

New Research in  
Global Political Economy



Pia  
Eberhardt

## **Beyond the Prototypical Male Migrant:**

An Analysis of the Gender Knowledge in  
Jacob Mincer's Family Migration Model  
and the Roy-Borjas Selection Model of  
Migration

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**U N I K A S S E L**  
**V E R S I T Ä T**

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# **Beyond the Prototypical Male Migrant:**

An Analysis of the Gender Knowledge in Jacob Mincer's

Family Migration Model

and the Roy-Borjas Selection Model of Migration\*

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**Abbreviations:**

EU	European Union
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization of Migration
UN	United Nations
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund

## 1. Introduction

*Feminist scholarship has emerged from a deep scepticism about knowledge that, even though it claims to be universal and objective, is not. In reality, such knowledge is usually partial, created by men, and based on men's lives.*

J. Ann Tickner (2006: 387)

When, in 1984, sociologist Mirjana Morokvasic edited a special issue of the *International Migration Review* to demonstrate that “birds of passage are also women” (Morokvasic 1984: 886), migration studies and politics had just stepped out of an era of egregious amnesia about female migrants. Until then, they had been either completely disregarded or deemed passive dependents following in the footsteps of men. Since the 1980s, however, feminist scholarship has gained a foothold in the field and there now exist a plethora of empirical studies about female migration. Furthermore, the political arena is dotted with policy roundtables and reports about “women on the move” (World Bank 2006). The quantitative as well as the qualitative “feminisation of migration” has become part of a conventional wisdom in academia and politics alike.

In contrast, the primary theoretical accounts of population movement have been largely unaffected by this knowledge (Chant/Radcliffe 1992: 19; Katz 1999; Kofman et al. 2000: 21ff.; Boyd/Grieco 2003). More generally, they have little to say on gender as a major organising principle in the structuring of migration, but are “largely gender-blind or even overtly sexist” (Carling 2005: 4) in that they treat the relocation experience of men as the norm and continue to conceptualise women as accompanying spouses or those left behind. They therefore have a difficult time explaining the gender selectivity of certain migratory streams. Why, for example, is international migration from Africa, South Asia and the Middle East male dominated while the majority of migrants from East Asia and the Pacific, Central Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and Europe are female (Chant 1998: 10; World Bank 2006)? What accounts for the fact that women constitute 85% of Cape Verdean immigrants in Italy whereas men make up 96% of those from the Senegal (Carling 2005: 2)? Why do most villages in Mexico send more males to the US while a few send more females (Pfeiffer et al. 2006: 2)? These snapshots of migration speak to the importance of gender roles, relations and inequalities for the who, why and how of migration and settlement, as well as the consequences for movers, and sending and receiving societies. It is unsurprising then that the incorporation of gender into migration theory has been identified as a pressing endeavour for gender and migration studies (e.g. Chant 1992b; Chant/Radcliffe 1992; Katz 1999; Boyd/Grieco 2003) and, more recently, also in a draft

paper for the World Bank, where it has been argued that “a ‘g-subscript [i.e. a gender-subscript] should be attached to every key variable in international migration models” (Pfeiffer et al. 2006: 25).

But can existing models serve as an adequate basis for engendering theorising about migration? Which role does gender play in this type of knowledge? Building on the feminist critique of science and knowledge, feminist economics and the research on gender and migration, I aim to interrogate two neoclassical models of migration, the Roy-Borjas selection model and the Mincer model of family migration, for their gender knowledge. In other words, they will be analysed for the way they represent, make sense of, legitimise or challenge gender differences and hierarchies and so participate in the social construction of the meaning of gender. I have chosen the sub-field of economic theories because of their disproportionately influential role in academic and political debates about migration and have further narrowed down the focus to the neoclassical approaches by George J. Borjas and Jacob Mincer, as both constitute important benchmarks in the field, but differ in that the latter is explicit on gender whereas the former is carefully gender-neutral in its terminology.

The concept of gender knowledge already foreshadows the theoretical perspective underlying my research task: critical feminist theory. It opts for a strategic analytical use of social categories like ‘men’ or ‘women’ to research persistent inequalities on the basis of gender, but takes on board the poststructuralist insight that these categories are contingent and contested constructs. Scientific knowledge is regarded as *one* constitutive force in the complex processes involved in the social production of meaning. Consequently, I will take neoclassical migration economics seriously as a productive discourse that contributes to the construction of gender instead of simply representing it. At the same time, I will rather stereotypically draw on the experiences of different ‘migrant men’, ‘female migrants’ or ‘queers<sup>1</sup> on the move’ identified in the literature to show that the models by Mincer and Borjas rest on a very peculiar understanding of what is a migrant – a white, relatively affluent, heterosexual man (see ch. 4). The universalisation of this prototype alerts us to the gender knowledge that pervades migration economics – a knowledge, which either lacks any awareness of gender as a powerful differentiating and hierarchising factor or naturalises and thereby legitimises it.

These hypotheses hint at the political relevance of the analysis. As science in general and theories in particular, do not speak into the void, but rather want to persuade, to make a

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<sup>1</sup> I use ‘queer’ in opposition to heteronormativity and thus as an umbrella term to cover a multiplicity of non-heterosexual identities. Simultaneously, the term underscores the fluidity and instability of these categories

suggestion about how the social world and its fundamental interrelations are to be understood (Steffens 2007: 259f.), they can become powerful social leitmotifs – “always for someone and for some purpose” (Cox 1986: 217). I thus consider gaining a deeper understanding of the inherent gender knowledge of economic writings on migration as part and parcel of a feminist practice of empowerment in the field, where stereotypes about male and female migrants not only shape public discourse and impinge on migrant subjectivities, but can also lead to discriminatory policies (Carling 2005: 8). More generally, I hope to better comprehend theory as a site for the production of hegemonic gender views, for only through tracing how these views are constructed, perpetuated and reinforced can they be deconstructed and changed.

The inquiry is scientifically relevant as it tries to overcome some of the shortcomings of the research I will draw on: Starting with economic migration models, they have rarely considered gender as a social category (for rare exceptions see Thadani/Todaro 1984; Jürges 2005; and Pfeiffer et al. 2006). At the same time, migration theories fall outside the purview of most feminist economics and writings on science and knowledge, and – more surprisingly – outside most of the scholarship on gender and migration (for valuable exceptions see Chant/Radcliffe 1992; Katz 1999; Kofman et al. 2000: 21ff.; Boyd/Grieco 2003). The reason for this ‘migration theories gap’ in feminist migration research is twofold: Firstly, there is a lack of dialogue between feminist and mainstream researchers in the field (Kofman 1999: 288); and secondly, the former is dominated by the compensatory approach, that is the tendency to concentrate on (heterosexual) women as the primary subjects of inquiry instead of developing gender as a central category (Carling 2005: 3; Moch 2005: 101; Manalansan IV 2006). I will try to counterbalance this proclivity by paying particular attention to patterns of queer and male migration, thereby gaining a deeper comprehension of how gender structures migration processes. Overall, reading migration economics through a lense of feminist economics, the critique on science and knowledge and the gender and migration research, is a first miniscule step towards filling the latter fields’ ‘migration theories gap’ and the ‘gender gap’ in migration economics (see also Eberhardt/Schwenken 2010).

Turning to the question of method, I will apply a very simplified deconstructive reading strategy in the sense of critically “reflecting on, questioning and unsettling existing assumptions” (Ramazanoglu/Holland 2002: 88). Starting with what is considered natural, obvious and universal in migration economics, a deconstructive reading strategy tries to disclose the seemingly erased traces of what is excluded. In doing so, an alleged universality is debunked as a cultural construct, “a political position rather than a self-



evident or self-present ‘truth’” (Hewitson 1999: 34). I use the theoretical insights from feminist economics and the feminist critique on science as well as the documentation of empirical migration experiences from studies on gender and migration for exposing the particularity of the ‘truth’ about migrants proffered by neoclassical economists.

The remainder of the paper is divided into four parts: I start with a building block exercise in which I develop my theoretical approach including central terms such as ‘gender’ and ‘gender knowledge’ and further delineate my research question and hypotheses. The subsequent section then depicts the field of migration theories, justifies the focus on the neoclassical models by Mincer and Borjas and presents them in detail. Chapter four constitutes the analytical heart of the study where the models’ implicit and explicit assumptions about the individual, migrant families, labour markets and immigration policies are scoured for their underlying gender knowledge. I conclude by weaving together these argumentative threads, reflecting upon my approach and sketching perspectives for further research.

## 2. Feminist sightings – theoretical perspectives

*The discursive power of economics is not to be underestimated.*

Drucilla K. Barker (2005: 2194)

To approach my research question, it is necessary to theorise the relation between gender and (scientific/economic) knowledge. To this end, I will draw together several conceptual-theoretical assumptions from feminist theory with a particular emphasis on writings concerning science and knowledge as well as feminist economics. On that ground, I will develop my research question and hypotheses.

### 2.1 *When ‘gender’ meets ‘degendering’ – the choice of a critical approach*

At the outset, it is important to note that the field of feminist theory encompasses a plethora of, partly contradictory, feminisms. To simplify matters, two strands, which share a critical gaze on gender relations, but differ in their conceptualisation of the subject, epistemologies and politics, can be distinguished (Zalewski 2000: 29ff.): modern/essentialist and postmodern/poststructuralist feminism. For modernist feminists, the stability of and belief in the subject ‘woman’ is pivotal. Conversely, postmodern feminists assume the discursive<sup>2</sup> construction of ‘reality’ and therefore caution against ‘woman’ as a natural subject. They instead centre on how the category ‘woman’ is defined, presented and made to appear natural. Concerning epistemology, modernism believes in the ability to discover the ‘truth’ about ‘reality’, and thus in the existence of ‘objective’ knowledge. Modernist feminists aim to replace the male-dominated organisation of knowledge by a more ‘objective’ one including woman-centred experience. Postmodernist thinkers, on the contrary, claim the impossibility of objective thought and investigate the “complicity of power and knowledge” (Scheich 1996: 14, translation: Pia Eberhardt, PE). Consequently, modernist feminism pursues identity politics demanding rights on behalf of ‘women’ as a group, while postmodernists regard the deconstruction of meaning, including what counts as ‘politics’ as a political act that will foster resistance.

The “gulf between modernist and postmodernist feminism” (Zalewski 2000: 79) also separates the different feminist traditions in economics (see Peterson and Lewis 1999) and the scholarship regarding the history and philosophy of science. In both fields, three distinct

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<sup>2</sup> I use the term ‘discourse’ in the late-Foucauldian sense of a set of meanings as well as institutions and social practices, which articulate and support those meanings. Thus, discourse is more than semiotic structures. Moreover, it is not directly linked to distinct social actors, but is rather ‘disembodied’. Despite this broad understanding of discourse, the scope of this paper limits the analysis to written texts by two ‘concrete’ authors, George J. Borjas and Jacob Mincer.

epistemological programmes have evolved: feminist empiricism and feminist standpoint theory, both grounded in the modernist tradition, and feminist postmodernism. Whilst feminist empiricism considers androcentrism, that is the view of the world from an exclusively male perspective, as a correctable bias if only the researcher adheres more strictly to methodological norms, feminist standpoint theory claims that an inquiry from a feminist perspective will provide more adequate understandings of social life. Feminist postmodernism, by contrast, insists that all knowledge is a social construction and, accordingly, advocates for the deconstruction of any truth claims “by showing the radical historical specificity, and so contestability, of every layer of the onion of scientific [...] constructions” (Haraway 1988: 578, see also: Harding 1986; Hewitson 1999: chapters 2-4; Singer 2004: 259ff.)

This simplified picture of the modernist-postmodernist divide within feminist theory would not be complete without mentioning a perspective, which tries to bridge the gulf and has been labelled “feminist critical theory” (Steans 1998: 29f.) and “social constructionist structural gender perspective” respectively (Lorber 2000: 80). Authors in this tradition take on the philosophical and methodological challenges from postmodernism in that they render suspect to the “conceptual practices of power” (Smith 1990), that is processes of social categorisation and connotation that create and reify difference and subordination. To abolish gender hierarchies, categories like ‘women’ or ‘men’, which essentialise and objectify individuals and groups, need to be refused. Yet, while being aware of the “inevitable feminist paradox [...] that the fight to erase the effects of sex differences invokes them” (ibid.: 86), authors in the critical tradition opt for a strategic use of existing categories such as men or women – contingent and contested though they be – to research persistent gendered relationships of inequality. Finally, critical feminist theory attempts to grasp gender inequality as intersecting with other structures of dominance such as class or race (e.g. Knapp 2005; McCall 2005).

Within the philosophy of science, the dialogical standpoint theory developed by Sandra Harding and Donna Haraway comes closest to that position (e.g. Haraway 1988; Harding 1994, 2002; see also Hill Collins 1990). Striving for “situated knowledges” (Haraway) that take into consideration different marginalised positions within a complex matrix of oppression, these authors try to find a middle ground between relativism and absolutism. Within feminist economics, I have not come across such a position, and have so decided to combine texts which decry the androcentrism of economics and try to revalue already-constituted female characteristics and contributions (e.g. Strassmann 1993; Nelson 1999; England 2003), with postmodern accounts, which have analysed economics as a productive

discourse within which sexed subjectivities are produced and criticised the former works for their essentialist understanding of sexual difference (e.g. Hewitson 1999, 2001a, 2001b, 2003; Danby 2007). While coalescing these two perspectives might be epistemologically daring, the latter authors have themselves developed the poststructuralist framework as “a coexisting alternative to, rather than a replacement” of the former (Hewitson 1999: 108).

My choice of a critical gender perspective is politically motivated. While my initial perusal of the literature suggested a thorough deconstruction of the ingrained masculinity in migration economics, I was hesitant to use categories like ‘masculine’ or ‘androcentric’ bias without problematising the binary gender order they are based upon. In short, I was wary of treating ‘men’ and ‘women’ as naturally discrete social groups. At last, I opted for a combination of both – a gender perspective to make visible and contest the gendered hierarchies in my field and a “degendering” lens (Lorber 2000) to trace the construction of gender differences within economic theories of migration.

## ***2.2 The gender-knowledge-nexus – theoretical assumptions***

The *key assumption* of a social constructivist gender perspective is the social construction of ‘biological’ sex, ‘social’ gender, and sexuality. Allegedly natural-biological physical differences between men, women and intersexuals as well as the social roles, attitudes, needs, abilities, responsibilities, emotions, and sexual orientations assigned to these bodies result from historical processes, in which society has learned to know about, and thereby constituted, these differences. I draw on the conception of gender by Caroline Ramazanoglu and Janet Holland (2002: 5) to cover the reach of this construction process. They take gender to include

sexuality and reproduction; sexual difference, embodiment, the social constitution of male and female, intersexual, other; masculinity and femininity; ideas, discourses, practices, subjectivities and social relationships.

By subsuming sexed bodies and roles/identities in the concept of gender I explicitly reject the sex/gender distinction prevalent in much of feminist economics, that is, the notion that socially constructed gender identities are imposed on inert ‘biologically given’ bodies (see Hewitson 1999: 108ff., 2003: 272ff.; Çağlar 2004). Instead, I follow feminist poststructuralists in regarding male and female bodies as cultural products that give meaning to their inscribed social roles (Hewitson 1999: 116f.). In also including sexuality in the concept of gender, that is sexual norms, identities, experiences, and arrangements, I rely on the queer theory derived idea that social processes, which produce sexuality, are

“part of the ideological infrastructure of gender itself” (Danby 2007: 45).<sup>3</sup> In addition, it is an attempt to counterbalance the implicit heterosexist norm in much of migration scholarship (see Manalansan IV 2006).

Understood in that way, gender operates on several levels. One is individual status and habitualised subjectivity – what people and their bodies are, their psychology. Second, gender encompasses interrelations between ‘boys’ and ‘girls’, ‘women’ and ‘men’ and among ‘men’ and ‘women’. Third, gender functions as a social structure inscribed in all individuals, institutions, and social relations. As such, it acts as a “husher” (Gildemeister/Wetterer 1992: 227, translation: PE) that hierarchises individuals and is intricately intertwined with other social stratifiers such as race, class, nationality, religion, ability or age. This leads to the *second assumption*, the interlinkage of gender difference and gender hierarchies. While there is no consensus about the exact character of this nexus, I follow Judith Lorber who suggests that gender difference is the prerequisite for gendered relations of power and powerlessness, privilege and disadvantage, normality and otherness ((Lorber 2000: 7, see also Wetterer 2005: 11). Lastly, gender is discourse and practice. It is constantly performed, a “routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment” (West/Zimmerman 1987: 126). In that sense – this is the *third assumption* – it is at once productive and in constant need of reiteration and stabilisation. Gender needs to be done.

While the (un-)doing gender literature (e.g. West/Zimmerman 1987; Lorber 2000) concentrates on everyday interactions, I am interested in the way (scientific) knowledge produces gender. Drawing on poststructuralist epistemology, I assume that due to “the impossibility of ever pulling apart the knower from the known” (Cullenberg/Amariglio/Ruccio 2001: 20), what people know is always bound to the historical-cultural contexts and complex power structures they are embedded in, as well as to their subjective perspectives, values, feelings, and vested interests. It is “situated knowledge” (Haraway 1988). Derived from gendered experience, knowledge is always gendered – be it incorporated everyday knowledge, a knowledge that is not known, or thoroughly reflected and explicit knowledge like that produced scientifically. Indeed, social scientist Irene Dölling has argued that “gender knowledge” – defined as knowledge according to which differences between the genders are perceived, evaluated, reasoned and either legitimised and accepted as self-evident, natural facts or challenged (Dölling 2005: 49) – encompasses all forms of thought: individual and collective, unconscious and well-reflected, stereotypes and scientific knowledge (ibid.: 50f.; see also Wetterer 2005). Indeed,

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<sup>3</sup> For an argument against the theoretical and analytical fusion of gender and sexuality due to the inherent heterosexist bias in the very concept of gender see Badgett (1995: 125f.) and Manalansan (2006: 226f.).

it is common sense in feminist approaches that “the visions of masculinity and femininity that circulate in a specific sociohistorical context shape the way people describe and understand their world” (Barker/Feiner 2004: 9). From that follows my *fourth assumption* that scientific knowledge is always gendered.

Finally, I assume that scientific knowledge is a medium of gender construction (*fifth assumption*, see also Wetterer 2004: 126). Again, this claim can be substantiated with reference to poststructuralist epistemology according to which, bearing the marks of its markers, knowledge is *made*, not *found*. In other words, “subjects are active in the construction of truths, and their very observations and perceptions structure those truths irresistibly” (Cullenberg/Amariglio/Ruccio 2001: 20). Sandra Harding and Kathryn Norberg (2005: 2009) point to the “complicity of power and knowledge” (Scheich 1996: 14):

Social research turns the chaotic and confusing experiences of everyday life into categories of people in society, categories that reflect prevailing political arrangements. The social sciences then assign causal relations to people and social relations in these categories. These causal accounts enable institutions to govern our everyday lives in ways that fulfil the interests and desires of these institutions, and of the social groups that design and manage them, but not the interests and desires of our societies’ most economically, socially, and politically vulnerable groups. Thus the social sciences, while claiming to do impartial research [...] are complicit in the exercise of power, including the power to control relations between men and women.

Of course, no responsible mind would argue that the social sciences in general and economics in particular are the most relevant, let alone the sole constituents doing gender. Nonetheless, the hitherto argument should have made clear that an analysis of the gender knowledge in a specific body of scientific knowledge – here: migration economics – is not merely a rhetorical gimmick, but aims at understanding how people’s lives are governed by conceptual schemes and, ultimately, at emancipatory social transformations.

### **2.3 *The gender knowledge in migration theory – research questions & hypotheses***

Relating the previous section to my field of inquiry begs the question of how gender differences and hierarchies are presented, evaluated, legitimised or challenged in economic theories of migration. Put differently, what is their gender-knowledge, their tacit gender-subtext? For developing hypotheses it is instructive to once again scour the feminist economics literature and writings on “the science question” (Harding). Both claim that modern, Western science in general, and economics in particular are distinctly masculine, Eurocentric and bourgeois enterprises, which serve to naturalise and protect gender, race, and class privilege. As avowed black feminist Patricia Hill Collins (1990: 201) states:

Tracing the origin and diffusion of any body of specialized thought reveals its affinity to the power of the groups that created it [...]. Because elite white men and their representatives control structures of knowledge validation, white male interests pervade the thematic content of traditional scholarship.

In this knowledge justification process, new claims are judged for their consistency with the political and epistemological consensus of the field, as it is mirrored in problematics, taken-for-granted assumptions and methods. Regarding the first two, the ones most relevant for this paper, four features support the asserted androcentrism of science and economics (see Rossetti 2001: 311ff.): First of all, both are grounded in a web of gendered and hierarchised dualisms (reason-passion, culture-nature etc.). Within science, the first term of the dyad is coded as masculine and considered the foremost domain of analysis, whereas the second is linked to femininity and analytically omitted (see also Harding 1994: 351; Jennings 1999). Second, this omission hints at what is excluded and silenced in scientific texts – the female Other. A potent example from economics is the ‘female’ sphere of unpaid reproductive work.<sup>4</sup> Yet, despite being unnamed, “the second and subordinate category, is already present, allowing the dominant one to function as it does” (Rossetti 2001: 314). Thus, the spoken masculine and the unspoken feminine in science and economics relate to each other in “mutual dependence but partial silence” (ibid.) – a third indicator of androcentrism. Last but not least, while science and economics are based on gendered dichotomies, they claim universality. Yet, at a closer look, this alleged universality is based on only one side of the aforementioned dualistic pairs: the one coded as masculine.

Within economics, feminists have entitled this universalisation of the male perspective the “male bias” (Elson 1995) and/or the “masculinity” (Hewitson 1999: 3) of economic reasoning. They have also identified a “male-centred universalism” (Erel/Morokvasic/Shinozaki 2003: 9) in migration studies and theory. More recently, scholars have added the notion of “compulsory heterosexuality” (Hewitson 2003: 267) to hint at the heteronormativity in much of (also feminist) migration scholarship and economics (Manalansan 2006; Danby 2007). Both, masculinity and heteronormativity are reflected in terms which appear to be gender neutral such as ‘the economy’, ‘the household’ or ‘the worker’. To see in how far these abstract categories derive from a heterosexual male subject position, Gillian J. Hewitson (1999: 4, 122) recommends a deconstructive reading of economic texts, starting from what is deemed natural, obvious and universal and from

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<sup>4</sup> Here, ‘reproductive labour’ is defined as “various kinds of work – mental, manual, and emotional – aimed at providing the historically and socially, as well as biologically, defined care necessary to maintain existing life and to reproduce the next generation” (Barbara Laslett and Johanna Brenner quoted in Duffy 2007: 315f.). It encompasses tasks ranging from cleaning, laundry, food preparation and service to care for children and the elderly, teaching, and health care. They can be done by family members or volunteers for no pay, by paid workers in private homes or in institutions such as hospitals, restaurants or child care centres (ibid.: 318ff.). The term ‘domestic work’ refers to the reproductive tasks within private homes.

binary oppositions to showcase that matters of course are cultural constructs, which rely on certain exclusions.

This leaves ground to clear on the terms ‘heteronormativity’ and ‘masculinity’. Regarding the former, I find Colin Danby’s (2007: 30) definition helpful. He calls heteronormative “the linked assumptions that a normal adult (a) belongs to and enacts one of two major genders; (b) forms [...], a romantic, sexual, and reproductive bond with an adult who belongs to and enacts the other gender; and (c) by doing this forms a household and starts a family; so that (d) a standard household or family may be understood to be built around a heterosexual couples of this kind.” I draw on the work of R.W. Connell, who identified multiple patterns of masculinity that hierarchically relate to each other. Here, masculinity “represents not a certain type of man but, rather, a way that men position themselves through discursive practices” (Connell/Messerschmidt 2005: 841). Connell (2005: 76ff.) distinguishes hegemonic, subordinate, complicit, and marginalised masculinities: Hegemonic masculinity is only exhibited by a minority of men, but is normative in that it embodies “the currently most honoured way of being a man” and thus requires all men to position themselves in relation to it (Connell/Messerschmidt 2005: 832). Complicit masculinity, on the other hand, refers to men who do not embody hegemonic masculinity, but do benefit from and not speak out against it; marginalised subjectivities are those of subordinated classes or racial/ethnic groups; and finally, subordinate masculinities – the most conspicuous example of which are gay men in a homophobic society – are positioned at the bottom of the gender hierarchy among men (*ibid.*: 78ff.). All these types come into existence in specific circumstances, they overlap and influence each other and are internally contradictory.

As economic migration theories are concerned, universalising one type of masculinity while removing others from the realm of the possible could be one such mechanism that operates by invisibility. And indeed, a first inspection of my research field suggests that one type is overrepresented: the formerly hegemonic modern bourgeois-managerial masculinity featuring rationality, whiteness, the capacity to earn a family wage, domestic patriarchy with a strict family division of labour, compulsory heterosexuality, strongly marked gender differences, association with power, patriotism, and religion (Connell 2005: 194ff.; Connell/Wood 2005: 348, 361). While some of these traits conspicuously contradict the well-known representation of migrants as originating from subaltern classes and racial minorities, they fit the role model of “‘Western man’ headed off to the cities where the benefits of modern life could be attained”, which, according to Patricia Pessar (1999: 578), has heavily influenced migration studies. Tracing the idealised characteristics of bourgeois



masculinity in economic migration theories might thus be a good starting point for thinking about how masculinity operates in the field. Simultaneously, in the sense of dialogical standpoint theory, these traces of modern bourgeois masculinity should be related to their inferior Other – the situated knowledges of the subaltern, the “marginal lives” (Harding 2002: 347) of those migrants who are not white, affluent, male and/or heterosexual.

Coming back to my research question, the hitherto remarks lead to the following working hypotheses:

- a) For an analysis of the gender knowledge in migration economics, it is crucial to pay attention to unstated assumptions, to that which is posited as beyond questioning.
- b) Important indicators of the gender subtext in economic migration theories are, first, the explicit use of gendered categories and dualisms, second, the “strategic silence” (Isabella Bakker) on one or more genders, social realities ascribed to them or gender inequalities and, third, the relation between what is explicitly named and what is silenced.

Regarding possible findings, I have the following hypothesis:

- c) Economic migration theories are biased towards modern bourgeois masculinity and heteronormativity in that they tend to universalise a white, relatively affluent and heterosexual male subject position while excluding, and thereby constructing as deviant, the experiences and knowledge that do not fit this peculiar position – above all women migrants, queers on the move and marginalised men. They thereby reveal a gender knowledge, which either lacks any sensibility of gender as a powerful differentiating and hierarchising factor, or naturalises and thereby legitimises it.

I will follow these hypotheses in chapter four. Now, however, the time is ripe for delineating my research field.

### 3. Should I stay or should I go? – economic migration theories

*[I]nternational labor flows are no different from the flows of goods implied by international trade theory. Workers, like goods, flow to the country that is willing to pay the most for them.*

George J. Borjas (1989: 466)

#### 3.1 *A colourful mosaic – migration theory in interdisciplinary and historical perspective*

Migration scholars draw on a wide array of models, concepts and theories to answer questions about the who, why, how and when of migration and its effects on movers, sender and receiver societies. These theoretical approaches belong to different disciplines (economics, sociology, anthropology, political science etc.) and paradigms (structuralism, rational choice etc.), they address different questions (who migrates, how, why, and with what consequences) and differ according to their level of analysis (micro, meso, macro) as well as to the types of mobility they refer to (internal, international or both) (Brettell/Hollifield 2000; Pries 2001: 11f.).<sup>5</sup> Drawing on the literature that reviews the field (e.g. Massey et al. 1993; Arango 2000; Pries 2001; Kraler/Parnreiter 2005; Düvell 2006: 79ff.), four periods of migration theory can be distinguished:

- From the late 19th until the middle of the 20th century, structuralist demographic accounts identified regularities regarding the distance and direction of migrations. A prominent example is British geographer Ernest-George Ravenstein's *Laws of Migration* (1885), according to which the majority of migrants cover short distances and move from rural to urban-industrial areas. Today, these 'classical' theories are only of historical interest.
- In the 1960s and 70s, neo-classical theories presided the thinking about migration. They focused on differentials in wages and employment conditions between countries and on mobility costs and conceptualised migration as an individual and/or a household decision to maximise income (for a more in-depth overview see the subsequent chapter).
- From the 1970s onwards, historical-structural accounts from Marxist political economy challenged the methodological individualism of the neoclassical models and linked international migration to the disruptions and dislocations that follow the global expansion of capitalism. Accordingly, migration stems from and reinforces the inequality between core and periphery. It is worthy of mention that the first gender-sensitive approaches, which explored the relation between gender-differentiated mobility on the

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<sup>5</sup> For a collection of key texts from different perspectives until the early 1990s see Cohen (1996).

one hand and shifts in the world economy, socio-cultural influences, and household power relations on the other, were developed within this Marxist perspective (e.g. Sassen 1991; Chant 1992a).

- The 1980s and '90s have given way to new disciplines (anthropology, cultural studies, political science etc.) and methods (in-depth interviews, participant observation etc.) blossoming in the field of migration studies. They no longer are primarily interested in the reasons for geographic relocation, but in its perpetuation through networks, migration systems and cumulative causation as well as in the emergence of transnational spaces and identities. Besides this, they take into account the role of the state.

After this “clear process of maturation” (Kraler/Parnreiter 2005: 342, translation: PE), the field of migration theory currently resembles a “colourful, variegated mosaic” (Arango 2000: 287). None the less, several approaches have been critiqued for not going beyond the level of pure description and/or conceptualisation and for being limited to certain types of mobility or specific historical or regional contexts (Arango 2000; Haug 2000). All theoretical strands have been critiqued for their gender-blindness. While after several generations of feminist scholarship on migration

the ‘add women, mix and stir’ or the ‘gender as a variable’ approach appeared in more and more research [...] this research ultimately did not question the underlying models used to explain why people moved, where they went, and how they integrated. (Boyd/Grieco 2003)

Far from it, “experiences of women migrants were fitted into models created to understand, explain and predict male migration, thus assuming that women have the same reasons for migrating as men” (Kofman et al. 2000: 21). This is not only true for the neoclassical and Marxist accounts, which in the main claimed to be gender-neutral while accepting or even propagating a model of gender relations built on female dependence (Wright 1995: 776ff.; Kofman et al. 2000: 21), but also for newer approaches like the focus on migrant networks, which hardly reflects upon the gendered aspects of these networks (Kofman et al. 2000: 29).

### **3.2 *Workers voting with their feet – economic approaches to migration***

The frequent reference to push and pull models in migration studies and politics signals that, relative to other approaches, economic theories have a disproportionately strong influence. Indeed, Caroline B. Brettel and James F. Hollifield (2000: 6) state, that “economists (and economic demographers) are often called upon (by those who formulate policy) to assess the fiscal and human capital costs and benefits of immigration.” Economic criteria gain in importance for worldwide immigration policies alongside issues of national

security and border control (e.g. Dodson/Crush 2004; McLaren/Dyck 2004). This speaks to a distinct influence of migration economics on the governance of migration. Economic approaches to migration differ according to paradigms (Marxism, neoclassical, institutional economics), levels of analysis (micro or macro) and to the issues they address. Five basic questions can be identified: First, why do immigrants come? Second, which persons are most likely to move? Third, how do they fare at the destination? Fourth, how does immigration affect receiving countries? And finally, how does emigration affect sending societies? Table 1 gives a piecemeal overview of some of the corresponding models and hypotheses (see also Ghatak/Levine/Price 1996; Freemann 2006).

The next pages provide a more detailed introduction into the way neoclassical economists deal with the why and who of migration. I have chosen ‘who and why models’ as they underpin the rest of migration economics (Clark/Hatton/Williamson 2004: 1). The focus on neoclassical economics is due to their dominance in standard textbooks on labour economics (e.g. Ehrenberg/Smith 2006: 323ff.), in the bulk of quantitative research (e.g. Hatton/Williamson 2002; Pedersen/Pytikova/Smith 2006) and policy briefs (e.g. Hanson 2007).<sup>6</sup> They also serve as a common point of reference in other disciplines of migration studies.

The neoclassical *macro-theory* of migration dates back to John R. Hicks’ *Theory of Wages* (1932), according to which migration is determined by geographic differences in economic opportunities. Above all it is wage differentials due to different endowments of labour relative to capital, which trigger mobility from places where labour is abundant and earnings are low to labour-scarce and high-wage destinations. To quote George J. Borjas (2000: 1): “Workers respond to regional differences in economic outcomes by voting with their feet.” In so doing, they contribute to a spatial redistribution of factors of production, which will balance wage levels in the long run. This will in turn entail a cessation of migration.

The reason why individuals respond to income gradients and engage in migration is given by the *microeconomic human capital approach*, which was first outlined by Chicago School economist Larry A. Sjaastad (1962) and given its classic form by Michael P. Todaro (1969) with reference to rural-to-urban migration. The Todaro-model claims that individuals make a rational decision to migrate when a cost-benefit calculation leads them

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<sup>6</sup> Consequently, Marxist theorising and institutionalist approaches are not elaborated upon. For a Marxist perspective see Nikolinakos (1975) or Portes/Walton (1981). For an institutionalist viewpoint see Piore (1979).

**Table 1: Overview of neoclassical approaches to migration**

Question	Theory/ model	Hypotheses
<b>Why do immigrants come?</b>	human capital theory, Todaro model	- people migrate when a cost-benefit calculus leads them to expect that future payoffs from the move exceed the costs $\Rightarrow$ emigration rate = negatively correlated with mean earnings in source country & migration costs and positively correlated with mean earnings at destination
<b>Which persons are likely to move?</b>	human capital model  Roy-Borjas application of human capital theory	- favourable self-selection of economic migrants $\Rightarrow$ more intense the greater the costs of mobility, the more skill enhances the efficiency of migration and the larger the skill differential at destination compared to the country of origin  - positive & negative selection: positive selection = more likely from more advanced, geographically distant countries and to countries with higher wage dispersion than home country; negative selection = more likely from less developed, geographically close countries and to host countries with lower wage dispersion than home country
<b>How do immigrants do in the host country?</b>	human capital theory	- the more positively immigrants are selected and the easier skills are transferred, the higher immigrants' occupational status  - in case of positive selection, lower earnings relative to natives upon arrival, but as returns to human capital investment are realised, incomes rise faster
<b>How do immigrants affect receiving countries?</b>	equilibrium model of labour supply and demand  human capital theory	- short-term labour market effects: depend on substitutability/complementarity of workers $\Rightarrow$ those complementary to immigrants gain; reduced wages + employment for competing workers  - long term economic growth effects: increase in national income (immigration surplus) $\Rightarrow$ wealth-redistribution from labour to capital  - brain gain through immigration of highly-skilled workers  - the younger, more qualified + more employed immigrants are, the more likely they are net contributors to public expenditure + vice versa  - remittance effects: may lead to decrease in investment, savings, production and growth
<b>How does immigration affect sending countries?</b>	equilibrium model of labour supply & demand  human capital theory	- short-run labour market effects: wages of emigrants' substitutes increase while those for complementary factors are reduced  - short term fall of national income, but long term increase due to increased specialisation  - brain drain vs. brain gain through return migration  - remittance effects: may increase investment, savings and economic growth and may improve a country's creditworthiness, but they may also lead to exchange rate depreciations, lower export competitiveness and may slow down growth by reducing work efforts of recipients

Source: Author's own.

to expect that future payoffs<sup>7</sup> from the geographic movement exceed the costs of the move. In plain words, “prospective [...] migrants behave as maximisers of expected<sup>8</sup> utility” (Harris/Todaro 1970: 248). Since the present costs have to pay off in the future, migration is interpreted as a human capital investment: “[W]here one lives can be viewed as an individual trait that rational actors change by investing in a move” (Massey/Durand/Malone 2005: 23). They will move to where the investment will reap the highest returns. This perspective of mobility as an income maximising decision is “probably the most influential and widely used micro-level approach to the study of human migration” (Swain/Garasky 2007: 153).

Several empirical findings hint at the shortcomings of the neoclassical approach to migration. They include the fact that regional relocation occurs in the absence of wage differentials, that migratory streams often end before wage gaps disappear or do not even start in the predicted way and the observation that migrations are not dominated by the poorest, but rather by moderately poor countries and middle classes (Arango 2000: 286f.; Pries 2001: 14; Hatton/Williamson 2002: 4; Massey/Durand/ Malone 2005: 23). Moreover, migration economics has been criticised for its blindness to the political dimension (Arango 2000: 286; Hatton/Williamson 2002), the exclusion of forms of migration other than the permanent movement of workers (Arango 2000: 287) and the flawed assumptions of perfect markets and migration as a mechanic, uni-causal process pursued by homogeneous rational individuals (Cohen 1996: xv; Faist 2000: 41). In that sense, Peter A. Fischer, Reiner Martin and Thomas Straubhaar (1997: 88) admit that

the classic economic man or woman, continuously computing economic benefits at all conceivable alternative locations, constantly on the move trying to exploit differences between macro-level units and thereby levelling them out, is not realistic. Not surprisingly, the most classical economic model is hardly able to explain the details and dynamics of migration flows, basing its explanations of migration on wage differences and assuming the homogeneous economic person to make decisions under conditions of perfect certainty, no costs, perfect information and the absence of risk.

Two strands of theory from the neoclassical tradition have revised this atomised conceptualisation of individuals. Both take as unit of analysis not the individual, but the

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<sup>7</sup> Besides wage advantages and welfare transfers, non-monetary factors are also considered important migration benefits – at least in empirical studies. They include political (e.g. civil liberties, political rights, stability, security), socio-cultural (e.g. love, social integration, self-fulfilment, educational opportunities) and geo-ecological gains (e.g. environment, climate, health). However, due to problems of empirical measurement, there is a certain hesitation among economists to include these factors (Fischer/Martin/Straubhaar 1997: 57f.).

<sup>8</sup> Todaro (1969) and Harris/Todaro (1970) modified the simple wage differential approach with its focus on real income differentials as independent variable by including the probability of obtaining a job in the destination area. In the Todaro model, expected (not real) income differentials drive migration, that is the income differential multiplied with employment opportunities. Thus, the neoclassical assumption of full employment is given up.

household, family or “other culturally defined units of production and consumption” (Massey et al. 1993: 439). The first is Jacob Mincer’s *theory of the economics of family migration*. It centres on the mobility of entire households and is presented in more detail in the next section. The second approach, the *new economics of labour migration*, was developed by Oded Stark and refers to partial (not entire) family migration. In the absence of smoothly functioning capital, credit and insurance markets, migration of one or more family members becomes a means to diversify the allocation of productive resources and hence a strategy to minimise risks to family income and to overcome capital constraints. Furthermore, the notion of relative deprivation is introduced, according to which households not only want to increase their income in absolute terms, but also relative to other households in their reference groups, that is the group they compare themselves with. Ergo, “a person who is more relatively deprived can be expected to have a stronger incentive to migrate than a person who is less relatively deprived” and “a reference group characterized by more income inequality is likely to generate more relative deprivation and higher propensities to migrate” (Stark/Bloom 1985: 173f.).

Consequently, the new economics of labour migration is compatible with some of the above mentioned empirical findings: The fact that only a few people journey abroad can be interpreted as risk aversion – “if all were to migrate risk will not be reduced” (Stark 1984: 210) – while the notion of relative deprivation is a possible explanation for the predominance of middle classes in migration processes (Pries 2001: 15) and for migration in the absence of significant wage gaps (Ghataik/Levine/Price 1996: 161). Nevertheless, Stark’s approach has been challenged by the observation that remittances are more often used for consumptive than for investment purposes (Kraler/Parnreiter 2005: 334).

From a gender analytic perspective, the household models are noteworthy as first attempts to include patterns of gender-specific migration. Another example is Thadani and Todaro (1984) who propose a model for female migration by adding factors such as marriage that explain the ‘extra’ influence acting on migrant women. Moreover, they admit that far from being general theorisations, economic accounts of migration represent “sex-specific theories – specific to male migration” (ibid.: 38). None the less, both attempts have been criticised from a feminist perspective – the household models for overestimating collective decision-making processes and ignoring inter-family conflicts as well as gendered power relations (Katz 1999: 559f.; Faist 2000: 40f.; Kraler/Parnreiter 2005: 334) and Thadani/Todaro for abstracting the migration decision from the household and for normalising male mobility, thereby being “female-aware” instead of “gender-aware” (Chant/Radcliffe 1992: 20; see also Katz 1999: 558).

This criticism already suggests that an in depth analysis of the gender knowledge of the household models is promising. I chose Mincer's model for its frequent citation in migration economics and for being more explicit on gender roles than Stark. Quite the opposite, the second model under investigation, the selection model developed by Harvard economist George J. Borjas, is crafted in seemingly gender-neutral terms. I will none the less analyse it because it is one of the most important benchmarks in the field. Moreover, the model's preoccupation with immigrants' skills renders it particularly relevant from a policy perspective since it relates to the discussion about brain drain in sending countries as well as the economic performance of immigrants in receiving societies. I therefore place Mincer and Borjas at the centre of the subsequent two chapters.

### 3.3 *She will follow him – the Mincer model of family migration*

Emphasis on migration as a family rather than an individual move began in the 1970s. In that context, Jacob Mincer (1978) drew on the *New Home or Household Economics*<sup>9</sup> to explore gains and losses of relocation decisions for household members. In so doing, he departed from a tradition, which treated the 'black box' household as based on identical utility functions of its members and allowed for separate preferences of household members and different opportunities across possible migration destinations.

At the heart of his model is the behavioural assumption "that net family gain rather than net personal gain [...] motivates migration of households" (Mincer 1978: 750). Couples move or stay in order to maximise the sum of their incomes, not individual wellbeing. Due to different personal tastes, this may imply forgoing opportunities, which would be optimal from a personal calculation. So, whilst for "tied movers" engaging in family migration implies sacrificing private gains, "tied stayers" would personally gain from geographic relocation, but decide against it for the sake of maximising family welfare. As forgone opportunities are recompensed within the household, overall, the family migrates if the future gains of one spouse exceed the other spouse's losses (net of migration costs). To say this differently,

a family moves if and only if the sum of all household members' benefits from moving is larger than the sum of all household members' losses. In this case, each household member benefits from the move, either directly (e.g. in the form of higher

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<sup>9</sup> The *New Home Economics* is a research programme that developed out of the neoclassical tradition in the 1960s and focused the spotlight on issues such as marriage, divorce, fertility, the inner-household division of labour and the labour market participation of family members. It theorises non-market exchanges such as the decision to marry or to have children as the utility-maximising choice of individuals and families respectively. The *New Home Economics* is closely associated with Chicago-based Gary Becker. Further well-known exponents are Jacob Mincer and Solomon Polachek.



wages) or because he or she receives compensation from other family members that undo migration losses (Jürges 2005: 2).

Consequently, family ties, which “exist so long as the gain of at least one spouse in the family’s optimal location is less than his or her private maximum” (Mincer 1978: 770), tend to deter migration. The deterrence effect is more distinct, the stronger the spouse’s job attachment and the larger the contribution to family earnings, as both higher the opportunity costs of the family move. In case of a two-member household, this allows to differentiate four scenarios (see also Jürges 2005: 2f.): In the first case, the net benefit of migration is greater than zero for each partner and migration is optimal for the family as well as for the husband and wife individually. In a second case, only one partner gains from the move, but the gains outweigh the losses of the other partner. The family moves with one tied mover. In a third situation, again, only one partner gains from relocation, but this time the spouse’s loss exceeds the gains. The family will not migrate. In a fourth scenario, the sum of individual utilities is larger when both partners go separate ways than if they stay together. According to Mincer this leads to family dissolution.

He assumes that women are more likely than men to be the tied partner as, empirically, their labour force participation is discontinuous and they earn less. This is why “husbands’ gains (or losses) from migration usually exceed the losses (or gains) of the wife” (ibid.: 754). Thus, migration is facilitated by a gender-based comparative advantage in the market: “wives’ initial relative specialization in domestic production frees up their husbands to move the family in response to his own labour market opportunities” (Katz 1999: 558; see also Mincer 1978: 757). At the same time, migration reduces employment and earnings of tied movers, while increasing those of their spouses (Mincer 1978: 768f.). Thus, women’s ‘specialisation’ in domestic labour is reinforced – for the sake of efficiency as Mincer (ibid.: 757) argues:

The adverse effects on the labor market experience of some married women may be seen as ‘social oppression’ from a private point of view. Such a view, however, fails to note that the behavior we analyzed is a product of family welfare maximization. This is Pareto-optimal, since private market losses can be internalized by the family, that is, compensated by a redistribution of gains.

This quote indicates that Mincer’s approach to migration is deeply rooted in the *New Household Economics*, which argues that the household gender division of labour is a result of the comparative advantage of women in domestic labour which is “partly due to the gains from specialized investments, [...] [and] partly due to intrinsic [viz. biological] differences between the sexes” (Becker 1998: 37). While “a man completes his biological contribution to the production of children when his sperm fertilizes a woman’s egg”, women “not only have a heavy biological commitment to the production and feeding of

children, but they also are biologically committed to the care of children in other, more subtle ways” (ibid.). Similarly, in their famous 1974 article, Mincer and Solomon Polachek argued that due to genetic endowments, women expected discontinuous labour market participation and hence chose to under-invest in human capital, which, in turn, lowered their productivity and wages (Mincer/Polachek 1974). Put differently, women’s lower earnings are fully attributed to their decisions on the basis of brute biological imperatives. Another central premise of the *New Home Economics* is the harmonious household, in which gains and losses are redistributed. Overall, the main assumptions of the Mincer model can be resumed as follows:

- A family is composed of husband and wife.<sup>10</sup>
- Family members act perfectly rationally.
- Their preferences are stable and respond to changes in relative prices.
- They are risk-neutral.
- They migrate in order to maximise family income, that is, each spouse places family ahead of personal wellbeing.
- They migrate only if both partners agree to move.
- Gains and losses from mobility relate to the expected wages.
- Each spouse’s gain or loss is weighted equally in the computation of family wellbeing.
- As income and resources are fully pooled, migration related gains and losses are redistributed within the family, that is, migration losers are compensated.
- As, empirically, gains and losses from migration tend to be larger for husbands, tied partners (movers or stayers) are disproportionately female.
- Migration is a one-time event, which involves the whole family.

The model’s predictions can be resumed as follows:

- Families move if the migration gains of one spouse exceed the other spouse’s losses (net of migration costs). As family ties deter migration, singles are more mobile than couples or larger families.
- As deterrent effects are stronger when the spouse’s wage labour is more permanent and earning power higher, dual-earner couples are less mobile than single-earner couples.
- Family ties reduce employment and earnings of migrating wives at destination while increasing the employment and earnings of their husbands.

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<sup>10</sup> The theoretical model explicitly abstracts from children, but families with kids are included in the empirical analysis. Here, they are factored in the cost variable and found to have a particularly inhibiting effect on migration (Mincer 1978: 750f.).

- Husbands receive the largest gains when their wives worked at origin, but no longer do so at destination.
- Location decisions bring about family dissolution when migration ties exceed the gains from marriage, that is, when the sum of separate incomes exceeds family income.

Mincer (1978) supported his theoretical discussion with empirical evidence from the USA for the 1960s and 70s. Since then, his approach has inspired many empirical tests. In general, they are consistent with family ties' assumed deterrent effect on migration (e.g. Mont 1989; Pingle 2006; Swain/Garasky 2007) and with the hypothesis that returns to migration differ substantially between men and women with women being more often migration losers (for an overview see Jürges 2005: 2). Yet, the thesis that females are more likely to be tied partners has been challenged. More recent studies found that due to the decrease in the earnings differential between husbands and wives, the tied stayer and mover phenomenon affected men and women more equally in the 90s (Nivalainen 2004). Others claim that husbands are more likely to be tied stayers (Swain/Garasky 2007). Moreover, bargaining theorists have criticised the supposed compensation of migration losers as too simple (Jürges 2005: 3f.).

Similarly, feminist critics of Mincer's approach have questioned the presumed consensual nature of the family decision process, the alleged inner-household redistribution of benefits and losses and the tendency to treat both men's and women's migration as determined by labour market opportunities while ignoring other motives (Bielby/Bielby 1992: 1244; Katz 1999: 558f.; Hill 2004). Another critique refers to the model's blindness towards gender role beliefs, which often lead to family migration decisions as "asymmetric in the sense that men dominate these decision also if their wives have a comparable labour market position, because men mostly take the primary provider role" (Jürges 2005: 5; see also Bielby/Bielby 1992). These remarks serve as a solid ground for a more in-depth gender analysis of the accounts by Mincer and Borjas in chapter 4. It is the depiction of this second model I will now turn to.

### ***3.4 Flowing to the market that pays the highest price – the Roy-Borjas selection model***

Which workers tend to engage in migration processes, the more or the least skilled? This question gained prominence in the analysis of immigrants' labour market performance in the US in the 1980s. While the traditional proposition was that, irrespective of country of origin, immigrants as a self-selected group were "more able and more highly motivated" than their fellow citizens (Chiswick 1978: 900), data at that time suggested deteriorating labour market performance and steep declining skills of immigrants (Borjas 1987, 1992). In

that context, Borjas (1987, 1991) and Borjas, Bronars and Trejo (1992) applied the Roy Model<sup>11</sup> to population movement to show that immigrants were not necessarily positively selected.

Borjas' model is guided by the income-maximising approach described above. Yet, it shows that relocation decisions not only depend on mean income variations, but on regional differences in the rewards to observed and unobserved skills. These skill-price differentials determine the skill composition of migration flows. In Borjas' words (1996: 298), “[w]orkers ‘selling’ their skills behave just like firms selling their product. Both, workers and goods flow to those markets where they can get the highest price.” In effect,

regions offering high rewards for skills attract skilled workers and unskilled workers move to regions with low skill prices. Because skilled workers currently residing in regions with low skill prices and unskilled workers living in regions with high skill prices are mismatched spatially, these workers are likely to migrate. Migrants are expected to relocate in regions where the returns to skills are more compatible with their skill endowment. (Borjas/Bronars/Trejo 1992: 161)

Taking income inequality as a proxy for returns to skill, Borjas hypothesises that the skill composition of migration flows depends on aspiring migrants' position in the home-country wage distribution and on the ratio of variances in the income distribution of home and host society. He (1992: 43) summarises this argument with reference to the US:

An economy with an egalitarian income distribution offers relatively low returns to skills. Because persons migrate to countries that provide the best economic opportunities, the immigrant flow originating in source countries with less income inequality than the United States will have above-average skills or productivities. Alternatively, the returns to skills are higher in source countries that have more income inequality than the United States. Highly skilled persons then face relatively better economic opportunities in the country of origin and have little incentive to migrate to the United States. The immigrant flow, therefore, will contain a relatively large number of unskilled workers.

Three types of selection can be distinguished: Positive selection refers to a situation when immigrants have above average skills in source and host countries. Negative selection occurs when migrants are drawn from the lower ranks of the home country's income distribution and outperformed in the host country's labour market. Lastly, refugee sorting occurs when the host country draws migrants whose skills have been devalued in the

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<sup>11</sup> The model goes back to A.D. Roy's *Some Thoughts on the Distribution of Earnings* (1951), according to which workers choose between economic sectors on the basis of mean earnings differentials and their comparative advantage in skills. It was first applied to migration by Robinson and Tomes (1982) who investigated internal migration in Canada.

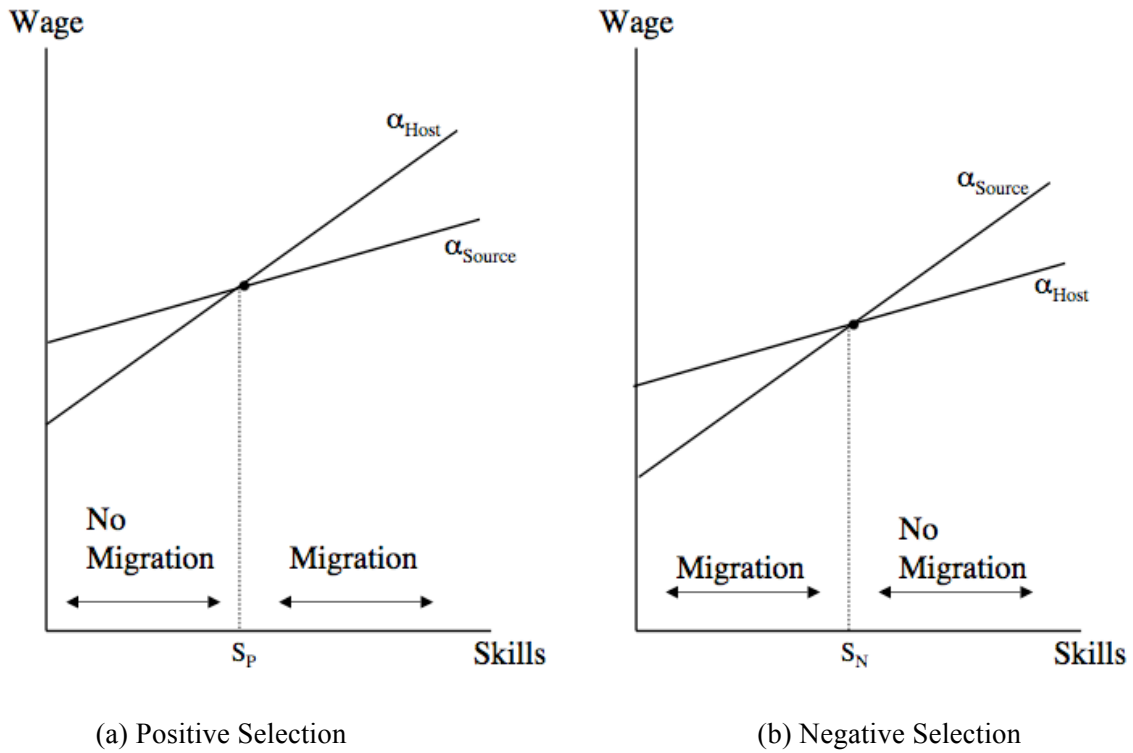
country of origin due to a change in the political system, but who outperform the average worker from the host country.<sup>12</sup>

Figure 1 is an illustration of the Roy model.  $\alpha_{\text{Source}}$  and  $\alpha_{\text{Host}}$  represent the relation between earnings and skills in the labour markets of the source and host community. In figure 1(a), the wage-skill line is steeper for the host country implying that returns to skill are higher than in the source country. Workers with fewer than SP skill units earn more in the source than in the host country while those with more than SP skills earn more in the host country. Thus, the latter have an incentive to move whereas the relatively less skilled have not. The migration flow is positively selected. In contrast, in 1(b), where payoff to skill is higher in the source country, workers with fewer than SN skills earn more in the host country and will want to migrate. The immigrant flow is negatively selected. (Borjas 1996: 297f.)

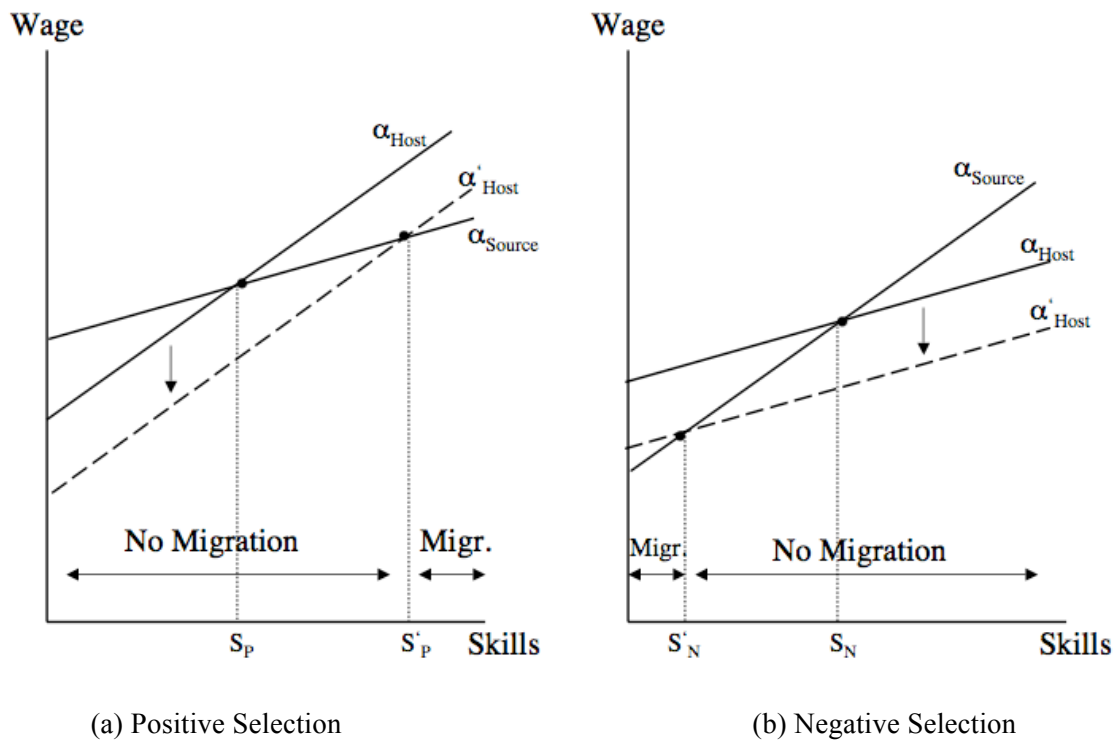
The role of mobility costs and mean incomes is considered in figure 2. The shift from  $\alpha_{\text{Host}}$  to  $\alpha'_{\text{Host}}$  results from a fall in mean incomes in the host country or an increase in migration costs. Both reduce the expected net income after migration. As a result, fewer workers hit the road while the type of selection of the immigrant flow remains the same. Thus, the Roy-Borjas model implies that relative wages on skills determine the kind of selection while mean income levels and migration costs determine the emigration rate. The latter, however, is also influenced by income distributions. If, for example, the wage dispersion in the home country increases, migration incentives for high-income persons decrease and the immigration rate declines due to their withdrawal from the pool of emigrants. (Borjas 1987: 551, 1996: 299f.)

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<sup>12</sup> Thus, Borjas (1989: 469) sees “no reason to resort to arbitrary distinctions between ‘economic’ and ‘non-economic’ migration to explain refugee experience.” For a similar argument see Fischer/Martin/Straubhaar (1997: 50).

**Figure 1: The Self-Selection of Immigrants according to the Roy-Borjas Model**

Source: Adapted from Borjas (1996: 298).

**Figure 2: Mean Incomes and Migration Costs in the Roy-Borjas Model**

Source: Adapted from Borjas (1996: 300).

I can now summarise the main assumptions informing the Roy-Borjas model:

- There are two countries with different wage distributions.
- Higher skill-levels due to education and training lead to higher productivity expressed in higher wages.
- Skills are perfectly transferable between places of origin and destination.
- Earnings are perfectly correlated across countries, that is, individuals who rank highly in the home country, also rank highly in the income distribution at destination.
- Migration costs are the same for all would-be migrants.<sup>13</sup>
- Potential migrants act perfectly rationally.
- Their preferences are stable and respond to changes in relative prices.
- They are risk-neutral.
- They migrate in order to maximise personal incomes.
- Migration is a one-time event.

The main hypotheses can be summarised as follows:

- The emigration rate is higher the higher the mean income in the host country.
- The emigration rate is lower the greater the mean income in the source country.
- The emigration rate is lower the greater the level of immigration costs.
- Higher-skilled individuals seek to migrate to locales with higher returns to skills/earnings inequality.
- Less qualified persons are attracted to locations with lower returns to skills/earnings inequality.

Critics of the Roy-Borjas model have particularly dismissed the assumption of constant migration costs arguing that they tend to decline with the migrants' skill level (e.g. Chiswick 2000; Chiquiar/Hanson 2005; Brücker/Defoort 2006). Accordingly, "migrants may be chosen from the upper tail of the skill distribution although the distribution of income in the host country is more equal than in the home country" (Brücker/ Defoort 2006: 3). In addition, the model has been challenged with empirical counter evidence (e.g. Chiquiar/Hanson 2005; Brücker/Defoort 2006). Yet, other studies have confirmed its hypotheses (e.g. Hatton/Williamson 2002; Hunt/Mueller 2004; Mayda 2005; van Tubergen 2006). Important extensions of the model include the conceptualisation of migration as a family decision (Borjas/Bronars 1991) and as a utility-maximising instead of an income-

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<sup>13</sup> In his 1991 application of the model, Borjas (1991: 32) allows for varying migration costs according to individuals' different opportunity costs and costs of moving expenses of family and household goods.

maximising decision (Hunt/Mueller 2004). While some studies have incorporated data differentiated by gender (ibid.; Chiquiar/Hanson 2005) and while Chiquiar and Hanson (2005) have identified different selection mechanisms for men and women migrating from Mexico to the US, to my knowledge, a profound theoretical critique of the Roy-Borjas model from a gender perspective is still to come.



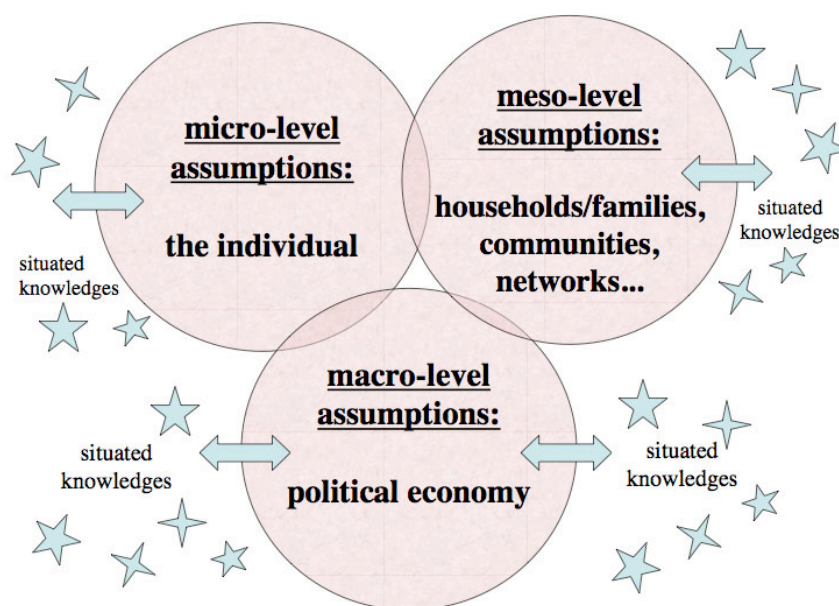
#### 4. Gender-blindness revisited- masculinity & heteronormativity in models by Borjas & Mincer

*Indeed, gender is in many cases at the heart of the most damaging constructions of today's immigrants. The more clearly scholars analyze damaging representations as constructions rooted in host society views of gender and sexuality, the less power such perceptions will have to shape continuing research and discourse.*

Leslie Page Moch (2005: 104)

Having outlined my theoretical approach and reviewed the research field, I will now turn to the analysis of the gender knowledge in Mincer's and Borjas' models. I will investigate their underlying assumptions for traces of heteronormativity and modern bourgeois masculinity and align them with what I expect them to exclude and thereby construct as deviant: the situated knowledges of migrant women, queers, ethnic minority and subaltern class men. I am aware that this 'dialogue' between their migration experience and that of the prototypical migrants in Mincer's and Borjas' theories bears the danger of dichotomising them. It further runs the risk of taking for granted what feminist scholars consider *the* migration experience of women and men without critically reflecting upon their gender knowledge. I will not solve these problems. Yet, if I want to detect the strategic silences of Mincer's and Borjas' models in order to unmask their alleged universality as particularity, I need to confront them with some kind of marginalised knowledge. To quote Donna Haraway (1988: 590): "The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular." My 'somewhere' will be the situated knowledges identified in gender and migration studies and feminist economics – even though it may be stereotypical and not necessarily emancipatory.

Following gendered accounts of migration (e.g. Chant 1992a; Wright 1995: 780), I relate the models' assumptions to three conceptually distinct levels: the micro-level of individual behaviour, the meso-level of interpersonal ties that connect migrants and non-migrants in sending and receiving societies and the macro-level of the wider political economy (see figure 3). As microeconomic models, the approaches by Mincer and Borjas are both rather explicit in their presuppositions about individual agency, which will be taken up in the following section (chapter 4.1). Mincer is similarly outspoken about the family, an important institution on the intermediate-level of migration analysis, the gender-subtext of which is the topic of chapter 4.2. Due to the scope of this paper, other institutions on the meso-level like migrant networks or local communities will not be investigated. Finally, both models rest upon an unarticulated knowledge about the functioning of the wider political economy. I will try to articulate this knowledge with reference to two macro political economy 'institutions', the labour market and immigration policy, which will be scrutinised in the final two analytical chapters (4.3 and 4.4).

**Figure 3: Analytical framework**

Source: Author's own.

#### 4.1 The migrant as 'true economic man' – assumptions about individual agency

*Vladimir Propp analysed 100 Russian folk tales and discovered that they contained only seven different characters. To most people this would seem to be a surprisingly small cast of personalities. To the economist, seven different characters, with seven different world views, histories, and personalities are an unseemly horde that could potentially wreak havoc on economic theory. This is because all economics stories and models really have only one character – Homo Economicus.*

Melanie Samson (1990: 145)

To begin with, let me recapitulate the assumptions about the individual, which inform Mincer's and Borjas' models. Both assume that migrants act rationally according to stable preferences and self-interest, are risk-neutral and relocate in order to maximise earnings – be it personal or family income. In the words of Borjas (1987: 532), they “compare the potential incomes in [...] [the destination countries] with the incomes in the home countries, and make the migration decision based on these income differentials (net of mobility costs)”. Migrants only differ in skills, which are to reflect different levels of education, training and distinct biological endowments of men and women – at least the latter is the subtext of the Mincer model. Finally, while the migrant in the original version of the Roy-Borjas model is a single person, autonomous and unrelated to others, the extension of the model to family migration (Borjas/Bronars 1991) is perfectly consistent

with Mincer's axioms about migrants as family members. They place family wellbeing ahead of personal benefits, redistribute gains and losses from migration and thus exhibit a certain amount of altruist behaviour. Whilst this generosity does not per se contradict the assumed self-interest of actors, it is incompatible with the egoism most economists assume in the market (England 2003: 43). As neither Mincer nor Borjas account for selfless behaviour outside the household, I take them to actually assume egoist behaviour in the market and altruism in the family.

This dichotomised conception of a separative 'lone wolf' self in the market and soluble selves in the family was first made explicit by Adam Smith (1723-1790) in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) and remains the bedrock of much of current economic thinking. The confinement of self-interest to the public and of altruism to the private sphere traditionally associated with women has been criticised by feminist economists for nurturing familial and dependent conceptions of women simultaneously with notions of the male breadwinner and, thus, as a rationalisation of women's limited opportunities (Jennings 1999: 146f.). Firmly rooted in that binary opposition, the models by Mincer and Borjas likewise reflect and solidify a purportedly natural and hierarchical binary gender order.

The archetypical being on the separative side of the dyad – the seemingly universal, unsexed, rational, autonomous and utility maximising economic man or *homo economicus* – is the brainchild of John Stuart Mill (1806-1873). Being the centrepiece of classical and neoclassical economics, it also informs migration economics as the above mentioned assumptions about individual agents evince. Quoting institutionalist economist Piore's account of the migrant as economic man (1979: 54) further illustrates that point:

The migration to the industrial community and the work performed there is purely instrumental: a means to gather income, income that can be taken back to his or her community and used to fulfil his or her role within *that* social structure. From the perspective of the migrant, the work is essentially asocial: It is purely a means to an end. In this sense, the migrant is initially a true economic man, probably the closest thing in real life to the *Homo economicus* of economic theory.

The feminist critique of *homo economicus* has advertised the blatant sexism of the term economic 'man' (Nelson 1999: 286). Furthermore, it has targeted the underlying axioms of selfishness, narrow rationality and social isolation for resting on a "subject position predicated on a particular identity – that of propertied men of European ancestry" (Barker/Kuiper 2003: 9) while claiming to be part of a universal human nature. As a result of setting this "Western romantic hero" as "transcendent individual" (Strassmann 1999: 61), other lived realities are deemed uneconomic and ignored – many of them coded as feminine. Take the putative autonomy of economic 'man' as it is poignantly summarised by Julie A. Nelson (1999: 287):

'Economic man', the 'agent' of the prototypical economic model, springs up fully formed, with preferences fully developed, and is fully active and self-contained. He has no childhood or old age; no dependence on anyone; no responsibility for anyone but himself. The environment has no effect on him, but rather is merely the passive material, presented as 'constraints', over which his rationality has play. He interacts in society without being influenced by society: his mode of interaction is through an ideal market in which prices form the only, and only necessary, form of communication. *Homo economicus* is the central character in a romance of individuality without connection to nature or to society.

Nelson and others have argued that this allegedly separate individual does not "spring from the ground like Hobbesian mushroom men" (Barker/Feiner 2004: 5), but is in fact dependent upon caring, and numerous other household tasks that are still preponderantly performed by women (Samson 1990: 146; Nelson 1999: 287; Hewitson 2001a: 15). By presupposing these activities but rendering them invisible, economic man exposes himself as "not an abstract, unsexed consciousness, but a textual production of a male subject position" (Hewitson 1999: 4). In addition, the underlying liberal paradigm of the autonomous individual literally excludes handicapped persons, infants and the elderly. Thus, *homo economicus* can be considered a one-sex model with a bias to a particular type of masculinity in that it eliminates activities ascribed to women and excludes old and disabled men.

Closely related to the critique of the alleged autonomy of *homo economicus* is the feminist unease with the neoclassical emphasis on atomistic choice (rather than underlying conditions), which clearly reverberates in metaphors of migrants as workers voting with their feet (see chapter 3.2). This focus has been challenged from two angles: First, feminist economists insist that people are burdened by sexist, racist, heterosexist etc. 'external' constraints and argue that presenting the ability to choose as the norm stems from the privileged experience "of adult, white, male, middle-class American economists" (Strassmann 1993: 60). Migrants are not only constrained by their budget as neoclassical theory indicates. Many women cannot 'choose' to migrate due to gender role constraints on mobility, such as concerns for their moral and sexual propriety (Chant 1998: 13; Jolly/Reeves 2005: 12). But gender roles also work on men: In cultural contexts where migration is seen as a rite of passage, they have to leave if they want to assert their masculinity and independence (ibid.; Jolly/Reeves 2005: 12; Piper 2005: 11). In others, they may be pushed into migration because of the male breadwinner ideal (Jolly/Reeves 2005: 12). In any case, this knowledge about the interrelation of gender norms on gender specific migratory streams is excluded from economic accounts of migration.

The second criticism feminist theory has launched against economics' reduction of the social world to individual choice is the internalisation of constraints. Being socialised into

gender roles, individuals are trained to ‘desire’ certain things and are therefore never fully autonomous. Even when their decisions reflect will rather than constraint, the question remains whether it mirrors internalised oppression or self-determination (Charusheela 2001: 199f.). A sobering example is women’s greater reluctance to relocate because of family considerations – even when their migration would increase family wellbeing. Here, clearly, internalised gender-roles, which define husbands as the main breadwinners and thus prioritise their career ambitions, mediate desires about work and family roles (Bielby/Bielby 1992; Willis/Yeoh 2000b; Jürges 2005). Yet, this does in no way imply that women are devoid of agency. Far from it, I want to stress, with S. Charusheela (2001: 208), that “agency and autonomy are never found in an asocial, ahistorical, trans-cultural, pre-given state of human nature.” A framework attentive to the centrality of gender in population movement needs to comprehend the social, cultural and material context of migrants as well as their agency from within that context, and not presume some abstract individualism.

This includes the notion of risk. In fact, women’s and men’s assessment of what forms or destinations of mobility may be risky or dangerous can differ widely as can actual vulnerabilities (Andall 2006: 276f.). The limited access to legal protection in feminised labour market sectors (see chapter 4.3), for example, or the greater exposure to sexual harassment and violence might imply bigger risks for women migrants (Piper 2003; Huang/Yeoh 2003; Jolly/Reeves 2005: 17; Lutz 2007: 198). A similar argument could be made for queers who still need to conceal their sexuality in many places of the world and for same-sex couples who are denied the right of joint residency petition and do thereupon have to apply separately, which increases their risk of family dissolution (Holt 2004: 30). But the notion of risk-neutrality is equally inadequate to describe some ‘general’ experience of heterosexual migrant men as the increased hostility towards Muslim men after September 11th (Jolly/Reeves 2005: 18) or the finding that South African men migrating internally are at a greater risk of HIV infection than non-migrants exemplify (Lurie 2004: 16). Thus, the concept is an indication of the particularity of the masculinity that besets Mincer’s and Borjas’ models – in that case a masculinity associated with whiteness, a religious majority and monogamy.

Let me now turn to their notion of preference. Within neoclassical economics, preferences are assumed to vary little over time and across individuals, so that most behaviour can be explained by prices and individual endowments. Indeed, in a famous article entitled *De Gustabus Non Est Disputandum*, Gary Becker and George Stigler (1977: 76) asserted that “one does not argue over tastes for the same reason that one does not argue over the Rocky

Mountains – both are there, will be there next year, too, and are the same to all men [sic].” Conversely, feminist economists have argued that likes and dislikes are socially fabricated and gendered. They shift according to situation and past outcomes and are hence endogenous to economic models. From that follows that women’s ‘innate’ preference for household chores and informal work as it is asserted in the *New Household Economics* results from a process in which they change their tastes to be consistent with available options in a male-dominated society. (Charusheela 2001: 213; Hewitson 2001a: 16; England 2003: 43) An equally telling example of the endogeneity of preferences is the finding that queers often have to relocate to another place to know themselves as queer, the quest for identity being predicated on migration (Kuntsman 2003; Gorman-Murray 2007: 111f.).

The gendered character of migration motives corroborates that point: Marital discord or search, inner-family physical violence, the impossibility of divorce, the prevalence of patriarchal legislation, practices and norms and conservative backlashes rank among the most important causes of women’s emigration (Kofman et al. 2000: 21f.; Hill 2004; Coyle 2007: 41f.). Against the background of the importance of marriage migration, it is more than coincidence that many nations with a US military base display a female predominance among immigrants to the US (Donato 1992: 166). Other studies report that the education of their children is an important motivating factor in the migration decisions of women (Phizacklea 2003: 94; McLaren/Dyck 2004: 47). Furthermore, queer studies have suggested that bodily sexual desires and erotic practices – “a very visceral search for bodies” (Gorman-Murray 2007: 114) – can be pivotal reasons for relocation in that the latter enables the (re-)negotiation of sexual identities and practices in a heterosexist world (Kuntsman 2003; Manalansan IV 2006: 225, 229). Andrew Gorman-Murray (2007) goes as far to conceptualise the relocations of queers as “embodied queer identity quests” (110) where “multi-directional, meandering migrations” are part and parcel of “an ongoing process of coming out” (113). In short, “queer migrant subjects move out in order to come out” (ibid.: 111). It goes without saying that this motive does not occur in the always-already heterosexual and fixed-identity world of migration economics.

While economists might retort that they only theorise labour migration, I would counter that migrants’ ambitions cannot be reduced to the dichotomy of economic vs. non-economic motives as one incitement does not preclude others and different forms of mobility are imbricated with one another (Kofman 1999: 287). Angela Coyle (2007: 41f.), for example, argues that the current westward migration of Polish women can only be understood in terms of unemployment in Poland *and* women’s resistance to and escape

from a conservative climate hostile to their autonomous aspirations and desires. Similarly, the trajectories of queer migrants to the urban-industrial labour markets in North America, Europe or Brazil in the 19th and early 20th century clearly shows how bodily desires dovetail with economic motivations (Gorman-Murray 2007: 107f.). Lastly, as marriage has always been a means to social upward mobility and as women opt for marriage migration due to gender-specific constraints on their labour market participation, this type of migration is clearly linked to the search for economic improvement (Piper 2000: 212, 218). Generally speaking, Dodson and Crush (2004: 101) have argued that it is hard to

separate ‘labour migration’ as a distinct category for female migrants, the patterns and strategies of their mobility reflecting the complex combination of productive and reproductive, paid and unpaid tasks that women typically perform. (see also chapter 4.2)

And even if women and men move for ‘purely’ economic reasons, they are not necessarily motivated by wage differentials. In many countries, property of land rather than income is considered the determinant of economic wellbeing (Agarwal 1997: 12f.). The idea of migration as first and foremost a response to wages has thus been reprimanded as a universalisation of patterns of behaviour associated with the expansion of markets in modern Western society (Zein-Elabdin 2004: 29). In light of laws and customs that restrict or even prohibit women’s control of money and their access to paid employment, it can also be reproached as a generalisation based on male experience. In fact, it has been argued that while men move indeed for income generation purposes, women’s solo moves are oftentimes inspired by familial reasons (Morokvasic 2003: 121f.). In any case, economic migration motives unfold in the context of certain gender orders. The current migration of women from Eastern Europe, for example, cannot be explained without the legacy of state socialism, in which paid employment was the norm for women. After the collapse of the communist economy, women capitalised on that habitus and engaged in income-generating activities during their tourist travels (Morokvasic 2004: 13). In a similar manner, the Buddhist tradition, in which it is common that daughters financially support their families, is one explanation for the enormous share of women in population movements in/from Southeast Asia (Aufhauser 2000: 112). Needless to say that models, which reduce migration to the dynamics of wage and skill differentials, have a hard time explaining these gender specific migration patterns.

This leaves ground to clear on the gender subtext of a final category in the models of Mincer and Borjas – skill. In both models, the concept exclusively refers to the small amount of human capital produced in formal education and in employment while abilities conveyed by parents and acquired in the household are considered natural endowments (see

also Samson 1990: 148; Strassmann 1993: 61; McLaren/Dyck 2004: 43). Thus implicitly, domestic workers, who are still mostly women, are deemed unskilled. Historical studies suggest that this is no accident as skill distinctions have repeatedly been arbitrary classifications imposed on certain types of work by virtue of the gender and race ascribed to the workers who performed them – more often than not in the context of white men’s struggles to retain social status (Phillips/Taylor 1980; Schwarzkopf 1993; Agarwal 1997: 11; Barker/Feiner 2004: 69). The deskilling of women is further aggravated when cultural norms, limited access to finances and family responsibilities curtail their access to education and training. In the context of migration this occurs pre- and after departure (Chant/Radcliffe 1992: 14; Morokvasic 2004: 13; Erel 2003: 269; Kofman/Raghuram 2006: 294). In Canada, for example, language training is only designated for immigrants destined for the labour market, but as women often come in as dependents, they are excluded from these programmes (Man 2004: 143).

To put the hitherto discussion in a nutshell, I would contend that allegedly gender-neutral concepts and assumptions about the micro-level of individual agency in Mincer’s and Borjas’ models – *homo economicus*, choice, skill and the preference for higher wages as the universal migration incentive – carry a white-affluent-masculine and heteronormative connotation. They are devoid of the knowledge of migrants who experience specific constraints and risks due to their gender, ethnicity or class status and of the peculiar preferences they form against the background of this status. Above all, this is true for female and queer migrants and for those with an ethnic minority and/or subaltern origin. While they are constructed as less qualified, passive, homebound, dependent, immobile, as “both deviant and somehow extra, unnecessary, marginal” (Danby 2007: 42), the migrant *as such* becomes associated with modern bourgeois masculinity.

This preliminary thesis is supported by the more explicit gender knowledge in the Mincer model, which self-evidently assumes universal heterosexuality and men and women as different by nature: Men are displayed as superior to women in terms of skills and labour market power while due to her (ultimately biologically determined) comparative advantage in housework and the resultant lesser disposition to migrate, the Mincer wife is a doomed stayer or a mere follower at her husband’s behest – exempt from the world of migration as a quest for higher wages. Gay, lesbians, bi- and transgender people as well as single-parent families likewise lurk in the category of the Other since Mincer assumes as his central case a husband and a wife in a bounded nuclear family. This fits well with the heteronormativity and the general notion of women as married and dependent prevalent in neoclassical economics (Pujol 1995: 20).



To claim that the models by Mincer and Borjas have a modern bourgeois masculine bias is not to say that they adequately represent the migrations of white, middle-class heterosexual men. Surely, the latter exhibit many of the constraints and incentives that are excluded by economic migration theories: They engage in relocation to marry, are constrained by their culturally prescribed role of the primary (or exclusive) breadwinner and they are singles or fathers whose migration decisions are curtailed by the necessity of reproductive labour. Likewise, I do not deny that the migration trajectories of women, queers and marginalised men can mirror the patterns prescribed by Mincer and Borjas. And finally, a bias towards modern bourgeois masculinity does not mean that there are no references to unskilled, poor and ethnic minority migrants in the models. To the contrary, unskilled migrants from less developed countries play an important part in Borjas' model. On a more abstract level, however, the codifications of *homo economicus* have shown that these migrants do not easily fit into the basic rationale of the model. I therefore suggest that – in the sense that *homo economicus* is never just a methodological abstraction, but always also a role model, an ideal actor with normative emanation (Steffens 2007: 268f.) – in the field of migration studies, the models by Mincer and Borjas participate in setting modern, bourgeois masculinity as the norm. This is reflected in their focus on rationality and wage-earning, their compulsory heterosexuality, the absence of any gender-, race- or class constraints, the propagated strongly marked gender differences and the rigid family division of labour. As these features are not cultural codes of a world of facticity, displaying them can be considered as part of a cultural practice that naturalises and legitimises respective gender differences and hierarchies.

#### 4.2 *We are (not) family – assumptions about households and families*

*It is possible that the number of households who sit down around the kitchen table and discuss in a rational way who it is that will make the most money if they migrate, is very small indeed.*

Annie Phizacklea (2003: 85)

Households and families have been of pivotal interest in the study of gender and migration as relocation decisions are frequently embedded in those units and as they mediate gender norms between individuals and the wider social context. On this account, Mincer's migration approach<sup>14</sup> has been welcomed for theorising the interplay between individual

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<sup>14</sup> The study by Borjas and Bronars (1991) on the role of the family in determining the skill composition of US- immigrants is based on the same assumptions about the family as the Mincer model. The authors

interests and collective wellbeing (Katz 1999: 560). From the perspective of feminist economics and queer theory, however, his assumptions about families are a bone of contention. But let me briefly recall the meso-level presuppositions of his model before turning to the critique.

Mincer's family consists of a man and a woman, who are so obviously married they are called 'husband' and 'wife'. Both are altruistic in that they place family wellbeing over personal benefit. In the family, income and resources are fully pooled and individual gains and losses from migration are valued equally and redistributed. Relocation decisions are made household-wide and by consensus, with the result that either the whole family moves or dissolves. Finally, Mincer assumes that due to their – empirically evident – lower wages in paid work, wives tend to gain and lose less from migration, which is why they are usually the tied partners. As other texts by Mincer show, this position is ultimately attributed to women's comparative advantage in domestic work.

Strikingly rooted in middle class, white and heterosexual prerogatives, Mincer's allegedly universal nuclear family – the heterosexual, economically independent couple, with a husband who works and wife who cares – covers only a very narrow slice of kin arrangements. More flexible and complex extended family forms, comprising friends, lovers, domestic helpers or apprentices, and other households are reduced to invisibility. These configurations have been particularly studied for poor and ethnic-minority families and same-sex couples and are increasingly displayed across populations as ways of living together have altered radically in recent decades. (Hill Collins 1990: 367; Badgett 1995; Bergmann 1995: 142; Chant 1998; Manalansan IV 2006: 236; Danby 2007: 48) Equally absent are single-parent and supra-local transnational families, whose members span borders and work and live in diverse places. While they are written out of Mincer's model, the image of a tight-knit husband-wife couple as *the* social atom normalises notions of the family as primarily a reproductive unit, sexuality as always heterosexual and marriage as a universal experience. To quote from a recent article criticising a similar tendency in writings by feminist economists:

These texts assume a social order in which people grow up, get married, and settle down to raise children. Heteronormativity allows the easy assumption that this is just what people do, just as they eat and sleep, and that social science can axiomatically assume heterosexual practice and institutional forms. (Danby 2007: 34)

Heteronormativity as Danby (*ibid.*: 30) defines it, is indeed at work in Mincer's model: It smoothly links the assumptions that a normal adult a) belongs to one of the major genders,

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particularly stress the family income-maximisation hypothesis and mutual agreement of all family members in migration decisions. Nonetheless, this section only refers to the Mincer model.

b) forms a romantic and sexual relationship with someone from the other side which c) leads to the formation of a family conceptualised as d) inherently built around a heterosexual couple of this kind. The supposed inner workings of the Mincer family – general altruism, pooling of resources and consensual decision-making – further underscores the notion of gender complementarity. From the perspective of gay men, lesbians, transgenders and other sexual dissidents, however, it could be argued that the experience of violence and rejection of the biological family is a far cry from Mincer's rosy 'home, sweet home' picture. Furthermore, it has been set forth that the assumed pooling of income does not hold for many queer couples considering that the absence of legal marriage, and hence rules for marital divorce, increase uncertainty about joining finances (Badgett 1995: 131). All in all, Mincer's family prototype is clearly in concert with most immigration systems' "anxious production of heteropatriarchal families" and the "intimate connections between citizenship and a patriarchal sexual order" (Luibhéid 2005: xv, xix; see also chapter 4.4).

The idealised picture of households and families as "benign groups of generous individuals, banded together in happy union" (Bergmann 1995: 146) has been equally challenged by feminist economists. They have criticised the masking of gender-based power asymmetries, gender roles and responsibilities, all of which structure decision-making processes, household divisions of labour, resource allocations and, consequently, population movement (e.g. Agarwal 1997; Katz 1997; Lawson 1998; Barker/Feiner 2004: 19ff.). Let me borrow from findings in the gender and migration scholarship to shed light on this point. As a starter, it goes without saying that the aforementioned migration of women who escape violent or exploitative relations is incompatible with the putative family cosiness of the Mincer model. Similarly, the already mentioned migration of daughters as a result of discriminatory inheritance patterns is a tentative example of how the political economy of the household distributes resources along the lines of gender and the way this can shape migration. Moreover, a recent draft report to the World Bank on gender differences in remittance motives challenges the assumption of overall altruism in the family and the equal redistribution of migration gains: Accordingly, women are found to remit more money to distant family members than men, they send it for longer periods and prioritise expenses on basic commodities like food and clothing whereas men remit more to invest (Orozco/Lowell/Schneider 2006). Men's remittances, on the other hand, are oftentimes positively related to their parents' inheritable assets (ibid.: 7). According to Manuel Orozco, B. Lindsay Lowell and Johanna Schneider (ibid.) this suggests that female migrants keep closer ties to their families and act more altruistically than men.

Other cases alert us to gender role beliefs, which severely limit the horizon of family migration decisions. Men are pushed into migration through the ideal of a male breadwinner or other social customs. Some women, on the other hand, have a ‘duty’ to migrate in order to finance their brothers’ education (Lawson 1998: 48f.). In countries like the Philippines, Taiwan, Indonesia and Thailand, they have an onus to ‘repay’ their parents for bringing them up (Chant 1998: 12). And women often privilege their male partner’s careers in relocation decisions – at times even to the detriment of family welfare. While this is incompatible with the Mincer model, it is an indication that men’s and women’s contributions to the household and hence their gains and losses from migration are valued differently (Bielby/Bielby 1992; Willis/Yeoh 2000b; Jürges 2005). In fact, accompanying spouses of high-skilled workers moving from Singapore to China, commented to Katie Willis and Brenda Yeoh (2000b) that it was their burden to follow their husbands rather than pursue their own interests. Moreover, they were often faced with the migration decision as a *fait accompli*, which clearly indicates that household members’ decision-making roles differ according to (internalised) social norms. Finally, the study by Willis and Yeoh unearths scant evidence of the inner-household division of labour underwriting gender divisions of mobility: While marriage and children did not severely affect the migration decisions of men, their female partners were mainly concerned with the post-migration combination of paid work and the household. When juggling the two spheres seemed impossible, many either abstained from the move or gave up their jobs, often becoming fulltime housewives in China.

Though there is little reason to think that all women behave like this, it has been identified as a general trend that they bear the brunt of family related work in migration processes (Aufhauser 2000: 19; Lutz 2007: 166). Even Mincer (1978: 766) seems to be aware of this fact when he reasons that women’s withdrawal from the labour force at destination reflected “a temporary increase in family demand for nonmarket activity necessitated by setting up a new household in a new environment”. But while he explains and legitimises this gender division of labour in terms of family welfare maximisation and natural gender differences, Chant (1992b: 198) turns the spotlight on social gender role constraints:

Over and above the constraints exerted on female mobility by practical aspects of household and family life, the apparently greater role of migrant women in maintaining ties with their places of origin points also to a strong symbolic and ideological impact of the family and kinship in shaping women’s movements and its corollaries.

It comes as no surprise then that solo moves by women are likelier when they have less responsibility for household management (ibid.) or when they move from cultural contexts where it is common that females from the broader family network share the reproductive

work (Lutz 2007: 163). It is also no coincidence that many women with family dependants opt for more complex patterns of settlement and return. Recent labour migration of Vietnamese women to Hanoi, for example, shows that they return regularly as they find it difficult to let go of their role as home workers and mothers (Resurreccion/Khanh 2006). Similarly, while about 80% of Eastern European labour migrants to Germany, who entered on a short-term contract basis in the mid 1990s were male, many women set up complex systems of rotation and shuttle mobility, travelling to and fro, sometimes on a daily basis, to combine paid employment and care for their family at home (Kofman 1999: 282; Morokvasic 2003, 2004; Coyle 2007: 42f.; Lutz 2007: 125f.). If men commuted, however, they were more likely to follow the needs of their employers. Similar patterns were observed with regards to migration in Southern Africa (Dodson/Crush 2004: 101) and in Hong Kong-Canada mobility, which Morokvasic (2003: 121f.) interprets in the following way:

The predominance of women in short distance movements [...] is related to the divisions of labour in the household and women's mothering role. Men constructed as 'breadwinners' send money to family staying behind and return seldom, while migrant women try to combine the care for the family with their work and return more often [...] the going back and forth of men is related to career goals, whereas their wives go back and forth to ensure their kin's well being.

Whether it is women or men who migrate, their move, their "time-space flexibility", is often predicated on the "time-space constraint" of their partners and other family members who take over household chores (Willis/Yeoh 2000b: 254). Mincer's silence on these time-space constraints, on reproductive work and on the above mentioned power asymmetries, gender roles and responsibilities that often work to the detriment of women in family migration decisions is another indicator of the masculine experience his model is anchored in.

This is confirmed by the *New Home Economics* resonances in Mincer's model, which rationalise the gender wage gap, the gender division of labour in heterosexual households and hence women's role as tied migration partners in terms of personal ability, individual choice, specialisation and efficiency. Via circular reasoning, women appear as self-determining their fate as tied partners: As a result of the gender division of labour within the household, they decide to invest less in human capital and do consequently earn lower wages. From that follows that they gain/lose less from migration and are prone to be the tied partner. Considering that they experience labour market withdrawals as tied movers and reduced wage progress as tied stayers, their tied status, in turn, reinforces the gender

division of labour.<sup>15</sup> A similar argument is made about the gender segregation in the labour market:

The expectation of becoming a tied spouse, which characterised most women until very recently, may have had some influence on women's initial occupational choices. The preference for occupations which are most easily transferable geographically may have contributed in part to the concentration of women in such traditional occupations as teaching, nursing, and secretarial work. (Mincer 1978: 756)

In other words, gender segregation in the labour market is taken as an exogenous variable to explain women's status as tied partners, while this status is taken as an exogenous variable to explain the continuity of a gender segregated labour market. Feminist economists, by contrast, have claimed that interpretations of that kind "are thinly disguised apologies for the existing social hierarchies" and have argued that economic inequalities are rooted "in social processes of inclusion, valorization and representation" (Barker/Feiner 2004: 2) that constitute individuals differently and thus mediate their articulation into the economy (see the following chapter).

To conclude this section, the gendered unpacking of the institution of the family in Mincer's account reveals that it is permeated with a retrograde gender knowledge of woman as first and foremost wife and mother, less inclined to migrate as she is dependent on a 'mobile' productive male breadwinner. It rests on "an essentialist understanding of sexual difference as determined by a heterosexual and biologically defined complementarity of the sexes" (Hewitson 2003: 267). Individuals are essentially different in their biological endowments and inherently complementary in that they form mutually beneficial, welfare-maximising, heterosexual bonds. The Mincer model thus naturalises the male-female distinction, 'inherent' gender complementarity and women's disadvantage in the labour market. It further plays its part in constructing exceptions to the norm of the nuclear family as deviant and/or irrelevant – extended families, same-sex couples, single parent and transnational families. Those that do not live up to the single breadwinner ideal, for example, families coming from peasant cultures where wives and children are expected to provide income for the family are equally othered (Harzig 2003: 51). Herein lies the model's inherent bias towards modern bourgeois masculinity and heteronormativity.

Again, this is not to allege that it adequately reflects the migration experience of nuclear families while simply misrepresenting others. As Connell and Messerschmidt (2005: 838) have clarified,

hegemonic masculinities can be constructed that do not correspond closely to the lives of any actual men. Yet these models do, in various ways, express widespread

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<sup>15</sup> In Mincer's (1978: 771) words, "[t]ied migration ranks next to child rearing as an important dampening influence in the life-cycle wage evolution of women."

ideals, fantasies and desires. They provide models of relations with women and solutions to problems of gender relations.

Against that background, Mincer's approach clearly participates in the *construction* of a *particular* meaning of what it means to be a migrant family. This meaning is imbued with a *particular* type of masculinity – one that rests on domestic patriarchy and a rigid household division of labour, the material wealth that allows for a single breadwinner and compulsory heterosexuality, put bluntly: modern bourgeois masculinity. That Mincer also refers to poor families and double-income couples does not derogate the normative character of this ideal. Indeed, as Mincer's reader is left with the impression that families would be better off if women earned less and were less active in the labour force, his text can be interpreted as a subtle plea for the male breadwinner model – with all its gender-, race- and class implications.

### 4.3 *Who is doing the dirty work? – assumptions about the labour market*

*If one asks a recently arrived migrant woman today where the opportunities for work lie in Europe, she will tell you that apart from sex work or domestic work, the avenues for employment are closed to her.*

Annie Phizacklea (2003: 89)

Mincer's and Borjas' migration models are deeply entrenched in the methodological individualism of the neoclassical microeconomics of the labour market, according to which the latter functions like any other market in that it follows the laws of supply and demand (e.g. Borjas 1996; Ehrenberg/Smith 2006): Wages, working conditions and the number of workers employed are determined jointly by the hiring and firing decisions of employers trying to maximise profits (labour demand) and the decisions of workers wanting to maximise income and leisure time (labour supply). Earnings – the price for labour – reflect workers' actual market productivities,<sup>16</sup> which are directly related to the human capital stock (skills) that they have acquired by making rational decisions about investing in themselves, for example, through education and job trainings. Finally, as “profit-maximizing employers are likely to value the same factors in any market economy” (Borjas 1987: 534), the Roy-Borjas model rests on the assumption that skills are perfectly

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<sup>16</sup> Since Gary Becker's doctoral dissertation, *The Economics of Discrimination* (1957), neoclassical labour economics also accounts for wage and occupational discrimination. They are theorised in terms of personal prejudice – a taste for discrimination – on the side of employers, employees or customers and assumed to vanish in competitive markets, at least in the long run (e.g. Ehrenberg/Smith 2006: 406ff.). Thus, neoclassical theories of labour market discrimination are firmly rooted in the notion of wages as prices (Power/Mutari/Figart 2003: 73f.) – a notion, which will be challenged in the course of this chapter.

transferable between different labour markets and that earnings are consummately correlated.

A foray through feminist economics and the gender and migration research suggests a critical reading of this core of Mincer's and Borjas' models from four different angles: the underlying concept of work, the ostensibly gender-neutral mechanisms of supply and demand, the notion of wages as prices for the labour performed and the transferability of skills. Let me begin with the restrictive – and I would add masculine coded – definition of work. Clearly limited to paid employment, both 'labour migration' models ignore all labour, which is not paid, including the unpaid domestic labour disproportionately done by women. They thereby under-appreciate the aforementioned migration motives related to reproductive tasks and are blind to the fact that the ascription of particular activities *as* work fundamentally shapes who leaves home. A potent example is the re-definition of women's contribution to the peasant household as non-work in the context of the commodification of agriculture in Peru, which resulted in a much higher rate of out-migration for daughters than for sons (Lawson 1998: 44f.). Moreover, both models implicitly code unpaid domestic labour as non-work. In so doing, they fit closely with most nation-states' notion of citizenship as requiring immigrants' access to paid work (Erel 2003: 264) and play a role in consolidating the devaluation of household chores – another indication of their masculine bias.

Turning to the supply side of the immigrant labour market, there is ample evidence that it is shaped by cultural prescriptions of *appropriate* work for women and men (Moch 2005: 102). That women are not always allowed to engage in paid employment has already been mentioned. Furthermore, the highly skilled among them may be denied intra-company overseas assignment by their employers because of their gender (Kofman 1999: 285). Similarly, narratives about certain destinations as places where only women go to work as domestics might hamper male migration. In each case, bringing gender to the forefront reveals that there is more to labour migration than individuals making decisions on the basis of income differentials.

Matters become even more complex if one considers that the supply of migrant labour is linked to macro-economic processes, which affect women and men differently. This point has been made for the Global South and Eastern Europe where the costs of neoliberal restructuring and deindustrialisation have disproportionately fallen upon women, which boosted female out-migration (Kofman et al. 2000: 24; Jolly/Reeves 2005: 11; Coyle 2007: 40). Thanh-Dam Truong (1996: 43) has gone as far to claim that crisis-ridden labour-exporting states have particularly instrumentalised female workers as sources of



remittances and foreign exchange to solve balance of payment and debt problems and contain unemployment (see also Mills 2003: 46f.). One of the best researched examples is the Philippines, which keeps several labour brokering agencies to identify and open up new markets for Filipinos and Filipinas through elaborate marketing strategies, while simultaneously facilitating their out-migration through bilateral arrangements with labour importing states (Rodriguez 2010). Constructions of masculinity and femininity in glossy brochures for prospective employers play an important role in this process (ibid.). The models by Mincer and Borjas, however, leave no space for this knowledge about how gender shapes the supply of immigrant labour.

The same argument can be made with regards to the demand for immigrants, which is equally differentiated along the lines of gender (and ethnicity, citizen status, and age etc.). Overall, there is a tendency to treat immigrant workers as a source of cheap labour and relegate them to low paid, menial “3D” positions (dirty, dangerous, degrading) (ILO 2007: 30). Yet, as class exploitation, racial and sexual discrimination intersect and reinforce each other, migrant women are confined to an even narrower range of occupations than their male home-state peers (Morokvasic 1984: 891; Chant/Radcliffe 1992: 16; Aufhauser 2000: 119; Piper 2000: 208; ILO 2007: 31). The bulk of female immigrants is clustered in domestic labour, entertainment, sex work, agriculture, public education and health, food processing and service, cleaning and labour intensive industries such as textiles or microelectronics (e.g. Truong 1996; Kofman et al. 2000: 30; Piper 2003; [www.iom.int](http://www.iom.int)). In France and Italy, for example, more than half of all migrant women are estimated to be involved in domestic work (Piper 2005: 6). Thus, the most readily available jobs are either hidden within the private sphere or are public extensions of domestic, caretaking, mothering, diligent, and obedient roles. Consequently, Helma Lutz (2007: 30) speaks of “an analogy of the gender of work and the gender of workers” (translation: PE). As Pfeiffer et al. (2006: 2) state in a draft paper for the World Bank, this “[g]ender segmentation of the immigrant labor market in receiving countries undoubtedly influences the gender composition of immigration flows.” Therefore, the dominance of women in the South-to-North flow of nurses and the predominance of men in that of doctors, for example, are not accidental (Jolly/Reeves 2005: 27).

Yet, this evidence alone does not refute the accounts of Mincer and Borjas, who might attribute these “gender-ghettos in waged work” (Phillips/Taylor 1980: 80) to different preferences and skills of women and men. While Mincer is in fact aware of women’s lower labour market participation, their confinement to certain job sectors and lower wages, he ultimately legitimises this position with women’s comparative advantage in housework (see

chapter 4.2). Borjas, on the other hand, only once indicates the power of social structures of constraint when he (1991: 33) notes “the possibility that immigrant earnings may be reduced because of their ethnic or racial background” – but the remark is in brackets and its implication explicitly excluded from the model and the empirical application alike. The overall message instead is that “[m]ean earnings of migrants depend on the mean education of migrants [...] and on the mean level of their unobserved characteristics” (ibid.: 39). This leads to the assumption of a perfect correlation of earnings across countries, that is, the notion that individuals who rank highly in their country of origin are also at the top of the income distribution at destination. What this comes down to is an explicit rendering of social structures in the migration process as irrelevant, and ultimately, a rationalisation of related differences and hierarchies, including those based on gender.

Unsurprisingly, feminists have put forward different explanations of gender-segmented labour markets. Above all, they have stressed that “an overwhelmingly homogeneous cross-cultural apparatus” (Truong 1996: 29) marks certain types of work as feminine to cheapen the costs of labour to capital within and across national borders. The construction of gendered categories and boundaries in the economy is thus pegged to group-linked privileges, to the appropriation of wealth, status, and control. This includes a masculinised workforce who is viewed and views itself as unsuited for more feminised jobs and is unwilling to work for lower wages. Indeed, Morokvasic (1984: 890) has argued that oftentimes the exploitation of their female fellows is immigrant men’s only opportunity for capital accumulation. As a consequence, women are sometimes bluntly excluded from certain occupations as research on Chinese enclaves in New York City evinces, where better paying jobs are reserved for men (Pessar 1999: 581). But women also benefit from gendered constructions of cheap labour, for example, when they hire migrant women as inexpensive domestic workers to free themselves from cumbersome household chores while leaving the traditional connotations of domestic work and existing gender orders intact (Lutz 2007: 40).

The other side of the story of feminised sectors in the labour market are workers who internalise and reproduce a certain image of a ‘feminine’ workforce, which is always-already neat, motherly loving, caring, docile, patient as well as dextrous and more willing and/or suited for tedious and repetitive tasks (Pessar 1999: 581; Barker/Feiner 2004: 63). Advertisements of ‘clean Polish women’ or ‘nimble Hungarians’ (Haidinger 2007: 55) and Filipinas who believe themselves to possess the very race and gender traits promoted by the labour brokering Philippine state (Rodriguez 2006) are just the tip of the iceberg concerning the discursive production of a feminised workforce. These constructions also impinge upon

and hierarchise male workers and can be illustrated with the finding of more and more gay migrant men entering feminised sectors of the economy (Manalansan IV 2006: 238f.).

The last point in my critical reading of Mincer's and Borjas' labour market assumptions draws on the long-standing feminist argument that pay differentials and the notion of skill are themselves tainted with a specific gender knowledge – "skilled work is work that women don't do" (Phillips/Taylor 1980: 86). Chapter 4.1 already demonstrated that 'skill' as it is used by Borjas and Mincer undervalues capabilities related to reproductive labour, hides gender-specific constraints to acquire human capital and is blind to the fact that skill distinctions are to some extent arbitrary classifications. In addition, the assumption that immigrant earnings simply reflect education and unobserved qualities of migrants blanks out the problem of deskilling. But exactly the non-recognition of qualifications is a general problem for migrants. It is particularly severe for migrant women, who tend to experience an even higher post-migration deskilling than their male counterparts (Pessar 1999: 581; Aufhauser 2000: 119; Harzig 2003: 52; Kofman/ Raghuram 2006: 296; ILO 2007: 31). This is partly due to their frequent immigrant status as dependent spouse, which renders their labour market qualifications invisible (Man 2004: 138) and partly linked to the historical under-valorisation and codification of their skills as natural traits (Barker/Feiner 2004: 51). So, while the evidence of racial deskilling already flies in the face of the assumed link between skills/productivity and jobs/wages in Mincer's and Borjas' human capital applications, this link is even more unlikely to materialise for immigrant women. Borjas' assumption of a perfect correlation of earnings across countries is thus another indication of its white masculine bias.

More generally speaking, the hitherto line of reasoning has shown that labour markets are social institutions within which wages are no mere prices for certain worker characteristics, but

a social practice [...] used to enforce implicit beliefs about the ordering of society by factors such as race-ethnicity, class, and gender. They serve as a means of establishing and reinforcing what men and women should be doing and how they should live. (Power/Mutari/Figart 2003: 74)

It is worth highlighting that these processes are crucially mediated by politics and the state, which govern and interpret the social position and meaning of certain types of work and workers. Shirlena Huang and Brenda S.A. Yeoh (2003: 89), for example, have found that the Singaporean state considers domestic work as "'non-work' and an ability that should come naturally to women", whereas the work of (mainly male) foreign construction workers is regarded as skilled. As a result, only the latter are protected under the Employment Act. The Canadian point system equally devalues feminised work because it

does not recognise the skills of domestic workers (Harzig 2003: 45). Furthermore, states severely curtail the access to the formal labour market of those who entered as dependent spouses (see the next chapter). And they channel women into a narrow range of occupations through specific visa categories like the Japanese entertainers' visa or by promoting only certain overseas jobs like domestic service and nursing as in the case of the Philippines (Piper 2000: 210; Rodriguez 2006). Nicola Piper (2003: 725) has therefore labelled these types of state policies as "macro-level forms of violence against women."

Altogether, the models by Mincer and Borjas have a very thin comprehension of gender as social structure that constitutes individuals differently and sets the parameters for their operation within the world of work. Indeed, their methodological individualism points to a gender knowledge that interprets and legitimises existing gender inequalities in the labour market as a result of voluntary choice. A similar argument could be made about their stance towards the role of race, ethnicity and other social stratifiers. This, again, suggests that alleged universal categories like 'migrant', 'skilled' or 'unskilled worker' bear a white, masculine and – probably to a lesser extent – heterosexual bias while less privileged gendered and racialised social positions and the respective hampering factors to migration are framed as particularity.

#### **4.4 Not any body can become a citizen – the telling silence on immigration policies**

*In the Bahamas, I can be found guilty of the crime of lesbianism and imprisoned for twenty years. In the United States of North America where I now live, I must constantly keep in my possession the immigrant (green) card [...]. If I traverse any of the borders of twenty-two states even with green card in hand, I may be convicted of crimes variously defined as 'lewd unnatural; lascivious conduct; deviate sexual intercourse; gross indecency; buggery or crimes against nature'.*

M. Jacqui Alexander (1994: 5)

Including a section on immigration policies into an analysis of the gender knowledge in economic migration theories is not an obvious thing to do as these theories are well-known and have long been reprimanded for their ignorance towards the political dimension (e.g. Arango 2000: 286; Hatton/Williamson 2002). And indeed, the Mincer model *de facto* assumes the absence of immigration policies.<sup>17</sup> Yet, acknowledging that the difficulties of navigating immigration systems influence relocation decisions, other economists integrate them in the cost-variable of their models (e.g. Hunt/Mueller 2004; Péridy 2006). Likewise,

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<sup>17</sup> Correspondingly, Mincer's empirical application of the model is limited to internal US migration. Yet, within migration studies, his model is not recognised in that limited sense.

in his milestone 1987 article, Borjas (1987: 535) admits that immigration quotas for specific countries “play the important role of increasing migration costs of emigrants [...] since these individuals will presumably have to compete (and invest time and effort) to obtain the relatively scarce visas.” Still, his assumption of constant migration costs in the population suggests that his approach is indifferent to the fact that states’ ongoing efforts to control the entry of individuals to their territory are not gender (and, one could at least add, race and class) neutral. I will now undertake a short digression into the selectivity of immigration policies to demonstrate that sidelining it – whether through not at all conceptualising the state or in a manner that is blind to social axes of exclusion – is another indicator of the modern bourgeois masculinist and heterosexist prejudice of Mincer’s and Borjas’ migration models.

The historical record exhibits that nation states have overtly excluded immigrants on the basis of race, gender, sexuality, and class attempting to ensure “a ‘proper’ sexual and gender order, reproduction of white racial privilege, and exploitation of the poor” (Luibhéid 2005: xiv). The 1875 US *Page Act*, for example, banned reputed Chinese female prostitutes from immigration, the 1920s so called *Ladies Agreement* ended the migration of Japanese brides considered to threaten the imagined white supremacy and by 1924, the entry of all Asians was prevented. At the same time, gender-transitive migrants were excluded and poor working class wives as well as women from all backgrounds without a male breadwinner at their side faced growing difficulties entering due to the fear of a superabundance of poor children. (ibid.: xiv-xv) In the early twentieth century, women from Asia, the Caribbean and Africa were also identified as a threat to the white Canada and targeted for exclusion while their male fellows were allowed entry as cheap labour and Europeans were actively recruited to restock the nation (Thobani 2000: 36, 46). Turning to the middle of the century, the 1952 US *Immigration and Nationality Act* (also known as the *McCarran-Walter Act*) barred homosexuals (and adulterers) from entry – a ban that the US only consigned to history as the last industrialised country in 1990 (Luibhéid 2005: xii; Somerville 2005; Human Rights Watch/Immigration Equality 2006: 24-28; Manalansan IV 2006: 231). This policing of citizenship along the lines of sexuality was

part of a larger cultural and political emphasis on sexual discipline and the promotion of the nuclear family after World War II, an ideological vision that had economic consequences, since the nuclear family form played a necessary role in restructuring the postwar economy by expanding consumption of household goods and services. (Somerville 2005: 86)

Nowadays, the discriminatory logic of migration policies is articulated in more subtle ways. As states distinguish skilled-independent-working from unskilled-dependent-family migrants, the selection criteria for the former group bear a clear race, class and gender bias.

The German ‘Greencard’ is a case in point: Between 2000 and 2004, a special programme (*Sofortprogramm zur Deckung des IT-Fachkräftebedarfs*) granted IT-experts a five-year residence permit to meet the demand for high-skilled workers in the sector. As only those with earnings of at least 50.000€ and/or an appropriate university degree could enter, the programme was clearly laden with middle- if not upper-classism. By the same token, the imperative of fluency in English or French to qualify as ‘skilled’ in the Canadian point system evidently privileges Europeans (Harzig 2003: 46f.). The skills associated with feminised labour, on the other hand, are excluded from the point system while gender discrimination in access to human capital is ignored (ibid.: 45; Man 2004: 138; McLaren/Dyck 2004). A similar tendency has been identified for the 2002 South African Immigration Act, which, among other shortcomings, disregards the fact that women’s labour is oftentimes less formalised than men’s, which is why they are less likely to have certified records of their work experience (Dodson/Crush 2004: 105). Yet, these documents are necessary if women want to prove that they are “foreigners who are needed”, “exceptionally skilled or qualified people” and will increase South African “skilled human resources” (ibid.: 103). In their detailed analysis of the act, Belinda Dodson and Jonathan Crush find that due to this and other gender blind spots, nearly all legal gates for the entry of migrant labour favour male migration streams – a classic case of “state masculinism” that is by no means unique to South Africa (ibid.: 115). Assuming that men and women face constant migration costs as Borjas does, ultimately denies this masculinism.

One of its consequences is that in Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand women rather than men enter as dependents (Piper 2005: 4). Yet, once they have done so, they are often prohibited from seeking employment, which increases their dependency and forces them into off-the-books jobs (Dodson/Crush 2004: 106; Moch 2005: 100).<sup>18</sup> While in Germany, for example, between 1973 and 1979, there was a complete working-ban on spouses, they later on had to wait for four years to apply for work permits (Kofman 1999: 278). Additionally, as their right of residence is conditioned on their partner, dependents become liable for deportation in case of separation, which can trap them in abusive relationships (Phizacklea 1998: 29; Kofman et al. 2000: 25; Dodson/Crush 2004: 97f.). On the whole, it has thus been argued that family migration laws are still predicated on a male breadwinner ethos (Harzig 2003: 51; Dodson/Crush 2004; Moch 2005: 100). This is further evinced by the fact that migrant women who petition for family reunification are still less likely to be successful than men, particularly if they earn low wages, work in the informal sector and even less so if they are live-in domestics (Moch 2005: 100; Schwenken 2006:

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<sup>18</sup> This prohibition might itself replicate the male bias in migration flows as social norms in many parts of the world stigmatise unemployed men who rely on a female breadwinner (Dodson/Crush 2004: 106).

89; Caixeta 2007: 83). A reformulation of Mincer's model in this light would not only consider wage differentials between spouses but would acknowledge that "[i]t is easier for women than for men to come as dependants because of the overall male breadwinner ideology that expects them to do so" (Erel/Morokvasic/Shiozaki 2003: 11). Ignoring the power of this ideology in migration processes does again come down to naturalising the respective asymmetrical gender relations.

It would be equally challenging to include the migration experience of same-sex, transgender or non-marital families in Mincer's model. As they do not fit the norm of the conjugal nuclear, heteropatriarchal family at the heart of immigration systems across the world, their access to family reunification as one of the most important routes to visas and permanent legal residency is rigorously impeded. The US is a telling example: Here, the 1996 *Federal Defense of Marriage Act* declared that marriage meant "only a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife" (quoted in Human Rights Watch/Immigration Equality 2006: 30). As a result, couples who move to the US together and bi-national couples with one US citizen, who do not fit this definition, rely on separate tourist, student and training visas, which often entail exorbitant course fees and do not let the holder work, or employment-based visas, which are hard to get (Luibhéid 2005: xiii; Human Rights Watch/Immigration Equality 2006: 37ff.). Others opt for arranged heterosexual marriages to gain residency rights (e.g. Human Rights Watch and Immigration Equality 2006: 104ff.). This has little to do with the migration decision-making scenarios invoked by Mincer's and Borjas' theories. But there is no doubt that similar destinies can be found elsewhere. In Europe, for example, marriage is the principal route of legal entry for third-country nationals, but the right to marry is an overwhelmingly heterosexual prerogative (Elman 2000). On a world scale, only 14 countries allow joint residency applications from same-sex couples (Holt 2004: 30). Yet, even in those cases they are disadvantaged when they are asked to fulfil the same criteria to demonstrate the sincerity of their relationship as their heterosexual counterparts. On a more abstract level, the class, racial and gender selectivities of the immigration control apparatus identified in this section attest to the mutually constitutive relation of state and social relations stressed by (neo-)Marxian and feminist state theorists (e.g. Sauer 2001): While the state is permeated by gendered, racial, class etc. differences, it partly (re-)constitutes and legitimates the latter – through the definition of migrants' legal standing, of what is moral in gender relations and what is considered as work or non-work (see also chapter 4.3). Thus, like labour markets, the macro-level 'institution' 'immigration policy' not simply applies pre-existing categories to individuals but actively produces distinctions along the lines of gender, race, class etc. and links them to exclusionary processes of nation-making and citizenship (Luibhéid 2005:

xvi).<sup>19</sup> As these constructions critically mediate the conditions for and the benefits from migration, they should be part and parcel of any theory of the relocation of people.

Pulling the threads of this last analytical chapter together, one can conclude that immigration regulations both construct gendered, racialised and class-related concepts of ‘the migrant’ and produce *de facto* discrimination. It is therefore reasonable to argue that they influence – not determine – the composition of population flows. The two migrant prototypes displayed in the economic models under investigation, however, are noteworthy unaware of these processes: neither Borjas’ single migrant, who wanders around in the global labour market seeking his fortune, nor Mincer’s male breadwinner couple have to take the masculinity and heteronormativity of national immigration policies into account. How else could Borjas conceptualise migration costs as constant across populations? And how else could Mincer (1978: 768f.) explain the post-migration earnings losses and unemployment of accompanying wives as induced by the gains of their husbands? This ignorance towards the fact that legal and governmental regimes actively participate in structuring migration dynamics along the lines of gender, race, and class, again, hints at a knowledge that either does not know of these selectivities or renders them irrelevant. In any case, the myth of a gender-etc.-neutral immigration policy frames the migration experience of many people as deviant – of women, same-sex couples, families that are not based on blood or official legal ties, racial minorities and those who cannot meet certain income or human capital requirements. At the same time, a very peculiar, namely privileged white, bourgeois and heterosexual male immigration experience is inscribed as the norm.

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<sup>19</sup> That this process is contradictory and contingent can be exemplified by the paradox of the aforementioned policing of certain sexualities and the simultaneous sexualisation of the workforce by the state, for example, in tourism or the labour export strategies of the Philippines (Alexander 1994: 19; Rodriguez 2006; see chapter 4.3).



## 5. Conclusion

At the outset I raised the question whether existing migration theories could serve as a basis for engendering the theorising of the field. Regarding Jacob Mincer's model of family migration and the Roy-Borjas selection model, this question can be answered with a clear 'no'. The analysis of their assumptions about the individual, the family, the institution of the labour market and immigration policies evinced that both models are soaked with a narrow gendered meaning of what is a migrant. In Borjas' model, seemingly gender-neutral abstract concepts construct the prototypical mover as a rational, unattached and risk-neutral man, exclusively driven by the desire for higher wages, able to shop around the global immigration market as his human capital is valued equally across the globe and immigration systems do not affect him differently from other migrants. In the Mincer model this archetypical being is part of a heterosexual nuclear migrant family. His wife, who is less skilled and less involved in the labour market, but has an innate comparative advantage in housework, is less inclined to migrate, but chooses to follow in the footsteps of her husband for the sake of family welfare.

My cursory forays into migration studies have shown that many labour migrants fall short of this model: Due to social customs, they are pushed to journey abroad; or they are averted from migration even if their move would maximise family welfare; they abstain from relocation for they don't know how to organise reproductive tasks without the back-up of their family; they opt for complex rotation systems to combine family and paid work; as a couple, they cannot jointly apply for residency for they are same-sex; their skills are devalued because of their migrant status and they are confined to specific sectors of the labour market; they are prohibited from work because they entered as a dependent spouse – to recite just a few experiences. Of course, the task of model building requires an abstraction from these and other details of reality. Nonetheless, I have claimed that the exclusion of this everyday migrant knowledge regarding the structuration of the migration process through social relations of gender, race, and class, is not just a random simplification. Far from it, it is derived from and reinscribes a white, relatively affluent and heterosexual male subject position, in other words: modern bourgeois masculinity and heteronormativity. Setting this as the norm and constructing everything else as deviant, particular and therefore irrelevant suggests a gender knowledge that is either unaware of gender as a powerful differentiating and hierarchising factor or even legitimises it. While the latter is definitely true for the Mincer model, which ultimately attributes gender differences in migration patterns to given biological differences, such flagrantly sexist justifications and essentialism could not be found in Borjas' accounts.

It goes without saying that the prototypical mover in Mincer's and Borjas' models is blatantly at odds with the representation of migrants as poor, of racial and ethnic minority background and travelling in masses, which dominates Western media and political debates. It is equally incompatible with the working class families that show up in Mincer's empirical analysis and with the poor, unskilled immigrants Borjas has in mind when he campaigns for a US point-immigration-system that admits only the best and the brightest.<sup>20</sup> None the less, the basic rationale of both models is beset with the privileged migration experience of white, middle-class men or, to again quote Patricia Pessar (1999: 578), with the role model of "Western man' headed off to the cities where the benefits of modern life could be attained." This sheds new light on the "Achilles' heel of neo-classical [migration] theory" (Arango 2000: 286), that is the observation that population movements are not dominated by the poorest, but rather by moderately poor countries and the middle classes: On a very abstract level, one could go as far to argue that this finding does not contradict neoclassical migration economics as it is in fact limited to the migration of white, middle-class men. But of course, the models' claim is more encompassing.

What lessons for migration theory can be drawn from these realisations? To begin with, simply attaching a gender subscript to the key variables in neoclassical economic models of migration as it has been proposed by some economists would not amount to more than mere window-dressing. As the basic assumptions of the paradigm are deeply rooted in the privileged position of white, heterosexual, bourgeois man, the inclusion of one or another of the excluded migrant realities would not give us a significantly better picture (for a similar argument see Pujol 1995: 29). Other theories, particularly those with a stronger focus on social institutions (e.g. Piore 1979) might be more suitable starting points for incorporating gender. On the other hand, the diversity of gendered migration experiences and trajectories cited in the course of the hitherto argument emphasises the tension between the heterogeneity and complexity of human life and the desire to generate 'universal' knowledge that "explain[s] away the strange and the different" (Kaul 2004: 192). In the sense that "converting all forms of knowledge to Knowledge [constitutes] an endeavour of immense epistemic violence as it abstracts out those who 'do not fit' in the story" (ibid.: 191), one could indeed conclude that greater attention to the local skirmishes around gender

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<sup>20</sup> See Borjas' website ([www.borjas.com](http://www.borjas.com)) for a selection of articles that make this point. The site is worth a visit if only for statements such as the following from the article *Let's Be Clear About Whom We Want to Let in* published in the *Washington Post* on December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2001: "We'll never secure our borders completely. But we should do all we can to make sure we understand why we admit the people we do. The adoption of a more rational policy for granting permanent visas is but one step in a long road. Keep in mind: The terrorist attacks provided a shocking response to one highly contentious issue in the immigration debate. Supporters of a more liberal immigration policy have claimed that some immigrants do jobs that natives do not want to do. Sept. 11 proved them right." (<http://ksghome.harvard.edu/~GBorjas/Papers/WP122301.html> [25-10-07]).

and migration may be more useful than advocating a wholesale gendered theory of migration. In any case, the analysis in hand underscores the need for a more sustained dialogue between feminist and mainstream migration scholarship to further engender the field.

And what are the lessons for migration policy? First, concrete migration experiences, the migration world as a coding trickster, should be given at least as much attention in the policy process as grand theories. Second, it is probably not too far-fetched to argue that the flawed gender knowledge within these theories can lead to false conclusions about the movement of men and women and can block the awareness of problems specific to certain migrant groups. It might also be deliberately referred to in order to prevent changes to existing gender orders. In both cases, the likely result will be discriminatory policies. A greater sensibility of policymakers towards the gender knowledge of the theories that guide their policies is therefore more than advisable. Yet, how exactly the spirit of migration theories in general and economic models in particular translates into political practice has not yet been researched. Are economic theories really as influential in the policy process as I assumed? How do they relate to other accounts of migration? Which actors draw on which knowledge about migration and what are their interests? And what policy difference would gender-sensitive theories make? How would they impact migrant subjectivities? These are some of the thorny research questions lying ahead.

Let me exemplify two interfaces of migration economics and policy that might serve as starting points for further thinking about the theory-policy-subjectivity nexus in the field of economics, migration and gender. First, the advent of human capital logic within worldwide immigration systems (e.g. Dodson/ Crush 2004; McLaren/Dyck 2004) points to a considerable influence of neoclassical economics in the field. It has been showcased above (chapter 4.4) that this narrow economic rationale tends to discriminate against women and those who cannot meet certain income or skill requirements. And it does not leave migrant subjectivities unaffected as McLaren and Dyck (2004) have shown with reference to the skill discourse within the Canadian point system. It constructs immigrant women as passive, homebound and a drain on the system, to which they react by limiting their own job opportunities and investing heavily in their children's education so that at least the latter can meet the idea of citizen self-sufficiency. This, in turn, "deepens the hegemonic masculinization of the public sphere into a 'masculine, tough new world of global competition'" (ibid.: 50).

Another example is the ideal of the nuclear, heterosexual family with a male breadwinner. Despite significant changes to the ways of living together, it is at the heart of migration

economics and most immigration systems alike. This not only results in the above mentioned legal barriers to alternative family structures, but also to enormous financial difficulties if migrant households are asked to survive on a single income. Moreover, the moral dictates of the bourgeois family ideal can lead to a demonised self-perception of immigrants, for example, if they have left their children behind (Lutz 2007: 129). In addition, the related construction of women as dependents encapsulates women in a passive role, which leaves little room for agency. This is mirrored in other stereotypical representations, for example, the construction of Eastern European women as passive “beautiful victims” (Andrijasevic 2007: 42) in anti-trafficking campaigns of the International Organization of Migration (IOM).

These digressions underscore that the prototypical migrants in the models by Mincer and Borjas should not be mistaken for accidental misrepresentations of reality. Being a site for the production of meaning in social relations, theory can proffer powerful leitmotifs that work on policies and subjectivities alike. Challenging these leitmotifs is no mere battle of words, but a struggle about the material quality of people’s lives, about personal freedom, the access to resources, state regulations, borders, legitimated violence and so on.

What part does this publication play in this struggle? In the long tradition of a feminist critique of the representation of Woman as Other, it set out to unravel the gender subtext of economic theories of migration. As these theories are to a great extent framed in gender-neutral terms, I chose a deconstructive research strategy in the sense of a critical reading of their basic assumptions for explicit representations, but also silences on gender. In order to ‘hear’ the latter, I drew on knowledge that has been produced by feminists working on migration and/or economics. Overall, this strategy proved to be fruitful as it indeed made many silences ‘speak’. Moreover, the cursory integration of other social structures like race or class in the sense of the intersectionality paradigm helped to clarify that the theories under investigation reconstruct a *specific type* of masculinity and not masculinity *per se*. Consequently, they not only represent Woman as the Other, but also other subjects like gay men and transgenders, ethnic minority men, poor people or families that do not fit the nuclear husband-wife model.

Still, my research was trapped in several dilemmas. First of all, the way I tried to identify the silences in the theories of Mincer and Borjas had a functionalist tendency in that it resulted in an arbitrary adding up of elements, which reproduced the whole – heteronormativity and modern bourgeois masculinity. It is not unlikely that I was blind to opposing gender views and therefore read too much social conservatism into the models. Second, my reliance on a knowledge that is *external* to the theories to identify the silences

*within* them, made this external knowledge – the insights from studies on gender and migration and feminist economics – appear as if it was absolute truth. However, it is equally constructed and gendered and partly replicates representations of women that I would not necessarily consider feminist. Finally, I did neither manage to fully counterbalance the tendency of the gender and migration scholarship to equate gender with women nor overcome the paucity of the literature on men and migration. Put differently, while this analysis has come relatively far in the process of deconstructing the gender knowledge in two economic models of migration, it is a far cry from doing research in “anOther way”, which, according to Nitasha Kaul (2004: 197) requires the researcher to “acknowledge the impossibility – even the violence – of comprehension involving a multiplicity of subjectivities”.

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