GENDER AND MIGRATION INTERSECTIONS

In a Canadian Context

ABSTRACT

Given the tremendous changes in Canada's labour market over the last 30 years, and parallel changes in norms about the roles and responsibilities of women and men in various social contexts, research that does not accord serious attention to immigrants as gendered subjects is fundamentally flawed. Gender is the necessary lens to examine migration, settlement and integration processes in order to (1) develop a truly inclusive understanding of the ways in which Canadian society is changing and will change as a consequence of immigration and growing socio-cultural diversity; and (2) understand population movements and their consequences for development and citizenship, broadly defined, in an increasingly globalized world.

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Demographic aging and a low birthrate, coupled with policy decisions that have brought about some of the highest annual rates of immigrant arrival in Canada since World War II, means that there is scarcely a sector of Canadian society or a region which is not affected by immigration or where immigrants do not make a contribution. Less fully appreciated is the fact that migration, settlement and integration processes are dynamic and highly differentiated between groups and deeply gendered. How immigrants 'do' in Canada, their needs and contributions, why, when and how they arrive then maintain linkages with their places of origin, and the roles that newcomers play in the lives of their children are all fundamentally related to their identities, roles and responsibilities as women and men. Gender is the necessary lens to examine migration, settlement and integration processes in order to (1) develop a truly inclusive understanding of the ways in which Canadian society is changing and will change as a consequence of immigration and growing socio-cultural diversity; and (2) understand population movements and their consequences for development and citizenship, broadly defined, in an increasingly globalized world.

Research has focused on either the un-gendered "immigrant" as a meaningful analytical category or the generic immigrant man unencumbered by his own gender identity and culture. Given the tremendous changes in Canada's labour market over the last 30 years, and parallel changes in norms about the roles and responsibilities of women and men in various social contexts (e.g., the family, schools, government, politics and community organizations), research that does not accord serious attention to immigrants as gendered subjects is fundamentally flawed. As a consequence, our understanding of migration and settlement as a process is far from complete, and policy is insufficiently sensitive to women's and men's distinct needs. Research must go beyond simply 'adding in' sex as a variable because gender is a negotiated and historically constructed social practice, embedded in cultural norms and institutions. As such it decisively shapes female and male identities, interpersonal and social relations, and determines individuals' and households' access to resources during processes of migration and throughout the period of settlement and integration. Equally, the frequent equation of 'gender' with 'women' is highly problematic. This practice has ghettoized research about women and left men as an undifferentiated "other" category about which far too much is assumed. Feminist theory and research have highlighted the need to study the social construction of masculinities in relation to migration and gender identities in established ethnic communities (Willis and Yeoh, 2000).

A growing interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary body of scholarship is beginning to take form in gender migration and settlement studies (Anthias and Lazaridis, 2000; Giles, Moussa and Van Esterik, 1996; Kelson and DeLaet, 1999; Kofman, Phizacklea, Raghuram and Sales, 2000; Tastsoglou and Maratou-Alipranti, 2003; Willis and Yeoh, 2000). Gender practices in 'sending' countries shape the composition of migrant flows, migrants' material and social resources, goals and settlement strategies, while settlement and integration experiences may modify, transform or reinforce these gender practices in multiple ways (Grasmuck and Pessar, 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Salaff, 2000; Tyner, 1999). A highly diverse set of research findings suggests that migration can have 'emancipatory' effects for some women in terms of power relations within households and communities, but it may also perpetuate long-established forms of inequity (Menjivar, 1999; Pessar

1995; Pessar, 2000). There is a strong need to deepen our understanding of how newly achieved gender roles are being enacted in households and between women and men, and how gendered norms extend into interactions that women and men have with public and private institutions in both the sending and receiving societies (Goldring, 2000).

Gender is not only a dimension of identity, but a social relation that shapes the form and function of many institutions – the family, the workplace and labour markets, education, laws and policies, and non-governmental associations. In this sense, we can conceive of gender as a structure, or of gendered structures. Such structures are based upon and reflect unequal relations between men and women, with the balance of power systematically tipped against women. Gendered institutions and structures can and do change as a consequence of diverse, gendered immigration. They also change as a consequence of determined women and men, migrant and non-migrant, striving for a greater measure of equality. Within this conceptual framework, gender intersects with and other markers of identity, such as ethnicity, 'race,' language, religion, age and sexuality. These intersections structure social relations within and between newcomer and Canadian-born communities (Agnew, 2003). In addition, in an era of globalization and transnational migration, these gendered intersections affect immigrant involvement and socio-economic and political-cultural relations in the sending societies (Jones-Correa, 2000; Yeoh, Huang and Willis, 2000).

We contend that a comprehensive research agenda, spanning the entire continuum of the migration process from the sending society through to third countries to the ultimate society of reception, is necessary on methodological and ethical grounds. Methodologically, it is crucial to approach migration as a process and, in order to understand it as such, demands looking beyond what happens to women and men post-arrival in Canada. It is also far too facile to presume that settlement in Canada is some kind of migration endpoint. Although women and men may respond very differently to the opportunities that transnational linkages afford, the existence of such extensive and efficient linkages seriously call into question the permanence of settlement in traditional receiving countries like Canada. Morally, given Canada's humanitarian tradition and philosophy of development assistance, Canadians should take an interest in migration not only in terms of how newcomers fit into domestic policy considerations regarding population growth and labour market needs, but also how such policies influence community prosperity and socio-political stability in the developing world. With these considerations in mind, it is possible to identify a number of specific research objectives can be identified that emphasize the importance of a rigorous consideration of the intersections of gender and migration:

- the kinds of "transnational" linkages that immigrant women and men maintain with communities, families and individuals in other countries, and the influence of these links on household and family structures and well-being, caring-giving responsibilities, economic productivity, civic participation, citizenship and belonging;
- normative gender roles and change among adults in immigrant households;
the gendered qualities and character of relationships between parents and children, especially in relation to the maintenance of heritage languages, scholastic performance, and identity formation;
- the role of language, and especially literacy proficiency in English and/or French, for successful integration and in structuring power dynamics within families; and
the economic integration of immigrant women and men in a Canadian economy that increasingly emphasizes literacy, knowledge and skill/training flexibility.

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Moreover, migration does not occur in abstract space, and any analysis should take explicit account of the places of migration – both transitory and permanent – for women and men. Gender-specific changes in family structures, labour force roles and civic participation are negotiated within particular locales and spatial contexts in sending societies, and are interweaved with the formation of transnational diasporas. Moreover, the inter-related gender- and place-mediated processes are also evident with regard to economic, social and political participation of women and men in large cities (such as Toronto and Vancouver) where the majority of immigrants settle, as well as smaller cities and towns (such as Halifax) that often wish to attract more newcomers.

The importance of gender and its intersections in migration processes has led an increasing number of international research communities to adopt this analytical perspective in migration research. In Canada, in 2002, a group of researchers affiliated with the Metropolis Centres and supported by SSHRC held a series of workshops ("Strategic Workshop on Immigrant Women 'Making Place' in Canadian Cities: Transdisciplinary Approaches to Their Social Networks") that led to the formation of a network of researchers and a web-based policy document.[1] In 2003, the new Atlantic Metropolis Centre of Excellence established the only "Gender, Migration and Diversity / Immigrant Women"[2] research domain in the Canadian (and

international) Metropolis Project network. The domain provides a unique entry point to identify issues of particular relevance to immigrant women that might otherwise be overlooked in migration research. By doing so, it highlights the gendered character of every aspect of the migration process.

Much like Women's Studies programs in the academy, the Gender/Immigrant Women domain represents a different way of approaching what can be known and is a research paradigm that cuts across disciplines. The domain consists of a wide range of substantive research interests that are investigated through a gender lens (and gender in all of its diversity). It also encourages investigation of emerging questions that may not be evident in other research domains that do not foreground the experiences of female and male migrants as *gendered* subjects. Finally, through collaborative research and networking activities between academics in diverse regions of Canada and internationally, policy-makers and NGOs, the Gender/Immigrant Women domain aims to provide a regional and national focus and to function as a clearing-house for gender-based analysis of immigration and diversity. Members and affiliated researchers also engage in gender-based analysis of research questions emerging from the 12 federal priorities for policy-oriented research on immigration and integration, and aim to ensure that such questions take into account gender and immigrant women's experiences.

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Notes

1 Strategic Workshop on Immigrant Women Making Place in Canadian Cities (2002) *Policy-Relevant Research on Immigration and Settlement - Relevant for Whom?* A Working Document. Montréal: INRS Urbanisation, Culture et Société, Institut national de la recherche scientifique, and Immigration et Métropoles. [Workshop members: D. Rose (coordinator), J. Bernhard, C. Creese, I. Dyck, L. Goldring, A. McLaren, C. Nolin, V. Preston, B. Ray, E. Tastsoglou].

2 Conventionally it is known as "Gender / Immigrant Women" domain.