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## **Migration of Skilled Latin American Women to Switzerland and Their Struggle for Integration**

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Contemporary migration to the North is increasingly a female phenomenon. The literature has interpreted the accompanying upsurge in binational marriages as reflecting the escape of unskilled women from poverty in the South. This paper argues that many female migrants are in fact highly skilled, and that their binational marriages are not motivated chiefly by economics but by reasons of gender relations. A differentiated view of female migrants and of marriage migration is expounded, as revealed by testimonies of skilled Latin American women in Switzerland. The methods of study include in-depth interviewing, participant observation and focus groups. Analysis of the situation of social integration of these women shows that the majority are either employed at a level well below their qualifications or are excluded from the job market. This process has its roots in the prevailing discourses in Swiss society, which have led to social practices and immigration policies that effectively hinder the social integration of female immigrants. In reaction to these barriers, the immigrant women have created numerous action networks, which demonstrate their initiative and desire to participate in Swiss society. The conclusion is a paradox: whereas Latin America loses valuable human capital, Switzerland fails to take advantage of its gain in human capital.

**Keywords:** gender relations, intermarriage migration, migration trajectories, immigration policy, foreigner discourses, women's networks

**Palabras claves:** relaciones de género, matrimonios binacionales, trayectorias migratorias, política de inmigración, discursos sobre extranjeros, redes de mujeres

### **INTRODUCTION**

Three new trends characterise contemporary international migration. First, migration is increasingly a female phenomenon. Great numbers of women from Africa, Asia and Latin America are leaving their places of residence to move to Europe, North America, Japan and Australasia. In Peru, for example, 56% of the migrants that have left the country in the past ten years have been women (Altamirano 2001). Similarly, more than 60% of the Latin Americans who immigrated into Switzerland in 2000 were women (Swiss Federal Statistics 2001, 88). Second, women who leave their home

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countries are not exclusively poor and unskilled; many are well qualified. In Switzerland, for instance, the percentage of foreign women (excepting Southern Europeans) who have a university degree is one and a half to two times higher than that of their Swiss counterparts (Swiss Federal Statistics 2001, 35). Third, binational marriages are becoming more common and they are playing a decisive role in women's migration. For example, more than a third of all marriages taking place in Switzerland in 2000 were binational. Seventy two percent of women in these marriages are of foreign origin (Swiss Federal Statistics 2001, 98).

Interest in the phenomenon of female migration has increased over the past two decades (e.g. Morokšavić 1983; Chant 1992; Kofman and Sales 1992; Buijs 1993; Truong 1996; Karrer *et al.* 1996; Lim and Oishi 1996; Prodolliet 1999a; Waldis 2001a, Kofman *et al.* 2000). Such studies have emphasised the remarkable demographic and economic importance of women in contemporary migration and have pleaded for women to be taken out of their "sociological invisibility": women should be seen as active agents of migration and not simply as passive appendices of migrant men. Although studies on female migrants have contributed much to our understanding of migration, at the same time, they have focused too much on unskilled workers. As a consequence, a deficient image has been projected of the female immigrant. Studies in Switzerland have tended to portray women as victims for whom migration is the only option to improve their material quality of life and that of their families. Traffickers and employers exploit the women's plight of material need and of illegality (e.g. Bochsler and Gisiger 1989; Renschler 1991; Spring 1992; Canlas-Heuberger *et al.* 1995; Joris 1995; Karrer *et al.* 1996; Le Breton 1998; Schertenleib 2001).

Although it is true that many migrant women are unskilled, desperate to migrate, and often end up being exploited, it is not correct to view them exclusively as victims, nor to assume that all migrant women are poor and lacking education. Many migrant women are skilled, enjoy a middle- to high-class standard of living in their home countries, and therefore migration is arguably not an imperative for them. Their starting-point is very different to that of unskilled migrants with rural backgrounds: skilled women have lived and worked in urban centres (which often are larger than some European cities), they are used to participating in the public sphere of society and they lead relatively independent lives. Research on migration has, however, given little attention to the case of skilled women. For example, despite the high percentages of foreign women in Switzerland with a university degree, researchers have, with rare exceptions (e.g. Haour-Knipe 1984), not addressed the case of skilled female migrants. We need to balance our understanding of female migrants by examining the histories of migration and socio-economic integration of skilled women as well.

At the same time that the scientific literature has been biased towards unskilled

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female migrants, the increased role of binational marriages in women's migration -the third trend introduced above- has been too narrowly explained. Studies on women and binational marriages have focused too much on arranged marriages (e.g. Oshima and Francis 1989; Cahill 1990; Truong and del Rosario 1994; Caroni 1996; Karrer *et al.* 1996; Niesner *et al.* 1997). These studies explain binational marriages as a mechanism for poor women to migrate to a wealthy country and obtain legal status. Binational marriages have been explained as highly commercial arrangements (e.g. mail-order-brides) used to recruit women for illegal work in the sex industry, for farm work or to look after divorced, widowed or disabled men.

Generally, the role of binational marriages in female migration has been explained as a 'survival strategy,' allowing poor women from the South to improve their standard of life and that of their families. Thus, the main motivation for binational marriages is claimed to be economic. However, this literature overlooks the dimension of gender. Choosing a foreign partner is often motivated by the need to overcome the problem of local tensions between the sexes, which ultimately are caused by changing gender roles, as well as by simplistic imaginations of foreigners as ideal partners. Thus, many women, often skilled, leave their countries essentially so that they can share their lives with the men they love. Rather than being lumped together with "economic migrants," these women are better characterised as "love-migrants." We need to achieve a differentiated understanding of the reasons for binational marriages in female migration, which includes factors of gender. Unfortunately, Swiss research has so far given little attention to the role of gender in migration.

The aim of this paper is to address the above shortcomings of the literature on female migration, by examining the histories of migration and of professional integration of a group of fifteen skilled Latin American women, including the author of this paper. All these women emigrated because they married a resident of Switzerland. The sample of women was selected on the basis of pre-existing personal contacts and of contacts provided by migrant associations in Bern. The author has known most of the women for more than ten years, owing to their participation in common-interest groups. This social geographical study is designed to analyse migration and integration from the immigrant's viewpoint, an approach that is increasingly favoured by qualitative researchers (e.g. Ellis and Bochner 2000; Riaño and Brutschin 1999) and by feminist geographers (e.g. Chant 1992; Lawson 1999). Therefore, in-depth open interviews were carried out with each woman in the study group and this information was supported by participant observation and by informal group discussions.<sup>1</sup>

Social integration is interpreted here as equivalent to participation. The issue of social integration is one of social justice, implying equality of rights to access spaces

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<sup>1</sup> Interviews were partly carried out with the support of geography students at the University of Bern, as part of a course project on migration and integration, supervised by the author. The project results are published in Riaño and Brutschin 1999.

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of social, economic and political participation. Using the approach of structuration theory, this study addresses social integration in terms of human agency and structure. At the micro-level of human agency, an examination is made of the role of social actors in integration, i.e. the strategies of migrant women to improve their access to social resources. At the macro-level of structure, an analysis is carried out of the role of social discourse and of state policies in facilitating or hindering the social integration of migrant women. Overall, a gender perspective is taken to the investigation (e.g. Anthias and Lazaridis 2000) aimed at understanding constructions of feminine identity.

The contents of this paper are organised as follows. Chapter 1 provides the context of the study by reviewing the official statistics on gender and marriage relevant to immigration in Switzerland. Chapter 2 examines the reasons, circumstances and mechanisms for the migration of skilled Latin American women. Chapter 3 investigates the status of the professional integration of women, and of the social and institutional barriers they encounter. Chapter 4 reveals the prevailing discourses in Swiss society and the resulting policies, which create barriers to the professional integration of foreign women. Chapter 5 focuses on the strategies of network organisation developed by Latin American women in an effort to counteract the barriers of integration.

## **1. GENDER AND THE ROLE OF MARRIAGE IN IMMIGRATION TO SWITZERLAND**

In 2000, there were approximately a million and a half foreigners living in Switzerland, which constitutes 20,9% of the total population (Federal Statistics 2001, 12). This is the highest foreigner rate in Europe after Luxembourg and Liechtenstein. However, the high ranking is more the result of restrictive citizenship laws and the definition of “foreigners” than it is of high absolute immigration. Citizenship rights in Switzerland are guided by the principle of blood-line of descent (*ius sanguinis*) rather than by the principle of place of birth (*ius solis*). This means that only children of Swiss parents are automatically eligible to become Swiss, whereas children born in Switzerland to foreign parents are designated as “foreigners.” Because of *ius sanguinis*, and of Switzerland’s restrictive naturalisation policy (at 1.4%, Switzerland had in 1998 the lowest number of naturalisations in Europe after Germany), the number of “foreigners” in Switzerland appears so high. Over half of these “foreigners” were either born in Switzerland or have been living in the country for more than 15 years (Federal Statistics 2000, 19, 27). As in countries like Germany, people of foreign descent may remain “foreign” within Switzerland over generations. Indeed, so-called “second”- and “third-generation” foreigners make up 25% of the total number of foreigners in Switzerland. If the number of Swiss-born foreigners were not included in the statistics, the number of foreigners in Switzerland would sink to 16%. If the number of foreigners with a permanent resident permit were also not included, the number of foreigners would be reduced to 6.3%. Clearly, comparisons with other countries, where different definitions of the term “foreigner” apply, must be made with care.

Up until the 1980s, 80% of the foreigners living in Switzerland originated

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from member countries of the European Union (EU), particularly from neighbouring countries. However, two decades later this percentage had been reduced to 56%. The origin of foreigners is increasingly from more distant locations including ex-Yugoslavia, Turkey and countries outside the EU. By the year 2000, a total of 84,200 people immigrated to Switzerland. The areas of origin of these immigrants are as follows: EU-countries (47%), Turkey and ex-Yugoslavia (21%), Asia (13.4%), Latin America (6%), Africa (6%), North America (5.6%) and Oceania (1%). Just over half of these immigrants were women. Of the 5,044 immigrants that came from Latin America, 66% were women, whereas only 53% of Asian immigrants were women. The majority of all immigrant women (64%) were between 20 and 39 years of age, and they outnumbered male immigrants in the same age group (Federal Statistics Office 2001, 15, 85, 87, 88).

Family-related migration plays an enormous role in Swiss immigration. As shown in Table 1, 45% of the immigrants who come into Switzerland do so to join a family member already residing in Switzerland, while only 28% of the immigrants enter for employment. One of the reasons that the ratio of family-related immigration to economic immigration is so high, is that the number of employment immigrants is strictly limited by the Swiss government, whereas family migration is not so tightly controlled. Marriage with a Swiss national has become one of the chief motivations for migration. Thirty percent of all immigrants in 2000 came into Switzerland for this reason (Federal Statistics Office 2001, 24).

Marriage seems to be a main means by which Latin American women immigrate to Switzerland. Forty three percent of Latin American women in Switzerland over twenty years of age, are married to a Swiss national (Swiss Federal Statistics 2001, 68, 71).

**Table 1.** Reasons for migration to Switzerland, 2000

| <b>Migration reasons</b> | <b>Number of people</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Family*                  | 36,714                  | 45%               |
| Employment               | 22,974                  | 28%               |
| Study                    | 10,373                  | 13%               |
| Asylum                   | 2,890                   | 3%                |
| Pension                  | 800                     | 1%                |
| Other                    | 7,731                   | 10%               |
| <b>Total</b>             | <b>81,482</b>           | <b>100%</b>       |

\* Includes the categories of “marriage with a Swiss” (11,355) and the “family reunification” of a foreign citizen living in Switzerland (25,359).

Source: Swiss Federal Statistics Office 2001, 90

As shown in Table 2, the presence of foreigners in Swiss marriages is very high. In 43,3% of all marriages in 2000 at least one of the members of the couple was a

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foreigner. Swiss marriages are also increasingly binational. Thirty five percent of all marriages in Switzerland take place between individuals with different nationalities. A clear majority (68%) of the Swiss-foreigner marriages is between a foreign woman and a Swiss man. Binational marriages are not exclusively a Swiss phenomenon, of course. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (1993, 51-52), binational marriages have been on the increase in Europe since the early 1980s.

**Table 2.** Marriages involving foreigners in Switzerland, 2000

|   | <b>Number of marriages</b> | <b>Percentage of all marriages</b> |
|---|----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Female Swiss + male foreigner                           | 3,857                      | 13.3%                              |
| Female foreigner + male Swiss                           | 8,066                      | 20.3%                              |
| Female foreigner + male foreigner                       | 5,280                      | 9.7%                               |
| <b>Total marriages involving one or more foreigners</b> | <b>17,203</b>              | <b>43.3%</b>                       |

Source: Swiss Federal Statistics Office 2001, 98.

Where do the foreigners who marry the Swiss come from? As seen in Table 3, the majority of both male and female foreigners are European. Among the non-Europeans, the geographical groups most favoured by Swiss men to marry are Latin Americans, in first place, followed by Asians. The preference of Swiss men for Latin American wives is expressed by sheer numbers: by 2000 there were 7,244 Latin American women married to Swiss men (Swiss Federal Statistics 2001, 71). Swiss women, on the contrary, favour African and Asian men. Clearly, there are geographical and cultural preferences when it comes to choosing a partner. Europeans are geographically and culturally close to the Swiss and thus most men and women choose marriage with a European.

Informal interviews show that the preference of Swiss men for Latin American wives derives from at least three factors: (1) Swiss women are increasingly resisting the traditional role of being entirely responsible for household-keeping and for child-raising; (2) the popular belief that Latin American women are “open, cheerful, and dedicated wives and mothers”; (3) Swiss men find it less complicated to build relationships with Latin American women. Other interviews have shown that one of the important reasons for Latin American women to be attracted to European men is their belief that Europeans make ‘better’ husbands than Latin American men: Europeans are supposed to be faithful and willing to share household responsibilities.

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**Table 3.** Geographical origin of foreigners who marry Swiss nationals, 2000

| <b>Origin of Foreigners</b> | <b>Swiss Women</b> | <b>%</b>      | <b>Swiss Men</b> | <b>%</b>      |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|---------------|------------------|---------------|
| Europe                      | 3,064              | 79.43         | 4,627            | 57.36         |
| Latin America               | 140                | 3.62          | 1,313            | 16.27         |
| Asia                        | 219                | 5.67          | 1,181            | 14.64         |
| Africa                      | 367                | 9.56          | 739              | 9.16          |
| North America               | 57                 | 1.47          | 173              | 2.14          |
| Oceania                     | 9                  | 0.23          | 30               | 0.40          |
| Stateless                   | 1                  | 0.02          | 3                | 0.03          |
| <b>Total</b>                | <b>3,857</b>       | <b>100.00</b> | <b>8,066</b>     | <b>100.00</b> |

Source: Federal Statistics Office 2001, 98

How stable are marriages between Swiss and foreigners? Between 1994 and 1999, the average divorce rate for couples involving a Swiss man and a foreign woman was 30%. This rate was lower than that for Swiss-Swiss or foreigner-foreigner couples, which were both just over 40%. In contrast, the average divorce rate for couples involving a Swiss woman and a foreign man was much higher, at a remarkable 80% (Federal Statistics Office 2001, 99).

To sum up, two principal facts are revealed by the statistics: (a) immigration from Latin America to Switzerland is chiefly a female phenomenon; (b) marriage with a resident of Switzerland is the main reason for the immigration of Latin American women. These facts bear clear implications for social geographical research: (a) we need to move beyond the idea of an “immigrant family” composed of members with the same cultural background and (b) we need to give special attention to Latin American female immigrants and to the reasons, circumstances and implications of marriage-migration. It is important for future research to address these issues in order to understand the unique characteristics of bi-cultural families and to achieve a differentiated understanding of marriage-migrants.

However, at present it is difficult to gain a differentiated understanding of marriage migrants because the necessary data to establish such differences are lacking. First, the Swiss immigration statistics do not provide comprehensive information on the qualifications of migrants. Such information is required as a function of the migrant’s gender, country of origin and reasons for migration. Second, as explained earlier, Swiss studies of binational marriages in female migration have focused on arranged marriages and thus we lack information on love-marriages. Third, the task of characterising Latin American marriage-migrants in Switzerland is particularly difficult because only few studies have chosen immigrants from that continent as the main focus of study (Bolzmänn 1993; Wiskemann 1993; Bueno 1995; Portier 1996). It is unfortunate that, although many studies have been carried out in Switzerland on the topic of binational couples, these have not specifically focused on female migrants nor have they included case studies with Latin Americans.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Swiss studies on binational couples have addressed the following topics: (a) intercultural

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For the practical purposes of this study, we propose an interim typology to differentiate migrants who leave their countries primarily for purposes of marriage (Table 4). Two types of marriage migration can be distinguished:

- 1) *Migration for marriage*. The reasons that convince this type of migrant to leave her country or to permanently stay abroad are a combination of love, gender and economic factors. Migration is not her priority but she realises that in order to have common lives with the person she loves she needs to consider migration. Her professional skills are in many cases middle- to high level. The main channel of migration is her partner. According to the main reason for migration, we call this group “*love migrants*.”
- 2) *Marriage for migration*. This type of migrant leaves her country mainly for economic reasons. She is prepared, or constrained, to marry an unknown individual in order to obtain residence status in a wealthy country and improve her standard of living, as well as that of her family. Her professional skills are in most cases low. Marriage is usually arranged by an international match-making agency. Based on the reasons for migration, we call this group *economic migrants*.

**Table 4.** Two types of marriage migration

| <b>Type of migration</b>      | <b>Primary reasons for migration</b> | <b>Migration Channel</b> | <b>Migrant Skills</b> | <b>Migrant economic status</b> | <b>Residence status in Switzerland</b> |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| <i>Migration for marriage</i> | Love, Gender<br>Economic             | Partner                  | Middle to high        | Middle to high                 | Legal                                  |
| <i>Marriage for migration</i> | Economic                             | Match-making agency      | Low                   | Low                            | Legal                                  |

## **2. THE MIGRATION HISTORIES OF SKILLED LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN IN SWITZERLAND**

This section reviews the migration histories of the skilled Latin American

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communication (Hollenstein 1994; Waldis 1998a, 1998b; Albert 2000) (b) internal power structures (Waldis 1993; Outemzabet 2000) (c) the role of binational couples for social integration (Ossipow 1999, 2000); (d) legal problems (Canevascini 2000); (e) migration histories of marriage-migrants (e.g. Waldis 1999) and (f) binational couples as political response to restrictive immigration policies (Waldis 2001b). Case studies have focused on Christian-Muslim relationships (Litsios 1994; Burri 1994; Aldeeb 1998) and on Swiss-African (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Cameroon, Congo) and Swiss-Asian relationships (Turkey, Philippines).

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women considered in this study. The study includes fifteen well-qualified women, including the author, who originate from nine Latin American countries: Mexico (3), Dominican Republic (1), Nicaragua (1), Honduras (1), Colombia (1), Ecuador (2), Peru (2), Bolivia (1), Brazil (3). The women are between 35 and 45 years of age, they have university education, they come from middle- to upper middle-class families in Latin America, they are married to a Swiss or non-Swiss resident of Switzerland, they speak German well, and they have lived in the German-speaking part of Switzerland for 5-15 years. Thirteen of the women are mothers of young children.

The following section begins with a description of the women's migratory movements according to the place where she and her partner first met. These migratory movements are divided into two groups (Table 5):

1) *Meeting place in Europe*. All the women met their future husbands in Switzerland, with the exception of one case in Russia. At that time the women were graduate or postgraduate students at university, and the men were also either university students or lecturers (Swiss men in all but one case). The intention of the women before coming to Europe was to return to their home countries after completing their studies. After falling in love with a foreigner the women had to make new plans. Half of the women interviewed remained in Switzerland. Some of these later moved with their partners to another European country or to North America for a few years, but then returned to Switzerland. The remaining women interviewed decided to go back to their home countries to continue their professions. One of the women was accompanied by her Swiss partner, and he then worked in Latin America for several months. The other Swiss men stayed in Switzerland but visited their women in Latin America several times. After a period, these couples were faced with the question of where to live if they were to stay together permanently. In each case the answer fell in favour of Switzerland.

2) *Meeting place in Latin America*. In these cases the women met their future Swiss partners while the men were studying or working in the women's home countries. Three patterns of migration are recognisable: (a) the couples married and lived together in Latin America but later moved to Switzerland; (b) the woman left with the man on his previously planned departure to Switzerland; (c) the Swiss man departed alone but the woman joined him later in Switzerland, once she had finished her studies or work projects. Nearly half of the couples who met in Latin America divorced in Switzerland. Fully in line with the national statistics, the divorce rate of the interviewed women is 28%. Some of the separated women stayed in Switzerland while others went back to Latin America for a period and then returned to Switzerland.

In each of the reported histories the reasons for the final decision of the woman to stay with her foreign partner and to migrate to Switzerland were the following:

- the desire to be with the man she loves
- the belief that European men are less "macho" than Latin American men
- the curiosity about foreign cultures
- the desire for her husband and herself to have better employment possibilities

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- the desire for her children to obtain high-quality, free education  
Evidently, a combination of factors including love, a criticism of gender relations, an attraction to the 'exotic', and economics, weighed in the final decision.

**Table 5.** The migratory movements of Latin American marriage-migrants

| Meeting place    | Meeting circumstances                 | Woman's migratory movements   | Migration steps | Decision-making period |
|------------------|---------------------------------------|---|-----------------|------------------------|
| 1. Europe        | Woman studies in Europe               | - Goes to CH/Europe (short-term)<br>- Stays in Switzerland                  | Two steps       | 1-5 years              |
|                  |                                       | - Goes to CH/Europe (short-term)<br>- Goes to Europe/N.Am<br>- Goes to CH   | Three steps     |                        |
|                  |                                       | - Goes to CH/Europe (short-term)<br>- Goes to Latin America<br>- Goes to CH |                 |                        |
| 2. Latin America | Man studies or works in Latin America | - Goes to CH  | One step        | 1-6 years              |
|                  |                                       | - Goes to CH<br>- Goes to L.A.<br>- Goes to CH                              | Three steps     |                        |

CH = Switzerland, L.A. = Latin America.

Source: Interviews carried out for this study in 1999.

None of the interviewed women initially intended to migrate, and they first considered a move well after they had fallen in love. All of the women expressed how difficult it was for them to decide to leave their home countries; they were obviously torn between their professional futures at home and their married lives abroad. This difficulty is reflected in the slowness of the decision-making process: the decision to migrate to Switzerland definitively took between one and six years to finalise (Table 5). Also the migration movements of the women (Table 5) reflect this indecision: only three women took one direct step to Switzerland, whereas the others moved back and forth over the years before finally settling in Switzerland.

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In summary, the women's stated reasons for migration, the long periods of decision-making and the hesitant migration movements all underscore the marked differences in motivation between these love-migrants and the purely economic migrants. It is clear that explanations of binational marriages that exclusively focus on economics are inadequate for the case of skilled female migrants. Their binational marriages cannot be exclusively ascribed to escape from poverty. Studies on binational marriages need to recognise that facilitated global communication and changing gender relations are both contributing to the increase of binational marriages. International travel and the internet have become accessible to large numbers of people around the world and this has permitted many of them to fulfil their desire of coming into contact with 'exotic' cultures and of developing partnerships with people from those places. At the same time, evolving gender roles in contemporary societies have created tensions between men and women and have rendered it more difficult for people from the same country to form stable partnerships. In view of these tensions, and the fact that the communication between people who travel, study or have internet contact, tends to be very spontaneous, rather than regulated by local rules of behaviour, there is a certain propensity for binational couples to form. Such newly formed couples consist of partners that live in different countries, and sooner or later they are faced with the question of where to live if they are to stay together in the future. The answer inevitably results in migration for at least one of the partners, and it is most commonly the woman who migrates. This is exactly the case of the skilled Latin American women in this study. These women have migrated primarily for reasons of love and gender relations and thus their type of migration needs to be characterised as "migration for marriage". Rather than being grouped together with "economic migrants," these women are better understood as "love migrants."

The phenomenon of preferring a foreign partner is interpreted here as an implicit criticism of local gender relations (see also Waldis, 2001c). The Latin American women interviewed by this study are critical of the prevailing "macho" attitudes of men in their home countries. They appreciate the fact that, over the past generations, they have gained increased access to professional activity. However, at the same time, they are discontent with the men's widespread lack of commitment with sharing household activities. On the other hand, as already mentioned in Chapter 1, many Swiss men have difficulties in coping with changing gender roles in Switzerland. They find it increasingly complicated to form stable relationships with Swiss women. Thus, choosing a foreign partner, be it by Latin American women or by Swiss men, appears to be a strategy to overcome the problem of local tensions between the sexes, which ultimately are caused by changing gender roles. This conclusion underscores the importance of gender factors in explaining contemporary international migration.

### **3. THE PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION OF SKILLED LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN IN SWITZERLAND**

The main aspiration expressed by Latin American women in the interviews carried out by this study is to work in the profession and at the level for which they were trained. As noted earlier, all these women have university degrees and some of them also have postgraduate qualifications. In practice their aspiration of professional

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integration is seldom fulfilled. An analysis of the current economic activities of the studied women reveals three situations (Table 6):

- 1) *No professional integration*. Around a third of the studied women are not economically active at the productive level. Whereas these women were professionally active and economically independent in their countries of origin, in Switzerland they have become economically dependent on their partners and reduced to the role of household-keepers. Female migration in this case can be viewed as a *process of de-emancipation*.
- 2) *Professional integration below qualifications*. Two thirds of the women work in occupations such as teachers of Spanish or Portuguese language (Russian in one case!), which do not require the years of training that they have completed. Others work in the area for which they have been trained but at the level of assistants and not of professionals. In both cases the original professional capabilities of the women have been eroded by lack of practice. Female migration in this case can be viewed as a *process of de-qualification*.
- 3) *Equivalent professional integration*. Only two women work in occupations that correspond to their level of training. Perhaps an important factor in their “success” is that they both have Ph.D. degrees from North American universities and working experience on that continent. As such they are not strictly regarded as having been trained in Latin America. Also, one of them does not have any children, which, in a country like Switzerland, makes it much easier to work professionally.

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**Table 6.** Professional integration of Latin American women in Switzerland

| <b>Degree of professional integration</b> | <b>Percentage of women interviewed</b> | <b>Professional Training</b>                                       | <b>Current Occupation</b> |
|---|--|--|---------------------------|
| 1. None                                   | 27%                                    | - Food technology/Business Manager<br>- Economist<br>- Sociologist | Household-keepers         |
| 2. Below qualifications                   | 60%                                    | - Economists<br>- Psychologists<br>- Hotel manager<br>- Architect  | Language teachers         |
|   |  | - Dentist  | Dental assistant          |
|   |  | - Anthropologist   | Social worker             |
|   |  | - Bilingual secretary  | Library assistant         |
| 3. Equivalent                             | 13%                                    | - Physics (Ph.D.)<br>- Geography (Ph.D.)                           | University researchers    |

Source: Interviews carried out for this study in 1999.

What are the reasons for the deficient professional integration of skilled Latin American women in Switzerland? A series of barriers including official policies and prevalent social behaviour combine to make it very difficult for Latin American women to access the job market at the professional level for which they have been trained. Five of these barriers are discussed in the following:

- 1) *Visa regulations restrict economic integration.* Visas for foreign spouses are not designed to stimulate economic activity but principally “to enable family reunification.” Foreigners who marry a Swiss or a non-Swiss resident of Switzerland do not at first obtain citizenship or permanent resident status but a “B” annual residence-permit. This gives them only the right to residence for a period of one year, although the permit can be renewed. In the case of foreign spouses, the primary purpose of the B-permit is to enable the foreigners “to accompany their spouses”. Permission to work is not explicitly stipulated. However, if a foreign spouse with a B-permit is offered a job, the immigration

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police considers the case, but it has to be ensured that (a) there is no Swiss person who can do that job, and (b) the cantonal quota for work permits is not exceeded<sup>3</sup>. These barriers are made worse by the fact that Swiss employers tend to solicit job applications from “C” permanent residents rather than from “B” annual residents. Further, foreign spouses with a B permit do not have an independent status and they are only allowed to stay in Switzerland as long as they remain with their spouses. In case of divorce or death of their spouses, they have to leave the country. The great majority of marriage-migrants are women and thus the visa restrictions on foreign spouses mostly affect women.

Work restrictions are relaxed for foreign spouses who have been married to a Swiss or EU citizen for five years. Their B permit is changed into a “C-permit,” which allows them to work without restrictions. However, they remain legally dependent on their spouses for their residence in Switzerland. Their C permits are cancelled if they divorce their spouses. The women who have married Swiss citizens are eligible for Swiss nationality after receiving the C permit and thus gain independence from their spouses as well as the same social, economic and civil rights of any Swiss citizen. Women who have married men from EU countries hold the C permit but are only eligible for Swiss nationality after twelve years of uninterrupted residence from the time they obtained the C permit. Foreign spouses who are married to non-Swiss or non-EU citizens living in Switzerland are excluded from the job market for a much longer time. They have to wait up to 10 years before they can obtain a C permit and thus the right to work. They remain dependent on their spouses for twelve more years until they are eligible for Swiss citizenship.

Thus, foreign spouses have to wait between 5 and 10 years before they are able to enter the job market without restrictions. Clearly, work-permit regulations severely restrict the access of marriage-migrants to the Swiss job market and constrain them to adopt the basic reproductive role of tending to their spouses and children.

2) *Latin American educational degrees are not officially recognised.* Swiss employers do not accept these degrees and therefore they cannot be used when applying for a job. In general, Swiss universities attach little value to Latin American degrees. Latin Americans who attempt to obtain the Swiss equivalence of their university degrees are obliged to repeat almost their entire studies. For women this represents a huge barrier, since the time requirements of a university degree are usually incompatible with their additional workload of looking after children and a household. From a psychological point of view, it is also very difficult to accept repeating a whole degree after having graduated and had years of experience working in the field as a professional.

3) The peculiar *language diglossy* of the German-speaking part of Switzerland, in

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<sup>3</sup> Foreigner regulations are currently undergoing change in Switzerland (see Chapter 4).

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which the spoken language is different from the written language, makes it difficult for foreigners to compete with the Swiss in the job market. The spoken languages are dialects of German that vary considerably from town to town. These dialects are exclusively oral and thus the Swiss use standard German, termed “high-German,” to write. The spoken and written languages are so different that most foreigners manage to learn one or the other but not both. Fluency in both languages is officially required for some jobs (e.g. health care). For others, fluency in high-German is in theory sufficient qualification, but in practice an understanding of dialect is considered indispensable. There is no other German-speaking country where the oral dialects are used as much in public as in Switzerland. For example, regional news and a great part of national news are reported on radio and television in dialect. Meetings in private enterprises, universities and governments are also held in dialect. Without an understanding of the local dialect, foreigners are excluded from information and from taking part in important decisions.

- 4) Job-hunting is hindered by the *cultural prejudice* of Swiss employers towards Latin Americans. They are not considered to be at the same professional level as the Swiss. Prejudices accumulate in the case of women, particularly if they are married to a Swiss. Latin American women are exclusively seen as “wives,” and are thus not taken seriously as potential employees.
- 5) The *lack of child-care facilities and the discontinuous school schedules* for children in Switzerland forces one of the parents to remain at home, and this is usually the mother. Child-care facilities, whether private or official, are very limited in number in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. Because the demand is so high and the offer is so low, there are usually long waiting lists. Priority is given to low-income or solo mothers who are “obliged to work.” Women whose husbands have relatively good salaries have little chance of obtaining a place for their children at a child-care institution. Without such institutional or family support for childcare it is very difficult for migrant women to work. This difficulty is made worse by the opinion of many conservative Swiss, who believe that children need to be given full-time attention by their mothers. The implication of this belief is that women are to stay at home. Such patriarchal values put enormous pressure on women to keep out of the job market.

To sum up, the degree of professional integration of the great majority of Latin American women can be characterised as poor or completely lacking. Most women are either employed at a level well below their qualifications or are excluded from the job market and relegated to the role of domestic workers. It is particularly difficult for skilled Latin American women to achieve professional integration in Switzerland, especially in the German-speaking part, because of the barriers imposed on them by the state and by society. Restrictive visas, lack of recognition of professional qualifications, language diglossy, culturally prejudiced behaviour, and poor institutional support for child-care facilities all combine to hinder the professional integration of Latin American women.

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The above observations make it plain that migration has a definite effect on the identity of female migrants. The women studied here come from middle- to high-income classes. They are educated and, as is now the case for many Latin American women in urban centres, they have achieved a relatively high level of economic integration in the professional public sphere. Although this has often resulted from necessity (the husband's salary is not always enough to support the family), women have also proved to be excellent professionals. Today, it is frequent that the identity of women in Latin America is not chiefly defined through their reproductive role in the private sphere but through their productivity in the public, professional sphere. After migration to Switzerland many skilled Latin American women are confronted with an identity shift. Their principal activity becomes that of looking after their families. In some cases, women become legally, economically and culturally dependent on their husbands. As stated in the interviews, it is difficult for many to accept this identity shift. They see it as paradoxical that, having come from economically active lives in Latin America, they are constrained to a reproductive role in Switzerland.

Studies of female migration have pointed out the impact of migration on identity shifts (e.g. Buijs 1993). However, there has been a tendency to portray such shifts as being emancipatory for migrant women. It is argued that women become more independent, earn their own money and have a stronger position within the family. Although this may be true for the poorly educated migrants from rural countrysides who do not enter bi-national marriages, such a conclusion needs to be put into context. Migration does not have an emancipatory effect *per se*. Its effect depends on specific factors that vary among migrants, such as nationality, environment of origin (urban/rural), educational skills and whether the marriage is binational or not. Clearly, in the case of the women studied here, the effect of migration is rather one of a loss in emancipatory terms. Thus, conclusions regarding the impact of migration on the identity of female migrants need to be differentiated. This is particularly important because the idea that migration means emancipation is becoming a myth in female migration research.

Moreover, as shown by the above conclusions, female migration may result in a process of de-skilling. The same has also been shown for female immigrants living in canton Bern (Şancar *et al.* 2001), for Turkish and ex-Yugoslavian doctors and engineers and other professionals in Western Europe (e.g. Moroksavic 1983, Kadioglu 1994, Kofman *et al.* 2000), and for Korean female doctors in United States (Eui Han Shing and Kyung-Sup Chang 1998). The discrimination of women according to their nationality hinders the recognition of their individual skills and qualifications and leads to professional segregation.

#### **4. THE ROLE OF DISCOURSE AND IMMIGRATION POLICY IN THE SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF LATIN AMERICAN WOMEN IN SWITZERLAND**

This chapter addresses the prevailing discourses that underlie the barriers to socio-economic integration described in Chapter 3. Discourse is simply defined here as the body of socio-cultural ideas that legitimise social practices and official policies towards foreigners. Understanding Swiss discourses on foreigners and on women is particularly

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important for two reasons. First, if we are to understand the poor professional integration of foreign female immigrants, we need to address the cause of the problem. Second, as several social scientists have already argued, discourses are socially constructed and are therefore always open to be contested and negotiated (e.g. Gregory 1978). Thus, three discourses dominant in Swiss society, particularly in the Swiss German regions, are examined in this chapter: (a) “foreign influence is a threat”; (b) “the value of immigrants depends on their origin”; (c) “home- and child-care activities are the main responsibility of women.” The connections between Swiss discourses and integrational barriers are exemplified by the case of skilled Latin American women (Table 7).

**Table 7.** The role of discourse in barriers to the professional integration of skilled Latin American women in Switzerland

| <b>Barriers / Discourse</b>                   | <i>“Foreign influence is a threat”</i> | <i>“Child-care is women’s responsibility”</i> | <i>“Immigrants’ value depends on their origin”</i> |
|---|--|---|--|
| Restrictive visas                             | X                                      |   |  |
| No recognition of professional qualifications |  |   | X  |
| Culturally prejudiced behaviour               |  |   | X  |
| Lacking child-care facilities                 |  | X   |  |

(a) “*Foreign influence is a threat.*” The fear of foreign influence has long roots in Swiss society. Naturally, the Swiss seem to fear foreigners because the small size of their country leads to a feeling of fragility. The fear of foreign influence and the belief that the Swiss have superior qualities, are ideas that have been officially propagated in Switzerland since the 19th century. At that time, as historians have shown (e.g. Jost 1992; Tanner 1998) politicians, writers and scientists disseminated discourses about the threat of “barbaric” and “uncivilised” peoples coming from the South and from the East and expressed the wish of being “strong enough to impose our culture on them.” Fear of foreign influence has guided Swiss immigration policies. The federal law that regulates the settlement and residence of foreigners (ANAG), which came into effect in 1931, was designed to respond to the fear of being overwhelmed by foreigners (“*Überfremdung*”) (Tanner 1998; Lanz 2000). This law has several functions: to avoid the entry of ‘undesirable’ people into the country; to stabilise the job market; to protect Swiss nationals from unemployment and to control the ratio of foreigners to Swiss within the population (Kälin and Rieder 1999). In order to realise these aims, Swiss authorities have established a series of permits which regulate the economic and political participation of foreigners (see Appendix 1).

Foreigner permits have traditionally divided foreigners into two groups: those with the right to long-term residence in Switzerland and those without such rights.

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Foreigners with the right to long-term residence, also called the “constant foreign population,” are made up by permanent residents (holders of a C permit) and annual residents (holders of a B permit) who can renew their permits. Short-term residents, border crossers, seasonal workers, temporary residents, asylum seekers and diplomats do not have any right to long-term residence in Switzerland and are therefore commonly known as the “transient foreign population.” The large majority of foreigners (90%) are holders of B and C permits (see Appendix 2).

The differences in the rights of B- and C- permit holders are substantial. Whereas holders of C-permits have practically the same rights as the Swiss, except for voting and the right to exercise some professions, B permits offer little long-term stability and legally hinder the ability of foreigners to access employment. There are remarkable regional differences in the numbers of foreigners that hold B- or C-permits. Whereas 80% of European immigrants hold permanent resident permits, only 36-43% of Asians, Latin Americans and Africans hold such permits (see Appendix 3 in annex for details). To this is added the fact that non-Europeans are subjected to more hurdles than Europeans if they wish to transform their B-permits into C-permits. Europeans need only live for five uninterrupted years in a Swiss Canton to obtain a C-permit. Non-Europeans are forced to wait ten years to obtain the same permit. Clearly, foreigners are discriminated on the grounds of their geographical origin. This brings us to the second point of ideology.

(b) “*The value of immigrants depends on their origin.*” The idea that the value of immigrants depends on their country of origin is widespread among the Swiss. This discourse principally affects immigrants from the so-called “Third World,” who are considered as inferior in terms of culture and education. Such prejudices have a direct influence on the behaviour of many Swiss, particularly potential employers, who consider these individuals *a priori* to be of little professional value. The valuation of immigrants on the basis of origin, rather than on the basis of individual qualities and professional qualifications, has been official policy in Switzerland since the early 1990s. At that time, the number of all foreigners increased and with it the fear of being overwhelmed by foreigners. As a response, the national government issued in 1991 the ‘three-circle’ policy, which attempted to reduce foreign immigration (Haug 1998). This policy divided immigrants into three groups, according to their geographical origin, and determined the extent to which members of each group were to be allowed into the country. Three circles were defined: an inner-circle, made up of European Union nationals, whose members should enjoy first immigration priority; a middle circle for nationals of countries with the potential for skilled personnel (e.g. USA, Canada) and for individuals from traditional recruitment countries (e.g. ex-Yugoslavia), and a third circle, including nationals of Africa, Asia and Latin America, who were to be allowed into Switzerland only in exceptional cases. This three-circle policy was legitimised by referring to “culturally-close” and “culturally-distant” groups of migrants.

Because of increasing social and political pressure, foreigner laws in Switzerland have been in a process of change in recent years. The three-circle policy has been criticised for being racist. Consequently, it was replaced in 1998 by the ‘two-circle’ model, which provides a dual system of admission. It gives admission priority to EU-citizens, while at the same time restricting the entry of non-EU citizens to

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specialised personnel. Progressive civil groups (e.g. charity organisations, immigrant groups, the Federal Commission against Racism) have urged the Swiss government to revise foreigner policies, to stop cultural and gender discrimination, and to devise measures which help improve the precarious situation of many foreigners. Also, immigration experts have criticised immigration policies for being formulated from the perspective of police law and not from the reality of the contemporary immigration phenomenon (e.g. Kälin and Rieder 1999). Swiss companies have also applied pressure for a more liberal immigration policy, especially towards highly skilled people from "Third World" countries. The globalisation of the economy, the emergence of worldwide networks of enterprises and the expansion of the service sector in Switzerland has led to a significant demand for highly skilled labour, particularly in the computing branch where the local work force is inadequate. It is ironic that "Third World" countries (e.g. India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka), now have more computing expertise than Switzerland itself. The above developments resulted in the revision of the ANAG federal law on the immigration of foreigners and the formulation of a new proposal of law (AuG). At the same time, the agreement on the Free Movement of Individuals between Switzerland and the European Union -which governs the immigration and residence of EU-nationals in Switzerland and of Swiss-nationals in the EU- came into force in June 2002. This agreement, which is to be introduced step by step, gives to EU-nationals the same living and working rights as to the Swiss (except for voting).

In line with these changes, EU-nationals will no longer be labelled as 'foreigners'. The new foreigner's law (AuG) will govern the admission and residence of individuals originating from countries outside the EU. These individuals will be labelled as 'third foreigners' ("*Drittausländer*"). According to the new law, foreigners are no longer evaluated exclusively on the basis of their country of origin but on the basis of their qualifications. However, only those foreigners who are highly qualified will be allowed into Switzerland. Some improvements in the situation of foreigners are foreseen. Their families will also obtain work and residence rights and foreigners will be allowed to change jobs and place of residence. This proposal is not without criticism in Switzerland. Conservative forces see it as granting too many rights for foreigners. For progressive groups, the new law is still guided by the view of foreigners as a threat, it creates unfair inequalities between EU- and non-EU nationals, and it gives too little attention to the problems of immigrant women (EJP 2001). Additionally, it is not clear to what extent the possibilities of professional integration for 'third foreigners' will actually be improved, since the proposal does not provide criteria to define 'highly skilled'; nor does it foresee complementary policies for the recognition of the professional qualifications of non-Europeans.

Another new development is a decree proposal (VIA), which seeks to promote equality of opportunities for foreigners in Switzerland (Latif 2000). The usefulness of this proposal for marriage-migrants is, however, limited. The decree applies exclusively to 'foreigners' who do not hold a Swiss passport and not to immigrants in general. This excludes marriage-migrants such as the Latin American women discussed in this paper, most of whom have already obtained a Swiss passport but still face many of the same integrational problems that non-naturalised foreigners do. Also, the decree does not contemplate any measures to counteract the barriers described in this paper, such as restrictive foreign policies, lack of recognition of foreign titles, cultural

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prejudice and lack of child-care facilities.

(c) *Home- and child-care activities are the responsibility of women*. Swiss-German society has a patriarchal mentality. The discourse that still dominates is that home- and child-care activities are the responsibility of women. The patriarchal mentality is reflected in the social policies of Swiss-German cantons, that assume the traditional model of the passive, nurturing mother and the active breadwinning father. Very few child-care facilities are provided by the State in this part of Switzerland. Indeed such facilities have been set up only for women who are 'constrained' to work. The effect of the patriarchal mentality and of poor child-care policies is that it is generally more difficult for women in the German-speaking part of Switzerland to pursue professional careers. For example, a much lower proportion of women in Swiss-German cantons hold positions in upper management, academia, and as self-employed professionals (15%) than in the French- or Italian- speaking cantons (22 and 23%). By comparison, child-care facilities are highly subsidised by the French and Italian speaking cantons (Bühler 2001). Several younger Swiss-German women react to this situation by deciding not to have children at all.

The argument of feminist geographers, that the capitalist state supervises women's lives in order to ensure the reproduction of the labour force (e.g. Wilson 1977 in Rose 1993), is confirmed in the Swiss-German case. When women, whether Swiss or immigrants, try to deviate from this norm they are disciplined by the personnel of the few available day-care centres. Women are told that they do not need a day-care place for their children because their husbands already earn a salary that is sufficient for the family. Many Swiss women are no longer willing to assume the role of domestic workers and so foreign women are increasingly filling the gap left by Swiss women. According to Truong (1996), a similar trend is observable in other industrialised societies where more and more women are refusing the ideology of domesticity. By entering marriage with a Swiss man, Latin American women are faced with the same problems that Swiss women have traditionally encountered.

To sum up the preceding section, three main discourses in Swiss society are responsible for barriers to the professional integration of Latin American women: "foreign influence is a threat"; "the value of immigrants depends on their origin"; and "home- and child-care activities are the main responsibility of women." These discourses, respectively, reflect defensive, racist and patriarchal aspects of a mentality

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prevailing in certain sectors of Swiss society. As long as these discourses remain strong in Switzerland, it will be very difficult to guarantee equality of opportunities for foreigners and for foreign women in particular. Today, Switzerland is caught between reactionary and progressive forces, and thus the future of policies towards foreign women will be determined by which of these forces prevails.

## 5. SOCIAL NETWORKS AND THE STRATEGIES OF MIGRANT WOMEN TO COUNTERACT BARRIERS TO PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION

Chapter 3 described the situation of professional integration for the majority of Latin American women studied in this paper: they are either integrated at a level well below their qualifications, or are excluded from the job market and relegated to the role of domestic workers. Social and institutional barriers combine to restrict the access of foreign women to professional life in Switzerland. The aim of this chapter is to elucidate the strategies that immigrant women devise to cope with barriers of social integration.

This study shows that immigrant Latin American women in Switzerland are not passive to the forces that push them out of full professional participation. They have developed gender-specific strategies to resist the process of de-emancipation. The interviewed women described how they have organised themselves in social networks, which are aimed at solving the specific problems of migrant women. These networks range from informal groups of family members and friends, to formalised support groups of female immigrants (Table 8), and migrant and intercultural associations. The networks, whether they function in the private or semi-public spheres, facilitate the social and economic integration of the migrant women: they provide the interaction needed to avoid social isolation, they enable job contacts, open access to help with baby-sitting so that mothers can work, and offer possibilities for inter-cultural learning among Swiss and Latin Americans. In addition, the formalised networks act as pressure groups that communicate the needs and visions of immigrant women to Swiss society at large.

**Table 8:** Formalised support networks of female Latin American immigrants in Switzerland

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Atitude</i> (“Attitude”) Brazilian female migrant group (name chosen to demonstrate assertiveness before the forces of exclusion)</li><li>• <i>Migrant Forum Bern</i>: umbrella organisation for the improvement of the situation of female immigrants in Switzerland</li><li>• <i>Nosotras-Wir Frauen</i> (“We women”): organisation for the improvement of the social integration of migrant women (name chosen to demonstrate the will of immigrant women to not be made invisible)</li><li>• <i>Amigas</i> (“Friends”): support group for female Latin American immigrants</li><li>• <i>Ação</i> (“Action”): Brazilian female migrant group in Zurich to promote the public role of women in society</li><li>• <i>Club de Argentinas en Suiza</i> (“Club for Argentinian Women in Switzerland”):</li></ul> |
|---|

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An important aim of the formalised networks is to resist the role assigned to foreign women as domestic workers. Also, they aim to change the prevailing negative image of immigrant women in Swiss society as uneducated and incompetent individuals. Such a negative view has the effect that foreign women are seen only as ‘a problem,’ and not as individuals with the potential of contributing significantly to Swiss society.

A phenomenon of recent years is that formalised networks such as the ones listed in Table 8 are increasingly coming together to form organisations with wider possibilities as pressure groups. A remarkable example of such initiatives is the meeting of more than a hundred immigrant women of various nationalities that took place in Bern in 1997. Under the title, “immigrant women network to formulate integration policies,” women from 28 immigrant organisations and migration agencies created an umbrella organisation to discuss a common platform for the definition of integration policies for women. The stated principles and aims of the umbrella organisation are: ‘social integration is a process requiring mutual co-operation between natives and immigrants. Equal opportunities and participation possibilities need to be guaranteed for migrants at the political, legal, economic and social levels. For that reason, migrants call for the eradication of existing institutional and structural barriers to integration in Swiss society.’ Proposals were made to insure the access of migrant women to decision-making processes, to facilitate their access to jobs other than those in the low-paying scale, and to guarantee their access to good education and health care (Paiva Keller 2000). This organisation is currently very active in public debates on the newly proposed law for foreigners in Switzerland.

We conclude that the networks of foreign women play an important function in alleviating the impact of social and institutional barriers to integration. As such, women’s networks can be conceptually viewed as crucial action-spheres between individuals and society. Such networks can also be interpreted as the struggle of immigrant women to define a different identity to that imposed by Swiss society and by foreigner regulations. The networks of immigrant women are calling for an identity that defines them neither as domestic workers nor as incompetent individuals. Immigrant women want to be seen as what they are: individuals with great will and potential to contribute to the development of Swiss society at the private level of family life and at the public level of professional activity.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study of skilled Latin American women in Switzerland provides insight into several issues of female migration from countries of the South to those of the industrialised North. These issues include the reasons, characteristics and effects of marriage migration, the role of discourse in restricting integration, and the role of social networks in counteracting integrational barriers. A provisional typology has been proposed to differentiate marriage-migrants into “love-migrants” and “economic migrants.” That these two types are essentially different is reflected in the women’s reasons for migration, their aspirations, their migration movements and the duration of

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their deliberations on whether to migrate. The interviewed women evidently “migrated to marry” rather than “married to migrate.” Migration research therefore needs to redress the simplistic view of marriage-migration as an escape from poverty. Further, it needs to take account of the new trends that influence binational marriages, such as increased global communication and changing gender roles. The product of these trends is that binational marriages are more likely to form than ever before.

Analysis of the socio-economic effects of migration on skilled Latin American women shows surprising results. Whereas it has often been shown in the literature that migration helps many unskilled female migrants gain personal and financial independence, the skilled “love migrants” actually experience de-emancipation and de-qualification versus their former situation in Latin America. The interviews with the migrant group show that the great majority of the women are poorly integrated or not integrated at all in the work force. Most of the women are either employed at a level well below their qualifications or are excluded from the job market and relegated to the role of domestic workers. It is particularly difficult for skilled Latin American women to integrate professionally in Switzerland, especially in the German-speaking part, because of the barriers imposed on them by the state and by society. Restrictive visas, lack of recognition of professional qualifications, language diglossy, culturally prejudiced behaviour, and poor institutional support for child-care facilities all combine to hinder their professional fulfilment.

Marriage migration causes an identity shift for many of the affected women. In Latin America, society viewed them principally as professionals, but in Switzerland they are now seen as domestic workers. Oversimplified arguments that Latin American women are “better-off” following their migration need to be relativised. Although migration to countries like Switzerland undoubtedly brings many advantages, such as social and physical security, political stability and low-cost education for children, it is also true that migration has very high costs for the personal development of professional women.

Considerations of the ideological background to Swiss immigration policies and to social behaviour towards foreign women shows that three main discourses in Swiss society, particularly prevalent in the German-speaking part, are responsible for the barriers to professional integration of Latin American women: (1) “foreign influence is a threat”; (2) “the value of immigrants depends on their origin”; and (3) “home and child-care activities are the main responsibility of women.” These discourses, respectively, reflect defensive, racist and patriarchal aspects of a mentality prevailing in certain sectors of Swiss society. This mentality has resulted in social practices and official policies that discriminate foreigners and stall the professional integration of foreign women, particularly those coming from countries of the South. This raises the question of whether processes of de-emancipation and de-qualification are also common in other countries of the North. Additional studies are necessary, which compare the characteristics of professional integration of skilled migrants and which take account of the variables of geographical origin, family status and whether the marriage is binational or not.

Deconstruction of prevailing discourses on female marriage-migrants is essential if chances for professional integration are to be improved. New discourses need to be developed which move beyond representations of migrant women as

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victims, as needy, and as only fit for reproductive activity. Migrant women must be seen as individuals with much will and potential to contribute to the development of the countries where they live, both at the private level of family life and at the public level of professional and political activity. Only a positive attitude towards the abilities and potentials of migrant women will lead to constructive policies that are beneficial for both the migrant women and their host societies.

The self-organised social networks of immigrant women, which range from informal groups of family members and friends, to formalised support groups of female immigrants, are a means of counteracting social and institutional barriers to professional integration. Social networks facilitate socio-economic integration, work to reverse the prevailing negative image of immigrant women in Swiss society, and resist the role assigned to foreign women as domestic workers. As such, the social networks of immigrant women need to be seen as empowering, 'bottom-up' structures versus the constraints of the host society, and as a way for immigrant women to define their identity beyond the narrow perspectives of victims or domesticity. The very existence of these networks demonstrates the strength and initiative of the immigrant women. Public authorities need to recognise these networks, support them and grant them the necessary participation in public decision-making, particularly in issues of immigrant integration. Furthermore, the network activities support the conclusions from the personal interviews, that the motivations of women to migrate and to integrate are not exclusively economic. Women are campaigning for public recognition and for the right to have a career that is commensurate with their abilities. It is not economics that is driving their protest but the women's desire to establish their identities in the host society.

Migration research needs to understand the characteristics of the professional integration of skilled female immigrants from the South in the countries of the North. An integrated perspective of analysis, which includes the macro-levels of discourse and of official policies and the micro-level of immigrants' actions, has much scientific and social potential. It offers ample possibilities for feminist research on migration issues such as emancipation and de-emancipation, the role of discourse in social exclusion, and social networks as bottom-up initiatives against structural exclusion. It also offers possibilities for research that aims to influence the current status of North-South exchanges, namely, that while the countries of the South lose valuable human capital, the countries of the North do not take advantage of this valuable new capital.

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**Appendix 1:** The rights and restrictions of foreigner permits in Switzerland<sup>4</sup>

| Types of foreigner permits   | Gives right to:  |  | Does not give right to:  |
|--|--|--|--|
|  | Period of residence  | Activity   |  |
| <b>C - Permanent residence</b>   | Indefinite   | Work & residence (unrestricted)                      | -Vote<br>-Practise professions reserved for the Swiss (e.g self-employed doctors)<br>-Military service   |
| <b>B - Annual residence*</b><br>(skilled personnel)                              | 1 year<br>(renewable as long as job available)             | Work and / or residence                              | -Obtain a job when Swiss person available<br>-Self-employment<br>-Permit renewal when foreigner becomes unemployed<br>-Change employment or canton of residence<br>-Bring family members of students |
| <b>L-Short-term residence*</b><br>(skilled personnel)                            | 4 - 18 months<br>(non-renewable)                           | Work or study and residence                          | -Bring family members<br>-Change employment or canton of residence   |
| <b>A - Seasonal work*</b><br>(guest workers)                                     | 9 months in a year<br>(renewable as long as job available) | Work & residence                                     | -Bring family members<br>-Change employment or canton of residence   |
| <b>G - Border-crossing</b><br>(residents of bordering areas to Switzerland)      | -  | Work (yearly renewable if conditions are met)        | -Live in Switzerland   |
| <b>N - Asylum seeking</b>  | Until official decision                                    | Same as B-permit                                     | Same as B-permit   |
| <b>F- Temporary residence</b><br>(refused asylum-seekers who cannot be expelled) | Until expulsion becomes possible                           | Residence & work (only if "suitable to the economy") | -Bring family members (with some exceptions)   |
| <b>International agencies personnel / diplomats</b>                              | During diplomatic or intern. agency service                | Same as B-permit (but no taxation)                   | Same as B-permit   |

\* Number of permits regulated by cantonal quota system.

Source: Kälin and Rieder 1999; Swiss Federal Statistics Office 2001, 50.

<sup>4</sup> As of June 2002, the Agreement on the Free Movement of Individuals between Switzerland and the European Union will give, except for voting, the same living and working rights to EU-nationals as to the Swiss (the agreement is to be introduced step by step). A new foreigner's law (AuG) will regulate the rights of non-EU nationals (Chapter 4).

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**Appendix 2:** Numbers of foreigners according to the permit they hold, 2000

|                                     | Type of visa                                   | Number of foreigners | Percentage of total |
|-------------------------------------|--|----------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Constant foreign population</b>  | C-Permanent residents                          | 1,041,481            | 68.25               |
|                                     | B-Annual residents                             | 334,499              | 22.00               |
| <b>Transient foreign population</b> | L-Short term residents                         | 28,159               | 1.85                |
|                                     | A-Seasonal workers                             | 22,431               | 1.50                |
|                                     | F-Temporary residents                          | 31,976               | 2.10                |
|                                     | N-Asylum seekers                               | 39,981               | 2.60                |
|                                     | International agencies personnel and diplomats | 25,897               | 1.70                |
| <b>Total</b>                        |  | <b>1,524,424</b>     | <b>100.00</b>       |

Source: Swiss Federal Statistics Office 2001, 73

**Appendix 3:** Resident status of the constant foreign population in Switzerland, according to geographical origin, 2000

|               | Number of foreigners | C-permanent resident status | B-yearly resident status |
|---------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Europe        | 1,234,699            | 80%                         | 20%                      |
| Asia          | 62,317               | 36%                         | 64%                      |
| Africa        | 31,848               | 43%                         | 57%                      |
| Latin America | 28,402               | 40%                         | 60%                      |
| North America | 16,170               | 41%                         | 59%                      |
| Oceania       | 2,313                | 34%                         | 66%                      |
| Stateless     | 287                  | 28%                         | 72%                      |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>1,375,970</b>     | <b>76%</b>                  | <b>24%</b>               |

Source: Swiss Federal Statistics Office 2001, 73