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Migrating within “the gender-equal Nordic region”:

Icelandic migrants in Norway and the gendered division of work and care

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Abstract

Migration is a gendered process that shapes the lives of men and women differently, because they generally occupy dissimilar positions within the household, the labour market and society. This article examines gender and migration within a Nordic context, between two countries that are often presented as gender equal in cross-national comparisons. The focus is on how the gendered division of labour is manifested in the experiences of Icelanders who migrated to Norway in the wake of the Icelandic financial crisis of October 2008. The results are based on interviews with people who migrated to Norway both with and without their families. In our analysis, we show how the gender-segregated labour market and gender norms lead to different positions and opportunities for men and women at times of economic crisis and migration. For study participants who migrated with their families, the relocation was often organized around the labour-market position and opportunities of men. Those who migrated without their families emphasized their roles as providers for their families. However, only the women described how their absence was perceived as a failure to fulfil childcare responsibilities. The findings highlight the resilience of the notions of men as providers and women as primary parents within “the gender-equal Nordic region”, and indicate how these roles may facilitate or discourage the migration of men and women.

Keywords: gender, migration, division of labour, transnational families, Iceland, Norway.

Introduction

Feminist scholars have stressed that gender should be a central concept in migration research, because gender shapes the migration process and the lives of migrants in crucial ways (Hibbins & Pease, 2009; Lundström, 2014; Lutz, 2010; Mahler & Pessar, 2006; Näre & Akhtar, 2014; D. Walsh, Valestrand, Gerrard, & Aure, 2013). Studies on gender and migration have predominantly focused on people migrating from low- or middle-income countries to more affluent ones. Less research with a gendered focus has been conducted on migration between the affluent countries of the Global North (but see Lundström, 2014). In this article, we address this gap by concentrating on migration between two Nordic countries, Iceland and Norway, which are often considered comparable in terms of social structures and are presented as among the most gender-equal countries in the world (Siim & Stoltz, 2015; World Economic Forum, 2014; Þorvaldsdóttir, 2011). Based on a qualitative study, we examine the experiences of Icelandic women and men who migrated to Norway after the financial crash in Iceland in October 2008. We ask how migration motivations and opportunities, in this case of North-North migration, are shaped by the gendered division of work and care. In our analysis, we follow Lutz (2010), who emphasizes that a gendered approach to migration must consider the following aspects: discourses and practices of gender in the sending and receiving societies, gendered labour markets and care practices. These are interconnected features of the existing gender system. Our focus is on two groups that are rarely analysed together: transnational parents who left their families behind when migrating to Norway, and family migrants who moved to Norway along with their families. Combining the examination of these dissimilar migration trajectories gives a broader picture of how gendered labour markets, care practices and gendered norms shape the lives of migrant men and women. The experiences of the participants who migrated with their families illustrate how gender roles are played out, while those of the participants who

migrated without their families highlight existing gender norms. The migration process makes it more apparent how gender roles in relation to caring for children and the home still persist, alongside unequal positions in the labour market.

Gender and migration

Many studies have found that women's migration is often deemed to be more problematic for families than men's migration, as migrant women are "blamed for 'disrupting' the social and gender order" (Morokvašić, 2014, p. 366; see also Lutz, 2010; Näre & Akhtar, 2014). For instance, studies on transnational parenthood have primarily focused on women, where the absence of mothers from their children is depicted as more disturbing than the absence of fathers (Parreñas, 2008). While women often take up more traditional gender roles after migration (Fechter, 2010; Lundström, 2014; Morokvašić, 2014), they also commonly gain autonomy and empowerment (Mahler & Pessar, 2006; Parreñas, 2001). Studies on migrant men suggest that migration can weaken their position of power in the home as the division of work and responsibility changes (Charsley & Liversage, 2015; Donaldson & Howson, 2009). On the other hand, migration can also lead to "exaggerated masculinities", through which men emphasize their roles as good workers and providers (Donaldson & Howson, 2009). Migration can be an opportunity for men to escape the dominant ideas of masculinity in their home country (Batnitzky, McDowell, & Dyer, 2009), and improve their relationships with their spouses and children (Donaldson & Howson, 2009). Research on gender and migration thus shows that migration may both transform and reinforce gender identities and the division of labour.

As noted, there has been relatively little focus on gender in relation to current North-North migration. A notable exception is the work of Lundström (2014), who studied the migration of Swedish women to the United States. Lundström highlights how these women

needed to renegotiate their ideals of gender equality when they took up housewife roles in upper-middle-class settings in the USA. These women were in a privileged position with regard to race and class but not in relation to gender (Lundström, 2014). Research on internal migration shows that when couples move within Western countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, the Netherlands and Sweden, they are more likely to move in order to accommodate men's than women's career opportunities, and that migration may harm the employment prospects of married women (Boyle, Feng, & Gayle, 2009; Brandén, 2014; Cooke, 2008).

Studies on immigration and gender in Norway show that migration can result in more traditional patterns of work and care. Studying the labour-market participation of skilled migrants from different parts of the world, Fosslund (2013) found that nearly all of the female migrants in her study took up traditional gender roles soon after migrating to Norway. Aure (2013) similarly concluded that skilled migrant women who moved to Norway from various countries more commonly withdrew from the Norwegian labour market in order to care for their families than migrant men, making migrant women “more vulnerable and economically dependent” (p. 282). However, studies also indicate that migration to Norway can be an opportunity for fathers to become more actively involved in family life (Aure & Munkejord, 2016; Bygnes & Erdal, 2017).

Nordic context of gender equality and the division of labour

In international comparisons, the Nordic countries are often presented as role models when it comes to policies that promote gender equality and the equal division of labour (Aboim, 2010). In fact, the notion of gender equality has become part of the self-image of these countries and is used to judge who belongs and who does not (Borchorst, 2011; Loftsdóttir, 2012; Mulinari, Keskinen, Irni, & Tuori, 2009; Siim & Stoltz, 2015; Þorvaldsdóttir, 2011).

The male-breadwinner model based on the heterosexual nuclear family, in which men provide financially and women care for the family, has been declining as a practice in Europe since the 1990s (Lister, 2009). This is mainly due to women's increased participation in the labour market, whilst men have not increased their participation in housework and childcare to the same degree (Aboim, 2010; Lister, 2009). While policies of a dual-earner/dual-carer model have been differentially promoted in the Nordic countries, an overarching emphasis has been placed on enabling both men and women to combine labour-market participation with the care of small children. The length of parental leave varies between the Nordic countries; Iceland offers the shortest leave, of nine months with 80 per cent pay coverage, whereas Norway offers a leave of nearly 14 months with 80 per cent coverage (Ingólfssdóttir & Gislason, 2016; Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration, n.d.).

The Nordic countries have been celebrated as pioneers in introducing parental leave arrangements that encourage fathers to care for young children at home (Haas & Hwang, 2013). As in other Western societies, fathers in the Nordic countries have become more involved in caring for their children during recent decades (Farstad & Stefansen, 2015; Wall & Arnold, 2007). This trend has been referred to as “new” or “involved” fatherhood and has been associated with middle-class values (Brandth & Kvande, 2015; Wall & Arnold, 2007). Involved fathers are “more nurturing, develop closer emotional relationships with their children, and share the joys and work of caregiving with mothers” (Wall & Arnold, 2007, p. 509). The ideal of the “involved” father has had great support in the Nordic countries and has become a dominant ideal for fathering in Iceland (Farstad & Stefansen, 2015) and Norway (Aure & Munkejord, 2016; Brandth & Kvande, 2015).

Research has found that fathers' participation in childcare and household tasks is in fact more favourably perceived than mothers' participation in the labour market in Iceland (Farstad & Stefansen, 2015), and in the Nordic countries in general (Aboim, 2010).

According to Arnalds, Eydal, and Gíslason (2013), since the law on paternity leave was adopted in Iceland in the year 2000, specifying a three-month paternity leave quota, fathers have become more engaged and a more equal division of care has been observed among Icelandic parents (Arnalds et al., 2013). However, although women usually work full time and men have increased their participation in childcare, research indicates that women are still regarded as the primary parents in Iceland, while men are seen as primary breadwinners and secondary carers (Farstad, 2015; Ingólfssdóttir & Gíslason, 2016; Pétursdóttir, 2009; Símonardóttir, 2016). This was reflected in the Icelandic media coverage of migration to Norway, which focused primarily on men as breadwinners, while little attention was given to the women who migrated to work abroad (Júlíusdóttir, Skaptadóttir, & Karlsdóttir, 2013).

As Aure (2013) reminds us, “labour markets are not in fact ‘markets’ but rather place-specific, cultural, relational and gendered social systems” (p. 283). Both the Icelandic and Norwegian labour markets are highly segregated by ethnicity and gender (Eriksen & Neumann, 2011; Júlíusdóttir et al., 2013). A gendered wage gap also persists (Júlíusdóttir et al., 2013; Orupabo & Kitterød, 2016). Women’s labour-market participation is very high in both countries and in fact Iceland has the highest labour-market participation in Europe for both men and women (Eurostat, n.d.). Icelanders also have the longest working week in Europe. In 2011, full-time employed men worked on average 46.9 hours a week and women worked 41.2 hours. In comparison, Norwegian men worked 39.5 hours and Norwegian women worked 38.2 hours per week (Eurostat, 2013, p. 143).

The study

This article is informed by data from a larger project on the migration of Icelanders to Norway after the economic crash in October 2008. At this time, Iceland experienced a deep economic recession with a high rate of unemployment and a large increase in the debt burden

of many households (Ólafsson, 2011). Unemployment was initially higher among men, as male-dominated labour sectors like the construction industry were severely hit (Júlíusdóttir et al., 2013). The crisis led to increased emigration, with the largest group of people moving to Norway, one of only a few countries in Europe where the global financial crisis had little effect and unemployment levels remained low (Garðarsdóttir, 2012). Nearly 6,000 Icelandic nationals migrated to Norway between 2009 and 2012 (Statistics Iceland, n.d.), a sizeable number considering Iceland's small population of 320,000 people in 2009. More men than women migrated; among those relocating to Norway in 2009, 59 per cent were men, but the gender difference decreased in subsequent years (Statistics Iceland, n.d.).

In the project, a qualitative ethnographic methodology was applied, which included fieldwork in Oslo and surrounding areas from January to June 2012 and in Bergen for a week in April 2013. During this time, Guðjónsdóttir conducted semi-structured interviews with Icelanders about their motivations for migration, the process of migrating, labour-market experiences, transnational connections to Iceland and life in Norway in comparison to Iceland. Participants were recruited in a variety of ways: through the researcher's personal networks, through Facebook, at Icelandic gatherings in Norway and by the use of snowball sampling (Esterberg, 2002, pp. 93–94). The interviews usually took place in the participants' homes and lasted between one and four hours. The data analysed in this article consists of interviews with 20 individuals, aged 19 to 50. Although a diverse group, they were all in heterosexual relationships and, as "white" Icelandic nationals, they occupied a privileged position compared to many other migrants in Norway (see Guðjónsdóttir, 2014; Guðjónsdóttir & Loftsdóttir, 2017). All the participants had lived with their spouse and children in Iceland prior to migrating. Out of the 20 participants, 15 had migrated with their spouse and children to Norway, eight women and seven men. Five participants, three men and two women, migrated without their spouse and children, but usually visited their families

in Iceland every one or two months. We refer to the first group as family migrants and the second as transnational parents. The family migrants had different levels of education and worked in diverse occupations. Four were professionals, four worked as skilled craftspeople, and four worked in unskilled jobs. Three of the women were not employed at the time of the interviews. All of the transnational parents held university degrees and worked as professionals. The research participants had lived in Norway for periods ranging from six months to a little more than three years when the study took place. As recent migrants, Icelandic society was generally their reference point rather than Norway (Guðjónsdóttir & Loftsdóttir, 2017). The gendered norms of work and care, and how they are reflected in gender roles through migration, emerged as important themes during the analysis of the interviews and informal conversations. As depicted in our findings sections below, these themes were reflected in how people talked about their economic motivations and their desire for a better family life.

Economic motivations and opportunities for migration

In this section, we discuss the economic motivations that participants usually stressed as their main reason for migrating. We relate these motivations to the different opportunities that face migrant women and men. Firstly, we focus on the family migrants and highlight how the men and women explained their migration trajectories differently, with the women alone explaining their migration in terms of their partner's job opportunities. Secondly, the experiences of the transnational parents are examined. They show how women and men were affected differently by attitudes towards this type of migration.

Family migrants – adopting a more traditional division of work and care?

Of the family migrants, men and women described the factors leading to their migration

somewhat differently. Whereas many of the men referred to their own unemployment or lack of sufficient income as a reason to migrate, some of the women described how they had been in a fairly good job in Iceland but that their spouses had been unemployed or in an insecure position. Nanna's story is an example of this; explaining her reasons for migrating, she said:

We literally migrated because of the crash. We gave up. Well, I had a good job. At the start I was maybe not so excited about migrating, but I was ready to try something new. He [her spouse] is a [professional in a sector hit hard by the crisis] so you know he was sort of forced to go abroad, at home there was no work available for people with his qualifications.¹

Although the labour market participation of men often seemed to be prioritized over that of women, as in Nanna's case, the aim was usually for both spouses to be employed in Norway, as they had been in Iceland. However, the participants explained that it was sometimes difficult for women to find employment. They claimed that labour-market demands and language requirements made it easier for men to find work than women. They stated that in Norway there was a demand for carpenters, electricians and workers in other certified trades, as well as for professionals such as engineers and IT specialists, who were not usually required to speak Norwegian. Although healthcare professionals like nurses were also in high demand, it was usually necessary for them to speak Norwegian. Therefore, because men and women were positioned in different fields in the gender-segregated labour market, their job opportunities differed. Hafdís observed:

Naturally, it's normally the men who enter the labour market first; the women are at home a bit with the children like in the old days and get quite isolated. Those who haven't gone out to work, you know, who maybe haven't been able to because of the language.

Here, Hafdís is pointing out the tendency for men to enter the labour market before women, highlighting the persistence of men's primary role as breadwinners. Her description of

women who stay at home becoming “isolated” also highlights the vulnerable position of migrant women who do not enter the labour market (see also Aure, 2013). Hafðís also relates the arrangement of women staying at home with their children to “the old days”, seeing it as an out-dated practice that fails to fit in with the strong ideal in Iceland of women’s active labour-market participation and the equal division of work and care (Pétursdóttir, 2009).

Many participants mentioned the lack of day-care for children as a hindrance to women entering the labour market. Those who migrated with children of pre-school age sometimes had to wait for several months before their child was accepted at a day-care institution. With one exception, it was the mothers who covered the care gap because in many cases the fathers had pre-arranged jobs to go to upon their arrival in Norway. Explaining the work situation of his spouse, Árni said: “she’s looking for a job now; she was stuck at home for a whole year because we couldn’t get [their child] into day-care until one year after we arrived.”

The only exception, where the father stayed at home with his child, was Dröfn’s spouse. She reported: “I started working right away and my husband started a month later; he took one month to get us settled and find day-care for [their child].” Here the intersection of class and gender may be important. Dröfn and her spouse were professionals with high-salary jobs and had both found jobs before migrating. Instead of waiting six months for public day-care, they opted for the more expensive option of a private child-minder. This single case of a father staying at home before the child entered day-care thus did not translate into a long absence from the labour market, as it did for some of the mothers.

Transnational parents – experiencing gendered attitudes towards work and care?

Like the family migrants, the transnational parents explained their migration in economic terms. After the financial crash, the men had become unemployed, while the women had less work than before. They all emphasized their role as professionals and breadwinners in

relation to their migration to Norway. However, men and women faced different attitudes regarding their migration. When asked whether there were different views towards men and women working abroad, Ragnhildur, whose husband had also worked abroad while she stayed in Iceland, said:

That's a very good question. There are, and you almost have different views yourself towards this, so you first have to just forgive yourself. I feel, you know, with my mother-in-law and some others, you know, that it's much more natural that he commutes rather than me. But I'm actually in a position to get a higher salary than him, and if we only look at it from a financial perspective, then it's way better that I commute. And I'm so lucky to be in a good marriage where he is as much of a househusband [*húsfaðir*] as I'm a housewife [*húsmóðir*]. So the kids notice no difference in terms of which one of us leaves. [...] But I do feel it a bit, from some friends and some older housewives, like: "what are you doing, leaving the kids like that?" and stuff like that.

Ragnhildur explained that her reasons for commuting were financial; she could earn more than her spouse, yet his moving is still seen as more "natural". She also explained that she was "lucky" to have a spouse who is her equal when it comes to housework and childcare. The word "lucky" highlights that this is not to be taken for granted and that their equal ability to attend to the home is not the norm.

Brynja's experience illustrates how the absence of women from the home may be regarded with suspicion. Describing the reaction she encountered when people learned that she was migrating, Brynja said: "people thought it was a little strange, many thought there was something wrong with our marriage or something, because I was going on my own." Brynja's migration was therefore not conceived of in terms of her role as a provider for the family, but rather in terms of her role as a wife and mother.

These findings are in accordance with other studies showing that the migration of mothers is usually seen as more problematic for families than that of fathers, and that when women transgress gender norms or expectations they may be subjected to stigmatization or

regulation (Lutz, 2010; Morokvašić, 2014). Although Ragnhildur and Brynja had not encountered strict regulation or stigmatization, their narratives show that their migration was met with suspicion and criticism, and in this sense discouraged. Both women expressed feelings of guilt about leaving their families, which is common among transnational mothers due to gendered expectations and normative ideas of motherhood (Carling, Menjívar, & Schmalzbauer, 2012). Wall and Arnold (2007) identify parental guilt as one of the key factors keeping mothers in the role of primary parent. The Icelandic men did not describe such feelings of guilt or experiences of stigmatization for leaving their children back home. When asked whether women and men faced different attitudes when migrating from their families, Magnús said:

I see it this way, if it's necessary that the woman has to go and work like this then that's just the way it is, then the man just takes care of the home, or tries to at least. So I feel there should be complete equality in this, I can't see that it makes any difference. But in my case there was no other option because my wife has a job at home and I was unemployed, so naturally I had to go.

In his answer, Magnús described his gender-egalitarian view that both men and women are equally capable of earning and caring for the family. However, there does seem to be a slight reservation about the ability of men to perform the caring role, as Magnús talked about men “trying” to take care of the home, implying that they might not be fully able to do so. The fact that he did not discuss general attitudes but rather his own experiences may be because he had not personally experienced negative reactions towards his migration, as the women in the study had. After all, Magnús' migration did not transgress gender roles as the migration of mothers did (Lutz, 2010; Morokvašić, 2014; Parreñas, 2008). Because of these gender roles, men may be expected, to a greater extent than women, to migrate without their family.

In sum, the structural context in which the participants' migration took place is pertinent because it shapes the different experiences of men and women and how they

evaluate their choices. The decision to migrate among the family migrants was most often taken in terms of the husbands' employment status in Iceland and a demand for particular kinds of workers in Norway. Women had a more difficult time finding jobs due to the fact that women are strongly represented in the service and care sector, which has stricter language requirements. Differences in the views towards men and women in relation to work and care and how they affect the migration process were even more apparent in the voices of the transnational parents. We can clearly see how gendered norms affected both women's and men's migration experiences, with women's choice to migrate for work without their families challenging the gender norms and exposing them to criticism and suspicion regarding their role as mothers and spouses.

The family as a motivation for migration

Although most of the participants talked about financial security as an important reason for their migration, they also referred to family wellbeing as a relevant factor. Participants discussed the ideal forms of family life and how migration could be seen as a way to enable or hinder this. In this section, we show how the family migrants described their migration as an opportunity to obtain "a better family life". Then we turn to the transnational parents who, in contrast, commonly depicted their migration as leading to an "abnormal family situation".

Family migrants – moving to attain "a better family life"?

Among the family migrants, some described Norwegian society as being more "family friendly" than Icelandic society, and said that this had affected their decision to migrate. Dröfn commented: "Society is not very family friendly back home in Iceland. We didn't only move here because of the crash." Related to this, some of the younger women discussed the advantages of the longer parental leave in Norway compared to Iceland. For instance, Hafþís

said:

I liked the idea of being able to stay at home with a new-born for nine to twelve months, because we Icelandic women just haven't had the privilege to stay at home for so long with our children. [...] And I know that a lot of women here think like me; they're going to stay here while they have their children and then they're going home [to Iceland] when they've finished (laughs). That was also sort of the main idea.

In light of the emphasis in both Iceland and Norway on involving fathers in the care of young children through the paternity-leave quota (Brandth & Kvande, 2015; Farstad & Stefansen, 2015; Haas & Hwang, 2013), it is noteworthy that the women did not discuss the role of fathers in caring for infants, or how the parental leave would be shared by the parents. Longer parental leave was instead discussed as a chance for mothers to spend more time with their small children. These findings correspond with Ingólfssdóttir and Gíslason's (2016) study, which showed that Icelandic parents considered parental leave to be the mother's domain.

Relocation to Norway was also seen by the participants as a chance to devote more time to their family, because the working day in Norway is usually shorter than in Iceland (see also Bygnes & Erdal, 2017). Nanna said this about the opportunity to combine work and family life:

Here, I work from seven in the morning and am finished by three. You know, I'm home [around four], and have already picked up my child from day-care. [...] It's just somehow very different here. Back home, you know, I was always working from eight to five and then doing this and that and I was never home until six. Then you had to begin cooking. Here I eat dinner around five.

Baldur had also hoped to be able to balance his work and family life better in Norway than he had done in Iceland, where he had worked three jobs and saw very little of his family:

My dream is actually to be able to go to work in the morning and return home during the day, not in the evening or during the night; see my [child] and do everything here at

home and go to bed and go back to work. That is to say, to have a life outside of, a little family life. That's the only thing I ask. I don't want any extra money or anything, I don't need it. And that was precisely the plan, that you could get settled here and just arrange things so that you could see the family, and even friends as well.

Research on migrant men has shown that men equate successful migration with being a successful provider (Donaldson & Howson, 2009; K. Walsh, 2011). For Baldur, a young manual labourer, successful migration not only meant being a better provider, but also fulfilling his desire for more free time and being able to spend time with his family. Baldur therefore aligned himself with the middle-class ideal of the “involved” father (Farstad & Stefansen, 2015; Wall & Arnold, 2007), rather than merely the male breadwinner ideal. Migration can therefore be a chance for men to become more involved fathers (Aure & Munkejord, 2016; Bygnes & Erdal, 2017). However, economically motivated family migration may commonly lead to fathers having less time with their families as they work longer hours (Kilkey, Plomien, & Perrons, 2014). Although the Icelandic men talked about shorter working hours in Norway as commendable, such ideas were not always realized in practice. A case in point is Valdimar, a skilled craftsman who worked as an independent contractor in control of his own hours. He explained:

Seven and a half hours is a full working day here. Men just go home at three, there is no overtime offered. You wouldn't know what to do with yourself. But, I mean, it's definitely really nice and I could imagine working like that, maybe when you're at a better place financially, you know.

Valdimar was paying off debt in Iceland and his spouse was not yet employed. Consequently, he worked many more than the seven and a half hours that he described as the norm in Norway. At the time, working shorter hours seemed alien to him, although he hoped to reduce his hours when he had improved the family's finances.

Transnational parents – experiencing “abnormal” family life?

The transnational parents described the situation of living away from their spouse and children as undesirable and even abnormal, not matching the ideal of the nuclear family.

However, they also rationalized their choice to move, and there was a clear gender difference in the way women and men talked about this. For example, Ragnhildur said the following about living away from her family:

You always need to take into account normal family life, you know, to have both mom and dad at home. But if you think about it, fishermen leave for a month and then they're maybe a month at home, and it's been like that for many, many years in Iceland and no one has ever remarked on that really, other than that it's just a little hard to be a fisherman. But as a woman I feel that it's not viewed in the same way.

Héðinn also compared his family situation to being a fisherman:

Men were maybe on a trawler and were out at sea for one to two months and then they came home. They just stayed for a week and then they went out again, so I guess this is not much different in that respect.

To make sense of their absence from their family for extended periods of time, both Ragnhildur and Héðinn compared their position to that of fishermen, a traditional and highly respected field of work in Iceland. However, this is a male-dominated occupation. Ragnhildur points out that, although the absence of fishermen has always been seen as normal (even a little heroic), she has found that the same is not true when women are absent because of work.

These perceptions of men's and women's absence from the home influenced how the transnational parents spoke about the wellbeing of their children in Iceland and the possibility of leaving their work in Norway to return to Iceland. Without being asked, both Brynja and Ragnhildur stressed that their children were doing fine in Iceland living with their fathers. However, they both stated that they would go back to Iceland if their children wanted or

needed them. Brynja said: “the minute they feel bad about this I’ll go home; I mean that’s just how it is. But they feel, at least they say, they think it’s okay so far.” Both women emphasized that they had migrated to earn a higher salary to support the family, and Ragnhildur also described her job in Norway as particularly fulfilling. However, they stressed their children’s need for their presence as being more important than their work or income.

In contrast, the men did not talk about the children being fine at home in the capable hands of their mothers, perhaps because it goes without saying that children are fine when their mother, the primary caregiver, is around. This may explain why they did not mention their children’s need for their presence when evaluating whether to stay in Norway or return to Iceland. They approached the topic of return migration more from the standpoint of their own hopes and aspirations. Héðinn, for example, explained that it would be hard for him to return even if he found a job in Iceland, because it would never pay as well as his work in Norway. He said:

Once you’ve found something good then it’s really, I don’t really know what it would take for you to go home. The better you’re doing and the more you adapt to this environment here, you start to think more and more: “what can I do to enjoy both?”

Héðinn hoped to find a Norwegian job that would allow him to work both in Norway and Iceland. However, he added: “but of course you’re just fixed on what you have at home. That’s naturally always something you go for.” Héðinn talks about his wish to “enjoy” the best of both worlds: family life in Iceland and a highly paid job in Norway. Although he prioritizes his family, his narrative is different from that of Brynja and Ragnhildur; he focuses more on what would be good for him (what he wants to “enjoy”), rather than his children’s need for his presence.

Magnús found it difficult not to be able to share the family responsibility with his wife. He also described how he often felt lonely in Norway and missed his family. Magnús hoped that his family would be able to join him, saying:

I have to get the family over here, that's really important to me. Not to be so alone, it doesn't work in the long run; I can just feel it, it's difficult. [...] The family is the base, the foundation you see, so if they're around everyone feels good. But if only part of the family is present or it's split up, then it's like, then there's tension.

In a similar way to Héðinn, Magnús emphasized his own feelings and desires: he wanted his family to migrate because it would be good for them to be together but, perhaps more importantly, because he needed their support and companionship.

The participants' narratives reflect traditional ideas of the providing role of men and the caring role of women. Women have traditionally been responsible for creating the home and "homeliness", which the family consumes (K. Walsh, 2011). Although these findings are only based on five interviews, it is noteworthy that in the narratives it appears as though the home and family are a support for men, while women are a support for the family. The ways in which men and women emphasized different points in the interviews may reflect a situation in which the women were used to having to justify their migration and absence from their family, while men were not. This difference between the women's and men's narration of their parenting role again underscores the dominant idea of women's primary role as mothers (Ingólfssdóttir & Gíslason, 2016; Pétursdóttir, 2009; Símonardóttir, 2016; Wall & Arnold, 2007).

In sum, ideas about what is perceived as normal and good family life affected the participants' experiences of their migration, for both the family migrants and the transnational parents. The family migrants sought a more "family-friendly" society and a better work-care balance, whereby both mothers and fathers could spend more time with

their families. The transnational parents saw their families as unconventional, in “abnormal circumstances”, but the transnational mothers and fathers had different views about these circumstances. The mothers claimed that the needs of their children came above their own and that they would return home if the children requested them to do so, whereas the fathers talked about possible return in terms of their own needs and without mentioning the children. How women and men talk about their expectations of what migration can do to or for family life clearly reflects a gendered ideology.

Discussion and conclusion

In this article, in line with Lutz (2010), we have explored how gendered labour markets, care practices and gendered norms shape the lives of Icelandic men and women who have recently migrated to Norway. In terms of work and care, the findings of this study on North-North migration resemble the results of studies that focus on gender in relation to migration from low- or middle-income countries to more affluent ones. The gendered labour market plays an important role: men and women are generally employed in different job sectors and receive unequal pay, which leads to them having different positions and opportunities at times of economic crisis and migration. The narratives of the family migrants show that their migration was often organized around the labour-market positions and opportunities of men, and sometimes in opposition to the opportunities of women. The migration sometimes resulted in a weaker connection to the labour market for the women, who stayed at home because of a lack of job options and in order to care for their children, a pattern that has been found among other migrant women in Norway (Aure, 2013; Fosslund, 2013). In these cases, their migration has led to what some women saw as more traditional gender roles – “like in the old days” as one participant phrased it – in which the breadwinner role of men and the caring role of women are reinforced (Fechter, 2010; Lundström, 2014; Morokvašić, 2014).

We suggest that, rather than representing a return to the past, as a few of the

participants claimed, these more traditional roles that some women and men took on in the migration process reflect underlying gender norms and expectations. These gendered expectations and norms of work and care were particularly prominent in interviews with the five transnational parents. Both men and women emphasized their roles as providers for their families. However, women alone said that their absence from the home was seen by others as a failure to fulfil their childcare responsibilities. These findings are comparable with other studies showing that, when women migrate to provide for the family, they are judged for not conforming to the gender norm of motherly care. Conversely, men do not face this criticism to the same extent because they are adhering to the norm of the male provider (Lutz, 2010; Morokvašić, 2014; Parreñas, 2001, 2008).

The family migrants emphasized a more family-friendly society in Norway as an additional motivation for their migration to Norway. Both men and women described shorter working hours in Norway as an opportunity to find a better balance between work and care. Men who worked long hours, for instance, hoped to reduce these and spend more time with their families. While the family migrants saw their migration as a way to obtain a “better family life”, the transnational parents saw their families as “abnormal” because of their absence. The mothers talked about returning if the children needed them to, whereas the fathers placed more emphasis on their own needs and their desire to have their families join them in Norway. Although families were important to the fathers, the parenting role was not as central in their narratives as in the mothers’ narratives. Transnational parents explained that fathers are able to care for their children and their home while the mother is working abroad. This corresponds to the idealized role of “the involved father” (Brandth & Kvande, 2015; Farstad & Stefansen, 2015). However, the fact that they considered it necessary to voice this ability in relation to fathers and not mothers shows that it was not taken for granted. Therefore, although we see an emphasis on the involved father, it is apparent that the

gendered norms of women as primary parents and men as providers still prevail within “the gender-equal Nordic region”. These roles, along with a gendered labour market, have implications for migration motivations and opportunities and may facilitate or discourage the migration of men and women to differing extents. This crisis-induced intra-Nordic migration makes the prevalence of traditional gender roles more apparent (Farstad, 2015; Ingólfssdóttir & Gíslason, 2016; Pétursdóttir, 2009), contradicting the general belief that Icelandic society has become gender equal (Pétursdóttir, 2009; Þorvaldsdóttir, 2011).

Notes

- 1 The interviews were conducted in Icelandic and we have translated the quotes into English. The names of the participants have been changed.

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