
Gender and family in transnational entrepreneurship

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Abstract: The current process of globalisation is not only about increasing cross-border flows of capital, goods and services, but also about people moving often from developing to developed areas in search of a better life. The role of women in these dislocations is increasing as they are counted on to provide for their families, while in many cases still expected to conform to traditional nurturing roles or to fill the gaps in nurturing roles left by 'career women'. On a larger socioeconomic context, taking their habitus and social, economic and cultural capital with them to the new territories and institutional set-ups, these immigrants are affecting urban economies in ways beyond the formal economy and accepted social norms. Drawing on empirical evidence from cross-national studies, we explore this phenomenon within the context of the European Union and migrants coming in from developing countries. Most of the empirical data consists of a comparative study on undocumented worker transitions (UWT-project), conducted by an international research team in Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Italy, Spain and the UK. It includes 210 qualitative interviews with immigrants involved in the informal economy. Additionally, 84 interviews with stakeholders' representatives such as unions, public and semi-public agencies were conducted.

Keywords: transnational entrepreneurship; globalisation, gender, family and entrepreneurship; informal economic activities; bounded solidarity; enforceable trust; undocumented migration; parallel society; dual loyalty; divided loyalty; welfare state regime; EU and non-EU migrants.

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1 Introduction and methodology

The influence of family should not be ignored in labour force analyses. Central for a child's psychological formation, family may also be central, later on in life, as a 'push' and 'pull' force for certain career decisions including migration, especially for women.

Freeman (1990, p.18) observed that "self-image is subject to many other sources of influence throughout the course of development, but the first impressions emblazoned through the intimacy of family carry considerable weight. Our relationships within the family not only become the prototype for subsequent ones outside but also teach us who we are and what we might expect to do with our lives". This pertains especially to parents, who are largely responsible for forming views on gender roles and self-worth in their children.

Taking British society as a point of departure, Beauregard (2007) wrote that mothers who took on traditionally female occupations tended to influence their daughters to do the same. But when homemaking mothers in the USA encouraged their daughters to broaden their career choices, many of the girls went on to become managers, as found by Freeman (1990). Also in Freeman's study, women encouraged by their

fathers to be assertive and highly educated tended to seek to emulate the paternal role as breadwinners – even as their own parents played traditional gender roles.

While family undoubtedly shapes women as well as men, we should consider that, for centuries, men enjoyed a freedom of personal choice and mobility that women did not. After all, daughters were closely monitored and groomed to become wives and mothers, often required to give up their own wishes for their families'. These studies indicate that even in secular societies, women's liberation has not erased the importance of family expectations in moulding career paths. There is also an embedded sense of duty to their families.

Beauregard (2007) finds there is now a strong trend toward trying to combine career and raising a family, rather than seeing them as mutually exclusive; this tends to lead women back into traditionally female jobs such as nursing and teaching rather than into male-dominated fields such as technology and science. Stier and Yaish (2008, p.363) point out that "even in countries that have achieved greater compatibility between work and family (e.g., the Scandinavian countries) women assume the major responsibility for their families, so the pattern of employment along their life course is affected by family demands".

When a woman does choose a busy career while trying to raise a family, a demand naturally arises to fill the traditionally female role as caretaker. As women from developing countries migrate in search of better job opportunities, many come to fill that gap in the career women's households – as maids, nannies, etc. In their case, loyalty to familial duties manifests in their going abroad to work rather than staying home; their sacrifice lies in having to leave their families and even children to be able to provide for them.

The final report of Undocumented Worker Transitions (UWT), a two-year study commissioned by the European Union, points to a definite increase in the number of female labour migrants in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Italy, Spain and the UK. A collaboration among organisations in those countries plus Bulgaria, the report sought to shed light on migrants' flows, pathways, impacts, travails and treatment received in all seven partner countries (McKay et al., 2009).

After reviewing documents and statistics, talking to experts, and interviewing 211 migrants (99 of them women) from various nationalities, one of the report's main conclusions was that gender-based discrimination was a constant in the countries' labour markets – no matter how skilled the women interviewed were (2009). Worldwide, this discrimination persists despite the feminisation of labour and migration.

The Bulgarian partner in UWT, which focused on gender issues, quoted the United Nations as saying women's work accounts for 60% to 75% of world production, but women's share of world income is only 10% [Zhelyazkova, (2008), p.61]. Also according to the UN, the jobs mostly available to women in developing countries, besides farming, lie in casual, low labour-security sectors such as street vending, factory and domestic work, waste collection, and small-scale mining and construction [Department of Economic and Social Affairs, (2010), p.88]. Women face similar labour restrictions when migrating to developed countries, with many entering the domestic sector and the sex sector, limited by prejudice and the lack of documents, protections and opportunities.

The International Organization for Migration estimates that of the 214 million immigrants in the world today, about half are women and 57% live in developed countries (2010). In interviewing 101 female migrants in Europe, the UWT report found

that only 23 of them were working at their educational level (Zhelyazkova, 2008). The study also concluded that women, more often than men, tend to migrate because of economic and family necessities rather than out of a sense of adventure; and that they are generally more willing than men to endure job discrimination in the host countries for the sake of their families (McKay et al., 2009).

Says the final report:

“The mechanics of the labour market destine migrant women to jobs for which they ‘ought’ to have a ‘natural’ disposition as women and which could be classified as jobs centring on ‘care,’ in a broad sense of the word... [also,] particularly in the case of women with children, they saw the giving up of career opportunities in countries of origin, in return for higher economic rewards from migration, as uniquely tied up with the desire to provide for their children” (2009, p.15).

The UWT report singles out family-related factors as the main force behind the increase of female migrants in the labour force, listing four elements:

- 1 the feminisation of economic responsibility for families, which in turn has necessitated the migration of women in search of work
- 2 family reunification in those EU countries which now have an established migrant presence
- 3 a breakdown in family structures in host communities, where the care for the elderly, in particular, can no longer be carried out within the confines of individual families
- 4 an increase in the number of working women in host countries, requiring a different distribution of family caring responsibilities (2009, pp.56, 57).

This article will analyse the three elements that directly pertain to family, gender and labour (1, 3 and 4), using both empirical data and theory. It will explore how these elements combine with inequalities in the market economy to attract female migrants into the informal economy, particularly the domestic sector, and breed a class of transnational entrepreneurs.

In referring to the informal economy, we will use the UWT project’s definition of it, which is:

- “1 activities involving the paid production or sale of goods or services that are unregistered or hidden from the state for tax and employment law purposes, and are not registered by the official statistics and authorities when documenting the GDP
- 2 those economic activities that avoid the payment of taxes and social insurance contributions
- 3 activities involving working relations not in compliance with ruling labour law” (2009, p.7).

The UWT study found that most undocumented migrants (those who have entered a country illegally, who have irregular labour or residence status or who have overstayed their authorised period) are employed in the informal economy (2009).

Section 2 of this article will explore the demand for undocumented female workers, and the family-related ‘pull’ force leading them into the informal economy, often in developed countries’ domestic sector; Section 3 will deal with the supply side, and the

'push' force, also family-related, leading them to leave their home countries. It is in Section 3 that we will discuss the advent of transnational entrepreneurs and the high risks some women put themselves through, namely in transnational sex work. We will use case studies then to look into the motivations of foreign prostitutes in developed countries.

2 The demand side: a breakdown in family structures in host communities/increase in the number of working women in host countries

Modern capitalism, or neoliberalism, involves the freer flow of money, goods and labour, reduced government intervention in the economy, private ownership, personal responsibility, and competition among corporations, countries and individuals. But while the market economy has opened up borders for products and services, it has not necessarily done so for safely and legally settling down in a new country, as the UWT report indicates:

In all the countries studied migration policies have been moving in a similar direction, generally aimed at restricting undocumented migration and limiting the numbers of documented migrants. Our research finds that tightening immigration controls [does] not eliminate undocumented work. Instead they push workers further into the shadows of the economy, working at nights, in private spaces, hidden from the communities which they secretly service, whether through cleaning buildings at night, preparing food in the kitchens in the early hours of the morning, looking after the elderly in their homes, or working in small construction sites, doing the most difficult, arduous and sometimes dangerous jobs [McKay et al., (2009), p.9].

Because of growing obstacles to obtaining a visa and to finding formal employment in the receiving countries, these people enter informal sectors in search of opportunities they cannot find in traditional, low-paying jobs back home. The opening up of markets has in no way benefitted people and countries equally: Gaps between developing and developed countries have become so large that a Filipina maid in Hong Kong was earning 15 times more than a teacher back in the Philippines, Ehrenreich and Hochschild wrote (2002, p.8).

Undocumented and often unable to access protections and social benefits in their host countries, migrants are willing to enter the informal economy and take the high risks and low pay (by developed countries' standards) that many citizens would not. In the case of women, the sectors that are most often open to them are the "worst regulated and most likely to fall within the shadow economy, depriving female migrants from multiple rights" [Zhelyazkova, (2008), p.38]. But clearly, they would not find those jobs without a demand in the host countries.

The UWT researchers found that in Belgium, informal sectors make up 15.2% to 20.8% of the gross domestic product; and in Italy, undocumented labour in informal sectors such as construction, agriculture, hospitality and domestic work added 17.7% to the GDP in 2005 [McKay et al., (2009), p.33]. Production processes that are not mobile and must use labour on the spot, and/or which are seasonal, often depend on informal labour, the researchers added (2009, p.12).

When it comes to domestic labour itself, the appeal for female migrants is two-fold. First, it is easy to find work in private homes, since the demand is high and women are *expected* to perform care-related jobs; second, domestic work is viewed as less risky than

other types because authorities are not as likely to raid private homes as they are to raid ethnic restaurants, for instance (Zhelyazkova, 2008).

The final UWT report attributes a growth in the demand for informal services in Europe, and particularly for women in domestic care, to “the dismantling of welfare states” [McKay et al., (2009), p.58]. Neoliberalism mandates the privatisation of services once rendered by governments, making them more difficult to afford for many families and tying social benefits to formal employment. At the same time, the market economy encourages the creation of casual and part-time work by decreasing labour protections and regulations.

For example, in the unregulated domestic sector in Spain, employers are able to pay local workers more than migrant workers. But although the sector has been traditionally part of the ‘invisible’ economy, it has been “fundamental within Spanish society as it creates the conditions that allow local women to work in better jobs, as they are released from domestic work, including their caring responsibilities for the elderly and children,” Zhelyazkova (2008, p.44) writes in the Bulgarian team’s report.

In fact, whether or not a woman prefers to stay home with her children or ailing elders, many can no longer afford to do so and must find jobs, or must not stay away from their jobs for too long. While women’s liberation and the market economy have given some women (largely in developed countries) more social and career mobility, job pressures and public sector cutbacks have made it harder for them to take care of their families.

Thus, family structures have broken down and a gap has opened up for the nurturing role within the family. A demand has arisen for an affordable (female) replacement in domestic work and care. Finding that niche open, women with little access to formal employment (largely from developing countries) migrate into those roles and also into riskier ones, as Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2002, pp.2–3) describe:

In images familiar to the West from television commercials for credit cards, cell phones, and airlines, female executives jet about the world, phoning home from luxury hotels and reuniting with eager children in airports. But we hear much less about a far more prodigious flow of female labor and energy: the increasing migration of millions of women from poor countries to rich ones, where they serve as nannies, maids, and sometimes sex workers.

Massive labour deregulation has given opportunities to women who would probably be out of work otherwise, but has also increased insecurity. Especially for migrants, informal labour leaves them more open to destitution and exploitation by employers, as they have no protections in case of wage or job cuts and are often too afraid to report abuse.

Domestic labour is one of the most intimate in the informal sector. It is based on trust from both sides, and both sides have been known to betray it. But while the employers may not face consequences for their actions because of the lack of regulation, they could easily denounce and get their undocumented workers deported. Domestic workers, especially of the live-in kind, can become completely dependent on their employers, who can choose to become a surrogate family or to cut them off from people and resources, among other abuses, as Zhelyazkova (2008) indicates.

For many women, such as Latin Americans interviewed in Belgium, domestic labour means working below their qualifications in hopes of accumulating money quickly in better-paying markets [Zhelyazkova, (2008), p.28]. Their high education can give

less-educated employers more fuel for mistreatment, as it did in the case of some highly skilled Bulgarian women who had resorted to domestic work in Spain, Italy or Greece:

“My mistress used to wake me up during the night saying, ‘Come on, the engineer, change my bed sheets and bring me a glass of water, let me see you now’... ‘After I was employed they did not give me a day of rest for four months and I had not left the house. When I went out for the first time in the street, in the unknown city, having no acquaintances, I had the feeling I had gone mad...I had no one to complain to – neither any institution, nor friends, nor any contacts” [Zhelyazkova, (2008), p.51].

Why do women endure this sort of work, and this sort of treatment? A Ukrainian interviewee living in Bulgaria offers some insight:

“Women always manage because their most important value is to protect their families, their children in particular, against poverty. They accept any kind of job and they are more tenacious, they are not fastidious, they can bear humiliations” (2008, p.24).

In the next section, we will discuss women’s motivations for migrating, and how families and communities can continue to serve as an engine for their labour decisions and strategies in the host country (such as transnational entrepreneurship). Besides domestic labour, we will look at case studies on prostitution as a form of both exploitation and ability to work the system to one’s advantage through ethnic connections.

3 The supply side: the feminisation of economic responsibility for families

The term ‘transnational mothers’ relates to women who may be highly educated but work for years in low-level but high-paying jobs in developed countries, sending money to their husbands and children back in the home countries [Zhelyazkova, (2008), p.60]. The women’s rationale often is that these sacrifices are worth it to provide for their children’s education and material assets – a rationale that often differs from men’s.

Several interviewees from former Soviet-controlled countries told the UWT researchers that their husbands had preferred unemployment to taking jobs abroad below their skills. Some men had returned to their home countries while their wives stayed behind making money in the host countries [Zhelyazkova, (2008), p.24].

We previously mentioned societal and psychological factors that give many women a deeper sense of duty to their families than men may have. Indeed, most female interviewees said they had migrated and taken jobs inferior to their skills for the benefit of their children and families, but very few men said so; instead, most men cited political, economic or emotional reasons for migrating (2008, p.28). Also, the IOM states that women send money home more often than men [Koser et al., (2010), p.48].

With neoliberal reforms benefitting the private sector at the cost of a public safety net for the poor and unemployed, families come to count on women for extra income. Many women bear alone the risks in the ‘shadow’ economy abroad, sometimes foregoing their principles and bodily integrity to give their families a financial future (or at least a greater shot at survival). But while solo migration signifies the empowerment of women, it also means women become more vulnerable to exploitation and violence, remaining more of a target than men are [Zhelyazkova, (2008), p.60].

Meanwhile, families, communities and countries have encouraged and facilitated women's migration into the informal sector of richer countries. Sri Lanka, for example, has sponsored programs teaching women how to use domestic appliances, and has put out propaganda for them to go abroad and send money back home [Ehrenreich and Hochschild, (2002), p.7]. The message seems effective: In 2008, 88% of Sri Lankan female migrants went into domestic work, according to the IOM [Koser et al., (2010), p.176].

Another example, identified by the UWT study, is 'the massive presence of Polish women' in Belgium as au-pairs, living and working in Catholic families' homes. These women are 'introduced as students wanting to learn French' with the families and then placed by the Polish parish. Also in Belgium, two foreign domestic workers had been connected with an Ecuadorian woman by their own families, who probably also paid the agent for the women's placement with the host families [Zhelyazkova, (2008), p.48].

As discussed earlier, the regulated, formal labour sector is often not an option for migrants. But they face pressure to keep on abroad, as their remittances have become increasingly important for societies suffering through investors' demands and financial crises inherent in the market economy. Remittances quadrupled worldwide between 1990 and 2004, adding up to more than foreign direct investment and aid in many developing countries (McGrew, 2008). By 2008, immigrants were sending an estimated \$336 billion home to the Third World – more than one fifth of the GDP in ten countries (Koser et al., 2010).

Thus, drawing from the examples mentioned in this article, we can see that migrants manage to contribute to the economies of both their host and home countries. They can also use their connections in both countries to circumvent labour obstacles in the host country, in a mode known as transnational entrepreneurship. Families and ethnic communities often play big roles in providing these resources, as the migrants pursue business amid adverse conditions (Drori et al., 2009).

Combining resources from their bifocality (focus on more than one place), these migrants gain a comparative advantage over locally-based workers and can carve out a niche for themselves despite their lack of status in their new society (Patel and Conklin, 2010). The notable case of a Chinese woman who launched a successful tourism business after moving to Northern Ireland shows the usefulness of bifocality and family and ethnic connections (Drori et al., 2010): In terms of family locally, she had the advantage of being married to an Irishman, which may have helped her meet other Irish people and find out they were curious about life in China. Spotting the business opportunity in this, she contacted family and friends and got their help with the logistics for personalised tours of China.

According to Drori et al. (2010, pp.15, 16), this transnational entrepreneur "designed specialized tours that included visiting ordinary Chinese in their homes, arranging social and cultural engagements. She organized these tours by utilizing various friends and family, all the while acting as a personal guide, interpreter, and concierge".

Connections through marriage also help when a co-ethnic husband has settled and found employment in the host country. He can thus guide the newly arrived wife into the labour market and into adapting more easily to the local culture, writes Zhelyazkova (2008). She also mentions children (and their often easier integration into the host country's society and language) as an important channel for the parents' adaptation. But the tendency now, she adds, is for women to migrate alone in search of employment, their children being raised without them (2008, p.60).

Although ethnic and cultural factors certainly made for different experiences and degrees of independence among the female interviewees, the UWT report showed that family was often the main driving force behind their migration. While the family factor was not always positive for the female migrants, it ended up leading some to find, in more liberal societies, an autonomy they had never had before.

Zhelyazkova tells the stories of two women from patriarchal societies led toward independence in Austria by such family-related adversity:

“A Turkish female migrant... was living in her husband’s house feeling very isolated and exploited. ...She managed to get out of those coercive family structures and to get access to a German language course as well as to irregular jobs to earn her living. She obtained regularisation of her employment status by her own efforts. Moreover, she also arranged for the family reunification of her mother and her siblings” (2008, p.17).

“Another case... shows migration in terms of a forced escape as a result of major, life-threatening gender discrimination. The refusal of forced marriage and serious physical violence inflicted by family males made her leave her home country in order to save her life. She managed to escape the violent patriarchal structures in her country of origin, to cross Europe (without knowing any European languages), and to organise a regularised status, despite the strong patriarchal structures within the ethnic minority community in Austria, which she had either to circumvent or fight against” (2008, p.18).

Other women choose to go to extremes to reach financial independence and provide for themselves and their families: they go into prostitution. This is a field where there are great risks but where monetary gains are far greater than in other informal or low-skill occupations open to them (Edlund and Korn, 2002).

When not involving trafficking, entering the sex business involves making a cost-benefit analysis, as regular entrepreneurs would before entering a business or transaction. Except that for these ‘sex entrepreneurs’, the data available to make an informed decision is a lot less reliable and they have a lot more to lose, facing the threat of permanent ostracism, unsafe sex, exploitation, violence and even death.

In their willingness to face these risks and adverse conditions and use their bifocality to build their business, migrant sex workers and their agents become transnational entrepreneurs. To illustrate this idea, we will use the studies on Thai sex workers in developed countries from *Transnational Prostitution: Changing Patterns in a Global Context*. We will also show the role families have played in some of these women’s moves.

While exemplifying transnational entrepreneurship, these stories sometimes denote a trafficking problem. It could be said that trafficking is transnational entrepreneurship gone awry, as victims are often seeking to make profit abroad somehow and are deceived in the process – by other transnational entrepreneurs.

Prostitution in Thailand itself is illegal on paper but largely practiced and even protected by local officials, with anywhere between 76,000 and 300,000 prostitutes in entertainment venues, depending on which agency you ask, the US Department of State reports (2009). As a popular destination for sex tourists, Thailand has also become a large exporter of prostitution: For example, in Denmark in the early 2000s, Lisborg’s (2002) case study estimated that Thai women could make up half of all migrant sex workers and a fifth of all sex workers. Some of the women Lisborg interviewed met tourists in

Thailand and followed them to Denmark, turning to prostitution in their new country to support themselves when the relationships ended.

Of the more than 5,500 prostitutes estimated to be working in Denmark (where prostitution is legal but pimping is not), 37% are believed to be foreigners, the US Department of State (2010) says; but it could find no reliable estimates on how many had been trafficked there. Lisborg (2002) tells of a Thai agent who convinced a family from her village to send their 16-year-old daughter into supposed housework in Denmark, took money from them, and then sold the girl's virginity to two men and watched the rape. Other girls the researcher met were forced into marriage and to keep having sex with strangers to pay their migration debts.

The dishonest agent would be considered a transnational entrepreneur in that she used her ethnic connections across borders to help create and exploit opportunities entrepreneurs rooted in their home countries could not have spotted (Drori et al., 2009). More specifically, she would fit the definition of an 'ethnic entrepreneur', a person recognised as having traits related to a particular ethnic group and largely conducting relations and economic transactions within that group's social structures.

The agent could also be considered a 'middleman minority', which Drori et al. (2009, p.1004) describe as "entrepreneurs who take advantage of ethnic resources such as language, networks, and skills to trade between their host and origin societies". But she could not have accomplished the trafficking without the daughters' sense of duty to their families, which led them into migrating into her trap.

In the case of consensual sex workers, several of the Thai women interviewed could be said to be using ethnic entrepreneurship to get around obstacles they would face as migrants in the regular labour market. They seek to enter the sex trade through connections with Thai relatives and friends already in Denmark, and then advance and build a social life within the constraints of their ethnic group (Lisborg, 2002).

In the meantime, they are sending 60% to 80% of their income of up to 25,000 DKK a month to their families back home, for things such as education, purchasing land and building new houses. They hope to return to Thailand one day and retire, once they feel they have made enough money.

Some get addicted to material comforts and stay in the trade for a long time, becoming massage parlour owners themselves and largely hiring other Thai sex workers. As 'enclave entrepreneurs', they rely on their current locality's resources and co-ethnic employees to build their business (Drori et al., 2009).

This desire for capital accumulation was also widely observed by Ruenkaew (2002) in her case study in Germany. Not only has that country legalised prostitution and brothels, but it has given sex workers regular labour benefits and protections, no longer classifying their work as 'immoral' (Kavemann, 2007).

Between the start of the neoliberal revolution in the mid-'70s and that of the Asian financial crisis in 1997, the number of Thai women moving to Germany increased from an estimated 988 to 25,529, with the sex trade being a popular occupation among them (Ruenkaew, 2002). Ruenkaew writes that most Thai prostitutes she met – although poorly educated single mothers with a rural background – had been earning enough money in traditional jobs back home to get by. But their wages were not enough to build a financial future their children could also benefit from.

In our article, we have discussed domestic and sex work within the context of family-related 'push' and 'pull' factors for women's migration. Many of the women interviewed by researchers indicated their migration had been for the benefit of their

families, even more than for their own. Through the ups and downs of the market economy, the transitional nature of living and working, the discrimination and the exploitation, working for the good of the family may be the only thing that makes sense for many female migrants. It gives them a higher purpose, a sense that they are not suffering in vain and that through their sacrifices, their children can get opportunities that they were unable to have.

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