

An 'Untied' Research Agenda for Family Migration: Loosening the 'Shackles' of the Past

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This paper focuses on recent methodological and theoretical developments associated with studies of long-distance family migration. The starting point for the discussion is that previous quantitative-based studies have over-privileged economic-related outcomes, and masked the underlying social and cultural decision-making processes of family migrants. Emphasising the perceived merits of qualitative frameworks to tease out the 'non-economic' dimensions of family migration, the paper identifies two issues of concern. First, some current under-researched themes of family migration are illuminated, and an unfolding research agenda for qualitative studies of family migration is outlined. It is contended that this provides a useful entrée to future research activities. Second, and with this in mind, the paper stresses the need for more sophisticated analyses of the human agency of family migrants. Therefore, and building upon Halfacree's thesis of the intentional/unintentional agency of family migrants, an adaptation of Giddens' stratification model of action is presented. It is argued that this will allow a more structurationist reading of family migration decision-making processes, and a fuller understanding of non-economic processes and outcomes. Finally, the paper stresses the complementarity between qualitative and quantitative methods, and calls for the utilisation of mixed-method research designs for studies of family migration.

Keywords: Long-Distance Family Migration; Qualitative Methods; Biographical Approach; Agency

Introduction

Darling you've got to let me know. Should I stay or should I go? (*Should I Stay or Should I Go?* The Clash 1982)

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Over the last two decades British scholars have investigated the effects of family units moving long distances within Great Britain (GB), and increasingly examined the gendered dimensions of family migration (e.g. Boyle *et al.* 2002; Bruegel 1996; Fielding and Halford 1993). More recently, similar studies of family migration have been conducted in a wider European context, for example in the Netherlands (Smits 1999; van Ommeren *et al.* 1999), Germany (Kalter 1998) and Sweden (Nilsson 2001). Overall, this work has generally been limited to an assessment of economic-related *outcomes* of long-distance family migration, and, more specifically, the post-migration labour market participation of migrants, often measured by their employment or occupational status.

These European-based studies have been informed by a well-developed literature in the United States (US) and Canada (see Halfacree 1995 for fuller review), which most commonly draws upon human-capital models (Cooke 2003). The theoretical and conceptual underpinning of much of this work (see Becker 1962; Sjaastad 1962), and its implications for migration, are succinctly captured by Mincer (1978: 750) in his landmark paper which sets out a model of family migration:

The analysis starts from an explicit recognition that net family gain rather than net personal gain (*of the 'head'?*) motivates migration of households [emphasis added].

Or, as Mincer otherwise postulates (1978: 751):

$G_f > 0$ [the net real income from migration] means that one spouse moves along with the other even though his (or her) 'private' calculus dictates staying. The net loss of the 'tied' mover must be smaller than the net gain of the other spouse to result in a net family gain from moving. Conversely, if the signs differ and $G_f < 0$, one member of the couple would have moved were it not for the potential loss of the other, which exceeds the gain of the would-be mover. The result is one tied stayer. In both cases, the tied partner is one whose absolute value of loss (gain) is less than the absolute value of gain (loss) of the other partner.

Traditionally, this work demonstrates that *both* married and cohabiting women in North America, irrespective of the presence of children, are often disenfranchised in the labour market as a result of moving long distances with their spouse or cohabitee.¹ This outcome is viewed as a direct consequence of unequal gendered power relations within the home and workplace (Bielby and Bielby 1992; Shihadeh 1991). Crucial to this understanding is the perception that the long-distance relocation of the family unit is often initiated to fulfil the male partner's career and 'breadwinner' aspirations. Thus, the female partner's participation in the labour market is either 'sacrificed' (i.e. economic inactivity or unemployment) or 'satisfied' (i.e. part-time or occupational downgrading). It is assumed that economic benefits will accrue from this change in the family employment structure, with post-migration family-level income gains (solely derived from the increased waged income of the male partner) outweighing the reduced waged income associated with the female partner's compromised labour market participation.

To conceptualise this gendered imbalance, female long-distance migrants are referred to as 'tied migrants' or 'trailing spouses'—with post-migration economic inactivity,

unemployment, part-time employment status or occupational downgrading viewed as a negative, unintended consequence.² In this sense, long-distance family migration is seen by some authors as a process that mediates the reproduction of unequal gendered power relations within the family unit and the household, and consolidates the disadvantaged position of many women in the workplace and wider society (Halfacree 1995).

On the whole, research in the European context has generally corroborated the 'tied migrant' thesis. From a comparative cross-national study of long-distance family migration in the US and GB, Boyle *et al.* (2000, 2001) show that the employment status of migrant female partners in the US and GB is remarkably similar following family migration. Likewise, Smits (1999) draws attention to the similarities between the Netherlands and GB.

This paper focuses on some recent methodological and theoretical developments associated with recent studies of long-distance family migration. The following section contextualises the focus of the paper by noting that previous quantitative-based studies have over-privileged economic-related outcomes, and obfuscated the underlying social and cultural decision-making processes of family migrants. The second section discusses the perceived merits of qualitative research methods within the context of family migration, pointing to some recent empirical studies. The third section illuminates some under-researched themes of family migration, and outlines a research agenda for qualitative studies of family migration. With this in mind, the fourth section builds upon Halfacree's (1995) thesis of the intentional/unintentional agency of family migrants and stresses the need for more sophisticated analyses of the human agency of family migrants. For this purpose, an adaptation of Giddens' (1991) stratification model of action is presented. The paper concludes by stressing the complementarity of qualitative and quantitative research methods for studies of family migration, and hence makes a call for mixed-method research designs. Throughout the rest of the paper, the term 'family migration' is used to abbreviate long-distance family migration.

Contextualising Recent Qualitative Studies of Family Migration

A strand of recent studies of family migration has involved the use of qualitative research methods, and the increasing collection and analysis of 'rich' qualitative data (e.g. Green 1997; Green *et al.* 1999; Hardill *et al.* 1997; Li and Findlay 1999). This methodological development is linked to a growing consensus that previous quantitative-based analyses of family migration have provided partial accounts, often over-privileging economic-related outcomes such as post-migration labour market status (Bonney and Love 1991; Halfacree and Boyle 1999; Morrison and Lichter 1988). As a result, some commentators question the rigour of prevailing theoretical understandings of family migration, noting that non-economic aspects, in particular social, cultural and psychological processes and outcomes, have been masked (Cooke 2001, 2003).

It is surprising that scholars of family migration have only recently shown a fuller appreciation of the 'non-economic' realm, given that Mincer's (1978: 750) theory of family migration explicitly states that the 'costs and returns [of family migration]

should be understood to include both monetary and nonmonetary components'. It would appear, therefore, that most previous studies of family migration are based on a selective reading of Mincer's theory of family migration, and tend to overlook Mincer's emphasis on utility decisions (e.g. individual tastes, amenities, and social and cultural networks). In order to transcend this orthodoxy, it is valuable to question why such limited interpretations of Mincer's theory of family migration appear to have dominated studies of family migration since the early 1980s.

One plausible reason for the focus on economic-related outcomes may be linked to the positivist frameworks associated with family migration (see Graham and Boyle 2001; Halfacree and Boyle 1993). Underpinning this orthodoxy are distinct epistemological tenets, and a methodological protocol, which have been largely synonymous with a deductive quest to formulate and test hypotheses. As shown in Table 1, such an approach has been tied to analyses of large-scale, cross-sectional (e.g. Lee and Roseman 1999) and/or longitudinal (e.g. Shihadeh 1991) quantitative datasets to establish the 'general' regularities of family migration, via the use of quantitative research methods (such as multi-level modelling techniques; e.g. Cooke and Bailey 1996). Ultimately, this approach may have limited the breadth and nature of the research questions that can be addressed, since most of the datasets do not report the non-economic outcomes of family migration (e.g. quality-of-life concerns, levels of satisfaction). It is not surprising that most previous studies have been limited to the economic-related effects of family

Table 1. Post-1980 examples of quantitative studies of family migration

Author(s)	Quantitative dataset(s)
Lichter (1983)	1967–79 US National Longitudinal Surveys (NLS)
Sell (1983)	1973–77 US Annual Housing Survey (AHS)
Morrison and Lichter (1988)	1968–73 and 1973–78 US National Longitudinal Surveys (NLS)
Shihadeh (1991)	1987 Migrant Characteristics Survey, Alberta Bureau of Statistics in Canada
Bielby and Bielby (1992)	1977 US Quality of Employment Survey (QES)
Bruegel (1996)	1989 GB Labour Force Survey (LFS) / OPCS Longitudinal Study
Cooke and Bailey (1996)	1980 Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) of US
Bailey and Cooke (1998)	1979–91 US National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY)
Lee and Roseman (1999)	1990 Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) of US
Smits (1999)	1977 and 1995/6 Netherlands Labour Force Surveys (LFS)
Boyle <i>et al.</i> (1999a, 1999b, 2000, 2001, 2002)	1991 Sample of Anonymised Records (SAR) of the 1991 GB Census / 1990 Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) of the US Census
Cooke (2001)	1987–92 US Family File of the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID)
Cooke (2003)	1987–88 and 1992–93 US National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH)

migration, often based on statistical inferences of relationships between dependent (usually a categorical measure of labour market status) and independent variables—either demographic (e.g. age, presence of children) or socio-economic (e.g. educational credentials). In this sense, the focus on economic-related outcomes may signify a pragmatic response to the limitations of quantitative data, rather than a selective interpretation of Mincer's (1978) theory of family migration.

Furthermore, and following this epistemological argument, it can be contended that some recent studies of family migration may have been underpinned by an alternative (post-positivist) epistemological position—which espouses a more inductive route to the production of knowledge. This approach is exemplified by the recent proliferation of qualitative research with family migrants; the main focus of this paper.

Exploring the 'Non-Economic' Processes of Family Migration

Within the context of a wider recognition of the non-economic realm of family migration, two major themes have predominated in recent studies: the dynamics of different decision-making processes of family migrants, and the diverse human agency of family migrants. Crucially, these social and cultural dimensions of family migration cannot be fully gleaned from most quantitative datasets, particularly national cross-sectional datasets such as the GB Census. Studies which affirm this viewpoint include Bielby and Bielby's (1992) study of married respondents in dual-earner families recorded in the 1977 Quality of Employment Survey (QES), which reflexively states: '[our analysis] is limited by the information available in an existing data set not explicitly designed to study family migration decisions' (Bielby and Bielby 1992: 1262). As a result, Bielby and Bielby suggest that a more definitive study of family migration should involve qualitative interviews with both the male and female partner, and longitudinal methods to track employment changes and the relocation of the family unit. This methodological design, they argue, would facilitate research that could more fully tease out 'the economic, structural and cultural factors that shape how individuals in families reconcile their personal interests in job advancement with others' interests and with overall family well-being' (Bielby and Bielby 1992: 1263).

Similar limitations of quantitative datasets are noted by Boyle *et al.* (1999a), who maintain that most national quantitative datasets in Britain do not report the key reasons for relocating (or not relocating) the family unit, and reveal that it is not possible to distinguish between families moving for residential and/or labour-related purposes, or other reasons. Hence, it is asserted that quantitative studies of family migration are inherently weakened by the need to adopt a simplistic dichotomy, whereby families migrating long distances (usually to another region or country) are defined as moving for labour-related reasons, whilst families moving short distances (usually within the same broad location) are viewed as doing so for residential purposes. In most studies, the distinction between short- and long-distance moves is usually based on an arbitrary measure. For instance, Boyle *et al.* (1999b) utilise a 50km cut-off in GB, and Smits (1999) uses cross-boundary movement within the Netherlands.

The above examples clearly demonstrate that one key stimulus for the rise of primary qualitative research with family migrants is the limitations of some quantitative datasets (this is also linked to ontological and epistemological standpoints of researchers). As a result, the previously 'hidden voices' of family migrants are being increasingly interwoven into analyses of family migration, as researchers endeavour to pin down migrant perceptions, attitudes, meanings and interpretations of different migration decision-making processes. Naturally, this approach has placed a greater emphasis on the role of human agency within family migration decision-making processes, as played out and translated via intra-family conflicts, strains and anxieties, negotiations and compromises.

There is also a growing appreciation within qualitative research frameworks that family migration represents an action in time, or as Halfacree and Boyle (1993: 337) stress: 'a specific migration exists as a part of our past, our present and our future, as part of our biography'. This is contrary to previous studies of family migration which have tended to analyse migration as a one-off event. Importantly, this reconceptualisation of family migration focuses attention on the biographies of family migrants; an approach which is being increasingly used within wider migration studies (for example, Bondi 1999; Ní Laoire 1999).

Within the context of family migration, one study which typifies this approach includes a qualitative exploration of the migration histories and location strategies of dual career households in Greater Nottingham and East Midlands, Britain (Green 1997; Hardill *et al.* 1997). In contrast to previous studies of family migration, this research probes the decision-making processes of migrant couples at both the individual and family level, and situates experiences within the context of the everyday life of the migrants. For example, information is reported which describes the compromises and trade-offs that migrants make in order to enable family migration to go ahead. This has shed light on the social, cultural and psychological dimensions of the migration decision-making process, such as the individual and family-level motives, values, relationships, responsibilities, commitments and personal histories.

From such a perspective of family migration, the above studies show that it is possible to tease out previously 'hidden' aspects of migration decision-making, such as the impact of gender-role ideologies (see Bonney *et al.* 1999), fluid power relations between the male and female partner, and the (un)equal personal economic resources within the decision-making processes of migrant families.³ This is valuable since it problematises a number of taken-for-granted *a priori* characteristics of the tied migrant thesis. For instance, the works of Green (1997) and Hardill *et al.* (1997) implicitly disrupt ideas of the male partner being the 'lead migrant'—instigating (and directing) the relocation of the family unit to realise his personal career aspirations (albeit for the economic betterment of the family unit). Likewise, interviewing both partners allows the researchers to delve deeper into migration decision-making processes, and to question assumptions that the employment needs of both partners are not held in equal esteem prior to and following family migration.

Perhaps more importantly, such qualitative frameworks allow the collection and analysis of 'rich' empirical data to critically appraise notions of family migrants as

rational economic actors, as portrayed by human-capital models. This is important in order to clarify how different types of family migrant decide to stay or move based upon their capacity to calculate current and potential economic gains and losses. As a result, there is now a fuller acknowledgement of the influence of less formal economic factors such as unpaid work (e.g. caring for children and relatives/friends, domestic and household reproduction) and the utility of community and social networks (Hanson and Pratt 1995) upon family migration decision-making; concerns which the sociological literature has shown to be influential upon family decision-making processes (e.g. Reskin and Padovic 1994). Crucially, this recognition focuses attention on considerations which may be perceived as being 'irrational' in an economic sense (e.g. 'downsizing' or 'dropping out' of the labour market for personal 'quality of life' reasons, temporary disruptions associated with lifecourse events such as childrearing, marriage or home-making) and other influential factors that effect an individual's ability to assess options (e.g. residential and locational meanings, proximity to friends and relatives).

In summary, qualitative explorations of family migration enable scholars of family migration to ask, and scrutinise, research questions which most quantitative studies cannot fully address, such as the importance of social, cultural and psychological motives for moving or staying put (both at the individual and the family level). The next section outlines some current under-researched themes of family migration, which provide avenues for future qualitative research activities.

A Qualitative Research Agenda for Studies of Family Migration

The use of qualitative research methods facilitates the exploration of distinct themes which have been under-researched by previous studies of family migration. If addressed, I suggest that nuanced understandings of *when*, *how* and *why* processes and outcomes of family migration differ geographically, temporally, socially and culturally will be established. Importantly, this will require scholars of family migration to be more fully informed by, and to inform, the cognate geographical and sociological literature.

A major issue which has yet to be fully investigated within studies of family migration concerns the satisfaction levels of individuals following family migration. For instance, it is likely that post-migration satisfaction levels will be influenced by problems which migrants may not have foreseen prior to the movement of the family unit. Such issues can only be fully examined using qualitative methods. Examples may include unsuitable childcare provision, journey to work issues, quality of nurseries and schools, and lack of community support networks. Similarly, families may regret making their decision to move in the light of other conditions that have subsequently emerged (e.g. other employment opportunities, changes in house values, mortgage interest rates etc.).

To date, it is also not known whether previous measures of post-migration labour market outcomes signify intended, or unintended consequences of family migration. Of course, the meanings and perceptions associated with particular types of employment status will influence interpretations of post-migration labour market status. For

example, previous studies have often assumed that economic inactivity or unemployment is a negative outcome of family migration. However, such interpretations may have to be reassessed if it is found that economic inactivity or unemployment within a particular household signifies an intended outcome of family migration. If so, scholars of family migration will need to review the subjective meanings which both family migrants and researchers attach to employment and occupational status, especially given the increasing levels of individuals stepping out of the labour market, downgrading their occupation or 'downsizing' their disposable incomes and lifestyles (Heelas 1995), as well as the rising formal labour market status of some women (Crompton 1998). A starting point here for studies of family migration could involve in-depth qualitative research with migrant families to assess Bruegel's (1996: 252) contention: 'the breadwinner model may have been modified, rather than transcended'.

Indeed, it can be argued that studies of family migration have not adequately couched their analyses within contemporary understandings and debates of family forms and relations, as evidenced in the wider sociological and social policy literature (e.g. Harker 1996; Silva and Smart 1998). There is much value to be gleaned from sociological texts which examine the impact of gender relations on work-home balances. For example, the work of Duncan and Edwards (1999) would provide a valuable entry point to consider how family migration processes are influenced by 'gendered moral rationalities'. Utilising qualitative research methods will enable scholars of family migration to provide fuller insights of how and why different meanings of motherhood and fatherhood, as well as different ideas about what it means to be a 'wife/husband/partner', are enmeshed within the decision to move and the post-migration labour market status of partners, and other outcomes. For example: are mothers with traditional ideas about what it means to be a mother (stay at home with children) more likely to be 'tied migrants'?

Examining these issues within the context of family migration is important given that the idealised model of the family is being challenged by the growth of less traditional family forms (Duncan 1999; Jarvis 1999; Pfau-Effinger 1999), the increase of dual-career couples (Green 1995), and the (oft-debated) rising career aspirations of women (Sackmann 1999).

Although there has been a significant concern with 'dual-career' couples within the family migration literature (e.g. Boyle and Halfacree 1995; Green 1995), other atypical family employment structures, such as 'female flexible' (male full-time/female part-time) or 'male flexible' (male part-time/female full-time) arrangements have been overlooked (Jarvis 1997). This neglect of varied family employment structures may be linked to problems of identifying family structures from quantitative datasets. For instance, Boyle *et al.* (1999b) demonstrate the need for the matching of migrant partners to reconstruct family units within datasets, in order to distinguish between different types of migrant families (see also Cooke 2003; Lee and Roseman 1999). Identifying different family employment structures and using qualitative methods to examine how different intra-household employment relations impact on migration decision-making processes (i.e. negotiations about role allocation) will widen understandings of the diversity of family migration.

At the same time, in-depth qualitative research with migrant families will enable researchers to pin down when, how and why family migration brings about changes in family employment structures. This is important given that many previous quantitative-based studies have been unable to examine this issue, since most cross-sectional quantitative datasets (e.g. the 1991 GB Census) do not report the pre- and inter-temporal migrant or labour market status of individuals. Instead, most previous analyses of family migration have been based on post-migration measure of labour market status; to date, the actual changes in labour market status (for both male and female partners) following family migration have not been comprehensively measured.

Another lacuna, which focuses attention on less traditional family arrangements, is the issue of sexuality. Previous quantitative-based studies of family migration have been forced to focus on heterosexual couples (Brown and Boyle 2000), due to the difficulties of identifying same-sex couples within aggregated national datasets (for example, same-sex couples were not recorded in the 1991 GB Census). However, given the increasing official recognition of same-sex marriages (e.g. in the Netherlands), equal rights plans for same-sex couples,⁴ and the potential impacts on welfare and care resources, qualitative methods are necessary to allow researchers to identify and compare the decision-making processes and post-migration outcomes of same-sex and heterosexual couples. Indeed, there is some empirical evidence which suggests that same-sex couples construct particular forms of gender-home-work balances which may have interesting ramifications within the context of family migration.

For example, in a study of cohabiting lesbian couples with children, Dunne (1998) found that decision-making processes about paid employment and the home were balanced, given that both partners are deemed to occupy similar positions on the gender hierarchy (when compared to heterosexual couples). It would be valuable for future qualitative studies to examine how relationships within same-sex couples are played out within family migration, and whether they give rise to 'tied migration' or impede the relocation of the family unit of same-sex couples.

Despite many previous studies incorporating spatial variables within their analyses, I would argue that a fuller sensitivity to spatial contingencies is required within studies of family migration. It is acknowledged that employment and occupational opportunities are not spatially uniform, and that such geographies will mediate the post-migration labour market status in the place of destination. For example, Fielding (1992, 1993) has suggested the concept of the occupational 'escalator' in the South-East of England which, contrary to the tied migrant thesis, is argued to facilitate the occupational mobility for women (see also Bruegel 1999). Forsberg (1998) has also pointed to similar escalators within other locations within Europe. Surprisingly, given this European-wide empirical evidence, there have been limited efforts to explore the difference that geography makes (e.g. controlling for the effects of labour market segmentation and the sex-typing of occupations), or to compare the post-migration employment status of female partners moving into locations with 'upward' and 'descending' escalators (Hakim 1996). However, there is a clear recognition that families are most likely to relocate to places associated with buoyant economic conditions, or perceived as being part of a 'growth area' (e.g. Bieibly and Bielby 1992; Cooke and Bailey 1996).

It must be stressed here, however, that it is important not to simply read-off post-migration labour market status from different types of labour market—given that normative expectations and attitudes towards gender and family relations within the home and workplace vary within and between places, regions and countries. For example, based on recent quantitative analyses of the 1991 GB Census, Duncan and Smith (2002) have pointed to a geography of ‘gender work cultures’, and this may be useful for considering the processes underpinning the spatiality of post-migration labour market outcomes. For instance Duncan and Smith demonstrate that particular locations are associated with deeply embedded ‘traditional’ notions of partnering and parenting. Hence, they contend that women residing in these locations have a higher probability of being economically inactive (i.e. domestic workers) or unemployed within the labour market, even when high levels of employment opportunity exist. Duncan and Smith also identify ‘non-traditional’ locations of partnering and parenting, and here they contend that women are more likely to participate in the labour market, even when there are low levels of employment opportunity. It would be valuable for qualitative studies of family migration to explore the geographical effects of ‘gender work cultures’ on post-migration labour market status of female partners. For instance, are partnered female migrants moving to locations associated with traditional gender work cultures more likely to be ‘tied migrants’? If so, do processes of family migration help mediate deep-seated gender relations within locations, and vice versa?

Perhaps more importantly, qualitative research methods allow researchers of family migration to explore the influence of representations and meanings of places on migration decision-making processes. For instance, geographers have revealed that diverse cultural consumption practices of migrants are tied to representations of locations, and different meanings and appeals of urban and rural places are central to the residential decision-making processes of migrants (e.g. Halfacree 1993; Smith and Phillips 2001). Gathering ‘rich’ data to inform analyses of family migration of these socio-cultural dimensions of family migration is essential when seeking to understand why particular types of family unit decide to move to, or stay in, particular places. Moreover, the meanings and expectations which families attach to particular places will be influential as regards their post-migration satisfaction levels, and their interpretations of the family migration experience.

Geographical differentiation is also important to notions of employer work cultures (Hanson and Pratt 1995), such as the willingness of employers to enable flexible work hours, or provide childcare support within the workplace. Of course, these will vary substantially within and between places, and will have a significant impact on the post-migration labour market status of male and female partners. However, there is little evidence of this issue being examined within the context of family migration—despite being an influential factor. In-depth qualitative research with employers is important here to explore the motives and aspirations for establishing particular work conditions which enable and/or constrain the opportunities for family migrants to participate in the workplace. At the same time, primary research with employees would be valuable to explore the impact of specific work conditions that are established by employers.

Possible issues to explore here may include sex discrimination in the workplace and the sex-typing of waged labour.

Finally, gender-sensitive employer practices may be especially important given the recent legislative momentum in GB to encourage 'family-friendly' work practices, to enable families to negotiate the home-work balance in more efficient and effective ways (Harker 1996). The introduction of this legislation may have implications for the theorisation of family migration: is the post-migration labour market status of female partners moving into locations with high levels of 'family-friendly' employers, when compared to counterparts moving into locations with low levels of 'family-friendly' employers, associated with relatively higher levels of labour market participation?

The Human Agency of Family Migrants: Intentional or Unintentional?

If qualitative research frameworks are to be effective within studies of family migration, and thus provide integrated theoretical accounts of the economic and non-economic realms, there is a need for qualitative studies to delve deeper into migration decision-making processes. More specifically, it is essential that future studies provide sophisticated analyses of human agency. One criticism of recent qualitative studies of family migration is that, in line with Halfacree and Boyle's (1993) contention, they have tended to focus on the discursive consciousness of migrants. As a result, the non-discursive aspects of human agency within migration decision-making processes are generally under-explored. With this in mind, this section outlines a more structuralist reading of the different levels of human agency which are implicated within family migration decision-making processes.

Perhaps the most sophisticated theorisation of human agency within processes of family migration is Halfacree's (1995) discussion of 'household migration and the structuration of patriarchy'. His thesis draws attention to the reciprocal relationship between human agency and structural rules and resources that are involved in migration decision-making processes. Most significantly, and exploring the contention that 'structures of patriarchy' (e.g. the sex typing of occupations) are *both* the medium and end result of the gendering of family migration, Halfacree claims that 'there is no suggestion that the reproduction of patriarchy through labour migration is an intended action' (1995: 173). Instead, Halfacree posits that:

married women do not become secondary migrants in order to reproduce the subordinated position of women within both the home and waged workplace. Yet this is an unintended consequence of what happens, just as this subordinate position was a necessary condition for their 'tied migration' in the first place. ... However, those involved in the labour migration decision may be fully aware of the extent to which this action serves to reinforce patriarchy (Halfacree 1995: 173).

Halfacree's portrayal of intentional and unintentional agency being embedded within migration decision-making, and ultimately the structuration of 'tied migration', begs questions about whether family migration represents the 'choices' and/or 'constraints' of migrants. As outlined above, conventional theorisations of family migration have tended to view female migrants as being subordinate to the male

partner during the migration decision-making process, and being constrained in the labour market following migration. However, this ‘detrimental’ scenario may not always be the case. In some instances, women and men may not seek full-time employment following the migration of the family unit, and migrant ‘choices’ may therefore have been understated within the literature. This issue clearly demands further examination, and raises questions about the intentionality and unintentionality of different types of post-migration employment status and labour market participation.

Indeed, Hakim (1996), for example, asserts that women’s employment positions within the labour market are not a consequence of institutional and/or structural disadvantage. Rather, she argues that female labour market status signifies the outcome of varying choices, and contends that there are ‘qualitatively different’ types of working women: committed (who give priority to their employment careers), uncommitted (who give priority to their domestic responsibilities) and drifters and adaptives (who have unplanned careers). Importantly, Hakim claims that this last category of female worker contains the largest proportion of women. However, Crompton and Harris (1999) recently argue that Hakim’s typology over-states the capacity of women to ‘choose’, and they contend that female labour market positionality involves elements of both ‘choice’ and ‘constraint’:

certainly, women can and do make choices—although in aggregate, their relative lack of power and resources relative to men means that both today and in the past they have been less able to do so than the opposite sex. Women—and men—can choose but are also constrained, a fact that lies at the root of sociological explanations of human behaviour (Crompton and Harris 1999: 147).

A Structurationist Reading of Family Migration Decision-Making Processes

This section builds upon Halfacree’s (1995) thesis of intentional/unintentional human agency by emphasising more fully the distinction between different layers of human agency. For this purpose, an adaptation of Giddens’ (1984, 1991) stratification model of action is presented (see Figure 1). As can be seen, some initial research questions for qualitative studies of family migration are also outlined.

Giddens’ (1991) stratification model of action is based on the premise that individuals are: i) knowledgeable social actors; ii) act in common sense, taken-for-granted and routinised ways which are based upon unacknowledged ‘stocks of knowledge’ (unconscious motivation), and iii) have the capacity for self-reflection, and the creative and innovative ability to adjust their actions in accordance with their interpretations of the social context. But how does this conceptualisation of human agency fit with the decision-making processes of family migration?

First, Giddens (1984) places significant onus on the ways in which levels of knowledgeability are bounded. In brief, it is claimed that much of the knowledge which individuals draw upon in their daily life operates at a tacit level, and this is translated via routinised, taken-for-granted, common-sense actions. Giddens refers to this level of human agency as ‘practical consciousness’, and this is seen as being inaccessible to conscious reflection and discursive articulation. These conditions are thus viewed as



Figure 1. Human agency within family migration decision-making processes.

unacknowledged conditions of action, expressing the underlying rules and resources of particular social groups—(cf. Bourdieu’s (1984) definition of *habitus*)—and wider society. According to Giddens (1991), these structural conditions provide the unconscious motives for action, for example conformity with the gendered and ideological values and normative expectations associated with motherhood, fatherhood and of being a partner.

In the context of migration decision-making, unacknowledged conditions of action will clearly hinder the capacity of the migrant, both at the individual and the family level, to explain their motives and intentions for moving (or staying), and other aspects of the migration decision-making process, such as their behaviour and attitudes towards moving, post-migration employment conditions and gender–family–work balances. Indeed, Halfacree and Boyle (1993) view practical consciousness as being highly problematic for research: ‘human agents using this practical consciousness might not give the “correct” explanation for their actions if asked about them’ (1993: 336–7). In line with other levels of human agency (see below), the investigation of practical consciousness stresses the doubly hermeneutic task(s) that must be faced by researchers of family migration—analyses of migration decision-making processes will always involve an interpretation of the interpretation provided by the migrants. Care must be taken when making such interpretations, and the influence of positionality and narrative must be acknowledged.

Exploring practical consciousness is vital, however, if a deeper knowledge of the effects of gender-role ideology and socialisation processes upon migration decision-making and post-migration outcomes is to be gained. For example, how are migration decision-making processes shaped by ‘taken-for-granted’ and ‘common-sense’ ideas about what it means to be a wife/mother or husband/father? What are implications of normative expectations of male and female employment responsibilities and the

commitment to different role allocations tasks (paid/unpaid work)? How do these expectations vary between social groups in different places and what are the implications for family migration? Teasing out these 'hidden dimensions' of migration decision-making is a useful way to consider how ideological and institutional structures enable or constrain the agency of family migrants, and at the same time, how the agency of migrants conforms to or resists the 'virtual' structural conditions associated with patriarchy. Clearly, levels of knowledgeability are a crucial issue for studies of family migration to gauge, as this will help to place the migrant's decisions in the wider social context and will provide richer insights into the 'deeper' motives that underpin choices, compromises and trade-offs.

In contrast to practical consciousness, Giddens points to a level of human agency which is purposive, and motivated to realise particular goals and intentions (for example, within the context of family migration—moving to obtain economic betterment or more amenable employment conditions). Giddens (1984: 4) refers to this level of agency as the 'reflexive monitoring of action', which, it is argued, individuals can discursively articulate when accounting for, explaining and rationalising their actions. It also signifies the capacity of individuals to change actions in line with their perceptions of social and cultural contexts.

Within the context of studies of migration, Halfacree and Boyle (1993) suggest that the 'intellectual fallacy' is partially the result of an over-emphasis by researchers examining the discursive consciousness of migrants, relative to practical consciousness. This is not to say that studies of family migration should not tease out elements of discursive consciousness from accounts of migration decision-making processes. Clearly, the reasons that individuals and couples cite when explaining their decision to relocate are important. For example, a couple may move due to perceptions of economic betterment, or perhaps may move to a location which is more amenable to particular cultural lifestyles or gender/sexuality/ethnicity relations; themes which are integral to the qualitative research agenda outlined above.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this paper I have made the case for the wider use of qualitative methods within studies of family migration, and also pointed to the benefits of biographical approaches. My principal claim has been that this will facilitate a more integrated theoretical account of the economic and non-economic realms of family migration decision-making processes and outcomes. In addition, I have noted that the utilisation of qualitative methods opens up an extended research agenda, which previous quantitative-based studies have not been fully able to address due to data limitations. With this in mind, some avenues for future research activities have been suggested.

My main aim has not been to critique previous quantitative studies of family migration—although some limitations of quantitative datasets have been noted. Instead, I have sought to emphasise the perceived merits of qualitative research methods in order to tease out the 'non-economic' realms of family migration. Without doubt, quantitative studies are also imperative for investigating particular types of research question, for

example establishing the general 'indications' of the patterns and processes of family migration, and formulating research questions and/or hypotheses for follow-up, in-depth qualitative research, or vice versa. An exemplar here is Cooke's (2001) recent quantitative analysis of family migration, which concludes:

Additional research is warranted on a number of fronts: to confirm these results; to consider how family migration consequences may be contingent on other life course events; and to consider how to measure the noneconomic (in other words, the social) impacts of family migration (2001: 429).

In this sense, quantitative and qualitative research methods are viewed as being essentially complementary. For example, qualitative studies could usefully evaluate the applicability of the cut-off points, used within most quantitative studies to distinguish short- and long-distance migrants, to reveal how the populations under study self-define short- and long-distance movements, as well as the social or cultural meanings which they attach to perceptions of migration distances. Gathering such 'rich' data may inherently problematise long-standing assumptions of family migration, and clarify any correlation between short- and long-distance and residential or labour-motivated family migration.

The use of *both* quantitative and qualitative research methods points to a mixed-method research design (see McKendrick 1999 for fuller discussion). Within the context of family migration, one stark example which demonstrates the value of a mixed-method design is provided by Green (1997). In this study, Green offers a robust analysis of family migration based on the Labour Force Survey (1984–1991) and the 1 per cent households file of the SAR (Sample of Anonymised Records), and this is used to contextualise in-depth qualitative interviews with dual-career migrant couples.

Such pluralistic research approaches inevitably raise questions about the epistemological undercurrents of family migration research (as well as ontological considerations). In line with Bailey's (2001) recent call for the use of alternative (post-positivist) epistemological standpoints for studies of transnational migration, it may be valuable for scholars of family migration to 'hook-up' with these ideas. For example, there may be significant benefits for studies of family migration to critically appraise socially constructed categories, such as the 'family migrant' or the 'tied migrant' (see also Halfacree 2001). This will compel researchers to search for 'difference' between family migrants, and perhaps reassess the normative expectations that are associated with post-migration labour market status and other, non-economic, impacts. Of course, empirical findings from in-depth qualitative research with family migrants will be valuable here to evaluate the robustness of migrant categories.

At a theoretical level, the paper has sought to build upon Halfacree's (1995) discussion of intentional/unintentional human agency, and to discern, more fully, the different layers of human agency which are implicated within migration decision-making processes. It is important here, however, not to obscure the ways in which human agency is enabled or constrained by wider structural conditions. As Giddens (1984: 282–3) asserts: 'some of the most important tasks of social sciences are to be

found in the investigation of these [structure–agency] boundaries’. Although explicit efforts to investigate this issue have been limited, there are signs of a widening recognition of structure–agency within empirical studies of family migration. For example, in their cross-national study, Boyle *et al.* (2000) consider the influence of the different institutional factors (e.g. equal opportunities legislation, maternity/paternity rights and childcare provision) and ideological structures (e.g. normative expectations of motherhood and employment, fatherhood and employment, domestic and work commitments, role allocation tasks), when comparing the post-migration employment status of female partners in GB and the US. Interestingly, they found remarkable similarities in these very different national contexts. Similar cross-national structure–agency analyses could be undertaken within a European context, by drawing upon literature which documents different structural contexts within Europe, such as welfare-regimes and ideological gender cultures.⁵

Finally, I would argue that there is an overarching need for scholars of family migration to evaluate findings within wider socio-cultural, economic and political processes. Structural conditions associated with global capitalism suggest that family migration may become a more pronounced phenomenon, with a more flexible and spatially mobile workforce raising the propensity of employee relocation—and thus family relocation (or the rise of dual-location households). Likewise, the reduction of secure, life-long employment careers (usually tied to one place) may induce higher numbers of individuals and families to move to realise or search for other employment opportunities. At the same time, increased family breakdown and the establishment of new family forms may stimulate pronounced migration, as individuals move to join partners or friends during family formation.

In the context of these societal and socio-economic transformations associated with ‘work’ and the ‘family’, there is an urgent need to pose the question: Do processes of family migration reproduce and/or transform ‘traditional’ family forms and employment relationships, and vice versa? If so, how do these vary spatially and culturally? In this sense, researchers of family migration have an important role to play in the wider debates about the interfaces between family, work and gender.

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Notes

- [1] See Cooke and Bailey (1996, 1999) for exceptions, and discussion of self-selection bias.
- [2] In this paper the term ‘tied migration’ is used with caution. I would argue that this term implies a pre-defined interpretation of the outcome of the family migration process (in a sense putting

the 'cart before the horse'), and is value-laden and signifies a biased ideological construction of employment status (i.e. economic inactivity, unemployment and part-time work are viewed as negative positions within the labour market).

- [3] See Bielby and Bielby (1992) for discussion of 'family-resource theory'.
- [4] See the article 'Equal rights plan for gay couples', *The Guardian*, 6 December 2002.
- [5] For example, see Duncan and Pfau-Effinger's (2000) edited collection of essays.

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