



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Conclusion. Gender, migration and cross-categorical research

Schrover, M.L.J.C.; Moloney, M.D.; Schrover M., Moloney M.D.

Citation

Schrover, M. L. J. C., & Moloney, M. D. (2013). Conclusion. Gender, migration and cross-categorical research. In M. M. D. Schrover M. (Ed.), *Gender, migration and categorisation. Making distinctions between migrants in Western Countries, 1945-2010* (pp. 255-263). Amsterdam: AUP. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/58667>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)
License: [Leiden University Non-exclusive license](#)
Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/58667>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Gender, Migration and Categorisation

Making Distinctions between Migrants
in Western Countries, 1945-2010

Marlou Schrover & Deirdre M. Moloney (eds)

IMISCOE Research

AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cover illustration: Hungarian refugees Rozsa and Imre Tölgyesi at home in Numansdorp, 1958. Habetler Collection, IISG Amsterdam

Cover design: Studio Jan de Boer BNO, Amsterdam

Layout: Hanneke Kossen, Amsterdam

Amsterdam University Press English-language titles are distributed in the US and Canada by the University of Chicago Press.

ISBN 978 90 8964 573 9

e-ISBN 978 90 4852 175 3 (pdf)

e-ISBN 978 90 4852 176 0 (ePub)

NUR 741 / 763

© Marlou Schrover and Deirdre M. Moloney / Amsterdam University Press, Amsterdam 2013

All rights reserved. Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise) without the written permission of both the copyright owners and the authors of the book.

11 Conclusion

Gender, migration and cross-categorical research

Marlou Schrover and Deirdre Moloney

States differentiate explicitly between *categories of migrants* (e.g., colonial, refugee, labour and family) and implicitly according to *categories of analysis*, such as gender, class, religion and ethnicity. This volume focused on this dual relationship between gender and categorisation. Categories of migrants are like communicating vessels: migrants can and do change categories. We analysed how, when and why this happens, and how this differs according to gender, as well as to class and ethnicity. Defining (the true refugee, the family member or difference) is directly related to enumerating migrants. Numbers (real or inflated) are vital to justify measures or new policies. Categorisation is not only important for allocating or withholding rights, but also for substantiating claims, particularly the claim that there is a problem. The numbers game plays out differently for migrant men and women: men are *a* risk, women are *at* risk.

In the introductory chapter, we summarised the large literature on gender and migration. With this volume, we have added to that literature in six significant ways.

In the first place, we moved away from taking stock of differences, and from the over-studied sectors of domestic work and prostitution, with their stress on victimisation, feminisation and problematisation. We explained the functionality of making differences.

Secondly, we focused on the public sphere (political debates and media coverage), where boundaries are redrawn, rather than on the private sphere, and we showed that issues move between both spheres.

Third, we illustrated not only that class and ethnicity intersect with gender, but that religion does so as well. Christian support groups advocated for their co-religionists, and as part of that strategy emphasised that Christian women were at risk of being harmed by Muslim men. The aim of anti-veiling campaigns was partly to protect Muslim women from repression by Muslim men. What is labelled a crime of passion when it involves non-migrants becomes a culturally-based honour kill-

ing when it involves Islamic migrants. The intersection between class and gender is often strongest as part of problematising 'their' poverty as 'our' problem. Poor men applying for asylum are more likely to be suspected of not being 'true' refugees than poor women. Poor men are also more likely to be suspected of being labour migrants who are abusing family migration policies.

Fourth, we illustrated differences in the labelling of countries of origin of migrants. Some are more easily declared to be failing states than others. Possibilities for labelling are influenced by economic, political and postcolonial dependencies. The outcome for migrants from these countries differs according to gender, as well as to religion, class and sexuality.

In the fifth place, we emphasised the importance of looking at both men and women, as well as both femininity and masculinity. As Walaardt indicates in his chapter on the Netherlands, some asylum seekers sought to substitute masculinity for femininity in employing victimhood discourse. Advocates and lobbyists simultaneously and successfully redefined roles, so that asylum seekers could be heroes and victims at the same time. In some countries – Morocco, for instance – migration has become a rite of passage from boyhood to manhood. Those who do not manage to migrate remain in perpetual boyhood. That principle does not apply to women. In fact, the opposite is true. Women migrants are viewed as girls, long past the age of girlhood, and married migrant women are grouped alongside children into one broad category of dependents, which suggests they are economically unproductive.

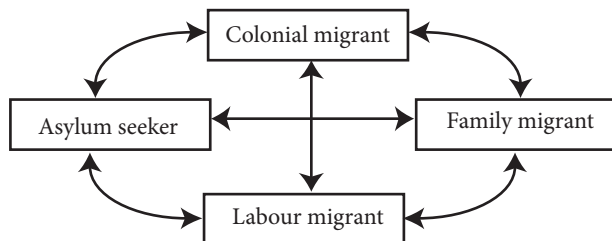
Finally, we demonstrated how understanding the way that women and men crossing borders contributes to our understanding of citizenship and rights, as well as definitions of family, social welfare and religion in a transnational context. We challenged much of the existing literature on gender and migration by proposing that the typical binaries reflected in the scholarship, such as labour migrant and refugee, the West and the Rest, public and private spheres, equality versus difference, democratic versus authoritarian, deserving and non-deserving, and men and women, intersect more than these simple dichotomies suggest. Scholars should not uncritically reproduce dichotomies that are used in the public sphere. Furthermore, we brought out a dilemma: emphasising difference works to gain attention and rights in the short run, but it creates disadvantages in the long run. An alterity discourse can be useful to policymakers and lobbyists, but it disadvantages migrants in the long run, and that, too, often differs by gender.

Contribution to theory: Introducing the transferral model

In our introductory chapter we pointed out that since there are many differences between migrant men and migrant women, there is not *one* theory that adequately explains all aspects of the relationship between gender and migration. We offered a large number of theories related to gender and migration. With this volume we contribute to theory by explaining when and why categorisation changed and when, how and why differences according to gender (as well as other categories of analysis) have been labelled, detected or deemed important within the public sphere.

Refugees and asylum seekers, family migrants, postcolonial migrants and labour migrants are not mutually exclusive categories, although policymakers tend to regard them as such. In practice, migrants can and do move between these categories.

FIGURE 11.1 *Migrants can and do move between the different categories*



We emphasised the ability of men and women to move between categories of migrant. We further analysed how ideas about gender intersect with other categories of analysis (such as ethnicity, religion and class) to shape debates in the media and politics. We focused on three areas of continued intense debate, in which at least differences according to gender were deemed important and which relate to different categories of migrants. These three areas are who is a ‘refugee’, who is ‘family’, and ‘multiculturalism’. These questions are frequently seen as separate. We showed that they are not. We described and analysed distinctions made between categories of migrants in France, the USA, Canada, the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark, and how political debates justified these distinctions.

Scholars tend to appropriate the categorisation framework used by policymakers and reproduced by politicians and journalists. In this volume we sought to move away from that perspective, and its moral overtones, by examining the ways in which migrants and policies move

between and across categories. Categories such as gender, class and ethnicity intersect, but not all categorisations are equally important in all contexts or at all times. We aimed to explain when and why differences were labelled, detected or deemed important. New categories were introduced to emphasise the novelty of a phenomenon, and to thus establish the need for new policies. To label phenomena (migrations, policies or debates) as new and different is part of the process of problematisation.

Policymakers, as a rule, seek to interpret categories of migrants narrowly and to exclude people who do not fit their definitions. In contrast, support groups tend to stretch categories and generate sympathy for those who seem to be inhumanly harmed by the government's rigour. Categorisation is not static, but it is frequently presented as such because such a representation eases governmentability. We pointed out similarities over time and between countries. Schacher described the case of Armenian refugees in the USA. The strategy used there was similar to the strategies pursued by Canadian advocates on behalf of Mexican refugees, as described by Boyd & Nowak, and for homosexual refugees in the USA, as described by Oxford. As illustrated by Schacher, Walaardt, and Oxford, state policies, and the policies of advocates, NGOs and lobbyists, continuously interacted, influenced and shaped one another. As Schacher discussed, many Armenian-American social workers in the USA, eager to promote the respectability of the Armenian community, opposed the harsh impact of immigration laws. But they nonetheless accommodated them in practice.

Our emphasis on categorisation highlights when, where and why analytical categories were absent. Gender was, for instance, initially not understood as relevant in refugee policy, as Walaardt showed for the Netherlands, Boyd & Nowak demonstrated for Canada, and Oxford for the USA. In fact, in 1951, when the Refugee Convention was drafted, there was little awareness that women could be refugees. Refugees were assumed to be men and masculine. Only later did women appear on the scene. Only then could refugees – both men and women – be viewed as feminine and vulnerable. Homosexual men have recently become more visible as potential refugees, but as Oxford indicates, lesbian women almost never claim asylum in the USA. Advocates often aim to make categories of migrants visible, although they need not be new. There is a thin line that separates visibility from categorisation. Changes in migration patterns influence visibilities, but high-profile court cases can do so as well, such as that of the caregiver and father Abdallah Berrehab described by Van Walsum, Jones & Legêne for the Netherlands. Possibilities for visibility differ according to gender.

Categorisations apply to migrants, but also to their countries of origin. Categorising democratic countries as failing states proved difficult, as described by Walaardt for Portugal and the USA, and by Boyd & Novak for Mexico, and this influenced the chances of migrants from these countries for gaining asylum. The difficulty of categorising certain states as failing states results not only from a lack of information, but also from a lack of potential political gains. The benefits that Western governments stood to obtain from granting asylum were no longer clear after the end of the Cold War, as indicated by Boyd & Novak and by Walaardt. The discourse of political gains was replaced by a discourse focusing on economic costs, and threats to society were defined in both cultural and safety terms. This is true for all countries described in this volume. Perceptions of costs, gains and threats differed according to gender. Men are more often portrayed as useful to the labour market, but also as (political) threats to society.

Categorisation, furthermore, relates to ideas about what belongs in the private sphere and what in the public sphere. Rather surprisingly, highly personalised and dramatised stories from the private sphere – mostly about women – were found to be instrumental in redrawing boundaries in the public sphere. This was true for the Armenian refugees in the USA, for Muslim migrants in the Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden, and for Mexican migrants in Canada, as well as for homosexual migrants in the USA. At the same time, however, when authorities could successfully relegate an issue to the private sphere they could justify keeping it outside of the public sphere, and refrain from introducing new policies or changing existing policy. For instance, the dominant narrative of ‘queer’ persecution for gay men and transgendered women is one of sexual family violence, as Oxford discusses for the USA. That which is categorised as ‘private violence’ – violence within the family sphere – is regarded as something that occurs in all societies. As a result, such incidents are defined as outside the realm of an asylum claim. Asylum claims lose power if persecution can be redefined as maltreatment or classified as belonging to the private sphere.

In the case of family migration, the opposite occurs. Very private aspects of family life – biological parenthood – have been made part of public debates and formal testing. Furthermore, the connotations of categorisations can change. ‘French by law’ was a legal category, but Sarkozy used it to categorise those who were ‘not really French’ and associated it with Islam, non-integration, polygamy and, by extension, illegality, as Raissiguier showed.

We described the efforts of supporters and lobbyists to create precedents, while authorities emphasised uniqueness. Among authorities,

there was a universal fear of establishing precedents. This was true for all countries studied, as well as for all categories of migrants. Refugee claims were more successful when presented as exceptions, though they had to be transformed into precedent cases to advance the overall cause of a migrant group. We emphasised the strong tendency towards victimisation narratives in seeking to find the 'true' refugee (whether in the Netherlands, in the USA or in Canada), as well as in claiming rights to family migration and in defending selective exceptionalism within multiculturalism (in the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark).

Personification was one of the main strategies used by lobbyists, as we discussed. Strategies and their success differed according to gender. Personal stories and gruelling details were invoked to strengthen the claims of Armenians and homosexuals in the USA, Mexicans in Canada, and Muslim women in the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark. Advocacy groups instructed asylum claimants so that they could make a successful appeal. The strategy worked in favour of the migrants in the short run, but led to victimisation in the long run. It also holds true for migrant women within a multiculturalism framework, as shown for the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark. Victimisation was a successful strategy for claiming rights, but the price of this success was that migrants came to be seen as vulnerable and in need of protection by the state, especially if they were women. More importantly, they came to be regarded as fundamentally different. It proved difficult to escape a victimhood identity. Victimisation played a role in the construction of a counter-identity of the 'Western' advocates who formed the support groups. This othering worked as a disadvantage in the long term by limiting economic and political roles for migrant women and men. Advocates invoked strong tropes, such as those that referred to the Second World War or the Holocaust, as discussed by Walaardt for refugees in the Netherlands, and by Oxford for the USA, fully aware that overuse of such tropes risked ultimately diminishing the power of the argument. But use of the tropes was effective in the short run, and thus attractive.

We demonstrated that discourses are reproduced and copied between categories of migrants, and between countries. Indeed, discourses travel. They shift from anti-colonial and civil rights movements, to family rights, refugee rights and gay rights movements. For the first time, the authors in this volume provide specific empirical evidence on how and why strategies have travelled, and how gender has influenced the transferral of those strategies. The evidence presented indicates how, in very different circumstances and with very different goals, many the same strategies were deployed. We highlighted the passage of discourses and concepts across time and space (between countries) and

between categories of migrants. In the process, migrants could and did switch roles and move from one category to another (e.g., from asylum seeker to labour migrant).

We introduce here what we call the *transferral model* to summarise and explain categorisation in relation to gender, class and ethnicity, based on the evidence in the preceding chapters (Figure 11.2). Five factors constitute the model.

FIGURE 11.2 *Transferral model: Factors that explain the relationship between categorisation and gender, class and ethnicity*

-
- Characteristics of the immigrant population (size of the group gender, class, ethnicity, religion, number, skill, sex ratio and country of origin)
 - Economic situation, geopolitical situation, perceptions of gain and costs, urgency and reciprocity (between countries)
 - Credibility, rights attached to ‘equality’
 - Recognisability, perceptions of ‘sameness’
 - Migrants’ rights discourse combined with other emancipatory goals
-

The first factor is the characteristics of the migrants, as these determined whether migrants could switch between categories. Foremost among these are their gender, ethnicity, class, the sex ratio within the group, the numbers of migrants, their countries of origin, and their religion.

Secondly, categorisations and therefore migration policies depended on particular economic situations and geopolitical circumstances (such as the end of the Cold War). High unemployment rates removed one avenue for switching categories. Perceptions regarding costs and gains (political, economic and security) influence possibilities for relabelling. Perceptions of costs and gains are influenced by linkage possibilities: Can marriage fraud be linked to migrant illegality? Can migrant illegality be linked to security threat? Urgency is important for relabelling. Cases that relate to women (and children) can be presented as more urgent (from the perspective of a need to save those involved). Such circumstances render it easier to change labels and categorisations, and for migrants to move across and between categories. Lawmakers, policy-makers, politicians, journalists and lobbyists are often influenced by what occurs in other countries. Since policymakers, as a rule, look to neighbouring countries in order to synchronise politics and prevent

migrants from 'shopping' for rights, they also study the arguments and strategies used elsewhere. They adapt and adopt these when useful or possible, while immigrant support organisations do the same. Leniency (or rumours about leniency) in one country work as a magnet (some fear), and restrictions divert migrants away from a country (some hope). Policymakers respond to what they believe will be the consequences of their decisions on the policies of and practices in neighbouring countries (reciprocity). Criticism about the relative leniency or stringency of policies in neighbouring countries is only valid and effective if it is matched by policies in one's own country.

Thirdly, whether discourses can effectively travel from one category of migrants to another is influenced by credibility, we argue here. Credibility plays an important role in refugee cases. Questions about whether a person is a true refugee or whether democratic countries (such as Mexico, or NATO partners, including the USA and Portugal) can even produce refugees, are central to the implementation of refugee policy. The question 'is this a man or a woman?' illustrates the problem of credibility: who is asking, who is answering and why is the question being asked? Credibility questions are also important to other categories of migrants, not simply asylum seekers: Is this person really migrating for love and marriage, and not for work? Can wearing a veil ever be a choice? Is this a real marriage, a real child, a real spouse? Is this migrant willing and capable of adapting? The answers to these questions differ according to gender, as well as to sexuality, age, class, skill, countries of origin, age and religion. If it can be proven that people are not what they claim to be – a true refugee, a family member, a spouse, or potentially a Dutch, Danish, Swedish or French citizen – rights can be denied accordingly. Multiculturalism had to be declared a failure and had to be attached to all sorts of behaviour, labelled deviant, strange and culturally-determined, in order to exclude migrants and deny their children rights. This happened in each of the countries examined in this volume. When equality comes with many rights, as is true for most Western countries, it is important to set high barriers for access to that 'equality'. Important to the discourse is how 'we' profit from believing or denying claims. A smooth transition from colonialism to postcolonialism, the recruitment of suitable workers, the claim to moral superiority, or the opportunity to pitch the enlightened West against a backward Rest, can be sufficient to change categorisations, as we showed.

In the fourth place, strategies, concepts and debates travel across time, between countries and across and between categories of migrants when new categorisation is built on old categorisations. That process

makes new categorisations acceptable. Recognisability, we argue, is a factor that stimulates and enables the transfer of ideas and policies. Transfers between categories, between countries and over time can only take place if those who are instrumental to these transfers believe that the situations, or the migrants, are 'the same'. Debates about multiculturalism are much more closely related to debates about who is a refugee and who is family, than might be apparent at first glance, or has been suggested in earlier literature. As in the quest for the 'true' refugee and 'true' family members, multiculturalism takes an essentialist view. Static ideas about culture legitimise categorisations. Since equality – or sameness – comes with rights, it is important to prove difference, as was done in multiculturalism, or fraud, as was key in debates about refugees or family members. The shared essentialist basis makes it possible for discourses to travel.

Lastly, similar archetypes figure in many of these debates. The 'eksik etek' – the 'short skirted', intellectual, unmarried US women, who came out in support of the Armenian refugees, as described by Schacher, were similar to the Dutch women who supported Turkish women decades later, as Schrover described. The people who supported gay rights, also came out in support of refugee rights in several of the countries examined. Strategies that proved to be successful in one context were copied, adapted and applied in other contexts. This was especially true if they could serve a multiple cause: advocating immigrants' rights combined with non-migrant emancipatory goals. The refugee war resisters of the 1970s, as described by Walaardt, were important in the anti-Vietnam or anti-'colonial' war movement. Gay refugees were important to the LGBT movement of the 1990s.

The testing and use of this transferral model in new contexts provides ample scope for future advances in the field.