State of the Art
Theoretical Perspectives and Debates in the UK

Floya Anthias, Maja Cederberg

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Integration of Female Immigrants in Labour Market and Society. Policy Assessment and Policy Recommendations
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Oxford Brookes University
Gypsy Lane, Headington, OX30BP Oxford, UK
e-mail: fanthias@brookes.ac.uk
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Introduction

This paper provides a brief review of the literature and debates surrounding gender, migration and work in the UK context. While migrant women remained absent in the literature on migration (apart from as dependants of men) until three decades ago, a significant amount of work on the issue has emerged since. While this paper is concerned specifically with literature produced in a British context (while not being exclusively about British society) it is worth noting that, national specificities aside, the debates relevant to our research on the integration of female migrants in labour market and society are not commonly contained by national boundaries, but cut across them. Perhaps particularly in the present ‘globalised’ world, research and literature produced elsewhere will necessarily impact on debates and work taking place in the UK, and vice versa.

The paper begins by looking at feminist critiques of migration approaches and the gendering of migration theory. It then goes on to look at a number of different areas of debate, including gender and ethnic and national boundaries; gender, ethnicity, class and the notion of intersectionality; and questions of globalisation and transnationalisms. The final section is devoted to literature and debates concerned particularly with the position and experience of migrant women in the labour market. The sectors included are care work, domestic work, sex work, the service sector, the agri-food sector and work within the so-called ethnic enclave. We furthermore consider the importance of attending to a range of labour market positions filled by female migrants generally, and in reproductive work specifically.

1. Feminist critiques of migration theory

The migration of women involves a range of different movements: movements of space across national or other borders, the relations between these spaces as well as movements in terms of a range of social locations, which include those of the family, networks and class positions, as well as potential identity shifts, often discussed through using notions of diaspora, marginalised or hybrid identities (Anthias 1998).

Some writers (e.g. Anthias and Yuval Davis 1992, Anthias 2000) have argued that migration is important in terms of testing the boundaries of who belongs to the ‘community’ or the nation. Moreover, migration from outside Europe tests the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion within Europe itself. Although migration is a world phenomenon, it is also a diverse one (Moch 1992, Cohen 1995, Castles and Miller 1993). There have been and still are different stages and forms of migration, although they are not necessarily either analytically or substantively distinct: the terms Gastarbeiters, settlers, refugees, exiles, sojourners and denizens all denote particular forms, as well as ways in which the phenomena of migration have been distinguished.

Anthias (2000) argues that the push-pull model, based on neo-liberal economic theory, and the classic explanation for migration to Europe, did not pay attention to gender, but was a deeply gendered approach. Firstly, men were the prototype migrants, being regarded as the decision makers and bread winners. Secondly, migration was seen as a rational choice of individuals rather than structurally determined. Not only did this ignore the role of constraints around choice (for example why did some individuals migrate while others in similar circumstances did not), but it also ignored wider structural constraints imposed by a long history of colonialist or imperialist forms of domination. It also underplayed the role of the mythology of the West and the continuing interaction between migrants and homelands (captured better by the notion of diaspora despite some of its problems (e.g. Cohen 1997, Clifford 1994, Anthias 1998b). Anthias argues that there is a case for looking at migration in terms of a threefold positioning of social actors: within the relations of the homeland, within the relations of the country of migration, and within the migrants’ own ethnic communities and networks.

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1 This is not to imply that gender has been mainstreamed in the migration literature. Indeed much of this literature remains inattentive to issues of gender.
Some of the important work of Marxists sought to emphasise the role of the mode of production, i.e. the macro or system level, as opposed to focusing on individual choices. The seminal text that gave an impetus in this direction was that of Castles and Kosack (1973). In this, the focus was on migrants, not as discrete individuals who made choices, but as particular categories of labour power, linked to the internationalisation of the labour market. Broadly speaking, Marxist political economy, particularly through the work of Castles and Kosack (1973) and Castells (1975), focused on migrants as a sub-proletariat forged out of the uneven development of capitalism. Such work has treated migrants as a reserve army of labour subjected to the power of capital, or as in Phizacklea and Miles's (1980) work, as a class fraction of the working class. The idea of a labour force of migrant workers as a ‘reserve army’ was reinforced by their temporary immigration status in most European countries, whereby they would be forced to leave as and when their labour was no longer needed – in turn advantageous from the perspective of the receiving society in the sense of ensuring minimal pressure on the welfare state. However, the use of Marxist economic categories (like that of the reserve army of labour) for particular population categories (like women or ethnic minorities) is itself problematic (Anthias 1980). This analysis was not only economistic but also gender blind.

Another strand related to the political economy approach to migration emphasises the effects of globalisation in terms of structural inequalities between the north and the global south on the one hand, and of the dislocation of people following structural adjustment programmes as well as environmental crises on the other. From this perspective, a number of processes related to the global expansion of capitalism function as ‘push’ factors in the sense of people having to migrate in order to survive. According to Castles (2004), the failure to take account of these processes is a crucial factor explaining why ‘migration policies fail’ to block ‘unwanted flows of migrants’ to developed countries. Whilst mainstream approaches to migration saw the actor as exercising free choice, the Marxist approaches erred in the opposite direction, and deprived actors of any agency, thereby reducing the migrant to a category of labour power in the global labour market. Neither of these approaches considered how decision making takes place within the family and broader social networks, both within the sending and receiving countries, and the ways in which knowledge and communication channels and opportunities for work are mediated by social actors in specific social locations. Moreover, the longing for return may fundamentally influence settlement (e.g. Dahya 1974). Class outcomes are related also to the ways migrants may be complexly oriented to a number of geographical locales, including the homeland (Anthias 1982, 1992). Most importantly, the ways in which migrants have been received by the countries of destination (such as through discrimination and racism), cannot be explained fully by economistic explanations, whether neo-liberal or Marxist (Solomos 1986, Anthias 1990).

In Britain in particular, the ‘race relations' and ethnic studies problematic dominated the field up to the 1990s (see Anthias 1982, 1992, Miles 1989), and more recently, a concern with identity, with new ethnicities, with difference and diversity has grown (see Anthias and Yuval Davis 1992). Theories of diasporisation and new diasporic social forms, including consciousness, have emerged (Cohen 1997, Anthias 1998b). New migration to Europe in the last decade or more turned the attention of scholars and politicians once again to migration processes as such (see e.g. King 1997, Koser and Lutz 1997). The paradigms used to explain earlier forms of migration, with their focus on economic migrants from poorer sectors of their communities, primarily men or families led by men, could no longer yield a fruitful conceptual basis for understanding migration. New migration was both more diverse and included large numbers of educated people from the old Eastern bloc (Rudolph and Hillman 1997). In addition, a large part of this migration is made up of women who migrate on their own, being involved in what can be termed a solo migration project. The diversity of these new forms of migration has therefore gone hand in hand with feminisation. It is diverse also in terms of motivation: some migrate for purposes of family reunification; others migrate mainly for work; while a significant number are asylum seekers (Koser 1997). Yet another category refers to what Mirjana Morokvasic (1994) has called commuter and brain drain migrants.

In relation to these shifts, the literature is increasingly pointing towards the shortcomings of the ‘race relations’ framework in accounting for the current complexities surrounding migrants and minority ethnic groups generally, and the disadvantage and exclusion from which they suffer particularly.
Shaped in a particular historical moment with regards to both immigration regimes and the ‘ethnic’ composition of the migrant population, it can arguably be regarded as problematic and/or insufficient in terms of making sense of today’s realities. For example, Steve Vertovec recently (2006) introduced the notion of ‘superdiversity’ to refer to the increasingly complex scenario with regards not only to ethnic and national differences on the British scene, but also the (ever increasing) multiplication of legal statuses. It is important to note, however, that diversity in society exists at multiple levels and not only in terms of minority ethnic or migrant groups, and therefore the recognition of differentiated and complex migrant statuses and locations is only one facet of social ‘diversity’.

As we noted in the policy working paper on the UK (June 2006), while protection of ‘settled’ ethnic minorities in the UK is formally rather well accounted for (although the gap between theory and practice in this area has been repeatedly noted in the literature), many groups of ‘new’ migrants face an altogether different set of problems and constraints in relation to their rights and opportunities, following to a large extent an increasingly selective and, for most, restrictive migration regime. Claims for rights in areas related to immigration status can be regarded as particularly difficult to make. The distinction between migrants with full and permanent legal status in the UK and others is significant, and in fact authors such as Schuster and Solomos (2004) even go so far as to suggest that the idea of harmonious ‘race relations’ in the UK has throughout its history been accompanied by a strong focus on controlling migration. In other words, a limited number of immigrants, as well as a particular ‘ethnic’ composition of the immigrant population, has been regarded as a precondition for equality and social stability. Needless to say, such logic is extremely problematic, not least through its implicit proposal that a large and diverse migrant population will necessarily entail social problems.

The economic incorporation into particular sectors of the economy provides an important context for understanding the position of migrant women, albeit in a heterogeneous manner. Women migrants provide the flexibility that global capital needs. Women fill particular functions in the labour market, being cheap and flexible labour for the service sectors and, in some countries, for small/light manufacturing industries. They are located within a secondary, service-oriented, and often hidden, labour market, which is divided into male and female jobs, and reproduces an ethnically and gendered divided labour market. Moreover, ethnic/migrant groups can use women as an economic resource. For example, family labour was a central pattern for many migrant groups in the post war period in Western Europe (Ward and Jenkins 1984, Anthias 1983).

2. Gendering migration

The focus on women in migration has been a relatively recent phenomenon despite the fact that women have always migrated either as members of families or as single women, seeking an improvement in their own economic and social position, or hoping to help family left back in their homelands. In the light of the failures of migration theory to attend to gender and women, feminist theorists (Phizacklea 1983; Morokvasic 1984; Anthias 1992, Lutz et al. 1995; Anderson and Phizacklea 1997; Indra 1999; Kofman 1999; Anthias and Lazaridis 2000; Kofman et al. 2000) proposed a more complex understanding of migration, attentive to the multiple gendered dimensions involved. Apart from highlighting the constraints within which migrants operate, these theories have also attended to the importance of agency: ways in which migrants, and in this case migrant women, make choices and plans for the future of themselves and their families.

When reduced to the economic dimensions or factors, whether understood in terms of individual and rational choices or a structural and/or collective basis, the complexity of migratory choices, and those of women particularly, tend to be overlooked. Amongst the factors ignored by such models are social, cultural and political constraints, which may affect both women and men, but the effects of which are always gendered. For example, Kofman et al. (2000) mention violent and/or oppressive familial or marital relations that women wish to escape, and furthermore point towards the fact that constraints of gender roles and normative expectations more generally may act as powerful factors in women conceiving of migration in terms of emancipation and greater opportunities (see also Anthias and Lazaridis 2000).
One of the important contributions of a gendered perspective on migration was to provide an alternative to the image of the rational (male) individual migrant, by focusing on the household as the unit of analysis. This suggested that migratory decisions need to be understood in the context of considerations for and negotiations within the family/household. As Kofman et al. (2000) point out, however, much early literature on households and migration tended to regard it in terms of an unproblematic homogenous unit, questioned by the view from intersectionality theorists that the family/household is composed of divergent interests and positions, and is a site of power and struggle of different kinds and not only those of gender.

Moving beyond the limits of individual households, we have seen a growing body of literature concerned with the role of social networks more broadly in migratory processes. Much of this literature has attended particularly to ethnic bonds and ties and the part they play, on the one hand in migratory paths and choices of residence, and on the other in the process whereby migrants come to settle or ‘integrate’ into host societies, by virtue of facilitating access to social networks as well as knowledge. A particular strand of literature that has attended greatly to the role of ethnic networks concerns the study of ethnic entrepreneurship (e.g. Aldrich and Waldinger 1990; Light 1972; Light and Bonacich 1988; Portes 1987; Ram et al 2000; Ram and Phizacklea 1996; Werbner 1984, 1990; Zhou 1992; Zimmer and Aldrich 1987).

While households and wider social networks play important parts in migratory paths, some more recent literature has suggested that the changing nature of migratory flows and systems entails a need for a revised understanding of the mechanisms at play in relation to migratory decisions and processes. While there is a significant body of literature emphasising the importance and role of more or less informal social networks in migration and the making and sustenance of transnational links, another has developed alongside this, focusing on the institutional frameworks developing in both sender and receiving countries in relation to on the one hand increasing needs and wishes to migrate and on the other restrictive immigration regimes. These institutions, including both those that take advantage of the scenario by creating various migration-related businesses (labour agencies, people smugglers, traffickers, etc) and those aiming to support the migrants exploited in the process, it is suggested, produce a different set of conditions for migrants and prospective migrants (discussed in Kofman et al. 2000: 30-31).

Alongside these developments, there has been literature on the role that women play in the reproduction of national and ethnic boundaries, important for understanding the position of migrant women (Anthias and Yuval Davis 1989, Wilford and Miller 1998, Charles and Hintjens 1998). This crucially takes account of differences amongst women migrants, not only in terms of geographical origin, but also in terms of the differentiated social positions they occupy in the receiving countries.

Part of the background for gendering migration lies in the development of a more gender oriented approach to social relations more broadly, found for example in the work of feminist theorisations of women’s roles and positions in society. A central distinction to be made in theoretical debates on the social function of gender is between approaches that conceive of gendered relations of power as a distinct system, and those that find gender to be a function of the broader economic system. The notion of patriarchy has become central to those of the former approach: the understanding of social inequalities residing primarily in relations of power between men and women, allocating social positions and resources accordingly (e.g. Walby 1990, and for a critique of patriarchy as an autonomous system, see Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992; Pollert 1996).

By contrast, Marxist-feminist perspectives have approached gender relations in terms of their function in a capitalist system. Two important examples of this function are on the one hand women as the reserve army of labour in capitalist systems (e.g. Beechey 1977, Bruegel 1979), as described earlier in relation to Marxist approaches to labour migration (Castles and Kosack 1973); and on the other women fulfilling the role of unpaid workers in the household, enabling the capitalist system to take full advantage of the labour power of the male worker, while at the same time playing the important role of reproducing the labour force (e.g. Gardiner 1975). From this perspective, clear links are made
between the (traditionally male) productive work and (traditionally female) reproductive work in the sense of the latter conditioning and enabling the smooth functioning of the former.

3. Migrant women and ethnic and national boundaries

An important area of debate has been concerned with the links between the major social divisions of ethnicity, gender and class, and with the links between gender and national boundaries. By the early 80s, black feminists (e.g. hooks 1981, Carby 1982, see also Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1983) had intervened in the gender debate, asking into the extent to which it was appropriate to speak of ‘women’ as a unitary group with a shared experience, as proposed through the idea of patriarchy as a singular system of power and domination. These theorists highlighted divisions amongst ‘women’ by pointing towards processes of racialisation and the disadvantages following on from these. Introducing notions of double or treble discrimination, they made first steps towards qualifying the gender agenda and achieving a more complex understanding of gendered forms of disadvantage. While highlighting differences in experience, they disrupted ideas about an all-woman homogenous collective in the sense of both understanding the world and mobilising for social change (an additional parameter disrupting the unitary conception of women was introduced by lesbian and gay studies and/or queer theory, e.g. Butler 1990).

There have been important debates on gender and nation (for a discussion, see Anthias and Yuval Davis 1989 and Yuval Davis 1997), on the one hand, and what has come to be called ‘intersectionality’ on the other (for a discussion of the latter, see Anthias 2005). In relation to ethnic and national boundaries, in much of the history of migration in the post war period generally, there are contradictions that lie in the perceived needs of the economy (or at least action by employers to cheaply fill their needs), as well as the perceived needs of the 'integrity of the nation', and the borders of 'otherness' or alterity that construct migrants (and migrant women) as a threat. Various discourses and practices around ethnicity, or civic rights, may be deployed in excluding and including different groups of migrants in different countries, and from different countries (e.g. see Triantafillidou 1997). This is particularly important where national identity is an important part of the agenda, as it is within many societies, including the UK.

The importance of not homogenising women's experiences and practices, and the view that literature on women should also look at how gender intersects with other social divisions, such as ethnicity, 'race' and class, is a debate which forms an important part of developments in the migration literature today (Anthias and Yuval Davis 1983, 1992, Anthias 1998a). This involves a recognition of the fact that it is necessary to look beyond mere economic processes for understanding the position of migrant women, and to attend to ethnic and national boundaries.

*Women, ethnicity and nation*

There is much evidence that women are central transmitters of ethnic culture: they reproduce the culture and tradition of the group, and its religious and familial structures and ideologies. They reproduce the group biologically and are used as symbols of the nation or ethnic group. They are important as "mothers" of patriots, and represent the nation (see Anthias and Yuval Davis 1989 for an analysis). For example, in both Bosnia and Cyprus, the rape of women involved the project of forcing them to bear the children of the enemy, and being violated as mothers of the national enemy.

Migration can be seen in the context of the reproduction of national identity and the boundaries of belonging, both for the receiving countries (where it may lead to ethnic exclusion and racism), and the sending countries (where it may lead to a concern with retaining the ethnic bonds of migrants with their countries of origin). These processes are not given or static; they change around specific economic and political conditions. Gender processes may be regarded as important in understanding how nationhood and belongingness are retained, and reconstituted, particularly through the role of women as ethnic actors (see Walby 1996, Anthias and Yuval Davis 1989, Yuval Davis 1997). However, it could be argued that women function as objects of discursive practices and social relations whereas men are its active agents.
Wetherell and Potter (1992) argue that men are given the authentic voice to represent their communities (see also Anthias and Yuval Davis 1992).

Whilst nationalism, as Benedict Anderson (1983) notes, constructs imagined communities with a sense of belonging, it also requires an ‘other’ from which it can imagine itself as separate. The migrant ‘other’ is gendered as well as racialised and classed. Gender is a significant component of ethnic landscapes. Cultural groups, nations, ethnic groups are imagined as female (see Anthias and Yuval Davis 1989), and women are particular objects of national and ethnic discourses and policies in terms of the biological reproduction of the group/nation, as well as its social and cultural reproduction and symbolic figuration. In addition, women are active participants in economic processes as well as particular political actors, often playing specific roles within the nation. It is necessary to incorporate women as active agents and to focus on the different ways in which they manage the migration process. Women as social actors are located at the intersection of their country of origin and country of destination, since they are economic and ethnic subjects within both locales. A contextual and situational analysis is needed therefore. Moreover, the importance of transnational connections requires us to look beyond the interaction between countries of origin and destination, towards wider migratory networks.

Debates on intersectionality

Debates on intersectionality are central to the theorisation of female migrants’ lives and (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1983, 1992; Anthias 1992, Brah 1992). Broadly speaking, an intersectional approach emphasises the importance of attending to the multiple social structures and processes that intertwine to produce specific social positions and identities. From this perspective, we need to simultaneously attend to processes of ethnicity, gender, class and so on, as isolated accounts do not sufficiently grasp the complexities of the social world and the multifaceted nature of social identities and advantage/disadvantage. Theorising social stratification through an intersectional approach, Floya Anthias (2001) has emphasised the importance of disrupting the material/symbolic dichotomy at play in discussions of class vis a vis ethnicity/gender, and understanding the role of both material and symbolic dimensions to them all. More recently, Anthias (2002, 2004) developed the notion of translocational positionality as a tool for making sense of the positions and outcomes produced through intersections between different a number of different social structures and processes. It is defined as follows:

(p)ositionality refers to placement within a set of relations and practices that implicate identification and ‘performativity’ or action. It combines a reference to social position (as a set of effectivities; as outcome) and social positioning (as a set of practices, actions and meanings; as process) … (p)ositionality relates to the space at the intersection of structure (as social positions/social effects) and agency (as social positioning/meaning and practice) … (t)ranslocational’ … references the complex nature of positionality faced by those who are at the interplay of a range of locations and dislocations in relation to gender, ethnicity, national belonging, class and racialization (Anthias 2002: 501-502).

An intersectional approach has been central to feminist critiques of multiculturalism, through the focus put on relations between gender and ethnicity/racialisation, or more specifically the role and position of women in ethnic groups and/or the (re)production of ethnic boundaries (Anthias 1993; Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1983; Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992; Saghal and Yuval-Davis 2000; Yuval-Davis 1997). By protecting and promoting the right to difference of minority ethnic groups without paying attention to the gendered relations of power within such groups, the argument goes, multicultural government policies function to reproduce inequalities internal to them. Furthermore, the fact that gender and family relations in themselves are often what is in fact regarded as the ‘authentic’ core of ethnic cultures and ‘communities’ puts further focus on the importance of their reproduction; hence the general centrality of images of ‘other’ women in the production of difference (Puwar 2003, Yuval-Davis 1997). This brings us to another crucial part of these critiques of multiculturalism, to do not with group-internal relations of power, but with those between minorities and majority society. The argument here centres on the divisive mechanisms of multiculturalism and the fact that by
emphasising and reproducing difference, these ensure that minorities remain precisely that – minorities – as well as ‘other’ to majority society (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992, Gilroy 1987).

4. Migrant women, globalisation and transnational ties

We now turn to locating the discussion of women migrants in the context of globalisation and transnationalism. New forms of migration cannot be understood using the binary focus of traditional migration theory with its emphasis on the process of migration from and to particular nation states. Migration needs to be seen as part of the globalising tendencies in the modern world, and in terms of transnational processes. This raises a set of contradictions between the continuing imperatives of nationhood, on the one hand, and increasing economic and cultural globalism, on the other. Moreover, all transnational population movements entail contradictory processes relating to particular forms of exclusion and inclusion. These processes involve competing discourses: the idea of human rights and equality of treatment of all persons is accompanied by exclusion from full citizenship rights, as well as the differential racisms experienced by different categories of migrants.

Transnational social spaces involve border crossings, where migrants have complex relations to different locales and form new and different communities. These include migrant networks, involving social, symbolic and material ties between homelands and destinations, as well as relations between destinations. Globalisation challenges social scientific analysis with changing forms of governance and political participation, and with changing identities, values, and allegiances. These have a profound effect on social life and our understanding of it, with serious implications for the future of democracy, citizenship, and nationalism (Eisenstein 1997). Some categories have emerged excluded from society, through new technology and new flexible employment patterns. Many of the most affected by these processes are women. This is partly because the drive to attain greater flexibility in employment practices has encouraged casualised employment practices, and especially the feminisation of migration.

Moreover, despite globalisation, the reconfiguration of ethnic boundaries and exceptions, such as the European court of human rights, nation states are still the determinants of juridical, social and cultural citizenship (Anthias 1998 and forthcoming), and the ethno-national project remains central. The borders of the nation state are still policed against undesirable others in formal and informal ways, through migration controls, racism, and the desire for the integration and management of minorities within while excluding others, on the outside and the inside.

By emphasising the importance of the transnational ties of migrants, early writings on the subject of transnationalism tended to emphasise their counter-hegemonic potential, in the sense of providing an alternative to on the one hand the assimilative pressures of receiving societies, and on the other the disadvantage or exclusion experienced therein (references: Glick Schiller et al 1992). However, accounts have increasingly come to question celebratory versions of transnationalism by emphasising the social (global) structures that condition engagement in transnational ties and networks, but also their usability in terms of gaining advantage (see Apitzsch et al, “Ethnogeneration” 2006). For example, Adrian Favell (2003) points towards the lack of research into the relation between transnationalism and social mobility. Discussing transnational practices or ties in terms of social capital, he emphasises the importance of considering the value attached to ethnic forms of social capital by reminding of the wider social structures in which the groups are already disadvantaged. Hence, he suggests that although a certain amount of ethnic social capital can enable a person to achieve a slightly improved position, for example within the ‘ethnic enclave’, the likelihood is low that it will enable him/her to compete with people of an altogether different and higher position in the wider social hierarchy.

On a specifically gendered note, Ruba Salih (2003: 655) similarly questions the celebratory literature on transnationalism by pointing out the fact that it fails to take into account ‘how these structures operate in gendered ways’. Salih suggests that the transnational experiences of men and women are qualitatively different on the one hand because women do not always have ‘access to mobility’, and on the other because their movements are ‘framed within a set of normative and culturally gendered rules’.
Hence, for the women, their construction of home in two (or more) places is set within the multiple gendered normative frameworks. Drawing on her research into women commuting between Italy and Morocco, Salih argues for the usefulness of a household approach to understanding ‘the relation between gender and transnationalism’, and particularly for understanding ‘women’s reproductive roles in the two countries’, and ‘subjects who embody, but at the same time challenge, the multiple constraints, both in Italy and Morocco, which frame their movements back and forth’ (Salih 2003: 659). Another way in which Salih questions celebrations of transnationalism is through her findings of women that often ‘expressed a high sense of unease, the feeling of being trapped in a vicious circle’. It seems that they find difficult the struggle to ‘maintain membership in both countries, yet being ultimately ‘of’ neither’. They also seem to find it difficult to decide where to ‘invest’ economically, emotionally, culturally, etc, importantly for the future of their children. Salih suggests that while they manage to maintain multiple homes and a transnational life, ‘women paradoxically also increase their need for territorialisation and secure identities’ (Salih 2003: 667-8).

5. Migrant women’s position in the labour market

The position and profile of migrant women on the UK labour market has significantly shaped the debate on gender and migration. Important debates in the literature during the past three decades include that of women and care (Kofman 2005; Kofman et al. 2005); domestic work (Anderson 2000, 2006; Cox 2006); sex work (Anderson 1997); women in the manufacturing industry (Phizacklea 1983), notably the garment industry (which has declined in recent decades); and women’s role in family or ‘ethnic’ businesses (Phizacklea 1990, Anthias 1992, Anthias and Mehta 2003). Further and more recent debates concern on the one hand the growing service sector, and on the other work in the agricultural and food processing sectors. The following sections will look particularly at the sectors that could be regarded as the main employers of new migrant women, and bring out some of the main issues and debates relating to these.

The care sector

The care sector generally, and the National Health System (NHS) particularly, has long relied on migrant labour, and overseas trained nurses have provided a crucial resource in its development and sustenance. An increasing pressure on the health system, related greatly to the ageing British population, has sustained the need for overseas labour, including care workers, nurses as well as doctors. With the increasing privatisation of the care sector, labour demands are furthermore growing alongside the NHS, in private care homes as well as the domestic sector. On a broader level, it seems possible to suggest that structures of and developments in welfare states significantly impact on the labour market for migrant women (Kofman et al. 2000; Kofman 2005; Kofman and Raghuram 2006).

Literature (e.g. Allan and Aggergaard 2003, Buchan et al. 2006; Buchan and Secombe 2006, Smith and Mackintosh. 2006) suggests that the living and working conditions of care and health workers in the UK vary on several counts. These include recruitment procedures, and worth mentioning in relation to these are the differences between individual and group recruitment (implying e.g. isolation versus the availability of social networks for the migrant women) and the common involvement of agencies, which is found to be problematic with regards to exploitation and forms of de facto bonded labour. More generally, there is a significant segmentation in the health sector, and one important distinction is precisely between public and private employers. As discussed in the UK WP2 (key informants), the advantage of the former includes higher levels of control and less exploitation (in turn to some extent related to higher levels of unionisation), while the downsides have to do with lack of opportunities for progression and experiences of discrimination. As for the latter, less control implies higher levels of exploitation, such as higher work loads and excessive working hours. At the same time, while deskilling is a common phenomenon - largely through the nature of the workplaces (care homes rather than hospitals) and the fact that skilled staff are frequently expected to do not only skilled tasks but also more menial jobs, such as cleaning - it has been found easier to progress on the job. An important contributing factor to this difference is fact that migrant women in the public sector compete with indigenous labour, while, commonly, the labour force of private care homes consists...
largely of migrant workers. While the distinction between the indigenous and migrant workforce is significant, it is important also to note levels of ethnic differences within the latter group (Buchan et al. 2006).

**Domestic work**

The domestic sector has been regarded as the potentially largest informal sector employing migrant women. Aside from high levels of informality, another particular characteristic of this sector concerns the disrupted boundaries between the public/private and market/non-market relations (Anderson 2006). While private homes can be regarded in terms of a ‘refuge’ on the side of the employee, particularly for undocumented migrants fearing deportation and being at greater risk of detection in public workplaces, it entails a set of complex relations and not uncommonly cases of exploitation and abuse. As Bridget Anderson (2006) illustrates through her discussion of how employers of domestic workers make sense of, and justify, that employment relation, narratives of mutual help and obligation function to overshadow relations of power and, commonly, exploitation and lack of rights. Furthermore, employment relations in the domestic sphere is potent with racialised images: on the one hand as part of the ‘selection’ process whereby migrant women of specific ethnic backgrounds are preferred to others; and on the other through the role played by ‘othering’ processes in the employment relation itself (e.g. Anderson 2000, 2006).

More generally, the category of domestic work is of course not only gendered but highly racialised, as (white, Western, middle-class) women who have the option to do so leave behind their roles as primary carers in the household, in turn taken over by women from the global south, for whom this represents an employment opportunity (Anderson 2000, Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003)\(^2\). As noted in relation to care-work generally, the phenomenon of domestic work is closely related to the nature of the welfare regime and particularly the availability (or lack thereof) of public provision of care for both the young and the elderly (Kofman 2005).

On the subject of domestic work, it seems important to introduce some distinctions between different types of work undertaken, as well as contractual relationships. What can be included under the headline ‘domestic work’ ranges from full time care for children or the elderly, to hourly paid cleaning. Specifying the different sub-sections of the category of ‘domestic work’ is important not least in order to be able to make international comparisons, as the nature of most domestic work in the UK differs significantly from the southern European model. One important difference relates to the care sector more widely, where in the UK private care homes for the elderly are much more common than in southern Europe, where generally such care takes place in private homes. Another difference is found when comparing levels of ‘living-in’ domestics, a phenomenon much more common in southern Europe\(^3\).

**Sex work**

If domestic work is one area in which undocumented female migrants are likely to be found due to the specific nature of this labour market sector, another is sex work. Their location at the fringes of the labour market is one thing that unites the two sectors, while another concerns high levels of vulnerability to abuse and exploitation, related to the fringe position and the lack of insight and control that follows on from that. The UK has been regarded as something of a hub for the global sex industry, functioning both as a transit and a destination country (GCIM 2005).

Migrant women sex workers have gained a lot of public attention in the last few years in and through the debate on trafficking for purposes of sexual exploitation. While sex trafficking is a significant and growing problem in the UK, it seems important for our purposes not to reduce all sex workers to

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\(^2\) It is worth noting the fact that knowledge of the process whereby house- and care-work is delegated to ‘other’ women gives us a more nuanced understanding of the reality of ‘female emancipation’ in the Western world.

\(^3\) The importance of making distinctions was emphasised during the first FeMiPol UK advisors workshop held at Oxford Brookes University in November 2006.
victims of trafficking, and keep a more nuanced approach to understanding the nature of sex work and the sex industry in the UK, and towards the migrant women working therein, in the sense of distinguishing between levels of power, control and choice (noting of course the long-standing debate as to whether prostitution can ever be regarded as a ‘choice’ and as anything but a severe case of the exploitation of women).

The service sector

A growing area of research and debate concerns the service sector, including cleaning, hotel and catering (e.g. Datta et al. 2006; Mcilwaine et al. 2006; Pollert 2005; Anderson and Rogaly 2005): a significantly expanding sector with a particular profile relating to the conditions of employment, such as low levels of security (and unionisation, which has historically been weak in this sector), location at the ‘flexible’ margins of the economy, and high levels of irregularity. As discussed extensively in UK WP2, the discrepancy between on the one hand a high demand for workers in low-skilled sectors of the labour market, and on the other the availability of legal avenues, produces irregularity, and the current scenario we see in the service sector is a prime example of this. Similarly to the care sector discussed above, we can detect a clear segmentation within the overall ‘service’ sector, where a number of workers at the top enjoy relative stability and good conditions, while the secondary segment is composed of a ‘flexible’ workforce pushed in and out of employment as and when desired by the employer: and the workforce of migrant women is concentrated within the latter (note the reserve army of labour theory discussed earlier, e.g. Castles and Kosack 1973).

One sub-category of the service sector is cleaning, and an important characteristic of this category has to do with the levels of sub-contracting involved, which, as one of our key informants emphasised in UK WP2, often makes for an un-regulated work environment and lack of responsibility taken by employers. This sector could be regarded as one of the ‘lowest’ concerning work conditions, pay, and prestige. However, there seem to be differences within: for example McIlwaine et al. (2006) emphasise an important distinction concerning the types of spaces occupied by different groups, and they suggest that while male cleaners are more likely to work in public spaces, female cleaners are often located in ‘semi-private’ spaces, such as private offices. More generally, cleaning has been regarded as a particularly isolated occupation considering the nature of the activity as well as the hours worked (e.g. when offices are closed, see e.g. Anderson and Rogaly 2005).

The ‘agri-food’ sector

The growth of this sector, and the demand for labour that follows, is strongly related to the role and power of supermarkets on the UK scene (Rogaly 2006). The low pay and labour intensive nature of this work follows on from the levels of competition in which these supermarkets engage; another characteristic concerns the frequently temporary nature of the work. Yet another issue that arises in

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4 While an important distinction has been made in the literature between regular and irregular migration and/or employment, and while this remains crucial for understanding differences in the position and situation amongst migrant women, recent additions to this debate suggest a need not to regard it solely in terms of an either-or situation, but to pay attention to the ‘grey’ areas in between. Ruhs and Anderson (2006) for example emphasise the importance of considering regularity/irregularity in terms of a spectrum rather than a dichotomy, and their notion of ‘semi-compliance’ refers to a range of scenarios where people are regular or ‘legal’ in one sense, while ‘illegal’ in another by virtue of failing to live up to the conditions of their ‘legal’ status. Examples are au pairs who are in the UK legally on a visa, but who do additional undocumented work on the side of that of their primary employer or host family; or students who work more than the 20 hours a week they are entitled to. Importantly, such a discussion highlights the importance of attending to both immigration and employment status of the persons studied: in other words there are several ways in which a person can be ‘illegal’, and not all of them are reserved for migrants (see also Anderson 2006). On the subject of disrupting simplistic dichotomies, Anderson furthermore throws into question dominant conceptualisations of phenomena such as trafficking and forced labour, similarly arguing for the need to regard these in terms of a continuum rather than either-or, and to consider a multiplicity of trajectories and relations of employment and coercion (ibid).
relation to this labour market sector has to do with the places to which people migrate to take up work, which, as opposed to many other sectors employing high levels of migrant workers, are mainly located in rural areas of the country. This, as discussed in UK WP2, has implications for the ability of migrants to achieve social networks and knowledge, arguably increasing their vulnerability to isolation and exploitation (Anderson and Rogaly 2005). A particular case that brought issues surrounding this sector to the fore concerns the tragic death of the Chinese cockle pickers in Morecombe Bay, which through intense public debate, and notably the efforts of trade unions and other non-governmental organisations, led to the Gangmasters Licencing Act of 2004 (see further UK WP1 and WP2).

Women in the ‘ethnic enclave’

Literature concerned with the use of women in the family and/or ethnic ‘community’ have brought out both positive and negative aspects to this. While in some accounts, relations of mutual cooperation and trust prevail, others emphasise the need to pay attention to relations of power within families and ‘communities’, and warn of the risk of isolation and exploitation (e.g. Anthias 1993).

Recent European-wide research on the gendered and intergenerational aspects of ethnic business (Apitzsch et al, “Ethnogeneration” 2006) provides a multifaceted image of the role played by family members therein in terms of family dynamics, relations of power, and life chances, including enabling mechanisms as well as obstacles encountered. The research findings indicate the fact that women’s ability to gain resources in terms of social, cultural and financial capital in ethnic business depends greatly on their position in the business, the work they perform, and the amount of power they hold. Outcomes relate not only to gender, but are mediated by processes of class, ethnicity and racialisation, as well as in some cases particular family dynamics. This means that while it may at times be appropriate to conceive of the use of women in ethnic business in terms of limited opportunities and/or exploitation, at other times their work and work experience can enable them to pursue their ambitions, within or beyond the family business or the ethnic enclave. Another important factor found in this research to crucially condition women’s opportunities concerns the so-called ‘double work-load’ from which most of them suffer, bringing us to the question of the reproductive functions fulfilled by women (notably this includes the reproduction of (ethnic) culture, e.g. Anthias 1983, Anthias and Yuval Davis 1989, Yuval-Davis 1997).

Migrant women and various forms of reproductive work

As we have seen, a lot of the literature on migrant women and work has centred on the reproductive tasks they perform, in terms of paid as well as unpaid work. Aside from the literature already discussed, important contributions in the area include Sassen (1991, 2000, 2003), Hochschild (2000), Parrenas (2001), and Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2003). In the work of Sassen (1991, 2000, 2003), the celebratory narrative of globalisation that emphasises the highly mobile (male) individual taking advantage of the professional and financial opportunities offered, is balanced through an emphasis on the gendered consequences of global capital (the feminisation of poverty and the migration that follows) and the reproductive roles played by migrant women in the global economy (note the link between productive and reproductive work discussed earlier). On the issue of migrant women and the labour market, a lot of this literature has focused on domestic work (see also Anderson 2000).

As noted earlier, the domestic sector is indeed an important employer of migrant women globally, including in the UK. However, critics such as Kofman and Raghuram (2006; see also Raghuram and Kofman 2004) have questioned the disproportionate focus on domestic work (as well as sex work) in relation to the work migrant women do generally, and in the reproductive sphere particularly. Although they note that this is to some extent justified because of the fact that these categories are indeed key employers of migrant women, they also emphasise the need ‘to be careful to make sure that it does not obscure other forms of reproductive labour that migrant women engage in or other contributions they make to receiving economies’, and suggest that, ‘(t)hey should not provide the discursive limits for theorising migrant women’s incorporation into global circuits of reproductive labour’ (Kofman and Raghuram 2006: 287). On the one hand, the authors point towards the unpaid reproductive work undertaken in individual households by the spouses of the mobile ‘productive’ men
noted above. On the other, they emphasise the importance of ‘incorporating skilled (female) workers’ in the theorisation of global labour migration. In relation to the latter, the authors argue for the need to further consider the skilled reproductive work performed by migrant women in care organised by the state, a role that comes across as particularly important at a point in time when the need for skilled and highly skilled migrant workers has been explicitly emphasised by governments, as reflected in migration policies, e.g. the so-called points system in the UK.

Apart from representing a particular type of care-work, other issues brought about by the focus on domestic work relate to migrant women’s socio-economic as well as symbolic status in the labour market and wider society; here we find that women are represented largely in the lower ranks. As well as domestic work, other sectors include sex work and cleaning. While acknowledging the importance of studying these, and notably the disadvantage that face women forced into these segments, it is important also to disrupt the image of migrant women being located solely therein: not least in order to challenge the dominant image of migrant women as uneducated and unskilled on the one hand, and as ‘victims’ on the other. More generally, including women from a range of sectors and/or professions in our study makes for a more complex understanding of the role and position of migrant women on the UK labour market and wider society, and furthermore of the processes that function to locate them in different places.

Another issue that is importantly addressed through this more balanced focus relates to the common assumptions surrounding the supposedly ‘privileged’ parts of the economy and labour market, which would render these uninteresting from the perspective of studying disadvantage. Research such as Nirmal Puwar’s (2001, 2004) study of the experiences of women and racialised minorities in the British senior civil service highlights the numerous ways in which it is possible to be excluded and/or inferiorised within ‘higher’ positions in the labour market, disrupting any simple dichotomy between inclusion/exclusion and advantage/disadvantage (see also Cederberg 2005). In relation to migrant workers particularly, it is worth noting, for example, that the de-skilling of health workers discussed earlier takes place also amongst doctors, and notably migrant women doctors (Raghuram and Montiel 2003). This in turn highlights the fact that a lot of migrant women are unable to utilise their skills fully for a number of different reasons, relating on the one hand to rigid immigration rules, lack of recognition of foreign qualification and/or labour market discrimination, and on the other, insufficient care provision that stops them from entering the labour market (Raghuram and Kofman 2004).

The migration and work of female migrants: emancipation viz a viz exploitation

In an earlier discussion concerned with the agency of migrant women, we noted a number of potential problems, constraints and disadvantages faced by women in different parts of the world, which could make migration an attractive option in the sense of providing a potential to overcome these (Anthias and Lazaridis 2000, Kofman et al. 2000). Hence, some writers have chosen to conceive of female migration in terms of emancipation. These tend to emphasise on the one hand the increasing opportunities gained through migration, and on the other the ability of escaping the boundaries and gendered relations of power within the ethnic “community”. From another perspective, however, the potential for women’s emancipation is severely undercut by the reality of gendered as well as racialised structures and processes in receiving societies, whereby migrant women come to be conceived of as doubly disadvantaged, or even exploited.

Adding to the wider structures of the labour market and society factors surrounding the specific networks in which the women are embedded, one argument pertains to the risk of losing important support networks through migration, and having to manage on your own, or alternatively carrying a disproportionate burden of family responsibilities through the lack of a more extensive network. Another argument is related to the earlier discussion on intersectionality generally, and critiques of

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5 Another factor to take into account when trying to understand the invisibility of skilled female migrants in the literature according to Kofman and Raghuram (2006, Raghuram and Kofman 2004) has to do with the fact that they frequently enter receiving countries not as skilled migrants but as students or through family reunification routes.
multiculturalism particularly, in which the ethnic structures existing in the receiving society may function to constrain women to the same extent, or even further than prior to migration. In such cases, we can add to the disadvantage already discussed and conceive of migrant women’s position in terms of a treble disadvantage: in terms of processes of both gender and ethnic discrimination in wider society, as well as gender inequalities within the ethnic ‘community’ (e.g. Anthias 1993). The latter may potentially pertain to cultural, social as well as economic/labour market constraints.

In summary, it seems possible to suggest that what determines whether or not the outcome of migration for women provides a level of emancipation or further disadvantage relates to levels of choice, power, resources and constraints (e.g. Morokvasic 2004, see also Anthias and Lazaridis 2000 for accounts of how migration impacts differently on women in terms of social position). However, it is important also to note that the two are not mutually exclusive, and a woman can potentially find herself emancipated on one level while disadvantaged on another (Anthias and Lazaridis 2000, Kofman et al. 2000).

**Concluding remarks**

To summarise, we have seen that since the invisibility of women on the map of migration was finally challenged, a significant amount of work has gone into understanding female migrants’ migratory choices and paths, as well as their position in receiving countries and globally – in the labour market and wider society. Through this review of the literature and the multiple perspectives within it, we can see the importance of understanding and accounting for the differences amongst ‘migrant women’: the numerous structures and processes involved, and the wide range of positions and experiences that follow. Through our concern to attend to the different enabling and constraining mechanisms involved, the potential contribution of our research could be located perhaps particularly at the numerous intersections with which we are about to engage. Concerned to include in our study a number of different ‘types’ of migrant women in terms of ethnic and class background, migratory paths and legal status, as well as position in the labour market and participation in wider society, we aim to capture some of the main patterns amongst and distinctions between different groups of migrant women. By looking at both women who are regarded as disadvantaged at face value, and those seen to be ‘privileged’ by virtue of their status and position, we hope to provide a more nuanced understanding of the processes whereby female migrants are integrated into the labour market and wider society, as well as the numerous obstacles they face on the way to doing so.
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