaving no room for migrants to determine for themselves the persons who they perceive as constituting their family. Along these lines, the EU and the national policies context admits spouses and dependent children as family members, making migrants conform to traditional marriage patterns despite the radical changes that family life has undergone in European states (Kofman, 2004: 245).

Several women in our sample were able to arrange their residence permits based on family reunification policies, either as immediate family members of Slovene citizens or as spouses of “foreigners” with residence and work permit in Slovenia. Getting a work permit was much harder, and the women note that the lengthy processes made them feel that nobody would listen to “foreigners”, let alone provide assistance. In addition, the interviews point to the need for policies to consider that the increased insecurity in the labour market, racialisation and gender bias to a great extent define the overall economic position of migrants. Women migrants spell out the need for a greater flexibility in the process of judging economic positions to avoid situations when women are denied entry, a work permit or residence due to unsteady jobs, either their own or of their family members.

The interviews point to the scarce integration provisions, which assume that “family migrants” will be “provided for” by their family members, thus totally preventing them from any individual and self-sufficient claims. Biographies show that migrant women, whose status is dependent on their spouses, find it particularly hard to form social networks, as well as to find employment. They do not receive any assistance in their efforts to obtain a work permit, and being denied access to the formal labour market several are forced into undeclared work (cf. Phizacklea 1998: 30). Moreover, there exists a lack of opportunities for migrant women to find jobs that are not confined to domestic and care work. Furthermore, it is difficult for them to find jobs that respond to their actual qualifications; on the contrary, a great majority report experiencing deskilling. The current policies should therefore be more individualised and allow the consideration of female migrants’ needs outside of the family. Specifically, the Employment Service of Slovenia must facilitate access to the labour market for all migrants, regardless of their status or type of work permit. All migrant women should be included in and eligible to participate in Active Employment Policy programmes.

Another important dimension pertains to the fact that current policies, which award special provisions for what is called family reunification status, are not dealt with, let alone problematised by the responsible institutions. Women migrants whose entry patterns are categorised under these policy provisions are considered by policies and state officials as having the advantage of enjoying benefits and certain “privileges”, such as easier access to residence permits, or, for instance, shorter legally prescribed periods for submitting citizenship applications. Assuming that the “resident alien” – in our sample these are the husbands of our respondents – would provide for their family members, the actual situation of migrant women is left entirely to the family. The fact that migrant women perform domestic work at home is naturalised, since the policies in fact adopt and enshrine in their stipulations the “breadwinner/dependant” relationship between spouses. Tying the status of migrant women to their spouses perpetuates the naturalisation of the female role of performing invisible and underpaid domestic work (cf. Westwood and Phizacklea, 2000). It also renders female migrants too dependent on their spouses, especially considering that they may wish to disengage from the relationship, yet feel unable to do so because of the fear of losing their status rights, which are, under the existing policies, tied to their family status.

While it seems that, at least in principle, both EU and national policies loosen bureaucratic obstacles when it comes to family reunification-related migration (especially when compared to restrictive measures in areas of asylum policy), relevant policies lack direct action to address the various patterns of migrant women’s transnationalism. The interviews with
migrant women in Slovenia make it clear that current policies should find place to address what feminist authors have termed “the needs discourse” or the “politics of needs interpretation” (Fraser, 1987), i.e. to address more specifically the needs that pertain to gender divides in the process of recognising social, cultural, political, economic and health rights of migrant women. The interviews instruct us to consider policies that would embrace the cross-cutting of gender, ethnicity and class, and would introduce “intersectionality” as a “policy methodology” (Yuval-Davis, 2006). “Engendering” of migration and integration policies and specifically considering differentiating transnationalism of migrant women when applying policies in practice might result in overcoming the current dependent model of family unification in handling migration.

NOTES

1. See, for example, the 6FP project FEMAGE – Needs for Female Immigrants and Their Integration in Ageing Societies, 2006–2007 (http://www.bib-demographie.de/EN/Projects/FEMAGE/femage_node.html?_nnn=true) (accessed on October 21, 2009).
2. Biographical narrative interviews were conducted in Slovenia as part of the 6FP project FeMiPol – Integration of Female Immigrants in Labour Market and Society: Policy Assessment and Policy Recommendations, 2006–2008. For more, see http://www.femipol.uni-frankfurt.de/ (accessed on October 15, 2009).
3. Our sample reflects the official statistics, which report the majority of migrants come from former Yugoslavia. At the same time, our selection of interviewees from a variety of different countries illustrates recent trends in Slovenia’s migration flows. The sample also covers different regions of Slovenia and we included women from urban centres as well as migrants from smaller towns and rural areas. Moreover, the sample is as exhaustive as possible in terms of various “categories” of migrants. Even though our initial focus was on women working in the tertiary sector and performing low paid jobs, it soon became apparent that the same structural problems permeate the lives of migrant women regardless of their official status, education or professional qualifications.
4. Biographical interviews were conducted according to the Research Manual prepared for the FeMiPol project by Lena Inowlocki (cf. Apitzsch and Inowlocki, 2000).
5. All the citations of the female migrant’s narratives that appear here have been translated into English. Every effort has been made to preserve the particular speech of women migrants, whose Slovene is mixed with regional and colloquial expressions, as well as words from their mother tongue. Still, since several of the interviews were conducted in other languages than Slovene, and consequently translated into Slovene, there is the potential for nuances to get lost in translation.
6. Here we foremost refer to the tertiary sector, specifically the care work, while demand for prostitution cannot be ignored, nor can the fact that Slovenia has recently appeared as a transit country, but also a destination country and a country of origin for trafficking in women.
7. It should be pointed out, however, that the overall numbers of these migrants are generally quite low, especially for geographically remote countries.
8. The term “foreigner” is put in inverted commas in order to delineate the feelings of “otherness” expressed by some of our respondents, who noted the social distance of the “native” Slovene population. It is also a term that distinguishes the foreign-born population, which we prefer to use instead of the legalistic designation “alien” that is adopted by the Employment and Work of Aliens Act (Article 2) – and defined as “a person who is not a citizen of the Republic of Slovenia”.
9. For more, see Article 36 of the Aliens Act.
10. Article 5, Ztuj-1-UPB3, October 2006.
11. For the purposes of this paper, we refer to the legalistic understanding of citizenship as a formal status, a membership in a specific state.
12. This is true for all cases but one: a sportswoman who was awarded citizenship under special legal provisions.
13. The country of birth concealed for ethical concerns.
14. Official statistics on demographic composition of female migrants in Slovenia are scarce. In addition to the Ministry of Interior’s information on the number of issued residence permits, certain data on work permits are also available, however, data on migrant women’s marital status or number of children is not available, while statistics on educational levels are not conclusive.

15. Ten women in our sample live in Slovenia together with their children, two as single mothers after divorce.

16. The position of migrants from the former Yugoslav republics, who comprise the majority of Slovenia’s migrant population, should be seen as slightly different because they are more likely to be able to draw on informal networks of friends and relatives.

17. Migrant women most often do not have access to public childcare and they generally encounter obstacles to accessing healthcare, employment benefits, and so on. State-sponsored welfare provisions depend on a migrant’s status, however, the narratives show that it is the lack of information about the current policies and administrative procedures that hinders the migrant women even when they are entitled to claim the benefits.

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