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“This is not a career move” - accompanying partners’ labour market participation after migration

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Abstract

In recent years, an increasingly international competition for highly-skilled professionals has become apparent. Many countries try to attract highly-skilled migrants and to keep them for the long term. These countries also allow the immigration of close family members, who are expected to play an important role in the decision to migrate and to stay in a country. However, accompanying partners often face significant difficulties when entering the foreign labour market.

The paper is based on 26 qualitative interviews with the accompanying partners of highly-skilled migrants in the United Kingdom [UK]. It explores the challenges that they face when trying to take up work after migration, elaborates on their strategies of finding work and examines the conditions for their labour market integration. The paper draws on Bourdieu’s concept of capital accumulation and conversion and asks how partners negotiate the value of their cultural capital after migration. In order to better understand their professional integration, accompanying partners’ positions after migration are related to their career plans before migration. Consequently, the paper differentiates between family migrants who use their expatriation as an occasion for a career change, family migrants who continue their career abroad and family migrants who wish to continue their career, but do not succeed.

Keywords: Family migration, Labour market, Highly-skilled migrants, Qualitative research, UK

Introduction

“This is not a career move” – this was clearly expressed by an interviewee who accompanied her husband on a work-related move from Denmark to the UK. The fact that family migration is rarely beneficial for the labour market participation of accompanying partners is reflected throughout the literature on *tiered migration* (Banerjee & Phan, 2015; Cooke, 2007; Raghuram, 2004). Moreover, terms like “trailing wife” (Ackers, 2004, p. 191) and the female partners’ “employment sacrifices” (Yeoh & Willis, 2005, p. 211) point to the gendered nature of family migration and the gendered effects of family migration on labour market participation (Cooke, 2001; Raghuram, 2004). Despite rising levels of qualification and the increasing professional aspirations of women, it is mostly men who are the primary migrants in career-related moves. Women in skilled-migration households usually follow men (Ackers, 2004; Cooke, 2007; Raghuram, 2004; Roos, 2013). The literature on dual career couples documents the

difficulties in balancing two careers within one household (Krause-Nicolai, 2005; Linehan, 2001). Very often the coping strategies of these households, such as putting one – usually the female – career on hold, end up in the wives being the trailing partner (Auspurg, Hinz, & Amorelli, 2010; Linehan, 2001).

For these highly-skilled trailing partners, the general conditions of the labour market entry in the host country are crucial in establishing a local career. Accompanying partners' dissatisfaction with migration is often due to their experiences in the labour market (Yeoh & Khoo, 1998). They frequently face de-skilling or are not even able to take up paid work in the host country (Riaño & Baghdadi, 2007). This also impacts negatively on the migration of the primary migrant, which is a common concern within the literature on international human resource management (Fechter, 2012; Kupka & Cathro, 2007). The important influence of accompanying partners has also been acknowledged by national authorities. In recent years, increased competition on an international level for highly-skilled staff has become apparent (Salt, 2009), because they are expected to ensure the international competitiveness of national economies (European Council, 2009). In this context, the possibility of accompanying partners of working in the host country is portrayed as an important influencing factor in attracting highly-skilled migrants (Migration Advisory Committee [MAC], 2009).

Moreover, accompanying partners have a quantitative significance. In the UK about 419,800 visas were granted to highly-skilled migrants¹ between 2010 and 2017 - an additional 343,400 visas to their dependants (including partners and children) (Home Office, 2018c). How partners fare in the labour market is, therefore, an important policy question. According to a survey by the Permits Foundation, the employment rates of partners decrease after migration to the UK. Calculations based on the Labour Force Survey (2008/ 2009) show that 59% of immigrants'² partners were employed, 33% were inactive and 9% were seeking work (MAC, 2009). The Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Australia shows that after 12 months partners still have higher rates of unemployment, lower rates of labour market participation and lower earnings than primary skilled migrants (Commonwealth of Australia, 2007). Moreover, a study in Canada by Elrick and Lightman (2016) demonstrates an independent, negative effect of the visa status (i.e. primary migrant vs. dependant) on the income of both male and female dependants.

Given the importance attached to the labour market integration of accompanying partners and the difficulties of family migrants in continuing their career abroad, this paper explores the following questions: What challenges do accompanying partners of highly-skilled migrants face when trying to enter the labour market after migration? What strategies do they develop against the backdrop of these challenges and their personal objectives? In order to answer the latter question, I will draw on Bourdieu's concept of capital and pay particular attention to how partners negotiate the value of their cultural capital in the process of positioning themselves in the labour market. Since the study is based on a small sample and the data is interpreted in a qualitative research tradition, it is not designed to give generalisable explanations, but it contributes to a better understanding of the logic behind the partners' strategies. The paper starts by giving an overview of factors influencing the labour market participation of accompanying partners, including the legal conditions for family migrants in the UK. The following section briefly summarises some aspects of the role of economic, social and

cultural capital, as conceptualised by Bourdieu (1983), for labour market participation after migration. The research methods, guided interviews with 26 accompanying partners of highly-skilled migrants, are discussed in the next part. The following section provides a detailed analysis of their labour market entry in the UK. On the basis of the empirical results, the paper concludes by discussing structural and personal factors for labour market strategies of accompanying partners of highly-skilled migrants.

Factors influencing the labour market participation of accompanying partners

When accompanying partners of highly skilled migrants arrive in the host or new home country, they can take on a paid job, do unpaid work, retrain and study, look for the right employment opportunity or concentrate on their family and their leisure activities. The legal rules are a central precondition for the labour market participation of accompanying partners. They differ significantly between countries (Bordoloi, 2015; Riaño & Baghdadi, 2007). In the UK, the rules for immigration depend on the immigrants’ nationality and their reasons for migration. However, at the time of this study (2013), partners of highly-skilled migrants were allowed to migrate to the UK and to work apart from a few restrictions (Table 1).

Moreover, the structure of regional labour markets is essential for accompanying partners’ opportunity to work. Since the search for work is often limited to the area where the primary migrant is employed (Kofman & Raghuram, 2005; Purkayastha, 2005), the regional availability of appropriate employment is crucial. So is the income level, particularly in relation to the costs of household services (Yeoh & Willis, 2005).

Furthermore, household structure plays an important role for the labour market participation of accompanying partners. Particularly mothers of young children face additional challenges regarding their labour market entry (Cobb-Clark & Connolly, 2001). The general struggle to coordinate family and work life is aggravated after migration. This is due to changing demands and the loss of former support networks (Banerjee & Phan, 2015;

Table 1 Rules for immigration and working in the UK (UK Visas and Immigration, 2013^a)

	Citizens from European Economic Area [EEA] - countries and Switzerland as well as partners of these citizens	Third country nationals
Primary migrants	Right of residence and right to work in the UK	Undergo points’ assessment Tier 1 - High-value migrants Tier 2 - Skilled migrants Tier 4 - Students
Partners ^b	Partners are allowed to join citizens from EEA-countries and Switzerland, irrespective of own citizenship; they have the right to work [Immigration (EEA) Regulations 2006]	Points’ based system dependants (Tier 1, 2, 4) can apply for visa to join primary migrant; have the right to work ^c ; are not allowed to work as doctor/dentist in training [Immigration Rules §319C-D]
Regulated professions	Migrants are required to register with the appropriate competent authority and to obtain professional recognition of qualifications; predominantly within fields of teaching, medicine and law	

Sources: Centre for Professional Qualifications, 2016; Jayaweera & Oliver, 2013; UK Legislation, 2018; Mavroudi & Warren, 2013; UK Visas and Immigration, 2013a, 2013b

^aThe information is based on the year when the empirical study was conducted, since these rules applied to the interviewees

^bAccording to UK immigration law, a partner can be a husband, a wife, a civil partner, an unmarried or a same-sex partner

^cDependants of students who are granted less than 12 months leave to enter are not permitted to work EEA European Economic Area

Cooke, 2007). The support network of family and friends is reduced after migration, so that partners have to rely on service providers for help with household and children. However, the availability of services differs locally (Riaño & Baghdadi, 2007; Yeoh & Khoo, 1998; Yeoh & Willis, 2005) and access depends on the cost of services in relation to earnings. At the same time, migration gives rise to additional responsibilities, as accompanying partners are often in charge of transition work in order to support the primary migrants' career move. They are supposed to organise the settling-in process of the household, ensure the emotional well-being of the whole family and build up family and community networks (Cooke, 2007; Fechter, 2012; Purkayastha, 2005).

Unfavourable structural conditions, from national law and policies to regional labour markets, local child care options as well as organisational patterns within households, can thus impede labour market entry. However, it is important to note that not working after migration can also be an active and deliberate decision of accompanying partners. Raghuram (2004, p. 307) points out that staying abroad can be experienced "as an opportunity to gain satisfaction outside the labour market" or to retrain. Personal decisions whether to work or not are strongly influenced by career aspirations, the planned duration of the migration, the income situation of the household and the stage people are at in their careers and personal lives (Yeoh & Khoo, 1998). In particular, childbirth shortly before or after migration is a common reason for not working (Clark & Huang, 2006; Roos, 2013). Moreover, being abroad as a family migrant is sometimes seen as a good time to expand the family.

There has been a controversial debate on the significance of structural conditions versus individual choice for women's labour market participation – independent of migration. While Hakim's preference theory stresses that choice is based on life goals and becomes more important with individualisation processes in late modern societies (Hakim, 1998; 2006), her critics, however, point out that choices are made within structural constraints (Crompton & Harris, 1998, see also Hakim, 2006). Therefore, Evetts suggests that structural explanations as well as women's choices have to be taken into account in order to understand women's career experiences, with "one or another dimensions [being] more important at different times or in different social systems" (Evetts, 2000, p. 58).

Economic, social and cultural capital and migrants' labour market entry

In addition to structural conditions and personal choice, the human capital of accompanying partners, such as language proficiency, plays a crucial role for their labour market participation (Cobb-Clark & Connolly, 2001). However, Erel suggests that human capital is not "a key that the migrant puts into her rucksack and, once in the country of immigration, unpacks to see if it fits the 'keyhole' " (Erel, 2010: 649). Instead, she points out that migrants negotiate the value of their cultural capital after migration. In studies on immigrants' labour market integration, Bourdieu's concept of different types of capital, economic, social and cultural capital, (Bourdieu, 1983) has proven useful in revealing power relations and the agency of migrants (e.g. Erel, 2010; Nowicka, 2013; Riaño & Baghdadi, 2007; Weiss, 2005). Economic capital includes income and other forms of financial resources and assets which can be cashed in immediately and directly. Social capital includes the current and potential resources that come with being a member of a particular group. The extent of the social capital depends on the extent of the economic, social and cultural capital of the other members of the group (Bourdieu, 1983).

Cultural capital is subdivided by Bourdieu into three forms. The embodied form is tied to the individual and is the result of long-term socialisation processes in formal educational institutions, the family, political parties, clubs etc. (Bourdieu, 1983; Erel, 2010). It includes competencies, value orientations as well as thought and behavioural schemata. This embodied cultural capital manifests itself in the habitus of the individual. The second form is objectified cultural capital, for example, in the shape of cultural goods such as books and pictures. Finally, institutionalised cultural capital can include educational qualifications and academic titles. These are a reference for cultural competence that transfer a permanent and legally-guaranteed value to the holder (Bourdieu, 1983).

The three types of capital are related and can, in principle, be converted into each other (Erel, 2010). Economic capital can be used to pursue higher education and thus accumulate cultural capital. Going to university not only creates institutionalised cultural capital, but also social relationships, which can be used to promote the professional career (Thomsen, 2010; Waters, 2006). However, migration can devalue the accumulated capital (Nowicka, 2013) as apparent in studies on immigrants' labour market entry. For example, professional networks, which can inform about job openings and opportunities, are often location-specific. Thus, social capital cannot be mobilised for the job search in the host country (Purkayastha, 2005; Ryan & Mulholland, 2014). This also applies to embodied cultural capital, e.g. norms and customs in the application process differ between countries (Bauder, 2005). Finally, qualifications and work experience from abroad, especially when gained in developing countries (Cooke, 2007; Man, 2004; Purkayastha, 2005; Støren & Wiers-Jenssen, 2010), are often not recognised in the host country, i.e. immigrants' institutionalised cultural capital is devalued. The value of social and cultural capital is thus often tied to national and regional contexts (Bauder, 2015).

However, migration scholars point out that migrants are not passive in relation to the devaluation of their cultural capital (Erel, 2010; Riaño & Baghdadi, 2007). They are active agents who engage in bargaining activities with institutions and people (e.g. employers) about the value of their cultural capital. Moreover, in the last few decades transnational labour markets have developed in several professions and fields of knowledge. Weiss (2005) demonstrates for highly-skilled migrants that, while part of migrants' cultural capital is location-specific, another part is transnationally valid, e.g. IT or medical expertise as well as knowledge from culturally or economically hegemonic states, like the USA [United States of America]. Furthermore, Nowicka (2013) describes how transnational migrants convert different forms of capital across national borders.

The aim of the following qualitative analysis of interviews with highly-skilled migrants' accompanying partners is to explore their strategies for labour market entry after migration. It has become apparent from the literature review that, in order to understand their strategies, it is essential to take into account structural conditions, personal objectives as well as the partners' active agency in negotiating the value of their cultural capital.

Project description and research methods

This research is based on a study on accompanying partners of highly-skilled migrants in the UK that draws on 26 qualitative interviews. The concept of highly-skilled migrants which is used in this study relates to persons with tertiary-level education (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2008) who have migrated internationally to take up an occupation that is in line with their skills. However, being highly-skilled does

not necessarily relate to being highly-paid, since the interview sample of this study also includes interviewees who accompanied a PhD student to the UK. The concept of partner used here includes married and non-married partners as well as heterosexual and same-sex partners. However, the final sample only contains heterosexual partners.

The interview sample resulted from purposeful sampling. Interviewees were selected to incorporate accompanying partners who possessed a variety of social characteristics that were expected to impact on the migration and integration process of the partners. Selection criteria included sex (male and female interviewees), household structure (children vs. no children within the household), origin (EEA vs. non-EEA states) and the leading migrant's work contract (permanent vs. temporary). Most of the interviews were conducted in the East Midlands in the summer of 2013. This spatial concentration resulted partly from budgetary restrictions and partly from the demand for more UK case studies outside of the global city London and its wider area. As most studies on the experiences of highly-skilled migrants have focused on global cities (Beaverstock, 2002; Beaverstock, 2005; Meier, 2009), this recruitment strategy provides an innovative perspective on highly-skilled migration. The interviewees were contacted through different channels: circular emails and notices within the Universities of Nottingham and Loughborough, local expat communities (e.g. toddlers' groups, churches) and snowballing. The interviews were conducted in English and in German, the first language of the interviewer, and lasted between one and 2 hours. The following analysis is based on transcripts and protocols of the interviews. The quotes used here are extracts from the interviews. German quotes have been translated into English. Names have been changed to maintain confidentiality.

The main characteristics of the final interview sample are displayed in Table 2. The characteristics of the leading migrant's work contract and the origin from EEA and non-EEA states are evenly distributed in the sample. However, regarding the demographic variables, female interviewees and interviewees with children clearly dominate the sample. This reflects the actual quantitative situation when regarding highly-skilled migration. For example, Jöns has shown in a study on long-term research stays in Germany (Humboldt research fellows 1991–2000) that female visiting researchers were less often accompanied by a family than male researchers (Jöns, 2011; see also Heß, 2009). Additionally, the interviews illustrate that women were more inclined to define themselves as accompanying partners than men were.

Results

Sample description: Career plans and types of occupations

At the time of the study, the interviewees were engaged in different kinds of activities. These have been classified by the author into four broad types based on the main kind of occupation outside the household, namely study, paid work, non-paid work and leisure.

- The interview partners of the occupation type “study” are enrolled in different higher education programmes from Bachelor to PhD.
- The occupation type “paid work” covers very different kinds of paid activities. It can be further subdivided based on the relation between the qualification and the position of the interviewees.

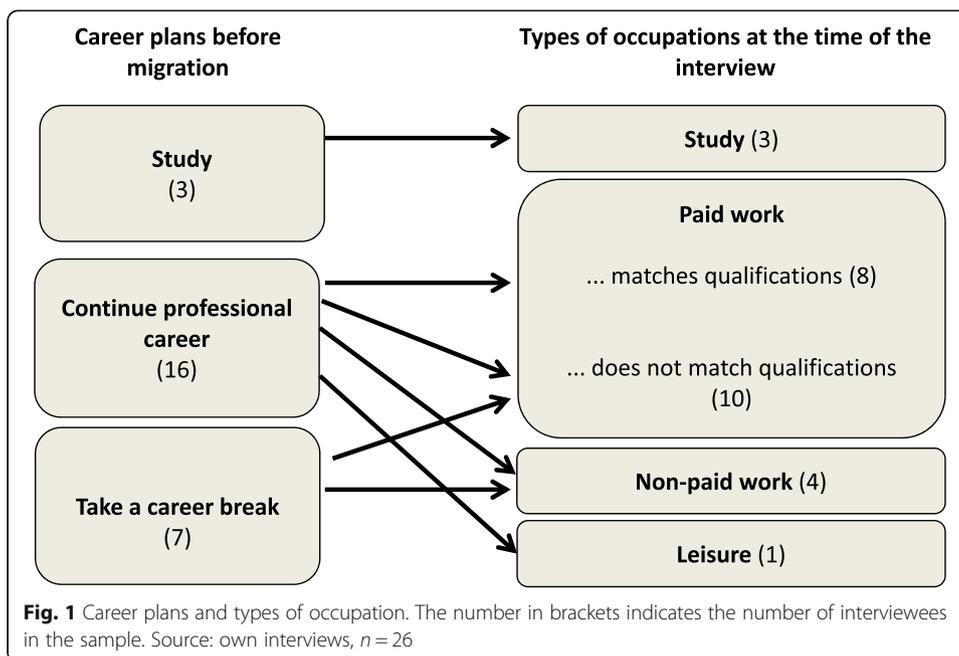
Table 2 Sample characteristics

No.	Continent of origin	Sex	Children	leading migrant's work contract	Duration of stay in destination country
1	Africa	f	yes	temporary	1–5
2	Latin America/ Caribbean	f	yes	permanent	1–5
3	Europe	m	no	temporary	< 1
4	Europe	f	yes	initially temp., later perm.	> 5
5	Europe	f	yes	permanent	> 5
6	North America	f	yes	permanent	> 5
7	Europe	f	yes	permanent	> 5
8	North America	f	no	temporary	1–5
9	North America	f	no	temporary	1–5
10	Europe	f	yes	permanent	1–5
11	Europe	f	yes	permanent	1–5
12	Africa	f	yes	temporary	1–5
13	North America	f	yes	temporary	1–5
14	Europe	f	yes	permanent	> 5
15	Europe	f	yes	permanent	1–5
16	Europe	f	yes	permanent	> 5
17	Africa	f	yes	temporary	< 1
18	Europe	f	yes	permanent	> 5
19	Asia	f	yes	permanent	> 5
20	Latin America/ Caribbean	f	yes	temporary	1–5
21	Europe	f	no	temporary	< 1
22	Latin America/ Caribbean	m	yes	permanent	> 5
23	Europe	f	yes	temporary	< 1
24	Europe	f	yes	temporary	1–5
25	Europe	m	yes	temporary	1–5
26	Asia	f	yes	permanent	1–5

Source: own data, $n = 26$ interviews

- “Non-paid work” relates to volunteering at charity organisations or churches.
- “Leisure”: Time is spent mainly on hobbies.

The interviewees of the occupation types “non-paid work” and “leisure” could have been classified as full-time homemakers. However, they differ clearly regarding their main kind of occupation outside the household. Figure 1 relates the employment situation to the career plans that the interviewees had before their migration. The figure shows that disregarding their original plans, the interviewees find themselves in different types of occupations. In the following sections, the three paths that, in this study, lead to “paid work” (Fig. 1) will be analysed. Firstly, there are interviewees who had not planned to continue their career abroad. Instead, they use their migration as a means of taking a career break. It has been pointed out by gender scholars that women’s aspirations are not reduced to employment (Raghuram, 2004). However, this path has rarely been studied in detail for accompanying partners (e.g. Braseby, 2010). Secondly, there were eight interviewees who managed to find a position that matches their qualifications. Thirdly, other interviewees were not able to relaunch their career. They ended



up doing jobs that did not correspond with their qualifications. Others have not found paid work at all and engage in non-paid work or leisure activities. However, they are not discussed in this article.

Migration as an occasion for a career break

There are various reasons to take a career break: Some interviewees did not enjoy their previous work experience and purposely did not look for the same kind of job. A major motivation for interviewees with children was the wish to spend more time with them. Hanne, who has a degree in Science and worked in her home country as a team leader in a big company, accompanied her husband on his expatriation to the UK. She explains:

“I have chosen to be a Mom here (...) I actually get more time to spend with my kids here and do get to be a part of their life when they are small. If I were here for 5 years, I would gradually change that more. If we are only here for two years, I can definitely be that for two years. (...) The job is for me to be satisfied and happy and contained, it’s not a career-planning move, so the job [that she has in the UK] does not necessarily have to be a step up the ladder, it is just to keep me happy. As I said, if it’s 60% something I know and 40% something new, but not necessarily something going up and it can be to a low wage, it is okay, as long as it keeps me happy. (...) I could get a job in Asda [supermarket], that would not be fun, so I don’t see that as an option, that is not why I want a job.” (Interview #23)

This quote illustrates three aspects: the prioritisation of children over job, the length of the career break and the function of work as a source of personal satisfaction as opposed to income. For Hanne, a strategy for combining the two aims, family and personal satisfaction, was to look for a job that somehow related to her qualifications,

offered new insights, but did not include the pressure of pursuing a career. This illustrates that working below one's skill-level is not necessarily perceived as a devaluation of their cultural capital. On the contrary, it can add to their cultural capital when it offers new professional skills or personal experiences. These might even be transnationally valid, e.g. English-language proficiency or technical skills, and can later be converted into economic capital.

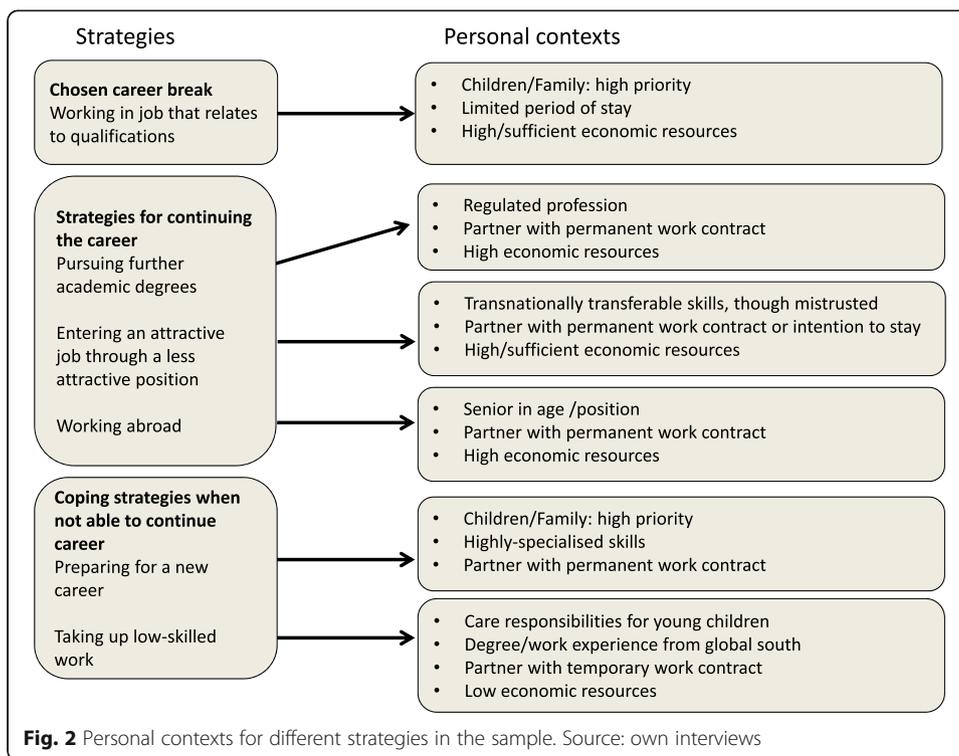
Not pursuing a career is thus not necessarily a question of structural barriers to the foreign labour market. Nor, is it necessarily a question of traditional gender roles. This is also illustrated by the case of Filipe. He accompanied his then-wife who is doing a PhD in the UK. For him, coming to the UK was an opportunity to take a break from his career back home and to study in the UK. After completing his degree, he searched for a job in the UK where he could work until his former wife had completed her PhD.

“I would like to do something more directly related with my proper job (...) But yes I am very happy, mostly because I can take care of my daughter which is very, very important for me. That's my priority. That is why I am still living here in the UK. I can go back to Spain whenever I want. My job is waiting for me there (...) But I am still here because my daughter needs a dad and a mum, so that's why I am living here.” (Interview #25)

Just like Hanne, Filipe had a senior position in his home country and stressed that he was not abroad for career reasons, but that he would pursue his original career when back home. Therefore, he does not measure the value of his cultural capital in the UK context, but in the context of his home country. Both interviewees clearly prioritise family over job while abroad. This is explained by their particular situation as family migrants who have already made a conscious choice to put their career second to be able to follow their partners and live abroad as a family. Moreover, it is explained by their limited period of stay and their economic resources (Fig. 2). It also shows that career plans are not necessarily focused on the host country.

Strategies for continuing the career after migration

Among the interviewees who planned to continue their professional career, few started right away after migration in a job that matches their qualifications. When analysing their professional backgrounds and degrees, it becomes apparent that there are certain conditions that offer easier access to the UK labour market. These include working in a profession with labour shortages (e.g. nursing) and having studied in the UK. If certain professional skills are in demand in the host country and skills are transnationally valued, accreditation processes run smoothly (Liversage, 2009). The recognition and evaluation of institutionalised cultural capital depend on the national context and mirror the respective national economic interests and needs of the labour market (Bauder, 2003; Erel, 2010). Having studied in the UK means that the accompanying partner possesses national institutionalised cultural capital (a university degree), embodied cultural capital (e.g. language proficiency, knowledge about rules in application processes) and social capital (e.g. professional network, organisational contacts) that give access to the national labour market.



Other interviewees had to negotiate the value of their cultural capital in order to be hired for a job that matches their qualifications. They used different strategies:

Pursuing further academic degrees

This strategy was particularly important for interviewees looking for a job in a regulated profession that are not considered shortage occupations. Padma had followed her husband, an investment banker, from Asia to the UK. She had worked as a teacher in her home country for a decade. However, as she did not have a transnationally-valued teaching degree, she had to study for a year and take the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) to be allowed to work as a teacher in the UK.

“For this PGCE I paid around ten, eleven grand, so £11,000, which is a huge amount of money and I didn't get any bursary as well, even though I had a first class graduation things and whatever.” (Interview #26)

Thus Padma invested time and money, which she perceived as being reasonable because of her husband's permanent work contract in the UK. Due to the economic resources of her family, she was able to finance her degree and thus convert economic capital into national cultural capital (Fig. 2). By doing so, she could validate the cultural capital that she had accumulated during her studies and her work life in Asia. This strategy of pursuing further academic degrees was also identified as being very successful in other national and occupational contexts (see Riaño & Baghdadi, 2007 for Switzerland; Liversage, 2009 for Denmark) as it often leads to the desired professional integration. However, depending on the national context, there are different barriers as the cost of studying varies greatly between countries.

Entering an attractive job through a less attractive position

Access to other professions is not regulated by the state. However, access is more difficult for migrants than for national graduates (Støren & Wiers-Jenssen, 2010). As already described above they lack local social capital and location-specific embodied cultural capital (e.g. knowledge of application processes). Damian, who holds an international degree in accounting, has experienced mistrust in his skills.

“It was very difficult, because I think British people follow preconception about what ‘in brackets’ third world people, the level of their skills and how competent they are. So it was difficult getting into work, because I think people just don’t think that you are capable, and [when you work] people found how capable you are. It wasn’t so hard, but getting in is very hard because people seem to think that you are from a developing nation, you won’t be competent.” (Interview #22)

Damian perceives that the value of cultural capital is not only attached to the place of higher education, but also to the nationality and ethnicity of its holder. He negotiated the value of his cultural capital on the job. Therefore, he applied for jobs that corresponded to his qualifications. However, he was willing to work in a less attractive position, such as a temporary position, to get a chance to demonstrate his skills and work ethic. Other interviewees strategically employ their resources when they look for jobs in companies or institutions that have close links to their home country. Thus, they use their embodied cultural capital as a way to stand out from the mass of applicants. By working in less attractive positions, these interviewees acquired local work experience and local professional networks (Ackers, 2004). From these positions, they then applied for other, more attractive positions. As this strategy was time-consuming, it was applied by interviewees with sufficient household income (to overcome periods with lower earnings) and a long-term perspective in the UK, which was attached to the permanent work contract of the primary migrant or the intention to stay in the UK (Fig. 2).

Working abroad

There is a third strategy that allowed accompanying partners to work at the level of their qualifications after migration. These partners kept in touch with their professional networks abroad. This was the case for two accompanying partners. One of them kept his job abroad and travelled back and forth between job and family (pluri-local household). The other travelled to teach courses abroad on a regular basis and was, in addition, trying to build up contacts in order to arrange teaching assignments in the UK. One teaching assignment was offered to her by her husband’s employer. However, it was limited in the amount of hours and pay and did not offer a career perspective in the UK. Both partners were senior (in age / position) and appreciated their work environment and their position abroad. They realised that, while their spouses had permanent work contracts in the UK, it would be an effort or even impossible for them to find comparable work / a comparable position to the one they had abroad. Therefore, they did not concentrate on bargaining the value of their cultural capital in the UK. Instead, they relied on their location-specific social and cultural capital abroad. Travel expenses did not constrain their mobility as they disposed of a comparably high household income (Fig. 2).

A forced career change after migration

Preparing for a new career

However, living apart together was not a viable option for all the interviewees. Irina, who had worked as a researcher before she followed her then-boyfriend to the UK, remembered:

“I realised that, if I wanted to continue working as a researcher, I would not find any job within 200 miles of here. I would have had to go back to [country where she had worked before]. I have even sent an application to [country where she had worked before] (...) That was the situation when I said: ‘I came here to live with you. It does not make sense to (commute that long distance).’” (Interview #19)

The dual career couple realised that they cannot pursue two careers in the same place because both worked in a highly-specialised field (Fig. 2). After deciding in favour of family life with husband and child in one location, Irina chose to retrain as a clinical scientist. This new career interested her and was somehow related to her former research. Moreover, she expects there would be demand for her new skills in every country they could possibly move to in the future. Thus, she expects to acquire transnationally valid cultural capital that would give her greater bargaining power in the future. This is important for her although her husband had a permanent work contract. However, future international migration is a way to promote her husband's career.

Low-skilled work instead of a career

A number of interviewees had originally planned to continue their professional career after their migration to the UK, however, they ended up in low-skilled work. Among them were interviewees who were affected by cumulative disadvantage (Purkayastha, 2005), in terms of gender, origin and economic resources. These were mothers of young children who were the main person responsible for childcare in their households. They came from countries in the global south, had degrees and work experiences from their home countries. Their husbands were PhD students with temporary contracts and comparably low income (Fig. 2). The following quote of Tayo illustrates the logic behind taking up unskilled work:

“I had some plans to work, so I set up early. (...) I checked the internet for work and luckily I found a job in the same month, although not what I wanted, the job I got does not match with my qualification, but I don't mind, I wanted to get a job in the same month. (...) I have a family friend, who also studied B.A. She advised me on some jobs and she said: ‘we don't need to wait for you to get what you have studied, you can do this and that’. So she downloaded some application forms for me which I filled and submitted (...) I applied for kitchen assistant job, I also applied for a cleaning job. I heard it's so convenient, it's part time, early in the morning, even when you have a baby, and your husband is working, when you come back home, your husband can go working at 9.” (Interview #12)

For Tayo, as well as for the other interviewees who worked in unskilled jobs, the main objective was to find work quickly. They stressed the fact that it was very important for them to earn money so as to be independent, to support their household or to

be able to save money for bigger expenses like travelling to their home country. However, they shared similar experiences with Damian (see above) and expected or were told that searching for a job in their field of expertise would take a long time (see also Riaño & Baghdadi, 2007). Consequently, they applied for a low-skilled job. The lack of economic resources also affected Tayo's job search in terms of working hours. Due to the high costs of child care in the UK, Tayo looked for jobs in the mornings (and in the evenings) when her husband was at home and could take care of their child. Thus, paid child care options can be avoided. However, the choice of jobs is consequently limited.

The quote also illustrates the role of social capital in the job search. As Tayo's friend advises her to look for low-skilled jobs and supports her search in this sector, it becomes apparent how social capital gives access to the same job opportunities of the other members of the group.

However, working in a low-skilled job does not necessarily mean taking "any job available" (Riaño & Baghdadi, 2007: 178) as the case of Grace (Interview #17), a journalist from an African country, illustrates. Grace started working as a volunteer in a citizens advice bureau. Since she needed to earn money to support her household, she then did several paid jobs in the catering industry which provided her with the necessary UK work experience. She finally found a job as a call centre agent in a media company. She pointed out that she would include her current job in her CV [Curriculum Vitae] because it was related to her field and she expected it to be beneficial for a career in her home country. As the example of Grace shows, voluntary work and a paid job that does not match one's qualifications can be one of the steps to entering the labour market. It is comparatively easy to be accepted for an unpaid job. At the same time it is an opportunity to gain work experience in the foreign labour market, get references and develop social networks (Riaño & Baghdadi, 2007). This location-specific social and cultural capital give access to other jobs. Working one's way up is a time-consuming task. If the period of time which is spent in the UK is limited, this path might take too long for them to finally be able to enter a sought-after position before leaving the UK. However, it is important to stress that acquiring skills in fields that are not highly-valued in the country of migration can be a strategy to enhance job opportunities in the country of origin, if these skills are considered valuable there (Erel, 2010).

Conclusion

In this article, I have explored the challenges that accompanying partners of highly-skilled migrants face when trying to take up work after migration, and I have examined the strategies they develop. Only rarely is it the case that accompanying partners can start working immediately after migration and continue their former careers without major interruptions (Hardill, 1998). The study suggests that this is the case for partners who have national cultural capital as well as for partners who work in a short-age occupation. Most partners, however, experience a devaluation of their cultural capital in the host country, with some partners facing additional challenges because their occupation is regulated by law, their skills are too specialised for the regional labour market or their cultural capital was acquired in the global south.

Accompanying partners invest time and / or money in further training, retraining or in working their way up from a less attractive position. Other accompanying partners maintain their networks abroad and keep on working abroad which leads to a

pluri-local lifestyle. Yet others take up lower or low-skilled work. The strategies are taken within the specific contexts that the accompanying partners, who were interviewed, live in. These are summarised in Fig. 2. As already mentioned, the study is not designed to give generalisable explanations. Future quantitative research could refer to the strategies, analyse the quantitative significance of different strategies and correlations between strategies and labour market outcomes. Instead, the aim of this study is to understand the logic behind the partners' strategies.

The study shows that working below one's skill level is not experienced as a devaluation of cultural capital per se. It can also be a conscious decision on the part of the interviewees and can therefore express their active agency. This underlines how important it is to include the interviewees' objectives in order to prevent economic interpretations of migration. The study supports that women's aspirations are not limited to employment (Raghuram, 2004). It even suggests broadening the perspective and speaking more generally of *family migrants* – irrespective of their gender – whose aspirations cannot be reduced to their professional career. Choosing an occupation below one's skill level can also be explained as a consequence of personal objectives. However, it seems strongly connected to the limited time of expatriation. As compared to other migrants, this strategy seems to be specific for family migrants who (at least initially) plan to return to their former place of residence.

Economic capital plays a significant role for accompanying partners' labour market strategies as it can be converted into cultural capital (e.g. further qualifications). Sufficient household income allows partners to engage in lengthy job search or to travel internationally between work and family locations. In contrast, limited household financial resources are a major reason for working in a low-skilled and low paid job. Moreover, childcare responsibilities were a challenge mainly for interviewees with low household income, since, in the UK, childcare services are widely available, but costly. Many, though not all, households of highly-skilled migrants have high economic capital. That means that accompanying partners of highly-skilled migrants often have more options for coping strategies than other migrants.

However, social capital is rarely available to the accompanying partners of highly-skilled migrants in the host country. While studies on low-skilled migrants underline the importance of (extended) family networks in finding work (Boyd, 1989), networks of family or friends were rarely mentioned by the interviewees who were looking for a skilled or highly-skilled job. However, when such networks existed, they gave access to low-skilled jobs. In this study, the professional networks of the highly-skilled work migrants did not prove useful either. In contrast, Roos (2013), who studied Indian IT specialists in Belgium, described how accompanying partners were able to benefit from professional networks of the primary migrant when couples worked in the same field. Also ethnic professional networks can play a crucial role for career entry (e.g. Indian physicians' network in the US, cited by Purkayastha, 2005; Turkish political activist networks, cited by Erel, 2010). However, these factors do not play any role in this study which might be an effect of the selection of a mixed urban and rural area outside of London for this study.

Instead, some of the accompanying partners make use of their social capital abroad. They do not engage in negotiating the value of their cultural capital in the UK labour market, but keep their jobs abroad. This strategy also seems to be specific for

highly-skilled family migrants (Liversage, 2009) who migrate to live together as a family (at least temporarily), but attach a high value to their professional career. Other interviewees focus on a future career elsewhere or look for a profession that can be practised internationally. Moreover, they often expect to benefit from cultural capital which is acquired in the UK, because they consider it to be transnationally valued. There has been an extensive debate on highly-skilled migrants as a transnational elite (Beaverstock, 2005) and on the highly-skilled mobile middle class that has developed professional and private networks transcending national borders (Bauder, 2015; Scheibelhofer, 2006). The results of this study suggest also adopting a transnational perspective for the research on accompanying partners, as their labour market strategies are not limited to the destination country. Moreover, transnationally-valued cultural capital is of particular significance to the accompanying partners of highly-skilled migrants, who often expect further international mobility as their spouse moves on in their career. Consequently, in future research accompanying partners' labour market integration should not only be measured against the backdrop of the national labour market of the destination country. It should account for their incorporation in various national and local contexts (Pries, 2008).

These transnational strategies should not be interpreted in a way that place does not matter for the labour market participation of accompanying partners. Only a segment of the accompanying partners use transnational labour market strategies. Others can be characterised as classical immigrants who seek integration in the destination country (Pries, 2008). Therefore, the national as well as regional and local contexts play a crucial role in the labour market strategies of accompanying partners. On a national scale, the legal conditions for labour market participation of accompanying partners have proven to be positive in the UK in comparison to other places, e.g. Singapore (Yeoh & Khoo, 1998). Other structural conditions disadvantage the career entry of accompanying partners from households with low economic status. The study suggests that, in the UK, economic capital is a decisive factor in choosing labour market strategies. For example, accompanying partners with a higher household income can more easily afford to take a UK degree. As place also matters with regard to *where* a degree is taken (Riaño & Baghdadi, 2007), they are more likely to enter the labour market at their skill level. Moreover, they are more likely to enter full-time positions because they can invest in e.g. child care and thus compensate for their loss of social capital after migration. On the contrary, the low economic status that leads to some accompanying partners taking low-skilled jobs is further reproduced by national structures where goods such as university education and child care are expensive.

The regional labour market structure also impacts on the career paths of the interviewees. Being highly-skilled often also means being highly-specialised. Consequently, a local labour market that offers an appropriate job for the primary migrant might not offer an appropriate job for the accompanying partner. If there are no job opportunities for their particular career, family migrants seem to reinforce their decision to put family before their career and search for alternative careers in the regional labour market. It has, therefore, proven useful to place the study outside a global city with a comprehensive labour market where this effect would probably not have been found. Generally, it can be expected that metropolitan areas offer more favourable conditions for the labour market entry of accompanying partners, such as more opportunities for retraining as

well as ethnic communities that might offer access to ethnic professional networks beyond low-skilled work. There is substantial brain waste, as many accompanying partners cannot find a position that corresponds to their qualifications. Therefore, it is vital to improve labour market entry outside metropolitan areas and it would be helpful to establish customised counselling that links accompanying partners to local professional networks in their field.

Not only place, also the historical context matters. This is evident for the UK in times of Brexit. What Brexit will bring is not yet known. However, there is a lively debate on immigration rules and immigrants' labour market access after Brexit. Moreover, recent research results (Sime et al., 2017) on the perception of Brexit among young immigrants in the UK suggest rising levels of hostility towards foreigners. This could result in accompanying partners finding it more challenging to negotiate their cultural capital.

Endnotes

¹The number refers to non-EEA migrants, who have been granted visas in Tiers 1 and 2. It is important to stress that the number of entry clearance visas granted is only an indicator for immigration, since people who have been granted a visa may not use it and, therefore, never actually migrate to the UK (Home Office, 2018a). The share of dependants is significantly lower for students (Tier 4) with about 1.6 million student visas vs. 150,000 students' dependants (Home Office, 2018b), which can be explained by their different stage of life.

²Here defined as: "as those who reported non-EEA nationality and who first entered the UK not more than 5 years ago." (MAC, 2009, p. 129).

Abbreviation

EEA: European Economic Area; MAC: Migration Advisory Committee; PGCE: Postgraduate Certificate in Education; UK: United Kingdom; USA: United States of America

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Author's contributions

The author has developed the project, collected the data, analysed the material and written this article herself. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

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