

Drawing new boundaries of participation: experiences and strategies of economic citizenship among skilled migrant women in Switzerland

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Abstract. The concept of citizenship, originally coined by Marshall, and synonymous with social rights and equality, is pivotal in understanding and overcoming the social injustices that many migrants experience. Marshall's notion of social rights, however, does not elaborate on economic rights. Feminist authors argue that women's equal access to sources of income outside family relations is key to their citizenship. Access to spaces of paid work is a significant aspect of migrant women's citizenship because their residence status and naturalization is often contingent on their employment. The author thus argues that economic rights should be central to debates on migration and citizenship. The proposed term 'economic citizenship' is used to examine experiences and strategies of fifty-seven skilled migrant women from Latin America, the Middle East, and South East Europe when trying to access positions in the Swiss labour market corresponding to their professional qualifications. The feminist and postcolonial perspectives of 'intersectionality' and participatory research are used to understand how and why inequalities in the labour market occur. It is found that traditional ideas about gender roles, discourses about ethnic difference, and discriminatory migration policies intersect to create boundaries for skilled migrant women in accessing upper segments of the Swiss labour market. Migration, therefore, does not always imply empowerment and emancipation, but also generates new forms of social inequality.

1 Introduction

Social inequality is a major driver of migration. Inequalities such as gender-based discrimination, racism, political persecution, and material scarcity move many individuals to leave their homes and seek new opportunities elsewhere (Black et al, 2005). Whether or not migration effectively reduces inequality is increasingly interesting scholars, particularly with regard to migrant women (eg Kofman, 2000; Zegers de Beijl, 2000). Migration flows in Europe have recently become increasingly feminine (Morrison et al, 2008). In countries like Switzerland, the recent feminization of migration is geographically specific, as migrants from countries outside Europe are in the main women. For example, whereas in 1980 only 48% of all Latin American immigrants were women, by 2005 this had increased to 65%. The percentage of female migrants from Asia increased from 46% in 1980 to 55% in 2005 (SFS, 2008). The relationship between women's migration and social (in)equality is, however, not yet fully understood (eg Hugo, 2000). Studies in which the roles of gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic position in the possibilities of migrant women to gain equal opportunities of access to the labour market in destination countries are specifically questioned are still scant (Riaño and Baghdadi, 2007).

Examining this question is crucial for understanding the relationship between migration and social justice. Upon entering the 21st century, global inequalities associated with migration persisted, including 'brain drain' and labour-market inequalities between migrant and nonmigrant workers (Black et al, 2005). Discrimination in access to employment, rather than poor qualifications, seems to be at the root of migrants' marginalization (Zegers de Beijl, 2000). In an increasingly globalized world, the numbers of skilled

migrants are rising significantly—both globally and in Switzerland. The educational level of women migrating to Switzerland has recently increased. Some 40% of non-EU working women have tertiary education, whereas this figure is only 18% among their Swiss counterparts (SFS, 2008). In 1990 only 22.5% of economically active foreigners in Switzerland were highly skilled; this percentage had increased to 62% by the year 2000 (Pecoraro, 2005). Such demographic increases result largely from the new emphasis of immigration policies in Switzerland, and in Europe, on acquiring skilled labour to bolster local human resources. Underlying assumptions behind attracting skilled migrants is the belief that their knowledge will flow easily into the local economy and that, precisely because they are better educated, they will participate successfully in the labour market (Kofman and Raghuram, 2008).

Studies in North America, Europe, and Australia show that skilled migrants from Africa, Asia, and Latin America encounter significant difficulties when attempting to transfer educational resources across international boundaries towards professional participation suited to their skills (eg Bauder, 2003; Grant and Nadin, 2007; Iredale, 2004; Kofman and Raghuram, 2008; Liversage, 2009). Unfortunately, we currently have insufficient knowledge about the dynamics leading to such situations of social inequality. Further, a significant part of the literature has dealt only with labour migrants, largely ignoring the skilled migrants in family and refugee streams. Recent studies in the UK and Canada suggest that many skilled immigrants, particularly women, do not cross international boundaries as labour migrants but in the context of family migration, marriage, or seeking asylum (eg Kofman, 2000).

The aim of this paper is to address these research gaps by examining the experiences and strategies of labour-market participation of fifty-seven skilled migrant women from countries in Latin America, the Middle East, and Southeastern Europe,⁽¹⁾ who have migrated to Switzerland in the context of family reunification and asylum seeking. The paper is divided into five sections. In the next part I present the conceptual framework and introduce concepts of economic citizenship and intersectionality. In section 3 I present the case study, introducing the biographical analysis and participatory research methodologies. In part 4 I describe the study-group members' participation in the labour market, and in section 5 I present two selected biographies and discuss how socioeconomic position, ethnicity, and gender intersect to shape women's access to the skilled labour market. In part 6 I look at strategies which women develop to improve their access to spaces of paid work. Finally, in the conclusion, I examine the implications of these results for further studies of labour markets, social inequality, and intersectionality.

2 The perspectives of economic citizenship and intersectionality

What conceptual approaches are useful in examining the access of skilled migrant women to the labour market from the perspective of social equality? This paper uses the concepts of *economic citizenship* and *intersectionality*. The concept of citizenship has long been synonymous with equality. Marshall (1950, page 18) defined citizenship as a “status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All those who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed.” From the perspective of migrants, citizenship would imply equal participation in various spheres of their new society.

⁽¹⁾This paper draws on a larger study, the “Social Integration and Exclusion of Skilled Migrant Women in Switzerland”, carried out under the Swiss National Research Program (NRP 51) on “Social Integration and Social Exclusion”. For details see <http://www.immigrantwomen.ch>. An initial discussion of the empirical results was presented in Riaño and Baghdadi (2007).

Marshall's 'citizenship' encompasses civil, political, and social rights. Although his notion of social rights includes the right to social protection against poverty, he does not elaborate on economic rights. Emphasizing the right of equal access to spaces of economic participation, a right I propose to understand as *economic citizenship* (see also Kessler-Harris, 2003), is crucial. This is particularly the case with migrants, because residence status and naturalization are often contingent on their employment. Migrants' participation in the labour market is also their key to social integration (Dumont and Liebig, 2005). Further, as perceptions of migrants from non-European countries are often based on negative stereotypes, securing entry into the labour market is a pivotal opportunity to disprove these stereotypes and obtain recognition from members of the host society. Feminist authors have also argued that women's equal access to paid employment is key to their citizenship (Kessler-Harris, 2003; Pateman, 1989). In order for women to acquire or maintain their autonomy, they must have equal access to sources of income and/or material support outside of their family relations—either paid employment and/or social benefits (Gill and Sharma, 2007). Economic citizenship is thus of utmost importance for migrant women. It is likely that women's economic citizenship received less attention from Marshall because he was writing at a time when the 'male as the main breadwinner' model dominated.

How do we understand an individual's position in the labour market? The concept of 'human capital', in which the individual's social position is directly related to his or her level of education, is often used for that purpose. Bourdieu (1986), expands this notion by arguing that the position of an individual depends on his or her economic, social, and cultural capitals. He conceives 'social capital' as a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance, influence, and support. This is a personal asset which provides tangible advantages to those individuals, families, or groups that are better connected. 'Cultural capital' refers to three types of assets that a person may possess: *embodied* in the individual as long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body (attitudes, behaviour, gender, and ethnicity); *objectified* in cultural goods (dress, pictures, books, instruments); and *institutionalized* as academic credentials and diplomas. Social and cultural capital can be converted into economic capital and thus become constitutive of class positioning. Bourdieu, however, did not apply his theory to migrant populations and it remains unclear how ethnicity and gender may influence the chances of skilled migrants to gain access to positions in the skilled labour market by using their social and cultural capital (see also Bauder, 2003).

The approach of *intersectionality* seems useful in addressing the aforementioned question. Feminist researchers argue that social inequality cannot be understood by examination from one single perspective (eg gender), but it requires an integrated approach in which the combined roles of gender, ethnicity, nationality, and religion are examined (McCall, 2005; Nash, 2008). Intersectionality holds that while individuals may be discriminated against on the basis of factors of gender, ethnicity, nationality, or religion, it must be taken into account that these systems of discrimination do not act independently of one another but interrelate, creating a system of inequality which reflects the 'intersection' of multiple forms of discrimination.

Thus, having introduced the concepts of economic citizenship (the right to equal access to spaces of economic participation), Bourdieu's triad of capitals, and intersectionality, the following guiding research questions are posed:

(a) To what extent are skilled migrant women from Latin America, the Middle East, and Southeastern Europe able to use their 'imported' social and cultural capital to gain equal access to spaces of economic participation?

(b) When and how do their socioeconomic position, gender, and nationality play a role in shaping the position of skilled migrant women in the labour market?

(c) What are women's strategies for enhancing their possibilities of access to economic citizenship?

3 Case study and methodology: biographical and participatory approach

Switzerland has successfully built a multicultural nation (made up of Swiss-Germans, Swiss-French, Swiss-Italian, and Swiss-Romansh), yet regards immigrants as a threat to Swiss identity (Riaño and Wastl-Walter, 2006). Immigration policies aimed at controlling the ratio of foreigners to Swiss have set limits to the socioeconomic and political participation of immigrants. Because of recent bilateral agreements with the European Union, Switzerland now aims to improve the residence rights of EU citizens, thus resulting in a dual system of immigrant rights which discriminates between EU and non-EU citizens. Ideas reflected in social policies about the 'normal' gender division of labour present men as the main breadwinners and women as responsible for the household, making it difficult for many women in Switzerland to combine motherhood with a career (Riaño, in press).

This case study involves fifty-seven migrant women (who were born abroad and migrated to Switzerland as adults) originating from countries outside the EU: in Latin America (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, Venezuela), the Middle East (Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey), and Southeastern Europe (Bosnia, Kosovo, Montenegro), and with contrasting religious backgrounds (Christian/Muslim).⁽²⁾ The groups chosen for this study are very good examples of current migration trends in Switzerland. The numbers of Latin American women have more than tripled in the past decade; they are increasingly well qualified (55% have completed high school, vocational training, or university education) and 50% of those over 20 years old have migrated because of marriage to a Swiss national (SFS, 2000). The number of Muslim migrants, particularly from the Middle East and Southeastern Europe, has doubled in the past decade and the percentage of women has increased from 36% in 1990 to 45% in 2000. Women with Muslim backgrounds are also increasingly well qualified (SFS, 2000).

The strategy for choosing the research subjects followed the principle of 'theoretical sampling' (Glaser, 1992), where the aim is not accurate statistical representation but, rather, gaining a thorough understanding of the phenomenon under study by detailed analysis of relevant case studies. The selection of relevant case studies was done by choosing individuals who represent a wide spectrum of situations among first-generation skilled migrant women, such as entry status (marriage, family reunion, study, work, asylum-seeking), age (28 to 60 years), time of residence (3 to 30 years), residence status (yearly permit, permanent residence, Swiss citizenship), and marital status and family situation (single, married, divorced, with and without children). We found our research subjects through personal contacts, leaflet advertising, the 'snowball' principle, and through collaboration with migrant-women organizations which provided further contacts with skilled migrant women.

When the interviews were conducted, study participants were an average of 40 years old, had been living in Switzerland for eleven years, and were residents of Zurich, Bern, and Aargau—the three most populated German-speaking cantons of Switzerland. There are significant regional differences among study participants regarding their entry status. Whereas the majority of Latin American women entered Switzerland for

⁽²⁾ The empirical study was carried out in 2004 and 2005 in the cities of Zurich, Bern, and Aargau in collaboration with Nadia Baghdadi.

marriage purposes (mostly to a Swiss citizen), the majority of Middle Eastern women left their countries because of war or political tensions (eg Kurdish women fleeing political persecution in Turkey or Iranian women fleeing Islamic fundamentalism). Both patterns are representative of general trends in Switzerland for these two groups (SFS, 2000). An insignificant number of women enter the country to work, reflecting the Swiss government's strict limits on labour migrants from non-EU countries; family migration is not so tightly controlled.⁽³⁾ The majority of women have Swiss citizenship (although the percentage is higher among Latin Americans, because of their more often being married to Swiss citizens) but only a third have yearly permits. The vast majority of study participants are married with children.

By OECD (2002) definitions, the study group includes both skilled (having completed at least secondary education) and highly skilled (university degree or equivalent) migrant women. Regional differences in the institutionalized cultural capital of study participants can be observed in migration to Switzerland: whereas Latin American women arrive after completing their tertiary education (obtained in their countries of origin or abroad⁽⁴⁾), only about two thirds of Middle Eastern and Southeastern European women had completed a similar level of education. Women from these latter regions tend to arrive at a younger age and thus 40% of them carry out their tertiary studies in Switzerland. Business administration and the social sciences are the most prevalent fields of study among highly skilled study participants, who together represent nearly 50% of the total. Professions such as law, fine arts, architecture, education, science, and teacher training are second in numerical frequency, followed by humanities, and medical and computer science. Only a few have engineering qualifications. Besides being highly skilled upon arriving in Switzerland, 88% of Latin American women had previously worked as skilled professionals. This percentage is much lower for women from the Middle East and Southeastern Europe (30%) because many more of them arrive at a younger age. All the women considered in this study speak German (the official language of the cantons where they live) fluently and, in addition to their mother tongues, they are able to speak an additional two to three languages.

How to address the 'intersection' of multiple forms of discrimination methodologically? There has been little discussion on this matter (McCall, 2005). In this study the method of biographical analysis, consisting of a critical examination of turning points in the lives of migrant women, was used to gain spatial and temporal understanding of how the socioeconomic position, gender, and ethnicity of migrant women intersect to shape their labour-market position. The collection of women's biographies was conducted within the framework of participatory research, which combined the theoretical premises of postcolonial and feminist theory. The overall aim was to include women's analytical voice in the research process and to establish research partnerships between academics and nonacademics. A participatory workshop specifically designed for this purpose was called MINGA—a Quechua word meaning 'working together for the betterment of the community'. Dating back to Inca times, minga is a traditional form of community work in Andean countries, appropriately reflecting the collective and reciprocal spirit of this research: academics and nonacademics jointly produce scientific knowledge. The method consists of interactive processes whereby migrant

⁽³⁾ Rare examples of women entering with a work visa are: first, an Argentine woman who was able to enter Switzerland to work because, although she grew up in Argentina, her parents were of Swiss nationality; and second, a Bosnian woman who came in the early 1970s as a guest worker at a time of labour shortages in Switzerland.

⁽⁴⁾ Twenty six of the Latin American women studied in their countries of origin, and a further five obtained their degrees at university institutions in the UK, Russia, USA, Argentina, and Germany.

women meet with the researchers; each woman narrates her own experiences and strategies for accessing the labour market, and thereafter the group analyses each individual story. In a second stage, individual interviews complement information provided by the workshops. These interviews consist of a more detailed biographical narration, in which each woman has the possibility of recalling her past by reflecting on her own experiences. In a third and final stage the researchers consolidate workshop and interview results and present them to the study participants. The results are then critically discussed in an exchange between all participants. Overall, this collective and participatory methodology effectively increased the knowledge of all the workshop participants about the dynamics of labour-market participation and expanded their social capital.

4 Access to spaces of paid work: characteristics of labour-market participation

From an economic citizenship perspective, ‘labour market’ is understood here as a ‘space of paid work’: that is, a setting in which agents and their social positions are located and negotiated. The concept of ‘participation’ (or integration—the term often used in the literature) is understood as a process as well as an aim. This aim is defined from an economic-citizenship perspective, meaning that women need to have equal opportunity of access to spaces of paid work. Such an ‘objective’ perspective was expanded by women’s ‘subjective’ perspective: they defined this as “equal opportunity of access to jobs that correspond to their professional qualifications and have long-term prospects.”

Three typical forms of access to the labour market could be identified (table 1): (a) not in the labour market, (b) employed below skill level, and (c) employed according to skill level. As women’s employment is often intermittent and characterized by a lack of long-term prospects, a further differentiation of ‘short-term’ and ‘long-term’ employment was introduced for types (b) and (c). As table 1 suggests, a variety of situations describe women’s ‘inclusion’ or ‘exclusion’ from the labour market. The majority of study participants, however, cannot use their social and cultural capital to gain access to the upper segments of the labour market. One third of the study participants are not integrated into the labour market at all, and one quarter occupy positions for which they are overqualified. A further third work at their skill level, but they are in a precarious situation with employment characterized by discontinuity and

Table 1. Accessing spaces of paid work: characteristics of labour-market participation (source: MINGA workshops and biographical interviews, adapted from Riaño and Baghdadi, 2007).

Types of access to the labour market	Impact on women’s desire to achieve professional identity
(a) <i>Not in the labour market</i> Not economically active (housewives/students) unemployed	Not achieved
(b) <i>Employment below skill level</i> Short-term employment Long-term employment	At the cost of working below skill level
(c) <i>Employment according to skill level</i> Short-term employment Long-term employment	At the cost of economic instability Achieving professional identity commensurate with qualifications

instability (short-term employment).⁽⁵⁾ Only a minority of study participants occupy positions in upper segments of the labour market, corresponding to their skill level, and with long-term employment prospects. A high level of educational qualifications is clearly no guarantee of successful labour-market participation.

What impact do these different situations have on women's aims to achieve a professional identity? Table 1 identifies four distinct situations: (a) not achieved, (b) at the cost of working below their skill level, (c) at the cost of economic instability, and (d) achieving professional identity, commensurate with qualifications. Thus, only a minority of study participants achieve the aim of economic citizenship. Consequently, for many study participants, migration does not lead to increased social equality but, rather, to a loss of their social position, progressive deskilling, loss of confidence, and loss of autonomy, since many become economically dependant on their partners or on welfare support.

These case-study results are comparable to those of the 2004 European labour survey: 19.8% of non-EU migrant women working in Switzerland are overqualified for their jobs (in contrast to 13.8% for EU-women and 7.6% for Swiss women) (Dumont and Liebig, 2005, page 7). Studies in North America, Europe, and Australia show similar results. The assumption that a high level of education guarantees successful labour-market participation is largely unjustified: skilled migrants of visible minorities face the undervaluing of their credentials and work experience, which results in underemployment and deskilling (eg Bauder, 2003; Grant and Nadin, 2007, Kofman and Raghuram, 2008, Liversage, 2009).

Thus, for many skilled migrants, migration does not inevitably imply the reduction of inequality, but may generate new forms of social inequality. The assumption often found in the literature—that migration automatically implies empowerment and emancipation for migrant women—needs to be questioned and explored in greater detail (see Bastia, 2011).

5 Understanding access to spaces of paid work: the intersections of gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic position

How can we explain the differences of inclusion and exclusion migrant women face when trying to access spaces of paid work? As postulated above, the best way to grasp how the socioeconomic position, gender, and ethnicity of migrant women intersect to shape their labour-market position is to examine their individual biographies. Thus, two contrasting biographies are analyzed in this section. Juana Müller's case⁽⁶⁾ illustrates that of many women who end up in precarious situations, and Zehra Tinaz's exemplifies the rare case of those who are able to reach the upper segments of the labour market.

5.1 Juana Müller's biography

Juana grew up in the Caribbean. She moved to an Eastern European country in 1981, where a government fellowship was available for her university studies. Six years later her strong motivation earned her a university degree in psychology and Slavic languages. She met her Swiss future husband during her studies and in 1988 they moved to Switzerland. Juana was very motivated to practice her profession, an aim she felt confident of achieving because of her young age (27), good qualifications, international

⁽⁵⁾ These are the cases of women who choose to create their own employment (eg freelance work as occasional translators, report writers, or video producers) rather than being unemployed, or of women who obtain occasional employment as replacement teachers or short-term project employees.

⁽⁶⁾ The names of the women have been changed to ensure anonymity.

experience, Swiss husband, and Swiss nationality.⁽⁷⁾ Initially, her husband's friends helped her to get a job at a home for the elderly, first as a nursing assistant, and later as social activity organizer. Her elderly patients questioned her skills because she was black. Disillusioned by the experiences of the first years, by the lack of professional perspective of the jobs, and feeling the 'biological clock' pressure to have children, she decided to quit her eldercare job. After having two children it became clear that childcare was going to be her responsibility: her husband was committed to a full-time job and the daycare policy did not give priority to women with highly-paid husbands. Juana got by teaching languages at a night school. In time, her Swiss friends helped her to get occasional replacement-teacher jobs teaching Spanish and Russian at a high school. Despite her proven teaching skills, the school authorities told her that they could not offer her a regular position because she did not have the Swiss *Höheres Lehramt*, the prerequisite for teaching in a high school. Juana also applied for several jobs as a psychologist, but was told by prospective employers that they could not accept her foreign degree and that she needed the Swiss degree known as *Berufsbegleitende psychotherapeutische Ausbildung*. She consulted a vocational counsellor who informed her that obtaining such a degree would require three to four years and would cost a significant amount. Juana's concern about how to finance such studies and combine them with her family responsibilities was interpreted by the counsellor as her "not being psychologically ready" to study. The counsellor advised her to think that "family work was also a psychological task" and that she was, "after all, not unemployed". Juana is currently 45 years old, has lost her skills as a psychologist and finds herself in an economically unstable and low-paid position in the labour market.

5.2 Zehra Tinaz's biography

Zehra was a member of the political opposition in Turkey. She came to Switzerland at the age of 22 as an asylum seeker, together with her husband and twin sons. The Swiss government granted them political asylum and they were able to rebuild their lives. Studying was Zehra's most important goal. Fellowships from the cantonal government and part-time jobs allowed Zehra to pursue studies in anthropology. When she divorced her husband and became a single mother, it took her longer to finish her studies, but she was also able to place her sons at a daycare centre because single mothers had priority. After graduating, she got a job involving intercultural activities with an NGO. Her ethnic background, combined with her Swiss studies, had a positive impact on her employment. She was employed because of her knowledge of several cultures and languages and two religions (Muslim, Christian). Later, her ethnicity and gender seem to have played a negative role when she applied for a leading position at the same organization:

"I cannot say that being a foreigner played the only role; I would say as a woman you have difficulties, one way or another. There were two applicants at the end. He was a man and I was a woman. He was a Swiss and I was a foreigner. And I think religion also played a role, although that was obviously never mentioned."

She is currently 44 years old and now holds a full-time permanent position as lecturer in intercultural pedagogy at a Swiss university. Her origin, combined with her Swiss degree, worked to her advantage in obtaining the job. Her success also resides in the fact that she is a very strong and persevering person with clear strategies with which to accomplish her goals.

⁽⁷⁾ Until 1991 foreign women automatically acquired Swiss citizenship upon marriage to a Swiss citizen (whereas a foreign husband could only become Swiss by following the usual naturalization procedure). Since 1992 both foreign women and foreign men who marry a Swiss citizen need to live in Switzerland for five years and be married for at least three years before applying for Swiss citizenship.

These life stories reveal two highly motivated women with very different outcomes in terms of labour-market participation. Juana's initial social and cultural capital (tertiary education, Swiss nationality, and a Swiss-born husband) seemed more favourable than Zehra's (no tertiary education, refugee, single mother) for achieving successful labour-market participation. How can the unexpected outcome be explained? As is explained below, factors of socioeconomic position, gender, and ethnicity combined to shape very different outcomes. First, Juana was not able to use her more advantaged socioeconomic position to get access to the upper segments of the labour market because her social and cultural capital was devalued in the Swiss context. Her foreign credentials were not recognized; the value of her Swiss nationality was dampened by negative perceptions of her racial features; her husband's circle of friends was valuable in providing jobs, but those jobs confined her to either unskilled or unstable occupations. Not having her skills recognized put Juana in the same situation as Zehra—having to start from scratch to carry out her tertiary education. Factors of socioeconomic position, ethnicity, and gender explain why Zehra succeeded whereas Juana did not. First, having children in Switzerland is a serious impediment to many women's aim of studying and working. The prevailing value that 'good mothers stay at home' has generated a lack of institutional facilities for childcare. The idea that children need to go home for lunch has produced school schedules which force one of the parents to stay at home, usually the mother. Since migrant women lack family support because their families typically live abroad, they are dependent on external childcare. However, the daycare policy of giving priority to women 'who need to work' excludes married women with well-salaried husbands. Thus, being a single parent and having a low socioeconomic status worked to Zehra's advantage in solving the problem of external childcare support.

Second, financing university studies posed a significant obstacle for both Zehra and Juana, as it did for all the women who participated in this study. Socioeconomic position, ethnicity, and gender shape access to public financial resources. For example, Zehra was able to obtain fellowships from the cantonal government because of her refugee status and low-income situation. Juana, in contrast, had no access to government fellowships because of her marriage-migrant status and husband's good salary. Swiss institutional actors see that it is essential to support the economic participation of refugees, whereas the same is not the case for migrant spouses. Why is there such a difference? Bound by international agreements on the right to found a family and to family reunification, Switzerland has had to open its borders to family migrants, but they are expected to find their own way without state support. Besides, migrant spouses are seen as 'belonging' to the private family realm and not being the state's responsibility since they are expected to be supported by their husbands. This vision is inherent in family-related migration policies, which see men as economic providers and women as caregivers (Riaño, in press). State assistance is thus reserved for women who enter the country as refugees, since they are represented as individuals in fragile situations who need public support, and for women who are represented as 'difficult to reach cases'. These last are targeted by the 'VIntA' decree on integration,⁽⁸⁾ which portrays economically inactive (Muslim) mothers with children as living in a situation of self-inflicted isolation, which constrains them from learning the German language. VIntA's expressed aim is to provide such women with state assistance to learn German so that they can help their children integrate into Swiss society. These statements show how women's routes of entry, as spouses or as refugees, are crucial in

⁽⁸⁾'VIntA' is the official decree which regulates the principles and objectives of foreigners' integration in Swiss society, as well as the type and characteristics of federal subsidies used for this purpose.

determining their immigration status and in orienting their relationship to the dominant gender order. The following quote illustrates how traditional ideas about gender roles on the part of Swiss institutions and Swiss families combine to create and maintain boundaries limiting the access of marriage migrants to spaces of paid work:

“To study and to work are both very important for me. But the external pressure! The [Swiss husband’s] family! The institutions! They all want me to stay at home because I have a child. Everyone used to ask me: Why do you have to work? Brazilians are good mothers. They stay at home. You are behaving like a Swiss” (lawyer from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, born in Brazil).

Further, decrees such as VIntA, which foster the integration of foreigners, are built around under the idea that migrant women are poorly educated and hence do not support the educational advancement of skilled migrant women. An example is the lack of advanced language programs for migrant women—despite the great importance that Swiss employers place on mastering the German language. The women in our study reported that language perfection is given more importance by many employers with respect to skilled positions than are professional experience and social competence. Furthermore, the peculiar language situation of German-speaking cantons, in which the spoken language is different from the written language, makes it difficult for migrants to compete with Swiss-born individuals in the job market:

“Learning the language is very difficult. German is not as easy to learn as, for example, French. It takes years to learn to speak it well. Besides, the fact that Swiss people speak one language [Swiss German dialect] and write a different one [High German] made it very difficult for me to learn [High] German because you never hear it” (architect from the Andes University, born in Colombia)

“The language is a very big obstacle for finding a job. When you look at job advertisements they either demand German as a mother tongue or an impeccable spoken style. Besides, flexibility is also required and that is very difficult for me because I have a family. As we all know, childcare services are very poorly developed here and school children come home for lunch and are back again by three o’clock. That is why it is very difficult for women in Switzerland to combine profession and family. That’s why I am looking for a 50% job” (international business manager from Lima University, born in Peru).

We saw above that public funds are not available for the tertiary education of marriage migrants like Juana. The question is then: to what extent family resources are available for their education. Juana’s example shows that factors of inequality within the couple, as determined by gender and ethnicity, are a main obstacle. She recounts that she and her husband gave higher priority to investing the family’s resources in his educational advancement, since he, unlike her, as a Swiss-born person with Swiss education, had a higher potential of earning a good salary to support the family. Thus, while Juana was learning German and raising children, he carried out two postgraduate courses and a PhD, which led him to a very good position in the Swiss labour market. Being a refugee, a single parent, and having a low socioeconomic status worked to Zehra’s advantage in her objective of completing her studies, whereas Juana’s situation of being a skilled migrant in a binational marriage with a Swiss worked to her disadvantage.

Zehra’s example shows that ethnic origin can be an added value for certain jobs, such as in the field of interculturality, especially in combination with a Swiss degree. Ethnicity, however, can also play a negative role in the labour market, especially in combination with gender. Being a foreign woman of Muslim background hindered

Zehra's chances of a leading position. All study participants who wear the Muslim headscarf reported discrimination experiences. Rasema, for example, a trained salesperson from Bosnia, reported that she had many difficulties in finding a job after she decided to wear a headscarf—despite her good qualifications, German proficiency, extensive social network, and high commitment. She remained unemployed for many years until she found employment in a company owned by a Muslim Tunisian. The effects of ethnic prejudice towards women from Latin America, the Middle East, and Southeastern Europe and gender-biased ideas about technical professions are best illustrated by the examples of Besma, an electronic engineer from Kosovo; Üenay, an architect from Turkey; Natalia, a construction draftsman from Colombia; Yasi, a systems engineer from Mexico; and Mona, an agricultural engineer from Colombia—all of whom never succeeded in finding a job in their trained professions. When the interviews were conducted, four of these women were unemployed and the fifth worked as a seller on a fruit stand. The impact of migration policies, which establish unequal rights for European and non-European migrants, and the prejudiced ideas of some employers who regard non-European migrants as having lesser value is illustrated by the following quote:

“It is very difficult for me to work here as a medical doctor. Why? Firstly, because I am a foreigner, and a foreigner from Latin America. When I look for a job the first priority is for the Swiss, then for people from the European Union and I have third priority. Secondly, my diploma is not recognized here and thirdly, the language is very difficult” (medical doctor from the University of Buenos Aires, born in Peru).

Discourses on ethnic difference can also act as a barrier to the realization of the institutional cultural capital of migrants from countries outside the EU, as the credentialing of foreign degrees illustrates. Whereas in recent years academic institutions and employers have increasingly recognized credentials from EU countries, there is much reluctance towards accepting those from countries outside the EU. This situation is further complicated by the fact that Switzerland, as a federal nation, has no uniform credentialing system. Each canton making up the Confederation has a different educational and accreditation system. Without a unified accreditation system, decisions by institutional representatives are necessarily subjective and often inconsistent. For example, Joana, a Brazilian psychologist, applied to the University of Fribourg for recognition of her degree and was told that she needed to redo two years of university education to obtain the equivalent Swiss degree. She also applied to the University of Bern and was told that she needed to repeat her entire tertiary education. She demanded information at the Swiss Psychologists Association and was informed that her studies in Brazil are equivalent to the studies that psychology students do in Switzerland. Switzerland was for a long time a country which aimed to attract unskilled guest workers and thus it does not yet have a system of bridging programs which facilitate the labour-market integration of skilled immigrants.

Traditional ideas of gender roles, embedded in immigration policies, play a significant role in constraining the labour-market participation of skilled migrant women. For example, visas for foreign spouses from countries outside the EU are designed to allow them ‘to remain with their spouses’ but not to facilitate their economic independence (the great majority of foreign spouses are women). Such visas contain no explicit work permit (unless it can be proven that there is no Swiss or EU citizen who can take the job), must be renewed annually, and are contingent on the women remaining with their spouses. Spouses married to Swiss or EU citizens receive a permanent residence visa, giving them the unrestricted right to work after five years, whereas spouses married to citizens from countries outside the EU receive this right only after ten years. As many Swiss employers require a permanent visa for skilled positions,

it is in practice very difficult for a migrant woman holding a yearly visa to obtain a skilled job in the first five to ten years of residence. After such a long period, migrant women inevitably lose their skills and the prospects of obtaining a stable job in their professions of origin are drastically reduced.

“As I came here to live with my Swiss fiancé I didn’t realize how difficult it would be to get a job. First of all I didn’t know anyone and I also needed a work permit. That’s why we decided to marry a bit earlier than planned. But I still didn’t get a work permit. It turned out that in order to get a work permit I needed to first get a job offer. But I didn’t know anyone . . . After several months I finally got an offer from an international environment organization to do some consultancy work. But they were not prepared to take the responsibility of applying for a work permit for me” (political scientist from Columbia University, USA, born in Peru).

6 Drawing new boundaries: strategies to cope with social inequality

In the previous section I presented the boundaries set by Swiss society to migrant women’s efforts to gain access to spaces of economic activity. How do these women react to the disadvantages and situations of inequality that they face when trying to access the labour market? How do they cope with traditional ideas about gender roles in Swiss society and the challenge of labour-market participation? What strategies do women develop to recreate their social and cultural capital, and thus improve their access to the labour market? What roles do socioeconomic position, gender, and ethnicity play in structuring such strategies? Figure 1 shows the variety of strategies

Realm of action	Strategy	Means	Gains
Education	reskill	improve German proficiency	rebuilt capital wider social participation social recognition
		redo tertiary education	
		carry out postgraduate studies	
Labour market	work below skills	take any available job	professional identity struggle for rights
	self-employment	set up own business	
	do volunteer work	unpaid work in social organizations	
Political	organize in migrant organizations	create/participate in migrant associations	
Family	family planning and gender arrangements	postpone, limit number, or have no children	time for work and/or study
		share childcare tasks with partner	
	withdraw from labour market	assume domestic role	independence motherhood
Mobility	further migration	return to country of origin or move elsewhere	professional identity

Figure 1. Drawing new boundaries: strategies to cope with social inequality (source: MINGA workshops and biographical interviews, adapted from Riaño and Baghdadi, 2007).

that the women in this study had developed, in different realms of activity, and with the aim—conscious or unconscious—of attaining social, economic, and personal gains. Women may use one or several strategies simultaneously, or deploy them differently over the years, depending on past experiences.

Reskilling is a strategy chosen by many of the participants to rebuild their social and cultural capital, especially after several years of home-making activities or of working in low-pay and/or unstable employment. As explained above, a very high level of German proficiency is required for skilled jobs in Switzerland. Thus, many women take advanced German classes and others learn the Swiss-German dialect in order to enhance their employment chances. Many realize that they are never going to get a skilled job unless they study in Switzerland and thus decide to undertake tertiary studies, to repeat their entire university studies, or to carry out postgraduate work. For example, the majority of the women in this study group who had reached their desired professional employment had used such strategies. Others were in school at the time of this study: such as Mürside, a graduate English teacher from Turkey who was studying social work; Alba, a lawyer from Colombia who was repeating her law studies; Hana, a Libyan lawyer who was doing a PhD in international law; Mona, a Colombian agronomist who was doing a Master's degree in ecology; and Juliana, a Peruvian sociologist doing a Master's in intercultural communication. Three of these women report that participating in this study's MINGA workshops gave them the encouragement to go ahead with these strategies. Studying requires significant effort but the women have been very resourceful in finding solutions to the problems of time and money. Hana and Mona, for example, brought their mothers from Libya and Colombia, respectively, to assist them with childcare tasks. Antonia, an anthropologist from Mexico, used the compensation money that she had received from a car accident to finance her postgraduate studies in gender management.

Since many women cannot get a job which corresponds to their qualifications (and/or is in their original fields of study), one of the most common reactions is to *take any job available*, even if it is below their qualifications. This strategy is often not very successful as over the years women become 'trapped' in a vicious circle and cannot move to more skilled positions. Socioeconomic position plays an important role in choosing this kind of strategy. Some women have no choice because they need to generate an income to support their ill husbands, others need to complement their husband's low income (mostly non-Swiss husbands), and still others need to send money to support their families abroad. Gender also plays a role: many women have a desire to exercise their professions but at the same time feel the pressure that 'good mothers do not work'. Working part time thus becomes a compromise solution. This often entails taking a job below their qualifications because most skilled jobs require full-time commitment.

Other women become tired of their domestic role and/or of their failed access to the labour market. Their response is to *create their own employment*. Examples of women who used this strategy are Gülay, a Turkish computer specialist who opened up a travel agency specializing in travel to and from Turkey; Gloria (Venezuela), Lucia (Peru), Uenay (Turkey), Jana (Peru), and Clara (Peru) who work as freelance journalists, artists, translators, or video producers; and Hamyde, an Islamic theologian from Turkey, who works as a freelance consultant for intercultural dialogue. It is interesting to note that many of these women use their ethnic backgrounds (language and culture knowledge) as marketable attributes which allow them access into the labour market, although the economic rewards are not always very high.

Carrying out *volunteer activities* in organizations such as parents' groups, home-country associations, intercultural schools, music groups, migrant associations, and organizations for intercultural dialogue is an option chosen by the large majority

of the women in our study. Involvement in such organizations offers many advantages to the women: using their professional abilities, expanding their boundaries of social participation, struggling for migrant women's rights, and giving more meaning to their lives. The experience gained in these activities allows some to rebuild their social and cultural capital (networks and professional experience) and results, in some cases, in paid-job opportunities, often corresponding to their skill level. Gender and ethnicity play an important role in this kind of strategy. Being a woman and having first-hand knowledge of several cultures can be an added value for jobs in the field of social care and intercultural dialogue. Several of the women who do volunteer work had already worked in their countries of origin as activists or volunteers in organizations struggling for the rights of women, youth, and minority groups [eg Antonia (Mexico), Teresinha (Brazil), Azucena (Bolivia), Alba (Colombia), and Cemyle (Turkey)].

Some of the women participating in this study realize the importance of taking action in the realm of *family planning and gender arrangements* if they are to advance professionally. Postponing having children, limiting their number, sharing child-care responsibilities with their partners, or deciding to have no children at all have been decisive factors in their 'success' stories. Such strategies have been mostly used by the younger, more recently arrived women, but also at times by older women whose husbands value the professional advancement of their wives, or by women who have renegotiated gender arrangements with their husbands. Some of the women in this study report that participating in the MINGA workshops reinforced their awareness of the necessity to use that particular strategy. For other women, divorcing their husbands became a means of professional advancement. Not only did they feel freer from the need to conform to gender-specific social norms, but also the loss in socioeconomic status associated with their divorces pushed them to invest much more time and energy in their careers.

Women who became frustrated by the lack of value given to their foreign work experience and the difficulties they experienced in trying to combine a career and a family chose to *withdraw from the labour market* and concentrate on their domestic roles. Although they become economically dependent on their husbands, the personal and social reward of motherhood becomes a substitute. Socioeconomic position plays an important role here. Many of these women are in a privileged economic position as they are married to Swiss-born husbands who earn good salaries (not all women in that situation, however, choose to withdraw from the labour market). This strategy is not entirely satisfactory for many as they remain internally torn, miss their profession and worry about their future professional prospects. A further option chosen by a small minority of our research partners is to look for new opportunities of labour-market participation by *returning to their countries of origin* or *moving elsewhere*. These strategies can be interpreted as women's resistance to the limits imposed upon them by Swiss society and as an effort to expand their boundaries of social and economic participation.

7 Conclusions

This paper has examined the economic citizenship of fifty-seven skilled women from Latin America, the Middle East, and Southeastern Europe, studying their labour-market participation. The study builds on the feminist approach of *intersectionality*, Bourdieu's notion of *cultural capital*, and the concept of *economic citizenship*—here defined as equal opportunity of access to jobs which correspond to their professional qualifications and have long-term prospects. The question of how the socioeconomic position, gender, and ethnicity of migrant women intersect to shape their labour-market position was examined using the methods of biographical analysis and the participatory MINGA workshops.

The results of this study show that economic citizenship remains for many study participants an elusive goal. Although most contemporary European democracies claim that citizenship is an inclusive position which everybody should, in principle, have access to, this study shows that, in practice, formal and informal processes of inclusion and exclusion exist which lead to the unequal positioning of migrant women vis-à-vis the state and society. This unequal positioning clearly falls along the lines of gender, socioeconomic positioning, ethnicity, and legal status (see also Yuval-Davis, 1997). Tackling the problem of migration and social inequality requires the use of new paradigms of social justice which, according to Fraser (1999, page 25), are to be based on “a difference-friendly world, where assimilation to majority or dominant cultural norms is no longer the price of equal respect.”

The above conclusions have four important implications for further studies of labour market, social inequality, and intersectionality.

First, linking Bourdieu's concepts of social and cultural capital with feminist ideas about the combined roles of socioeconomic position, ethnicity, and gender proved a very fruitful approach for understanding the dynamics behind the various situations of inequality that skilled migrant women face when trying to access spaces of paid work.

Second, they bring to light some problematic aspects of the current discussion on intersectionality. Intersectionality has been mainly used as a tool to conceptualize oppression. Accordingly, the analogy of an ‘intersection’ has been used to convey the idea that a combination of negative attributes, which occurs at some specific point in time, automatically and permanently results in social exclusion. This conceptualization seems too narrow, for the following reasons. This study has found that intersectionality does not operate uniquely in the direction of social exclusion. At any given time in an individual's working lifetime, socioeconomic position, ethnicity, and gender may in fact take on positive or negative roles, depending on the sociospatial context and on the type of occupation that the migrant is striving to obtain. Moreover, the constellation of advantages and disadvantages posed by an individual's socioeconomic position, ethnicity, and gender may change with time in response to evolving personal variables (eg educational advancement, job experience, language skills, and family situation) or external constraints (eg state policies, job opportunities). Thus, it is not possible to speak about ‘social exclusion’ as if it was one single specific situation: rather, there are a variety of situations of social inclusion and exclusion which generate different forms of inequality. The findings thus suggest that the analogy of an ‘intersection’ does not seem to be a useful way to understand how socioeconomic position, ethnicity, and gender simultaneously shape a migrant's position in society. This study has also shown that migrant women devise a variety of strategies to expand their possibilities of access to spaces of paid work. Intersectionality can also be used to understand how women deploy their agency to reverse the disadvantages of socioeconomic position, gender, and ethnicity which initially handicap them.

Third, the methods of biographical analysis and participatory MINGA workshops proved to be powerful tools for gaining thorough temporal and spatial understanding of social inequality and intersectionality. As a collective and reciprocal methodology, MINGA had the effect of increasing the knowledge of all workshop participants about the dynamics of labour-market participation and of expanding their social capital.

Finally, the results of this study highlight the importance of place in shaping access to spaces of paid work. Clearly, the social and cultural capital of individuals has no universal value per se but is place specific. Understanding geographies of labour and geographies of inequality thus requires examining in detail how the social and cultural capital of workers may be valued differently in different locations, and how those varying valuations may lead to different situations of equality and inequality.

Acknowledgements. The author gratefully acknowledges the support of this research by grant 4051140-69125 from the Swiss National Science Foundation. I am also indebted to the Guest Editors and three anonymous reviewers for their useful comments to improve this paper.

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