



Changing Gendered Divisions of Work

Abstract This chapter discusses how migration changed gendered divisions of work. A sedentary bias can also be detected when the gendered effects of emigration from Switzerland are studied. Moreover, when studying emigration, its colonial contexts and, in particular, their relation to gender inequality have to be addressed. In colonial constellations, certain privileges intersected with specific forms of discriminations to produce an ambiguous potential for new social and political reconfigurations. A somewhat similar situation was also created by the migration of nurses from Kerala to Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Both a sedentary bias and an orientalising way of looking at this kind of migration once again become visible. But such stories could also be told differently, as we will see.

Keywords Changing gendered divisions of work · Sedentary bias · Colonial contexts of emigration · Intersection of privileges and forms of discrimination

NURSES FROM KERALA

Even though the vast body of secondary literature in migration studies provides a good starting point for reflecting on the reconfiguration of gender relations through migration, this type of scholarship has often

focused mainly on the ‘migrants’ themselves and on the society they *leave*. Those who stay behind, as well as the subjects themselves who move, might perform tasks that do not conform to traditional gender roles (even if this is, of course, not necessarily the case). For example, in a study done on the situation of Italian women in Switzerland, the authors identify important changes in gender relations for Italian couples living in Switzerland: ‘In other words, emigration stimulates processes of emancipation. [...] The women reach a certain independence thanks to work and thanks to the confrontation with other models concerning the division of roles’.¹ According to the authors, it was not only ‘migrant’ women who experienced a process of change. Their male partners now did housework relatively frequently, either because their wives were working or because, having lived on their own in a foreign country, they had learned to get by on their own.²

However, the possibility that this kind of migration could also change gender relations in the *receiving* society, i.e., Switzerland at large, is something that has not yet been systematically studied. It is precisely this question that I will look into by analysing the expansion of the nursery infrastructure and its consequences in Chapter 4. For now, let us turn to some interesting special cases concerning the migration of women to Switzerland and its impacts on gender dynamics.

A publication from 1977 on Turkish couples in West Germany suggests that ‘in such cases where wives have migrated prior to their husbands, the wife becomes the principal breadwinner and the husband the primary

¹Cristina Allemann-Ghionda, Conclusioni, in *Allemann-Ghionda, Meyer-Sabino, and De Marchi Oechslin, Donne italiane in Svizzera*, Basel: Dadò 1992, 269–288, 269. My translation.

²A similar situation was also described with respect to other migration contexts, see, for example, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo, Overcoming Patriarchal Constraints: The Reconstruction of Gender Relations Among Mexican Immigrant Women and Men, *Gender and Society* 6, 3 (1992), 393–415.

However, the care work that is redistributed in sending households in which only women migrate often seems to be performed by female family members, friends or neighbours or outsourced to another ‘migrant’ woman. Helma Lutz, Gender in the Migratory Process, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36, 10 (2010), 1647–1663, 1654. Sarah Schilliger, Pflegen ohne Grenzen? *Der Privathaushalt als globalisierter Arbeitsplatz*, Bielefeld: Transcript 2019.

child-carer'.³ However, no empirical data are given to support this claim. Conducting research on 'migrant' couples⁴ in which the woman migrated earlier than the man and, as a consequence, had already begun working outside the home before he arrived, therefore seems likely to prove fruitful. In this context, Urmila Goel studied how, in the 1960s and 1970s, Catholic institutions in Germany used their global networks to recruit young Christian nurses from Kerala. Research in Switzerland and the USA⁵ has confirmed these findings.⁶ After several years of work, most of these women had married highly qualified men from Kerala. However, their husbands could join their wives in West Germany only in the framework of regulations concerning family reunification. Consequently, they were not immediately eligible for work permits and instead stayed home and brought up the children. As a result, the women remained the main breadwinners in these families, while their husbands initially looked after the household and children. Later, these men were often forced to accept occupations below the level of their own qualifications and even those of their wives. The division of work within these families thus differed from the norms in both India and Europe.⁷ Here, we see how specific privileges like the right to immigrate intersect with specific forms of discriminations and thereby produce a new configuration.

Urmila Goel showed, moreover, that the existing research on these families focused most often on the resulting problems, for example, cases of alcoholism. It was also assumed that due to India's 'patriarchal

³Nermin Abadan-Unat, Implications of Migration on Emancipation and Pseudo-Emancipation of Turkish Women, *The International Migration Review* 11, 1 (1977), 31–57, 40.

⁴For same-sex couples, the situation was and still is different, not only in regard to the division of tasks within the family, but also with respect to the right of residence.

⁵Sheba Mariam George, *When Women Come First. Gender and Class in Transnational Migration*, Berkeley: University of California Press 2005.

⁶Many of these nurses apparently travelled from Austria to Switzerland. Simone Gschwend, *Aushandeln transnationaler und lokaler Beziehungen. Eine Fallstudie zu sozialen Netzwerken von Migranten und Migrantinnen aus Kerala, Indien*, Zürich: Ethnologisches Seminar der Universität Zürich 2007.

⁷Urmila Goel, Heteronormativity and Intersectionality as Perspective of Analysis of Gender and Migration: Nurses from India in West Germany, in Poma Poma and Pühl, *Perspectives on Asian Migration: Transformations of Gender and Labour Relations*, Berlin: Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung 2014, https://www.rosalux.de/fileadmin/rls_uploads/pdfs/rls_papers/Papers_Asian_Migration.pdf (1 July 2018).

structure’, such a role reversal was particularly hard for Indian men to adapt to. However, according to Goel, these stories could also be told in a different way: strong women forged their own path—and their husbands joined in. These Indian nurses could then be regarded as protagonists who were part of the West German emancipation of women.⁸ The fact that such a perspective was not, in fact, adopted and that the focus was on the problematic, rather than the productive dimensions of this migration, is the result of both a sedentary bias and an orientalising way of looking at this kind of migration. Here again, conceptualising ‘the immigrant woman’ into an analysis of the women’s movement remains a research desideratum.

Against this background, it would also be of interest to systematically investigate what happened to those couples in which the woman was native to the country and the man came from abroad. For instance, in the family of a friend of mine, the mother was Swiss while the father came from Spain. In this case, the father stayed at home and the mother went to work as long as they lived in Switzerland.⁹ In Switzerland in the 1970s and 1980s, such a distribution of roles was still very rare. It would therefore be interesting to study more binational cases in which the father relocated.

A SEDENTARY BIAS IN THE HISTORY OF EMIGRATION

At this point, we turn to emigration from Switzerland and its associated gender effects. The region that is now Switzerland experienced intense and sustained emigration for centuries, and it is only since the last decades of the twentieth century that immigration has become more common than emigration. The main focus of this contribution is on migration to Switzerland and its impact on changing gender relations. In future work, it would be worthwhile to address the same question with regard to Swiss emigration.¹⁰ As is the case with most discussions

⁸Urmila Goel, Praxis und (Re)Präsentation. (Wieder)Herstellung von Heteronormativität im Migrationskontext (2009), in: <http://www.urmila.de/DesisinD/Geschichte/malayali/malluindex.html> (1 July 2018).

⁹The family later moved to Spain.

¹⁰A good starting point is offered by Brigitte Studer, Caroline Arni, Walter Leimgruber, Jon Mathieu, and Laurent Tissot, *Die Schweiz anderswo. AuslandschweizerInnen* -

of immigration, a sedentary bias can, in fact, also be detected when the effects of emigration from Switzerland are studied.

A good example can be found in the interpretation of emigration from what is now called the Canton of Ticino during the early modern period. At that time, the seasonal emigration of men led to local women taking over all the work to be done in their home region. Contemporaries who visited these areas described this in very negative terms and often claimed that, in the absence of men, the whole community developed pathological traits. According to a widespread narrative, a correlation between migration and social stagnation was postulated. In addition, the alleged effects of mothers' working on children's health were described in very drastic terms. According to Paolo Ghiringhelli, for instance, in no other region of Switzerland did one see so many deaf and dumb people as in Ticino.¹¹ He attributed this to the hard work done by the women, who would often carry the heaviest burdens on their backs uphill and downhill even on the day of their parturition, to the clumsiness of the midwives, and to bad childcare in general. In spring and autumn, the mothers' and the other female members of the family would stay away from the house all day long, leaving the small children to the care of other children who, according to Ghiringhelli, were hardly able to keep themselves upright. Under such circumstances, the children would be in danger of being crushed, burning, falling—or of being eaten in the cradle by pigs, or at least seriously injured by them. In summer, the small children would be taken to the fields. There, they would stay with their heads uncovered, leaving them exposed to the scorching rays of the sun. This would boil their brains and make them into deaf, dumb, and completely stupid people.

As other reports also testify, this kind of migration called into question the traditional division of labour, revealing it to be a social construct rather than a natural phenomenon—which would explain the angry reactions. However, in historical research, the negative opinion expressed in such sources was for a long time simply taken over as is. For instance, Ghiringhelli's statements were not checked, but repeated verbatim, nor

SchweizerInnen im Ausland. La Suisse ailleurs. Les Suisses de l'étranger - les Suisses à l'étranger, Zürich: Chronos 2015.

¹¹See, for example, Paolo Ghiringhelli, *Topographisch statistische Darstellung des Cantons Tessin*, Helvetischer Almanach für das Jahr 1812.

was there a discussion of which function such discourses should fulfil.¹² Instead of simply showing how this migration was perceived by contemporaries, historians adopted these opinions as their own and thus, by extension, the view that emigration had reinforced the bad position of women. That a historian who is uncritically attached to his sources, adopts the judgement of contemporary observers and even transfers it to the present day is, under such circumstances, not surprising. For example, the following was written in this context: ‘Emigration was not only a mean of stabilising the size of the population, it also stabilised the backwardness from which the Ticino has still not [...] recovered today’.¹³

Only relatively recently have two female historians, Patrizia Audenino and Paola Corti, developed a different view on this process: ‘For these reasons, the women of the Alps could have verified precociously how the division of domestic and productive roles was a social construction, rather than a natural phenomenon’.¹⁴ Of course, it is not a question of proclaiming a naive narrative of ‘emancipation’, since the very difficult living conditions of these women must not be neglected. But only from a perspective like the one adopted by Audenino and Corti can the dimension of migration come into view, which can be an important trigger for socio-political change.

¹²A good example is André Schluchter, Die ‘Nie Genug zu verwünschende Wuth in Fremde Länder zu gehen.’ Notizen zur Emigration der Tessiner in der frühen Neuzeit, in Jaritz and Müller, *Migration in der Feudalgesellschaft*, Frankfurt: Campus Verlag 1988, 239–262; André Schluchter, *Demografia e Emigrazione nel Ticino in Epoca Moderna (secoli XVI–XIX)*, *Col bastone e la bisaccia per le strade d’Europa. Migrazioni stagionali di mestiere dall’arco alpino nei secoli XVI–XVIII*, Bellinzona: Arti grafiche A. Salvioni 1991, 21–48.

For a more detailed discussion on this, see Francesca Falk, Marignano da, Migration dort, Südafrika nirgends. Über eine gewollte Entkoppelung von Diskursen, in *Traverse. Zeitschrift für Geschichte* 3 (2015), 155–165.

¹³Schluchter, Die ‘Nie Genug zu verwünschende Wuth in Fremde Länder zu gehen.’ Notizen zur Emigration der Tessiner in der frühen Neuzeit, in Jaritz and Müller, *Migration in der Feudalgesellschaft*, Frankfurt: Campus Verlag 1988, 239–262, 258. My translation.

¹⁴Patrizia Audenino and Paola Corti, Il mondo diviso. Uomini che partono, donne che restano, *L’Alpe* (2001), 12–19, 19. My translation. See also Patrizia Audenino, Introduzione - la dinamica dei ruoli, in Valsangiacomo and Lorenzetti, *Donne e lavoro. Prospettive per una storia delle montagne europee XVIII–XX secc*, Milano: FrancoAngeli 2010, 17–25.

COLONIAL CONSTELLATIONS

In the colonies, women were also often perceived in ways that diverged from the European image of the ‘weaker sex’. The local women appeared to the European colonisers to be workhorses: carrying wood, stomping grain in heavy mortars, carrying heavy loads to the market, and doing ‘unwomanly’ work in the fields.

It is well known that colonialism legitimised itself as a civilising mission with the aim of improving the position of women in particular. In this context, female missionaries, female professionals, and missionary wives were able to create a field of activity of their own by ‘educating’ local girls and women and through medical work. Against this background, it appears evident that the colonial contexts of Swiss emigration, and in particular their relation to gender inequality, need to be addressed.¹⁵

In the case of Bertha Hardegger, for instance, gender discrimination was directly related to her decision to leave Switzerland. Hardegger had studied medicine.¹⁶ When her father died, she took over his practice, but only in order to preserve it for her younger brother, who was just taking his final examinations.¹⁷ In 1936, she left Switzerland for South Africa, and in 1937 she moved to colonial Lesotho, where she became the first female doctor in that region. She was also one of the first female Swiss Catholic missionary doctors. According to Ruramisai Charumbira, ‘Hardegger was following the footsteps of many educated European women who found an outlet in the colonies, where they could and did

¹⁵For an analysis of the presence and perseverance of colonial structures and power relations in a country like Switzerland that has not understood itself as an official colonial power, see, for instance, Patricia Purtschert, Francesca Falk, and Barbara Lüthi, Switzerland and ‘Colonialism without Colonies.’ Reflections on the Status of Colonial Outsiders, *Interventions. International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 18, 2 (2016), 286–302.

¹⁶In what follows, see Ruramisai Charumbira, *Becoming Imperial. A Swiss Woman’s Shifting Identity in British Southern Africa*, in Purtschert and Fischer-Tiné, *Colonial Switzerland. Rethinking Colonialism from the Margins*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2015, 157–178.

¹⁷Bertha Hardegger, *Eine junge Frau aus dem Toggenburg wird Missionsärztin: Bertha Hardeggers Lebenslauf*, in Specker, *Bertha Hardegger, Mutter der Basuto. Als weisse Ärztin in Schwarzafrika*, Olten: Walter-Verlag AG 1987, 11–16, 12.

become their own mistresses and practiced their professions fully'.¹⁸ Against this backdrop, it comes as no surprise that Hardegger saw the independence of Lesotho in 1966 critically and returned to Switzerland in 1970, where she ran a medical practice in Thalwil.

In colonial constellations, women were considered by the dominant European ideology to be inferior within a race that was considered superior.¹⁹ Therefore, certain privileges intersected with specific forms of discriminations and produced an ambiguous potential for new social and political reconfigurations. Female colonists exercised power over colonised men and were, for instance, able to delegate menial work to them. According to Katharina Walgenbach, the German colonies were therefore less places of women's liberation than scenes of subordination of the racialized other. In her opinion, it can be assumed that racist privilege in the colonies in fact stabilised traditional gender relationships between European men and women, because white women were compensated for their gender discrimination on another level.²⁰

A somewhat different picture is drawn in the research on Swiss missions.²¹ The relationship between mission and gender innovation is here as well highly ambivalent. Undisputed is that this mission was defined as

¹⁸Charumbira, *Becoming Imperial. A Swiss Woman's Shifting Identity in British Southern Africa*, in Purtschert and Fischer-Tiné, *Colonial Switzerland. Rethinking Colonialism from the Margins*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2015, 157–178, 157.

¹⁹Margaret Strobel, *Gender and Race in the Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Empire*, in Bridenthal, Koontz, and Stuard, *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin 1987, 375–396, 375.

²⁰Katharina Walgenbach, *Emanzipation als koloniale Fiktion: Zur sozialen Position Weisser Frauen in den deutschen Kolonien*, in *L'Homme. Europäische Zeitschrift für Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft* 16, 2 (2005), 47–67; Katharina Walgenbach, *'Die weisse Frau als Trägerin deutscher Kultur.' Koloniale Diskurse über Geschlecht, 'Rasse' und Klasse im Kaiserreich*, Frankfurt am Main: Campus 2005.

²¹Compared with the Protestant missions, especially to the Basel Mission, little research has been done on the Catholic mission in Switzerland. Simone Bleuer and Barbara Miller are currently investigating relations, interdependencies and contact zones between Switzerland and colonial Zimbabwe on the basis of the Catholic Swiss Bethlehem Mission Society. With regard to North America, Manuel Menrath showed how Swiss Catholic missionaries moved to the US around the middle of the nineteenth century to proselytise the indigenous peoples living there—above all the Sioux. Manuel Menrath, *Mission Sitting Bull. The Cultural Conquest of the Sioux and Their Varied Response*, Morgantown, PA: Swiss American Historical Society by Masthof Press 2017.

a male enterprise and that the movement behind it embraced conservative views of women's participation in public life.²² Even when women were designated as missionaries, they were often given subordinate status without the rights held by men.²³ Missions thus often confined women's activities to a limited sphere. On the other hand, in order to create Christian communities, women were indispensable as wives and teachers.²⁴ Girls were, for instance, taught domestic skills by older women, among other subjects, as they were trained to become Christian wives and mothers.²⁵ Cleanliness and hygiene campaigns in these years aimed at instructing both Europe's underclass and colonial subjects, while, at the same time, striving to establish bourgeois gender concepts.²⁶ The aim was to instruct these women so that they would be able to raise their children 'properly'. Colonial policies thus specifically aimed

²²Line Nyhagen Predelli and Jon Miller, *Piety and Patriarchy: Contested Gender Regimes in Nineteenth-Century Evangelical Mission*, in Huber and Lutkehaus, *Gendered Mission: Women and Men in Missionary Discourse and Practice*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press 2002, 67–111.

²³Mary Taylor Huber and Nancy C. Lutkehaus, Introduction: *Gendered Missions at Home and Abroad*, in Huber and Lutkehaus, *Gendered Mission: Women and Men in Missionary Discourse and Practice*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press 2002, 1–38, 14.

²⁴Nyhagen Predelli and Miller, *Piety and Patriarchy: Contested Gender Regimes in Nineteenth-Century Evangelical Mission*, in Huber and Lutkehaus, *Gendered Mission. Women and Men in Missionary Discourse and Practice*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press 2002, 67–111, 77.

²⁵Judith Becker, *Frauen in der Mission und Mächenschulen*, in Christ-von Wedel, *Basler Mission. Menschen, Geschichte, Perspektiven 1815–2015*, 2001, 57–62; Simone Prodoliet, *Wider die Schamlosigkeit und das Elend der heidnischen Weiber. Die Basler Frauenmission und der Export des europäischen Frauenideals in die Kolonien*, Zürich: Limmat Verlag 1987. See also Ulrike Sill, *Encounters in Quest of Christian Womanhood. The Basel Mission in pre- and early colonial Ghana*, Leiden and Boston: Brill 2010; Waltraud Haas, *Erlitten und erstritten. Der Befreiungsweg von Frauen in der Basler Mission 1816–1966*, Basel: Basilea Verlag 1994; Christine Keim, *Frauenmission und Frauenemanzipation. Eine Diskussion in der Basler Mission im Kontext der frühen ökumenischen Bewegung (1901–1928)*, Münster: Lit Verlag 2004.

²⁶Linda Ratschiller is currently working on a PhD project at the University of Fribourg that analyses how the Basel Mission shaped knowledge of hygiene both abroad and at home between 1885 and 1914. See also Linda Ratschiller and Siegfried Weichlein, *Der schwarze Körper als Missionsgebiet. Medizin, Ethnologie und Theologie in Afrika und Europa 1880–1960*, Köln, Weimar, and Wien: Böhlau Verlag 2016.

to change relationships between women, men, and children.²⁷ In addition, the circumstances created by the colonial constellation often placed pressure on received understandings about differences between men and women and their proper roles among colonised and colonisers alike. The paid employment of women to promote evangelical domestic ideals abroad implicitly violated and thus critiqued those very same ideals. And sending young children home to be reared and educated deprived missionary wives of many of the roles of motherhood. The imperial mission was therefore from its beginning gendered. It left its marks on the division of labour and relations between women and men in the broader societies in which the missions originated, as well as those in which the missions pursued their goal.²⁸

²⁷In what follows, see Huber and Lutkehaus, Introduction: Gendered Missions at Home and Abroad, in Huber and Lutkehaus, *Gendered Mission. Women and Men in Missionary Discourse and Practice*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press 2002, 1–38.

²⁸Nyhagen Predelli and Miller, Piety and Patriarchy: Contested Gender Regimes in Nineteenth-Century Evangelical Mission, in Huber and Lutkehaus, *Gendered Mission. Women and Men in Missionary Discourse and Practice*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press 2002, 67–111, 70.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if you modified the licensed material. You do not have permission under this license to share adapted material derived from this chapter or parts of it.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

