

## Family configurations and arrangements in the transnational mobility of early-career academics: Does gender make twice the difference?

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### Abstract

Previous studies have pointed out the highly gendered character of academia in general and international mobility in particular: women academics are confronted with a ‘glass ceiling’, and they are less geographically mobile than men, mainly as a result of family obligations. This paper examines whether gender plays twice a role in how women and men consider family arrangements in regard to a long-term post-PhD period of transnational mobility. Using data from an online survey and face-to-face interviews at the Universities of Cambridge and Zurich, we focus first on family configurations when academics decide to become mobile, then on how the family arrangements evolve while abroad. We show that the transnational mobility of academics has become more complex and varied than the ‘classical model’ of mobile academic men and non-mobile or ‘tied mover’ women. While having a child continues to impact gender roles, institutional characteristics in the context of mobility also play a role that needs to be further analysed.

**Keywords:** Early-career academics; international mobility; work-family conflict; gender.

### Introduction

Academia has been considered a ‘greedy institution’ (Currie et al., 2000; Hendrickson et al., 2011) that perpetuates inequalities between women and men, theorised in concepts such as the ‘academic mortality’ of women (Krais, 2002), a ‘leak in the pipeline’ (Alper, 1993; Leeman et al., 2010; Van Anders, 2004) and a ‘glass ceiling’ or ‘iron ceiling’ (Fassa and Kradolfer, 2010). The decrease in the percentage of women from one academic position to a higher one is due, among other things, to a *modus operandi* similar to an ‘old boys’ club’ (Bain & Cummings, 2000), a Matilda effect that underestimates women’s contribution to science, while men benefit from a cumulative process of recognition (Rossiter, 1993). This phenomenon is also related to perceived masculine norms like authority, ambition and availability (e.g. Lhenry, 2016), the last one becoming much more difficult to satisfy when one has children (see

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also Mason and Goulden, 2002). Consequently, work-family ‘interferences’ have been considered an important cause of inequalities between women and men (e.g. Barbier and Fusulier, 2016; Fusulier and del Rio Carral, 2012; Marry and Jonas, 2005), especially in an increasingly competitive environment like academia (see also Münch, 2014).

With regard to international mobility, several studies have pointed out its highly gendered character (e.g. Kofman & Raghuram, 2005; Jöns, 2011). Women academics have been shown to be less geographically mobile than men, mainly because of family obligations, which in turn can have a decisive impact on their career advancement (e.g. Ackers, 2003; Ackers and Bryony, 2008; Leemann, 2010; Le Feuvre, 2009; Fassa and Kradolfer, 2010; Shen, 2013; Shaumann & Xie, 1996; Ward and Wolf-Wendel, 2004). Furthermore, compared to their male counterparts, female academics more frequently follow their partners to a new location as ‘tied migrants’ (Bronstein, 2001; Ledin et al., 2007), without always finding a job corresponding to their qualifications, and experiencing a devaluation of their academic knowledge (e.g. Riaño and Baghdadi, 2007).

Although both academia in general and academics’ mobility in particular have been shown to be highly gendered, we argue that family configurations in the context of mobility have become more complex and varied for both women and men. Family arrangements do not always follow the ‘classical model’ – where men are the ‘primary migrants’ and women the ‘tied migrants’ or non-mobile – but undergo considerable changes while still being anchored in overall structures of social life that remain quite ‘traditional’ in many ways (with men playing the economic role and women relegated to the private sphere).

We thus examine family characteristics when women and men decide to become internationally mobile for at least one year after completing a PhD, then how the family arrangements evolve while being abroad, including the declared effects on the partners’ professional situation. Our focus is both on family considerations in deciding to undergo such a mobility, and especially on the impact of a long-term mobility on family arrangements. Because recent cohorts experience an increasing requirement to be internationally mobile, we conducted our research on female and male academics in natural and social sciences<sup>1</sup> who obtained their PhD from 2003 onwards and held a position (from a postdoc to a professorship) at the Universities of Cambridge and Zurich, during the 2013-2014 academic year.

The issue is even more important as the early-career academics considered here are often, from a life-course perspective, at a turning point in terms of both their career progression and the family formation. Our results show that

<sup>1</sup> We defined natural and social sciences very broadly, by excluding from our study only academics in medical and veterinary fields.

although some gender roles are reproduced in the context of transnational mobility, others are transformed, pointing to a clear tendency towards the ‘diversification’ of women’s and men’s roles, with women being also the ‘first movers’ and men the ‘followers’, resulting in new family arrangements. Furthermore, we suggest that institutional characteristics, i.e. the existence of family-friendly environments and measures that facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life, contribute to (re)defining masculine and feminine roles, thereby playing an important role in reducing gender inequalities.

### **Case Study**

The research study presented in this paper was conducted at the University of Cambridge (UK) and the University of Zurich (Switzerland), both with natural and social scientists. It has been observed recently that the ‘imperative of mobility’ spread from the natural to the social sciences: a stay abroad has become increasingly valued in one’s academic career path in almost each discipline. On the other hand, academics’ careers and mobility patterns are also related to more structural aspects of academia as a specific social field in Bourdieu’s sense (1979, see also Kraus 2002). In some ways, academia is inherently transnational (e.g. the claim for the universalism of scientific knowledge, Meyer et al. 2010; ‘the struggle for excellence’, Münch, 2014), while in other regards it remains locally anchored at a university or national level (e.g. the academic positions, the recruitment and funding structures, other support resources; see Enders and de Weert, 2009; Musselin, 2005).

The two countries considered here have distinct recruitment and funding systems, particularly the programs for international mobility: for instance, in Switzerland most further funding possibilities after a PhD and the perspective of obtaining a professorship require going abroad, while this does not appear to be a formal requirement in the UK. The two universities also present important structural differences in one’s academic career progression independently of the requirement to be internationally mobile: the University of Cambridge, as most UK higher education institutions, offer permanent/tenured positions that are not of a professorial status; whereas at the University of Zurich and in Switzerland more generally this is very rare. Thus, we can expect noteworthy differences at the two European universities considered as a case study here.

### **Data and Methodology**

The research design involves a quantitative methodology based on data from an online survey and a qualitative approach based on face-to-face interviews (e.g. Creswell, 2014).

We conducted the online survey in 2013. The questionnaire was completed by 150 early-career academics from the University of Cambridge (75 women and

75 men) and 131 from the University of Zurich (68 women, 62 men and 1 ‘other’). In this paper, we present some characteristics of the mobile respondents and their partners, as well as their considerations in becoming mobile, how they organised their (most recent) mobility and how their family configurations have evolved, including changes in their partners’ professional situation. This quantitative data allows for an overview of the respondents’ (last) experience of transnational mobility by considering family matters.

The online survey was followed by qualitative fieldwork at the same universities in 2014. In this article, we employ biographical-narrative interviews with mobile early-career academics (15 at Zurich and 12 at Cambridge) and – when they remained in the same relationship as they were in at the time of mobility – semi-structured interviews with their partners (7 and 6 respectively). The qualitative-interpretative analysis aims to obtain a better understanding of the dynamics of family arrangements in the context of mobility. We analysed the qualitative data by coding the material according to the categories as they appeared from the results of the online survey.

The analyses presented in the following sections concern respondents’ most recent experiences of transnational mobility that lasted at least a year, and which occurred after they had completed a PhD. We will present results from the survey by complementing them with elements from the qualitative interviews.

### **The Importance of Family Matters**

In our survey, 49 per cent of all female respondents and 55 per cent of all male respondents underwent a long-term post-PhD mobility. As in previous research, overall women appear to be less mobile than men (see also Mogue rou, 2004; Shaumann and Xie, 1996), but there are differences in this regard between the two universities considered here: at Cambridge, women are mobile almost as often as men (50.7% versus 53.3%), while at Zurich they are mobile to a lesser extent (47.1% versus 61.3%).

This gap at the University of Zurich is rather unexpected, given other statistics at the national level, whereas the results at the University of Cambridge seem to be much closer to what is observed in the UK as a whole (EC, 2016: 107).<sup>2</sup> While both universities are highly internationalised, with a large percentage of international students and sometimes staff,<sup>3</sup> they have different international mobility frameworks, which might account why women are less internationally

<sup>2</sup> In Switzerland, international mobility of at least three months in the ‘post-PhD’ phases of one’s careers is slightly higher among women (+1.3%) than men. In the UK, such mobility is higher among men (+4.9%) than women (EC, 2016: 107).

<sup>3</sup> For more details, see: <http://www.undergraduate.study.cam.ac.uk/international-students> and <http://www.studyingswitzerland.ch/uzh/university-description?id=8>, accessed on January 20, 2016.

mobile for a longer period of time (in our study at least one year versus at least three months in *She Figures*).

### Family considerations in deciding to become mobile

Most mobile academics (Table 1), women in particular, declared in our survey that their partner encouraged/supported them to go abroad, as did other family members. This emotional support appears to be an important element in academics' decision to become internationally mobile – for women, but also for men. At the same time, the majority of respondents 'felt [they] could satisfactorily accommodate [their] life as a couple and a family with [their] position abroad', and the very few who were parents at that time more frequently 'did not feel that having a child/children was an obstacle to taking up this position abroad'. However, some parents did feel that having children was an obstacle to taking up a position abroad; also, a significant number of women and men felt that they could not satisfactorily accommodate their life as a couple and a family.

**Table 1.** Family considerations regarding the decision to become mobile, by university and sex (%)

Family considerations regarding the decision to be internationally mobile: completely agree + somewhat agree (%)	Cambridge		Zurich	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
My (former) partner encouraged/supported me to go abroad	84.6	64.3	82.1	79.3
Other family members encouraged/supported me to go abroad	82.9	51.4	57.1	47.1
I did not feel that having a child/children was an obstacle to taking up this position abroad	50.0	75.0	75.0	N/A
I felt that I could satisfactorily accommodate my life as a couple and a family with my position abroad	62.9	59.5	62.1	76.5

*Source: TRAMA 2013 online survey*

This finding confirms previous results showing that family obligations, mainly having children, are important constraints to becoming internationally mobile, especially for women (e.g. Ackers, 2003; Ward and Wolf-Wendel, 2004). In

contrast, however, our results also indicate that not only women, but men too take family considerations into account when deciding to apply for an academic position abroad, which suggests some changes in ‘traditional’ gender roles.

The qualitative analysis showed that international mobility with children is complicated, mainly due to care issues, as this interviewee at the University of Cambridge claimed (although it was his female partner who mostly organised the move):

It was difficult to find a nursery we thought was good for our children, because the system of childcare here differs significantly from the German system [...]. And in the end we found a nursery that was comparable to our own [...]. And it’s only 100 meters from our house, so it’s very easy to bring them together [...]. But you pay for it (laughs). It costs ten times what it does in Germany. [...] It’s mostly the effort to move and, yes, [it was my wife] who organised that. I helped and I do, did all the physical stuff, but the organisation, that was [my wife]. (Man, ongoing mobility, two children at the time of mobility)

One of the central difficulties, however, involved the partner’s ability to find a (suitable) job, as pointed out by several interviewees, and as well illustrated in the following extract:

Cambridge is really bad for partners’ work. Because it’s a small town, and if your partner has a career, they all work in London. And the commute’s very heavy at the end of the day. So it’s very hard to find a balance here. [...] But usually it’s the other way around: it’s always the woman who suffers [...] or you even have a divorce rate that’s quite high. That’s really the problem in Cambridge. Or you move to London, that’s what a lot of people do, so it could be our option as well, but London is so expensive [...]. (Woman, ongoing mobility, no child at the time of mobility)

### **Characteristics of the mobile respondents and their partners**

Ultimately, who are the academics that decided to undergo such a long-term international mobility? At the time of the survey (Table 2), the mobile respondents in both universities were in their mid-thirties, and a very large majority of them were in a relationship, very often the same one they had been in when they had completed their PhD. Around a third of them had children at the time of survey, but many fewer had children when they had obtained their PhD. This suggests that our respondents were at a turning point in terms of founding a family, especially regarding whether to have children, when they completed their PhD.

In addition, very few mobile respondents at the University of Cambridge and only a few more at the University of Zurich were born in the UK or Switzerland,

respectively. This reveals that for most of them, their (extended) family lived in another country, which potentially created more difficulties in terms of reconciling work and family.

**Table 2.** Some characteristics of the respondents, by university and sex (%)

<b>Socio-demographic characteristics</b>	<b>Cambridge</b>		<b>Zurich</b>	
	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
<b>Age at the time of survey</b>				
average	34.3	34.4	36.1	37.0
median	33.5	34	36	37
<b>Relationship status at the time of survey</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
respondent currently in a relationship	81.6	90.0	90.6	92.1
respondent currently not in a relationship	18.4	10.0	9.4	7.9
<b>Same relationship the year of PhD</b>				
	86.8	90.0	90.6	76.3
<b>Had child/ren at the time of survey</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
respondent has children	39.5	32.5	37.5	39.5
respondent has no child	60.5	67.5	62.5	60.5
<b>Had children the year of PhD</b>	13.2	10.0	9.4	2.6
<b>Country of birth</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
Switzerland	0.0	5.0	25.0	42.1
UK	13.2	2.5	3.1	2.6
Other	86.8	92.5	71.9	55.3
<b>N</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>38</b>

*Source: TRAMA 2013 online survey*

As for their partners (Table 3), a large majority of them had a master's or PhD and, when employed, at least a third of them were employed in academia, especially the partners of male respondents at the University of Cambridge (who were mostly women). Mobile women were thus more concerned about dual academic careers, which appear even more difficult for both partners to pursue at such a competitive university. For partners who were not employed in academia, most were professionals, followed by managers, so highly qualified individuals for whom it is not self-evident to find a job in the same field of expertise and at the same level of responsibilities, especially since both universities do not really offer dual-career programs.

**Table 3.** Characteristics of the partners' respondents, by university and sex of the respondents (%)

Partners' Characteristics	Cambridge		Zurich	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
<b>Age</b>				
average	36.8	33.5	39.2	35.5
median	36	34	37	35
<b>Partner's highest level of education</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
bachelor or equivalent	12.9	13.9	13.8	14.3
master or equivalent	38.7	38.9	31.0	40.0
PhD or other doctorate level degrees	38.7	41.7	44.8	34.3
all other degrees	9.7	5.6	10.4	11.4
<b>Partner is employed in academia</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
yes	35.5	46.4	40.0	31.3
no	64.5	53.6	60.0	68.8
<b>If not, partner's main occupation</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
manager	5.0	6.7	13.3	13.6
professional	75.0	73.3	60.0	54.6
technician or associate professional	0.0	6.7	13.3	9.1
all other occupations	20.0	13.4	13.4	22.7
N	38	40	32	38

*Source: TRAMA 2013 online survey*

### **Organising the (most recent) mobility: Diversification and 'undoing' 'classical' gender roles**

The mobility taken into consideration here occurred soon after completing the PhD, on average the following year (Table 4). Among all respondents, it was the academics themselves who most often triggered the (last) mobility, for both women and men. They often moved together with their partners to the same place, more or less at the same time. For the very few respondents who were already parents when deciding about their mobility, the children almost always moved with them.

We found that it is not only men, but also women who are often the 'first movers' or move alone, especially at the University of Zurich, although more women continue to be 'tied movers'. Also, an important share of both women and men at the University of Zurich commute between a job abroad and the

main place of residence, which may be considered as a strategy to reconcile work and family (e.g. Van der Klis and Karsten, 2009).

**Table 4.** Characteristics of the (most recent) mobility, by university and sex (%)

<b>Characteristics of the (most recent) mobility</b>	<b>Cambridge</b>		<b>Zurich</b>	
	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
<b>Age of respondent at the beginning at the (most recent) mobility</b>				
average	30.5	30.1	31.9	32.3
median	29	30	31	32
<b>Years between the PhD of respondent and the (most recent) mobility</b>				
average	0.9	0.4	0.5	0.8
median	0	0	0	1
<b>Relationship status when deciding on the (most recent) mobility</b>				
in the same relationship as the current one	68.4	70.0	75.0	71.1
in another relationship than the current one	7.9	5.0	21.9	13.2
not in a relationship	23.7	25.0	3.1	15.8
<b>Statements about mobility situation with (former) partner</b>				
We moved abroad together at the same time to the same place	34.5	56.7	19.4	35.5
I moved first and my partner joined me later	17.2	16.7	16.1	19.4
My partner moved first and I joined him/her later	20.7	6.7	3.2	12.9
I moved alone and my partner did not move	10.3	20.0	25.8	12.9
I moved alone and my partner moved somewhere else	0.0	0.0	16.1	3.2
I am commuting between my job abroad and my main place of residence	6.9	0.0	9.7	12.9
Other	10.3	0.0	9.7	3.2

Characteristics of the (most recent) mobility	Cambridge		Zurich	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
<b>Person who had the professional opportunity leading to the (most recent) mobility</b>				
respondent	47.4	70.8	66.7	61.9
partner	15.8	8.3	16.7	9.5
both respondent and partner	36.8	20.8	16.7	28.6
<b>Had children when deciding about the (most recent) mobility</b>				
yes	15.8	10.0	15.6	5.3
no	84.2	90.0	84.4	94.7
<b>Children moved with respondent</b>				
yes	100.0	75.0	100.0	100.0
no	0.0	25.0	0.0	0.0
some of them	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
N	38	40	32	38

*Source: TRAMA 2013 online survey*

All this indicates a clear ‘diversification’ of gender roles that goes far beyond the ‘classical’ gendered pattern of mobility where men move alone and women follow them or do not move. In the qualitative interviews, we also observed a ‘diversification’ of the roles of men and women in regard to moving, and a wide range of negotiations was brought to light. The following quotations point to these ‘de-gendering’ or ‘undoing gender’ tendencies (Hirschauer, 2001) within couples:

I think for us it was always clear that we wanted to move together. [...] I mean, I could have imagined, let’s say, going ahead and being there half a year before my wife joined me, or vice versa, but I didn’t want to be there for two years while she stayed here and, you know, seeing each other once every two months, so that was not an option for me. And she thought the same thing. (Man, past mobility, no child at the time of mobility)

It coincided that when we got together she had already accepted the job, the fellowship in Cambridge. [...] So there was not much decision-making involved: it was very clear from the outset that she would stay here and I agreed that I would join her eventually (pause), which happened four and a half years later. [...] I think we met on weekends,

every other weekend [...] and I think that made it possible for me to stay a bit longer in Netherlands than I'd originally anticipated. Finally, after our first child was born and the maternity leave ended, we moved together to Cambridge. (Male partner)

In short, the experiences of transnational mobility have become more complex and varied for both women and men, which certainly involve new family negotiations and arrangements.

### Changes in partners' professional situations

To better understand what kinds of arrangements the mobility could entail, we first examined the survey data to determine whether the partners' professional situation changed during the mobility. These changes were declared by the academics themselves and regarded only partners who had moved with them: around half of the respondents mentioned that their partners had experienced a change in their professional situation as a result of the move, be it in their employment situation, the type of occupation or both (Table 5).

**Table 5.** Professional changes for respondents' partners, by university and sex (%)

Changes in the professional situation of the (former) partner during the mobility	Cambridge		Zurich	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
change from one employment situation to another	10.5	25.0	33.3	19.0
change from one type of occupation to another	26.3	8.3	8.3	14.3
change in both employment situation and type of occupation	21.1	25.0	8.3	9.5
no change	42.1	41.7	50.0	57.1
N	19	24	12	21

*Source: TRAMA 2013 online survey*

Although a majority of respondents' partners had a job during their (most recent) mobility, more of them were partly employed while abroad than before leaving, for both partners of male and female respondents. However, for the partners of male respondents (mostly women) this was often 'due to childcare, housekeeping [...]', while for partners of female respondents (mostly men) it was due to 'other reasons', which is certainly related to, on the one hand, the family organisation while abroad and, on the other, the different possibilities available in each country (i.e. part-time or full-time contracts). Either way, men also found themselves partly employed more frequently, which could again point to a 'diversification' in terms of gender roles. Furthermore, for those

partners who remained employed, fewer of them were managers during the mobility.

Other studies have revealed difficulties for partners, especially skilled women, in finding a job and having their human capital valued to the same degree as before (e.g. Bonney and Love, 1991; Boyle et al., 2003; Riaño and Baghdadi, 2007; Shihadeh, 1991). However, our findings show that not only female partners, but also male partners underwent many changes in their professional situation. This could happen throughout the period of mobility, for both the partner and the respondent, as the following quotation from an academic at the University of Zurich shows:

She stopped working for three or four months, and then she continued again and our daughter was in a day care and this was really comfortable. I mean the whole day care system in the UK, it's so much easier to find something than in Switzerland. Then [after the mobility, back in Switzerland] she had to work 100 per cent, so there was no way to have a part-time job. Then I decided: 'OK, then you start working 100 per cent, and if everything is settled I'll look for a new job'. And then, for a little more than a year, I was at home. (Man, past mobility, no child at the time of mobility, one child born while abroad and two children born after returning)

In the interviews, many male partners discussed the ways in which their work conditions changed, although they could find or keep a job in their field of expertise:

I didn't drive to the office; I just worked from home [...], used Skype at first and the phone to contact my colleagues, [...] for the last four and a half years. [...] But if I look at the differences between when we were still in the US and when we'd just moved here, it hasn't really changed since [...] they [colleagues] continued but I wasn't part of it (laughs). If you want to share ideas, [...] it's not possible [...]. The biggest problem is actually just the time difference. (Male partner)

I'm not leading a team at the moment [unlike before coming to the UK]. It was very clear to me; I didn't come with any illusions. If you leave one country and go to another, it can be a career move, but in this case it wasn't; it couldn't possibly be a career move at all. [...] I was more or less anticipating this. (Male partner)

While our results confirm that there are gendered effects with regard to the labour-market integration of partners – women have more difficulties in remaining employed in another country – they also point to a 'diversification'. In the interviews, male partners discussed the difficulties of being a 'tied migrant' in terms of finding a new job or having the same responsibilities within

the same position. However, gender representations seem to catch up with women as soon as children are involved and they are ‘tied movers’: here, the main reason for their (temporary) exclusion from the labour market is ‘traditional gender roles’, which consign them to the reproductive sphere.

### **Family arrangements before and after having children**

In brief, for the few respondents who were already parents when deciding about their (most recent) mobility, almost all of them moved together with their children. Some of the other respondents were in a relationship at that time which ultimately ended, and this could happen whether the partner followed or not. For the majority of respondents who remained in the same relationship, various situations could be observed during the mobility: a few of them commuted all the time (the ‘commuting primary mover’ could be a woman or a man); some of them lived in different locations than their partners (and saw each other on weekends, during their free time or when working from home), while in most cases the respondents moved with their partners to the same place (more or less) at the same time.

Subsequently, the couples had various mobility configurations until they had children. When they became parents, almost all the couples who had lived separately or commuted reunited. For some respondents, the reconciliation of work and family could go on, although professional adjustments were sometimes necessary (e.g. reducing working hours, changing working hours or jobs or giving up some responsibilities); while for others the conflict between work and family was more acute (which could result in unemployment for a period of time or in postponing having a child). When professional changes took place in order to reconcile work and family life, it was more often the ‘tied migrants’, the ‘followers’, be they women or men, who had to make the ultimate adjustments in a way that gave priority to the career of the ‘primary movers’ (see also Schaer et al., 2017).

### **Does Gender Make Twice the Difference?**

The last point raises the question of whether becoming a parent might not be more important than the mobility itself with regard to gendered issues and careers. In this final section, we therefore address the overall question of whether the described family arrangements are a gendered result of the mobility and/or having children – or, in other words, of how mobility and motherhood or fatherhood can interact and result in new family configurations.

In most cases where early-career academics moved with their partners and had children afterwards, the mobility made work-family balance more difficult and revealed the importance of personal and professional networks in reconciling the two social spheres. This issue was raised by several interviewees, including the following one:

Yeah, you need help. You need grandparents, you need very understanding bosses, both of which I luckily have. I think I'm really lucky that my bosses are women, although I've seen female bosses who completely react like, I don't know, testosterone bombs. I've seen both (laughs). But these are very nice [...]: I have an agreement with them, like, 'Look, when the kid's at home, I'm not working', and they agree to that because they know, they also have kids. (Male partner)

As this interview reveals, it was not only women who were confronted with these difficulties.

At the same time, mobility may make it easier to decide to have children:

I think if we hadn't left, I might not have had kids, because I wouldn't have dared to get pregnant [...]. I think moving was an advantage in terms of having kids. Or if we'd stayed in Switzerland, I might have tried it [at] 39 or 40 [years old], and it would have been [...] too late. (Female partner)

Nonetheless, the social environment can also reduce a female partner to the role of wife and/or mother, as suggested by one interviewee:

He's much more ready to have children than to get married, apparently (laughs). [...] It's neither of us [who sees the need to get married]: he doesn't see it as a necessity, and I don't see it as a necessity, but at some point if one of us lives in a country that we weren't born in, it might be a necessity, and we might just have to do it. (Female partner)

All in all, it appears that having children frequently reinforces 'traditional gender roles' (see also Mason and Goulden, 2002; Shaumann & Xie, 1996; Shen, 2013), but there is also a tendency towards the 'diversification' of these roles. Furthermore, long-term international mobility can contribute to this 'diversification', because men have become 'tied movers'/'followers' to a larger extent than before and are thus confronted with these family issues more often, and they are increasingly concerned with how to negotiate and reconcile work and family life.

## Conclusion

Using data from an online survey and face-to-face interviews, this paper has focused on gendered family configurations and arrangements among early-career academics (PhD after 2003) who were employed at the Universities of Cambridge and Zurich during the 2013-2014 academic year (regardless of their academic position), and who were or had been internationally mobile for at least one year after completing their PhD.

Our results show that although women continue to be less internationally mobile than men overall, the gap can be quite small in some places, as at the

University of Cambridge. Furthermore, not only women, but also men seriously take family considerations into account when deciding to undergo such mobility. Having a child continues to make more difficult taking up an academic position abroad, and several respondents felt that they could not satisfactorily accommodate their life as a couple and a family with a position abroad.

Also, female partners of mobile respondents appear to have more difficulties in entering the labour market abroad, and a significant percentage of both female and male partners were partially employed during the mobility, although for different reasons. In addition, several male partners who found or kept a job in their field of expertise experienced important changes in their working conditions and may have lost some professional responsibilities.

In order to combine the work and family expectations of both partners, various couple arrangements emerged during the mobility: some respondents or their partners commuted for a while, while others lived in different places and saw each other whenever possible. After becoming parents, almost all of these couples reunited and had to rearrange their work-family life: some of them without encountering specific difficulties, others by rearranging their working hours or their ways of working, or by changing their job, and yet others – and this is especially true for women – by being unemployed for a while.

Overall, we have argued that gender configurations in the context of mobility have become more complex and varied. Our paper shows that mobile early-career academics and their partners engage in a wide range of roles when it comes to mobility as ‘first movers’ or ‘tied movers’. There is a ‘diversification’ of gender roles that goes far beyond the ‘classical model’ in which men are the ‘primary migrants’ and women are the ‘tied migrants’, the ‘followers’ or do not move.

However, having a child can reinforce ‘traditional gender roles’ (according to which men work in the economic sphere and women are relegated to the reproductive sphere), but our results reveal that men too are often only partly employed during the mobility and more involved in childcare. Altogether, although both academia in general and academics’ mobility in particular have been shown to be highly gendered, female early-career academics who decide to undergo long-term post-PhD mobility do not appear to be disadvantaged twice relative to men; in some cases, international mobility can even be a chance to leave behind gendered and child-unfriendly environments, thus making it easier to combine work and the family life.

These findings do not appear to significantly differ according to academics’ discipline/field, but what seems to make a greater difference is the mobility status, i.e. if the women are the ‘primary movers’ or the ‘tied migrants’. Our results indicate that when professional adjustments are necessary in order to

reconcile work and family life, the priority is often given to the ‘primary mover’, and more women continue to be the ‘followers’.

Finally, the social environment remains gendered in many ways, but it can hinder men’s career and mobility as well as women’s. As regards the two contexts compared here, it appears that the mobility requirement for academics is more acutely perceived in Switzerland along with the pressure for women to work. Also, the British day-care system seems to facilitate the reconciliation of work and family life more than the Swiss, but in other respects mobility practices do not differ significantly between the two universities. Given the ‘diversification’ of childcare and gender roles, one way in which academics’ international mobility could be facilitated is by introducing institutional support not only for women, but also for men who take care of their children. Universities would become more attractive and contribute to reducing gender inequalities by offering good support that allows partners to enter the labour market, including specific funding and institutional resources for parents, both women and men.

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