



# Migrating Women: Mothers, Carers, Workers and Citizens

27th October 2015

## Event report

The aims of the event were to:

- (a) bring together researchers across the university with interests in female migration or the effects of migration on women and their families;
- (b) alert participants about opportunities for collaborative research across disciplines and various categories (academic staff, postdoctoral and graduate members in the university and locality); and,
- (c) encourage interest in the new Japanese initiative on *Migrating Women: mothers, carers, workers and citizens*, which is funded by the Anglo-Daiwa Foundation. The aim here is to establish a collaborative research partnership between Cambridge University and Kobe University that focuses on the implications for social and economic policy and provision of the presence of migrant female workers, transformations in marriage patterns and the presence of migrant children.

The event brought together 23 scholars working in a range of fields including social anthropology, education and continuing education, gender studies, criminology, development studies, geography, sociology, politics and international studies (POLIS), divinity, modern and medieval languages.

Presenters reflected the diverse theoretical, methodological and disciplinary frameworks that are being applied to the study of migration as not only the movement of people, but of body parts, data, resources, technologies, cultural products and ideas as well as the significance of gender to these dynamics.

Dr Lauren Wilcox, POLIS and Deputy Director of the Centre for Gender Studies, presented on “Gender and Embodiment in Securitized Migration Regimes,” which explored challenges affecting the ‘body in movement’ within airports from security technologies such as body scanners that transform bodies into data. Lauren showed that whilst these technologies are premised on objectivity and managing de-materialised information, they re-inscribe regimes of power by coding bodies according to normative conceptions of the ‘trustworthy’ body as hetero-normative and white.

Professor Loraine Gelsthorpe, Institute of Criminology, spoke on, “The Criminalisation of Migrant Women,” which was based on research conducted in 2010-2011 with Liz Hales with migrant women in prison. The presentation explored how state focus on migration as a means of exerting control within a

context of rapid social change, diverse patterns of mobility, and a heightened terror threat has closed down legal migration routes and access to work and benefits for migrants. The criminalisation of migrants as an effect of these changes necessitates further exploration of the dynamics of people-smuggling to the operation of categories of 'offender' and 'victim' within criminal justice systems and their impact on the treatment of migrant women in particular.

Dr Zeynep Gurtin, Research Associate for ReproSoc, Department of Sociology, presented on, "Assisted Reproduction, Globalisation and Repro-Migrants," which provided a very different perspective to traditional migration scholarship. Focusing on the context of 'cross-border reproductive care,' Zeynep highlighted how migration is prompted by differences in access to resources and technologies (in this case assisted reproductive technologies) and how they are shaped by legal frameworks concerning regulation and timeframes under which treatment can be accessed. Zeynep showed how globalised medical care is shaped by processes of localisation that raise important questions concerning extra-territorial regulation as well as ethical and moral issues relating to individual autonomy, access and inequality.

Aline Khoury, Department of Development Studies, spoke on "Wife, mother, plus former worker: new challenges for Syrian refugee women in a Brazilian metropolis," which explored social and cultural issues affecting Syrian Muslim women refugees to Sao Paulo where knowledge of Islam is limited. Examining intersections of ethnicity, religion and culture are significant for understanding different migration narratives of settled Lebanese migrants who are largely Christian to new patterns of Arab migrants that are predominately Muslim and what support and provisions are required to assist their transition to their new home. Aline highlighted the importance of learning from policies of countries such as Brazil that have traditionally not been a destination for refugees and asylum seekers such as differences in processing times and receptive rates compared to European models and what this might mean for future migration flows.

The second part involved a roundtable discussion on the following questions relevant to developing future research collaborations exploring women and migration:

1. What are the three most urgent priorities in terms of research on women and migration?
2. How can interdisciplinary research in the University of Cambridge on women and migration best be developed and supported?
3. What can Cambridge best offer as a site for research on women and migration?

Attendees were grouped by research areas for the discussion into the following themes: 'Global Shifts Affecting Women and Children;' 'Women at the Border;' 'Moving Women, Moving families;' Women, Colonialism and Development;' and 'Women, Culture, Art and Religion.'

Discussions highlighted the importance of interdisciplinary research for exploring the complexities of migration and for understanding how flows are networked across individuals, institutions, technologies, resources, cultural products, ideologies and practices.

Key issues that were raised included the following:

- Migration should be researched multi-directionally rather than binary categories of 'migrant' vs. 'ones left behind.' Focusing on migration *flows* supports examination of how migration occurs in stages that are often non-linear, operates in unanticipated ways when flows are blocked off, and often have unintended consequences.
- Importance should be placed on exploring the 'migration journey' or 'migration as process' in order to understand the mechanisms of violence, trafficking and smuggling that happens to women 'in-between' the entry point and destination.
- The complexities of causes and conditions of forced migration should be explored to understand how decisions concerning who stays and who goes are made and how they are gendered.
- Exploring intersections of Muslim women, war and faith would help address key socio-political issues affecting Muslim migrant women (such as Syrian women refugees) by encompassing experiences of war, conflict and dynamics of violence experienced by migrant women during their migration journey; interfaith (faith as a cause of conflict but also a tool of resilience and conviviality); and extremist laws and their connection to the criminalisation of Muslims, including Muslim women.
- The effect of cultural products such as representations of migrant women in film and how these might challenge or support existing ideologies and their transmission across global mediascapes would be a beneficial research area.
- Anticipating future migration flows involves accounting for the impact of climate change and the movement of water to definitions of security and national borders.

The event has highlighted the breadth of work that is currently being done in the University relevant to women and migration and a number of avenues for future research collaborations. The range of existing expertise, methodological knowledge, theoretical depth, and research experience could be usefully harnessed through interdisciplinary research. This event has facilitated dialogue between Faculties and Departments across the University that can be effectively built upon.