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Florian Tissot, *Doing Family on the Move: Highly-Skilled Migrants in Switzerland and Germany*

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Negotiating Paid Work and Care Work: A Review of *Doing Family on the Move*

In *Doing Family on the Move: Highly-Skilled Migrants in Switzerland and Germany*, Florian Tissot (2020) argues that the division of labor between paid work and care work among highly skilled migrant couples creates gendered hierarchies, especially in the context of career achievement when partners frequently relocate for professional reasons. Tissot presents an approachable, well-researched analysis of how "motility" and "family strategies" often reproduce gendered inequalities, especially toward women in the family unit. However, the limited analysis of participants of color restricts the scope of Tissot's discussion of gendered hierarchies in migrating family units.

Professional, economic, and social challenges before and after a migrating family unit moves from its place of origin to its destination are certain. Tissot's book explores the relationship between paid work and care work and the discrepancies this produces between men and women in highly skilled migration. His research question is how highly skilled migrants cope with professional careers on the one hand and family life on the other. This aspect of family migration is often overlooked in migration studies, in favour of internal migration or governance of migrants and refugees. The question of how care work and paid work are distributed is a source of tension for a family in transit. Often, the family unit adopts a traditional family structure with the husband as the breadwinner, relegating the wife to care work and homemaking (Banerjee & Phan, 2014; Krieger & Salikutluk, 2023; Vidal et al., 2017).

Through interviews, the book reveals that relocation produces "motile settling," a flexible mode of settling that accommodates subsequent relocations. Such settling affects a couple's ability to maintain dual professional careers, leading to gendered consequences. Defined as the capacity and readiness to move, motility results in gendered career inequalities. Male partners typically manage to balance a career, family, and the availability to relocate simultaneously. In contrast, female partners often cannot do all three due to the uneven division of care work, including substantial caregiving, homemaking, and emotional labor responsibilities they must undertake.

The epistemological framework critiques and deconstructs traditional distinctions between migration and mobility, aiming for a more nuanced understanding in migration and expatriation studies. This framework includes "methodological individualism" and "methodological nationalism" from existing academic literature. The former warns against conceptualizing the social context of migrants without a collective and dynamic approach to care work. The latter cautions against overlooking

nation-states or overemphasizing the link between territory, state, and culture. Tissot introduces “methodological economism” to complement these. It highlights the risks of opposing frictionless mobility (which implies temporary adaptation) and of controlled migration (which implies permanent integration).

The study involved 36 men and women, highly skilled migrants from the Lake Geneva Region, Switzerland, and the Frankfurt Rhine-Main Region, Germany, who participated in semi-structured qualitative interviews. Tissot developed a framework to identify the “primary mover,” who initiates the move, and the “secondary mover,” who reacts to it. A crucial distinction in understanding where gendered gaps appear in career achievement and wages is based on Flamm and Kaufmann’s (2006) research on the difference between men and women in relation to: 1) family life, 2) upward professional career, and 3) motility.

Tissot lays out three main arguments. First, the intersection of mobility and family dynamics reveals a deeply gendered tension between career mobility and family responsibilities. Career decisions and relocations are driven by primary movers, who are often male partners, while female partners—secondary movers—typically bear the majority of caregiving and homemaking responsibilities. Second, gendered career coordination leads to significant gender hierarchies in career opportunities and achievements. As primary movers, male partners often simultaneously combine professional advancement, family life, and readiness for subsequent relocations, whereas female partners face structural challenges that limit them to balancing only two of these factors at a time. Finally, Tissot examines the challenges and opportunities associated with these different family strategies: one prioritizes professional mobility and childcare but sacrifices dual careers; another favors stability and dual careers at the expense of professional mobility; and a third maintains mobility and dual careers but compromises family cohesion or the possibility of having children. All three reveal varying degrees of gendered inequality, or a “glass ceiling,” for women in relation to paid work and care work.

The motility and family strategies analysis underscores gendered inequalities, particularly for women, in migrating families. Motility reproduces these inequalities through three narratives. The “structural constraint narrative” describes secondary movers resigning from the labor force to join primary movers because the latter have “bigger” jobs. There is no negotiation over care work in the “career men and career women narrative,” as secondary movers cannot find alternative paid work after relocating. The “paradoxical family men narrative” combines elements of the previous two. The primary mover focuses solely on paid work for the family due to structural constraints and the secondary mover’s lack of alternative employment. Banerjee and Phan’s (2014) study of “tied movers” in Canada, where husbands often handle paid work while wives manage household responsibilities after migration, parallels Tissot’s findings. Hence, they reinforce Tissot’s argument by providing a wider theoretical framework and substantial evidence beyond the European setting.

A significant strength of Tissot's book is its attempt to integrate two distinct fields: transnational families and highly skilled migration, which are rarely studied together. Tissot's analytical lens was built upon the framework developed by another group of scholars. A study by Andresen, Bergdolt, Margenfeld, and Dickmann study (Andresen et al., 2014) distinguishes between expatriation types based on whether the subject is the initiator of the move (i.e., assigned expatriate, drawn expatriate, intra- and inter-self-initiated expatriates). It fails to acknowledge the partners' relationship; Tissot addresses this shortcoming by developing a framework structured around two types of movers: the primary mover and the secondary mover. The former takes the initiative of relocating while the latter reacts to it.

Furthermore, Tissot balanced his argument by incorporating findings from his interviews that ran counter to the general understanding of the applied theoretical framework. Maria's narrative comes across as critical of motility, downplaying its impact on the partnership. She was able to enter the labor force after each relocation of her partner, offering another way to address the lack of an alternative narrative in a motile strategy.

One unresolved issue concerns the representation and analysis of participants of color, or more broadly racialized and non-Western participants. Tissot defines "highly skilled migrants" primarily by educational attainment or professional position, rather than by race or country of origin. Although the study includes participants from Indonesia, Brazil, India, Japan, and South Korea, the empirical analysis does not appear to examine these respondents as a distinct group. As a result, the book only partially addresses how race, nationality, and legal status may shape the dynamics it describes. Returning to the question of participants of color in the study, Tissot's answer would be his interview with several Indonesian respondents who faced constraints on residency permit renewal that would be refused if they were to travel back to their home country. These potential participants were not engaged as such challenges are "beyond the scope of a lot of the other respondents" (p. 116). Avoiding this potential pool of applicants means losing insight into another aspect of studying migrating family units.

In contrast, the Banerjee and Phan (2014) study predominantly featured participants of color, revealing different dynamics, with some immigrant men undertaking more domestic responsibilities and expressing guilt or shame about their wives supporting them. Tissot's participants expressed only frustration. Therefore, difficulties like permit renewal should not preclude engaging diverse participants, particularly those from non-Western backgrounds.

Tissot noted differences between Germany and Switzerland in the field of welfare state regimes. Germany has significantly increased public childcare provision, whereas Switzerland retains short maternity leave, no paternity leave, and low public investment in childcare. Families' ability to balance competing demands is significantly influenced by local policy. For example, Switzerland's lack of midday school care perpetuates gendered care roles because it pushes one partner (often

the woman) to assume these burdens. Yet regions with more developed family policies like Frankfurt support dual-career couples. Participants noted that access to childcare services and family-friendly policies is critical for mitigating inequalities faced by secondary movers. Future research could examine how the local laws in other parts of Germany, Switzerland, and wider Europe are problematized, re-structured, and implemented in the context of childcare services and family policies.

Tissot's book offers a valuable perspective on wider gender inequalities within migrating family units through the dynamics between primary and secondary movers. Nevertheless, the limited analysis of participants of color restricts the potential findings and raises several questions for new knowledge production at the intersection of migration, career, family, and gender. These include how families without local childcare innovate to balance responsibilities, and the hidden costs of secondary movers sacrificing careers. As academic and public debates on gender equality continue, Tissot's work serves as a reminder that the negotiation of paid work and care work within migrating couples remains gendered, often favoring men.

Juan Paulo Gabriel Amurao

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