

An abstract painting with a complex, layered texture. The dominant colors are bright yellow and ochre, with streaks and patches of blue and red. The brushwork is visible, creating a sense of movement and depth. The overall effect is one of vibrant, somewhat chaotic energy.

Migration,
Diasporas and
Citizenship

MIGRATION, MASCULINITIES AND REPRODUCTIVE LABOUR

Men of the Home

Ester Gallo and Francesca Scrinzi

With a foreword by Raewyn Connell



Migration, Diasporas and Citizenship

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Migration, Masculinities and Reproductive Labour

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Foreword

It's a cliché to say that we live in a globalised world. It's a fact that we live in a world of increasing global integration. But that does not mean a world that has been homogenised. Global economy and global communications transform and merge structures of social relations, often in intricate ways that produce new boundaries, changed selves, and troubled politics.

This is true for gender relations as for other dimensions of society. Scholarship is gradually coming to terms with the depth of gender's enmeshing, for the last 500 years, in global empire and its successor, the global neoliberal economy. Patterns of masculinity and femininity, gender divisions of labour, gendered state structures, patterns of desire and hatred are all shaped by this involvement. They are very directly shaped by one of the most conspicuous features of empire and the postcolonial economy, the long-distance movement of gendered bodies and populations. That is to say, by migration.

In this notable contribution to migration studies, Ester Gallo and Francesca Scrinzi offer a carefully theorised account of migrant masculinities that is based on a remarkable piece of research. They have studied the situations of migrant men and women in Italy for 16 years, accumulating a rich set of interviews and field observations. They have a detailed knowledge of the research literature on migration, as well as on gender. They have followed the politics of migration as it changed with the rise

and fall of parties in the post-Christian-Democrat era of Italian life. They have connected their fieldwork with the debates over economic strategy and European integration, and the panics over “Muslim terrorism” which have a sharp focus on migrant masculinities.

Gallo and Scrinzi observe that in migration studies, as in most fields of research, a concern with gender has usually meant a concern with women. There are historical reasons for this, in the feminist effort to redress the non-recognition of women and women’s experience. Yet gender is relational, as the authors emphasise. Indeed, gender involves a whole structure of relations. Men are as much embroiled in gender relations as women are. To understand the way the gender order works, understanding men’s situations is as vital as understanding women’s. Above all, we need to understand those situations *together*; and this is what *Migration, Masculinities and Reproductive Labour: Men of the Home* does.

The book does so effectively because it does not treat the situations of men and women in static or stereotyped ways. The authors are well aware of social stereotypes and their ambiguous power, but they are not taken in by them. The book is full of the evidence of diversity, variation, and invention in everyday life. The position of men is not understood as one of simple domination. Indeed, some of the most interesting passages concern migrant men’s *dependence*, short term or long term, on women, whether as breadwinning spouses or employers. The “moral debt” that men in care work or domestic work often owe to the women who created pathways for them and the humiliation of doing women’s work and working for women are pointers to major issues in changing masculinities.

This is to say that Gallo and Scrinzi consistently see gender relations as historically dynamic. These relations were constructed over time, and change through time. They change under the pressure of economic and political events—rising and falling labour demand, softening and hardening immigration regimes, the drama of the War on Terror, and so on.

And they change because of the agency of the migrants themselves, individually and collectively. Another intensely interesting topic of the book is the way immigrant men, from positions of cultural and economic weakness, may set about reasserting gender privilege in new forms. Patriarchy is not just “tradition”. As the history of the computer industry shows, it can be re-created in new shapes suited to new conditions.

The facts of large-scale labour migration require us to think about gender orders on a world scale. Labour migration from poorer countries to richer countries is shaped by the long-term history of empire, and its residues of industrialisation, wealth accumulation, resource politics, and the information economy. Gallo and Scrinzi are actually writing about postcolonial relations, not just in Italy—a modern imperial power though not one of the big empires—but also on a world scale. This is demanded by the super-diversity that is so striking a feature of contemporary migrant workforces. Among their research participants are migrants from Eastern Europe, South America, Africa, the Arab world, South Asia, and the Pacific.

They write about postcolonial relations in full awareness of the way race, religion, and postcoloniality have become inflamed issues in contemporary politics. Though the research was done before the Syrian civil war and the European refugee crisis of 2015, the book throws a strong light on the fear, confusion, and political toxicity that emerged during these events. This is social research that matters.

Gallo and Scrinzi are illuminating about large-scale social structures and historical dynamics. But they do not lose touch (as so much political economy does) with the personal and intimate. Their topic, reproductive labour, centrally concerns domestic life, human relations, emotions, and sexuality. A substantial part of the book addresses the way migrant men and women *negotiate* the situations in which the macro-history has placed them.

Here we see the re-working of masculinities, the re-interpretation of different kinds of labour, and the networks of relationships—including continuing links with families in home countries—that the workers build and sustain. Here we see the projects of social (as well as geographical) mobility in which many of the men are engaged; the hopes as well as the fears in their personal agendas.

The topic is paid reproductive work, and one of the most striking things about this study is that it also documents the experience of employers. The men and women who pay for this work, in whose households the care work and housework are done, are also part of the changing gender order. In many discussions of ‘care chains’ the employer is just an abstract middle-class white woman in the global metropole, benefiting

from third-world poverty.

Gallo and Scrinzi show the situation is much more complex and interesting than this. Ruling-class families are also involved, and some working-class families too; and different patterns of employment may result from the class dynamics. Faithful to their relational view of gender, Gallo and Scrinzi point to the involvement of men as employers of domestic labour. Chapter 5 provides rare, and extremely interesting, evidence on men's strategies and practices as domestic employers, and the ways they are nuanced by Italian men's constructions of masculinity.

This is a book that deals carefully with large, immensely complex issues; but also works at a human level and gives insight into emotion, hopes, and fears. It offers a national case study, but does that in a way that illuminates situations around the world. It is based on careful, thoughtful, long-term study; we can rightly call this "in-depth" research.

I hope its findings will be noted not just in a specialised field but widely among social scientists working to understand contemporary societies and their transformations. And I hope Gallo and Scrinzi's approach and findings will be appreciated by the policy-makers who have to steer a humane and informed course on migration issues, in an environment now heavy with fear, hatred, and misrepresentation. If social science really can help social policy, this is the kind of research that will do it.

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Sydney
December 2015

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