



The History of the Family

ISSN: 1081-602X (Print) 1873-5398 (Online) Journal homepage: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rhof20>

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To cite this article: Leen Beyers , Machteld Venken & Idesbald Goddeeris (2009) Families, Foreignness, Migration, The History of the Family, 14:2, 125-131

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.hisfam.2009.04.001>



Published online: 03 Jan 2012.



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Families, Foreignness, Migration

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Abstract

Introducing the special issue on ‘Families, Foreignness and Migration. Now and Then’, this essay starts from the observation that in Western Europe migrating with or without one’s family in the last century was increasingly shaped by state policies. As a result, migrants’ identities and family experiences not only depended, and still depend, on their cultural backgrounds but also on very time-specific politics of foreignness and citizenship. The essay’s main argument is that comparing and deconstructing perceptions, policies and practices of ‘family’ and migration help to overcome the limited attention given to age and kin in the study of gender and migration. From an overview of contributions to this interdisciplinary issue, it is clear that deconstructing ‘family’ in migration studies should be developed further along three axes: child migration, the multi-level analysis of family and migration, including societies of origin and migrant organizations, and the comparison of ‘visible’ and ‘invisible’ migrants, which contributes to uncovering the relationship between foreignness, gender and age.

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Keywords: Families; Foreignness; Gender; Age; Interdisciplinarity; Western Europe

In 1951, the Rijkschroeff family, portrayed here arrived in the Dutch town of Amersfoort after several weeks of travelling by boat from Indonesia to the Netherlands. At first sight, they might seem to be one of the millions of families which decided to leave their home country in search of a better life. However, as the labels worn by the children suggest, the journey was not just a family affair. A larger social structure, namely the Dutch state, was behind it. The reason these people could move from Indonesia to the Netherlands was because they were considered Dutch citizens. They were among the 400,000 Indonesian residents with Dutch nationality who were entitled to migrate to the Netherlands when Indonesia became independent in 1949.¹



In fact, over the 20th century, practices of migrating with or without one’s family were increasingly shaped by states and by their constructions of foreignness. Within Western Europe alone, these politics of foreignness and citizenship and the related migration policies varied to a great extent. As a result, migrants’ identities and family

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¹ Historisch Beeldarchief Migranten (images archive of migration); International Institute of Social History (IISH), Collectie Rijkschroeff 02.

experiences have been vastly different, not only because of their diverse cultural backgrounds but also due to time-specific perceptions and politics of foreignness and citizenship in the societies of arrival.

This special issue has started from the idea that comparing family and migration now and then will contribute to a better understanding of migration as a whole, and the gender dynamics at work. Both in Europe and in the United States, comparative studies of migration across specific periods and societies flourish (Lucassen, 2005; Lucassen, Oltmer, & Feldman, 2006; Lucassen & Laarman, 2009; Green, 1997; Foner, 2000; Foner, 2005). These comparisons play an important role in criticizing the idea that migration is a new and unprecedented phenomenon as well as the idea that practices of migration and integration follow a linear, universal logic. One insight from these studies is that paths of migration and integration have varied considerably as they have been shaped by time-specific interactions between receiving societies, sending societies and migrants themselves. So far, historical comparisons of migration in Western Europe have mainly dealt with either ethnic groups or societies of settlement. This volume aims to deepen the comparative endeavour by adding a comparison from a new angle. Instead of comparing ethnic groups or nation states as a whole, which might run the risk of over-emphasizing ethnic and national differences, it draws attention to the changing construction of nations by highlighting the varying politics and experiences of migration and family in 20th century Western Europe.

One striking difference between then and now, and here and there, is the meaning attached by societies or by migrants themselves to migrating with or without one's family. Family boundaries widen and narrow, of course, according to circumstances. Moreover, these 'circumstances', or rather the politics and structures surrounding families, shape what families do. As Strasser et al. demonstrate in this volume, the continuously evolving family models which underlie migration policies within the European Union have a big impact on who migrants consider as their family as well as on how roles and dependencies within their families are defined. Timmerman's contribution on the 'culture of migration' in Anatolian Turkey equally shows that migrants or their families are not just passive victims of migration policies. They also seize the limited legal opportunities to realize their own dreams. In fact, 'family' was and is constantly being negotiated and reshaped among migrants, as a result of the complex interplay between norms of societies, dreams of migrants themselves and, not least, lived realities.

Since the 1980s, the study of family and kinship has lost significance in favour of gender analysis, parti-

cularly in ethnographic, anthropological and historical qualitative research. Interestingly, while the ever-growing body of literature on gender and migration is strongly deconstructionist, the economic and demographic research traditions in both family studies and migration studies have left little room for treating families as social constructions, (Kok, forthcoming). In addition, when studying women, men and their families, economic and demographic researchers have tended to approach them as static, binary entities rather than as relational, dynamic constructions (Kofman, 2004, pp. 247–249; Mahler & Pessar, 2006; Donato et al., 2006). The aim of *Families, foreignness and migration* is precisely to 'bring family back' to deconstructionist studies of gender and migration. Consequently, this volume approaches the family as a changing construction of meaningful relationships in terms of consanguinity or affinity, which entails specific constructions of gender and generation. In other words, we are interested in the history and subjectivity of 'family horizons' in relation to migration, a concept used by Heike Drotbohm in this volume.²

Deconstructing the family in migration research is important for at least two reasons. First, since the economic crisis of the 1970s put a halt to most legal labour immigration in Western Europe, family migration became the most important mode of entry for settling in Western Europe. Nonetheless, due to the economic focus in migration studies and the perception of men as producers and women as reproducers, family and gender dynamics have remained quite invisible in migration theories. As a result, it is only recently that researchers have started to understand the gendered character of migrants' networks (Kofman, 2004; Donato et al., 2006, p. 6–13). Networks are not gendered in the sense that they are more important for female than for male migrants. Nor is it true that all members of a family use the same networks. Rather, several contributions to this issue highlight that the composition as well as the functions of men and women's networks are gendered. Importantly, as both Louise Ryan and Heike Drotbohm argue in this volume, family networks not only create opportunities to migrate or to profit from the migration of relatives, they also help to maintain gender inequalities.

² Other recent initiatives also point to a closing of the gap between quantitative and qualitative, more deconstructionist studies of family and migration. See, among others: the European Association for Population Studies Working Group 'The Anthropological Demography of Europe', which recently organized the workshop 'Transnationalism, Family Ties and Migration in Europe'.

Second, for most of the 20th century, ‘family’ was a major category of experience for migrants and policy-makers alike. ‘Family’ was central to people’s thoughts, policies, conversations and experiences, and comprised more than relationships between adult men and women, which tend to be the focus of gender studies. The shift from researching families and households to analyzing gender in qualitative migration studies has meant that kin and age receive less attention. ‘Children are gendered too’, is the argument of Sarah Mahler and Patricia Pessar in a recent article, to which one can add ‘and the elderly too’ (Mahler & Pessar, 2006). As Vera Hajto demonstrates in her article, in the case of adoption or child fostering, citizenship and gender are important issues. It is time to analyze the interrelationship of gender, age and kin more thoroughly. In that way, we will find out more about lifecourse- as well as kin-related gender experiences.

1. Talking across disciplines

This volume aims to unravel and to compare how politics, practices and identities with regard to family and migration have changed and varied throughout Western Europe since the 1920s. The contributions have two things in common. First, all contributions discuss migrations which had a Western European nation state as their destination. Second, they focus on migration and on the settlement of migrants themselves and less on immigrant incorporation beyond the first generation. This is actually the result of responses to the call for the Families, Constructions of Foreignness and Migration conference (May 15–16 2008, Leuven) where first versions of the articles here were presented. It seems that researchers studying integration felt less invited by the emphasis on families and citizenship, which is a sign in itself. We will return to this below in our further considerations.

Apart from these two commonalities, this volume presents diversity in terms of geographies, periods and disciplines. In Europe in particular, exchanges between historians and social scientists have been limited to date. However, historians and social scientists studying gender and migration tend to exchange more ideas and refer more to each other’s work as gender studies in itself is a very interdisciplinary field (Sinke, 2006, p. 84). Motivated by the belief in exchanging concepts and data across disciplines, this issue gathers articles from historians, anthropologists and sociologists. Therefore, contributions written by specialists in these three disciplines are placed in a thematic, and not in a disciplinary order.

What do historians and social scientists have to learn from each other? Often, they ask the same key questions with regard to migration. For sociologists, the typical questions are: Who moves, why and when? In comparison, anthropologists deal more with the experience of migration itself and ask themselves: What is the meaning of the migration for migrants or their societies? Further, their research biotope is often the migrants’ region of origin, while sociologists tend to focus on societies of arrival. Historians have been inspired by both the sociology and anthropology of migration. However, they tend to keep away from the theory development and hypothesis testing that are so common in the social sciences, and most of all in sociology. Historiography par excellence is the discipline narrating and understanding the move, settlement and community life of migrants. Sociological or anthropological concepts are very useful for these purposes since they help to interpret historical data. In turn, history is relevant to social scientists because it helps to see if the phenomena or mechanisms of the present are applicable to a past situation. Moreover, history challenges social scientific theories to deal with time, evolution and path dependence (Brettell & Hollifield, 2000, p. 2–3).

Concerning the aim of interdisciplinarity, the contribution of anthropologist Heike Drotbohm is interesting to mention. Being an anthropologist, Drotbohm takes the past more into account than social scientists usually do. Drotbohm shows how the gendered culture of migration in Cape Verde is rooted in colonial history and qualitatively analyzes what transnationalism involves from day to day in a Cape Verdean household. Drotbohm comes to the conclusion that a very complex package of factors causes feelings of belonging and detachment. The degree of mobility, connectivity between localities, various migration regimes and gender normativity leads to different migration opportunities for different members of one family. These opportunities and restrictions also have an influence on the individual choice of members whether to contribute to the transnational family or not. In offering an anthropological viewpoint on kinship, Drotbohm breaks through the evidentially used concept of the nuclear family in historical, and to a lesser extent, sociological studies.

The contribution of historian Machteld Venken is exemplary of the interdisciplinary search in contemporary migration history. Combining perspectives from history, anthropology and sociology, Venken focuses on the relationship of public visibility and gender among immigrant men and women from behind the Iron Curtain who settled in Belgium, and the ways these immigrants

articulate(d) bodily memories within their organizations and families. She shows how ‘visible’ Polish ex-combatants, members of an immigrant organization which lobbied for the recognition of historical war trauma, have fewer problems articulating their bodily memories in speech than non-members who need to be helped by their wives to articulate such bodily memories. By focusing on how ‘invisible’ former Ostarbeiterinnen in Belgium have started to express their bodily memories in speech since the collapse of communism, she reveals how they practised bodily memories within their families and immigrant organizations in the past, the latter of which functioned as substitute families.

2. Migration to Western European nation states

As stated above, all contributions deal with migrations since the 1920s to a Western European nation state. While larger historical comparisons of migration phenomena are certainly relevant, we want this volume most of all to shed new light on both the specificity and diversity of contemporary Western European approaches to migration. The specificity of this location is that throughout the 20th century, as Western European nation states developed into democratic welfare states, migration became increasingly regulated and with it, the family lives of migrants (Schönwälder, 2006; Lucassen, 1998). Some of the migrants who feature in this volume lived at long distances from their family members, such as the transnational families of Cape Verdean origin discussed by Heike Drotbohm. Others travelled shorter distances, such as the Hungarian children in Belgium about whom Vera Hajto writes. In both cases, the policies of Western European states were crucial for their decisions and experiences.

In no more than a century and in Western Europe alone, definitions of foreignness, nation and citizenship and the family politics inherent to them have varied and evolved to a great extent (Soysal, 1994; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Nagel, 2002; Schönwälder, 2006). Incidentally, this variety of national identities constitutes a major difference between European and American migration history. For the European 20th century, migration scholars tend to discern four main migration and citizenship regimes, which have different histories in different states. These are, firstly, the labour migration regimes; secondly, the (post) colonial migration regimes; thirdly, the refugee or war migration regimes, and, fourthly, family reunification or family formation regimes, which have become very important since the halt to legal labour migration in most European countries during the economic recession of the 1970s.

A migration regime includes certain migrants and excludes others, but it also makes certain migrants visible and others remarkably invisible. In most of the 20th century, women and children were among these less visible migrants, and migration studies have reproduced that invisibility by privileging men and their public roles as study objects (Kofman, 2004; Donato et al., 2006; König & Ohliger, 2006, p. 11–19). The value of this volume is not only that it makes the migration histories of women and children more visible, but most of all that it adds to the understanding of all types of migration policies and practices as embedded in gender and family dynamics.

As such, the contribution of Louise Ryan highlights the network aspects of two predominantly labour-oriented migrations: Irish nurses to the UK in the 1950s and Polish women, mostly domestic workers, to Britain after the fall of the Iron Curtain and the enlargement of the European Union. Second, Kristen Stromberg shows how crucial family was to the French colonial and overseas politics of migration vis-à-vis the Départements d’Outre Mer. As for the third type of migration regime, Machteld Venken unravels the invisibility of the female Ostarbeiterinnen of the Third Reich who migrated to Belgium. Related to the fourth type of migration, Christiane Timmerman as well as other contributors show how marriage migration today is about more than family, but is certainly also about much more than economics.

The three papers in this issue which concentrate explicitly on Western European politics of migration offer interesting perspectives on the ways in which states or other authorities exercise power over migrants through controlling their family practices. The contribution of Elisabeth Strasser, Albert Kraler, Saskia Bonjour and Veronika Bilger investigates how the family models which underlie states’ migration policies within the European Union inform migrants’ family lives or ‘doing family’, as they call it. Drawing on a comparative policy analysis and on the first insights gained from about one hundred in-depth interviews, the article highlights the complex interplay of state norms, migrants’ ideals and lived reality. It suggests that the more migrants are perceived as unwanted foreigners, the more the authorities in the receiving society tend to interfere in their family lives. Being unwanted can be the result of hostile relations between sending and receiving societies, and ethno-cultural feelings or labour market projections, but it is of course always linked to gender and family. As such, their research reveals that marriage plans of Eastern European women in particular are met with suspicion in several other European countries.

Historian Kristen Stromberg equally deals with the control of a state over migrants in her article on French colonial and overseas politics. In this case, family and gender were the main arguments in the construction of foreignness. After Martinique and Guadeloupe turned from colonies into overseas departments (DOMs) of France in 1946, politics of migration and family served to both draw Antillean French citizens into a closer association with European France as well as to justify distancing them from their European compatriots. French administrators targeted what they saw as a loose family structure in two ways. On the one hand, they granted smaller child allowances to citizens in the new DOMs by citing the problematic nature of the Caribbean family in comparison to the Christian and nuclear family predominant in France. On the other hand, the French State deliberately initiated emigration to France in order to decrease birth rates in the Antilles and to provide unskilled labour in France.

The interference of states in the family lives of migrants has not only resulted in restrictions to family migration. At times, it also results in a visible problematization of the female members or the children of the migrant group and in charitable, paternalist attitudes. That is the main argument developed in the contribution of historian Marlou Schrover. Schrover analyzes the discourses with regard to ‘family’ in Dutch migration policy between 1945 and 2005, a period in which men were mainly associated with labour and women with family migration. This distinction was combined with a victimhood discourse in which women were presented as victims of repressive religion, domestic violence, prostitution or discriminatory government policy. The victimhood discourse was successfully used to acquire rights for migrant women (mostly the right to stay), but as a result all migrant women came to be seen as vulnerable and in need of protection.

3. Practices and identities

This volume situates itself not only at the intersection of different disciplines, but also at the intersection between research of politics and policies on the one hand and research of family practices and identities on the other hand. The contributions of Schrover, Stromberg, and Strasser et al. highlight politics and policies, while equally addressing their impact on practices and identities of migrants. The other authors —Timmerman, Hajto, Ryan, Drotbohm and Venken, concentrate on practices, identities and memories of migrants and their families themselves, and equally point to the impact of migration politics

and policies. By combining these two perspectives in one and the same volume, we hope to stimulate discussion on how the agency of migrants and their relatives has been ‘structurally embedded’ in structures of receiving as well as sending societies, and, secondly, how practices of migrants have in turn shaped migration policies. No doubt, this structure/agency balance is a typical feature of the historical perspective adopted in this volume. History looks for changes and changes are, after all, brought about by agents creating or changing structures (Brettell, 2002).

The contributions of Hajto, Ryan and Timmerman draw attention to how the lived reality of migrants is more complex than policy schemes suggest, but nevertheless conditioned by politics and policies. Historian Vera Hajto shows how the humanitarian action for Hungarian children in the interwar period in Belgium turned out to be very different from how it was designed and how it shaped the identities of the children. In this case, it was not so much the (Belgian) state, but the Catholic Church which shaped the migration policy. The plan was to have the Hungarian children stay for a six-month holiday to help them recover from the hardship in their country. In practice, however, a considerable number of children remained in Belgium with their host family. Contrary to the instructions given, foster parents did not always allow contact with the home family. The Hungarian children were quick in learning the local language and developing loyalty towards their new parents. Nevertheless, the interviewed ‘Hungarians’ nowadays identify themselves as victims or passive players in the whole process and stress the regular confrontation in Belgian society with their otherness.

Sociologist Louise Ryan argues that family and migration are related in much more complex ways than the British policies of family reunification suggest. She compares two groups of female immigrants in Britain: Irish women who had migrated in the 1950s and 1960s to work as nurses and Polish women who migrated after the fall of communism and, especially, after the opening of the British labour market in 2004. Focusing on the social networks facilitating their migration decision and settlement and operating within the framework of changing British migration policy over time, she shows the variety of ways family and migration were connected to each other. As such, some women migrated in order to follow relatives (often more than purely ‘nuclear’ family members), while others moved in order to escape from family tension and conflict.

Anthropologist Christiane Timmerman indicates how, since 1974, Belgian migration policy has restricted

legal migration to a few opportunities, of which migration for family formation or family reunification is the most important. Focusing on marriage migration from Turkey to Belgium, she states that it would be incorrect to explain the popularity of marriage migration only by its instrumentality for making migration possible, and, to the contrary, points to the complex phenomenon of marriage migration. In the practices of migrants, migration aspirations of Turks and marriage aspirations of people of Turkish origin in Belgium are linked to the possibilities ‘the family’ offers as an institution capable of building a bridge between traditional praxis and the challenges linked to international migration. While Turkish girls in Belgium marry men from their parents’ or grandparents’ region of origin as a way of acknowledging tradition, they also experience this practice as emancipating since their husbands become dependent on them after immigration.

4. Further considerations

This volume has only started to ‘bring family back’ to deconstructionist studies of gender and migration. Most of all, it helps to outline possible future projects. Collectively, the articles suggest what has been achieved and what is lacking when it comes to the deconstruction of family against the background of migration. Three things are important in this regard.

First, more research on children and migration is needed. On the one hand, children as migrants deserve more attention than we could give them in this volume. Related to this, the contributions to this volume reveal that it is important to pay consequent attention to the different roles of family members and to not to equate the family with women, if one hopes to deconstruct the family. As such, this volume not only ‘lacks’ children, it also lacks pronounced attention to fathers. On the other hand, research on immigrant incorporation, which is often about children, would advance by deconstructing family and gender in relation to citizenship (Donato et al., p. 12–13). This accounts in particular for all that is related to ‘generation’, a key word in the sociology of immigrant incorporation, which actually makes the intergenerational relationships among migrants invisible. ‘Generation’, as a notion in current approaches to immigrant incorporation, draws a strong boundary between migrants (the first generation), migrant children (the second generation) and their descendants (the third or fourth generation). ‘Generation’ suggests a teleological process from the first to the third generation of becoming less attached to the region of origin and of becoming a full citizen in the society of arrival. Family

histories of migrants or their descendants have no place in this scheme, as if intergenerational ties do not play a role in the lives of migrants. Deconstructing these meanings of ‘generation’ will shed new light on the ways foreignness is defined and the ways migrants and their families deal with host society expectations (Silverstein, 2004, p. 121–150; van der Tuin, 2007).

Second, we come to the conclusion that policies and practices of family and migration should be researched at more levels. This volume mainly considers the state and other authorities in the host societies on the one hand and the migrants and their families on the other hand. Hence, it makes very clear how constructions of citizenship and foreignness have shaped family practices of migrants. It leaves less clear how migrants or their families have influenced the politics of family and migration. In order to research this, the focus needs to shift from individual families, who do not take up public roles, to migrant organizations and their media. In this volume, Venken analyzes both immigrant organizations and families and points to their complementary roles. Further, the roles of the state and other authorities of the societies of origin should be highlighted since they heavily contribute to the negotiation of ‘family’ across international borders. As such, the ‘cultures of migration’ described by Timmerman and Drotbohm are not only created by people, but are also sustained or, at least, not hindered by their governments. Sketching this multi-level perspective, we come close to what Sarah J. Mahler and Patricia R. Pessar have called the ‘gendered geographies of power’. As they argue, gender is embedded and reenacted between and among multiple scales in transnational lives, and the crucial question is if this multiplication reinforces or rather opens up existing family regimes (Mahler & Pessar, 2006, p. 41–43).

Third, we think that the comparison of migrants who are highly visible and migrants who, due to the prevalent migration regime, remain invisible is a very useful reference point in migration studies. For one thing, if migration historians gave themselves the task of finding an invisible, less publicly problematized migrant for every visible migrant they studied, women and children migrants would receive much more attention. Second, public (in)visibility suggests things about the relationship between foreignness, power and family, or, in other words, about the concrete intersections of gender and nation in the case of migration. Invisibility can mean that there are no feelings of foreignness and indicate relative equality between migrants and the established population of the host society, as is the case with most Western European nationals in other Western European countries nowadays. Vice versa, the public visibility of

the least wanted migrants is generally strong. When it comes to gender and family, however, public (in)visibility of migrants plays out differently. As such, invisibility can signal a person has no power to control his or her own life and, thus, no power to react publicly to the politics of foreignness of states or other authorities. This has often been the case for women and children migrants in the last century. The Ostarbeiterinnen who feature in the article of Machteld Venken offer a strong case in point. At the same time, as Marlou Schrover demonstrates, the visible victimization of women (or children) creates individual opportunities and gives them power, but it also strengthens the foreignness of the ethno-cultural groups these individual migrants belong to. Finally, comparing (in)visible and visible migrants might help to gain insight into how and when family behaviour becomes the crucial vector of feelings of foreignness, as illustrated by Kristen Stromberg with regard to the French Antilleans. In order to increase understanding of these situations, we finish this introduction with a call for more comparisons, and, most of all, comparisons between visible and invisible migrants.

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