



GENDER AND CIRCULATIONS IN EUROPE

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Gender and the Administration of Immigration in Europe

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ABSTRACT

Before the Second World War, European states did not have immigration policies implemented by specialized central administrations. The management of mobility was for a longtime a matter for local authorities. Foreigners, refugees (beginning in the late nineteenth century), migrants, and later immigrant workers became clearly defined categories of public action much later. Administrations have applied distinctive procedures for the populations falling under these categories, which took the material form of travel permits, residence permits, and cards whose use expanded after the First World War. At the crossroads of the policies of sovereignty, demographics, labor, and health, the policies governing migration have been marked by the same gender logic affecting each of these areas. The control of migration, administration of migrant persons, granting of status, and aid for men and women are in keeping with longer-term variations in gendered migratory flows.



"The Tragedy of Secret Emigration," illustrated supplement for the Corriere della Sera, November 17, 1946. Source : www.histoire-immigration.fr



Advertisement welcoming refugees in Denmark appearing in the British daily The Guardian, August 10, 2015.

Migrations: Numerous But Not Very Visible

There was a substantial feminine component to migrations within Europe from the mid-nineteenth onward. Many women from Switzerland and Luxembourg worked in bourgeois homes in major European cities. These migrations were encouraged and even organized by states and national employers. In the early twentieth century, Germany recruited tens of thousands of female Polish agricultural workers from Austria-Hungary and the Russian Empire; during the interwar period, French farms made massive recourse to migrant women from Poland and Czechoslovakia. In France the most important country of immigration during the interwar period, women formed a sizeable share of the migrant population (40%). However, the presence of these female workers was rarely debated, as opposed to that of immigrant men. The primary concern of Western European states with respect to immigration, at least until the Second World War, was to provide a male labor force for growing industries. This labor force came from regions that were increasingly removed from areas of production, and sometimes from dominated peripheries (the Irish in England or the Polish in Germany) or foreign countries. France, Belgium, Switzerland, and England welcomed large populations of foreign women during the interwar period. From the viewpoint of both the public policies and public opinion of these locations, immigrants were essentially seen as being male, and were conflated with workers.

While it sparked less interest, female migration was nonetheless regulated in a specific manner. The nineteenth century was marked by obstacles to women's mobility, at a time when the liberty to cross borders was gradually becoming a norm for European men. This was justified by the status of women (legal minors, absence of civil and civic rights, assignment to reproductive functions). The Spanish law of 1907 granted all Spanish citizens the right to leave the national territory, except for unaccompanied women. They were increasingly seen by administrations and charitable organizations, as potentially falling prey to procurers, while their engagements and activities were less closely monitored than those of men. In London, the European capital of refuge during the nineteenth century, female exiles corresponded and circulated more freely than their male counterparts.

The first decades after the war saw the continuation of a number of earlier trends. There were many women among the migrants moving to prosperous Western European states—including Sweden and Denmark, which had become countries of immigration—and independent migratory flows of women can easily be discerned. Many Baltic women worked as staff in English sanatoriums, the *"bonne espagnole"* (Spanish housemaids) is a familiar figure from the Trente Glorieuses in France, and Italian female workers were highly present in the German processing industry. However, the central issue for states was to find the workers needed by expanding manufacturing sectors, and to build or rebuild rapidly growing cities. The presence of migrant women drew little commentary, and their work, which often did not take the form of formal employment but was seen as an extension of domestic work, was not always considered or recorded as such. In a context where social rights in the welfare state derived from one's status as an employee, and in which women's right of residence was often determined by that of men, this led to many female migrants being deprived of a decent retirement, and further reinforced dependence on their husbands or fathers.

Specific European Migratory Policies?

The terms of public debate have changed over the last thirty years. Tougher immigration policies since the 1970s, the unequal deindustrialization of European societies, and the tearing apart of states located at the gates of Europe have helped make it central to debates regarding the welcoming of foreigners and the possibility of their integration. The doors of European countries gradually closed with quota policies in Austria and Switzerland in 1973, the official end of economic immigration in Germany (1973), and the *prime au retour* (return bonus) in France (1977). This closing prompted the development of migration through family reunification and marriage (of convenience, traditional, or mixed), and in the name of the right to asylum.

The fall of the wall has intensified East/West migration since the 1990s. When visas were required, mafia networks for the trafficking of women coerced into emigration and prostitution spread across the continent. A European directive in 2004 incited member states to grant residency permits to women who denounced men engaging in human trafficking. Furthermore, the enlargement of the European Union (EU) to Romania and Bulgaria resulted in the significant migration of women employed for domestic work or personal assistance. For example, the work of *badanti* in Italy, numbering nearly one million women, has allowed many Italian women to at least partially free themselves from domestic tasks and gain access to paid employment.

While the creation of the Schengen Area (1995) allowed for the free movement of persons within member states, borders were pushed back to the edges of Europe, and access to the status of refugee became more difficult (Dublin Convention in 1990 and Dublin II in 2003). Among refugee populations requesting asylum, women are in situations of greater vulnerability due to sexual violence. This was stressed as early as 1991 by the High Commissioner for Refugees, which called on states to consider women as a specific group. However, authorities from various European states have struggled to recognize gendered violence and persecution as sufficient reason for asylum. A number of European countries, including Germany, have nevertheless granted refugee status to women bearing witness to excisions, rape, or domestic violence. The war in Syria and the flood of refugees heightened already considerable fears in many European countries regarding their numbers, poverty, religion, and potential infiltration by Islamists. While men, whose Muslim religion is emphasized, are deemed to possess an insurmountable misogyny that is incompatible with the European way of life, women are seen more positively, as long as they are freed from men of the same origin and separated from the culture they embody. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, migratory policies have sparked a public debate surrounding the topics of sovereignty, welcome, equality, gender, globalization, and more largely what Europe stands for.

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