

Moving My Brain to Canada

Motherhood and International Mobility as an Academic Career Requirement

This article highlights the challenges encountered by mothers in academe who face the demand of international mobility as a career requirement. In order to call attention to some of the policies and strategies that best empower mothers who move, I use qualitative and quantitative studies that document the different implications of academic mobility policies for men and women and their “gendering and stratifying effects on academic careers” (Leemann and Boes 213) in conversation with some of the insights I gained through my personal experience as a mother and as a postdoctoral fellow, funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation, conducting independent research in Canada. While I locate the ideal, readily mobile and unencumbered young Swiss researcher within cultural expectations that consider mothers as primary or sole caregivers of children, I question the persistent rhetoric of sacrifice both in the maternal and in the professional academic domains. I also call attention to the tendency to silence personal experience and circumstances in most discourses promoting academic mobility to early career researchers.

The demand to enhance one’s research (and, more rarely, teaching) experience abroad is characteristic of academe in small, multicultural, and multilingual countries such as Switzerland, though it is now increasingly common in the European Union, too. For scholars who also are mothers, *international* mobility raises specific challenges, even if many of them are similar to those arising from the more general demands of professional academic mobility in North America. In Switzerland, whether or not mothers share childrearing tasks and domestic work equitably with their partners, which is far from being the norm (“Enquête sur les familles” 12-17), they continue to be regarded as the primary caregivers of children. Mothers thus stand at the intersection of

two categories that remain, including in academe, disadvantaged professionally: women and parents. Even if the challenges of international mobility are extended to include all researchers who wish to become or are involved parents, the situation is particularly difficult for mothers who experience this double discrimination.

Research experience and collaboration with colleagues in other countries and inclusion, or even leadership, in international networks constitute key assets for an academic career in Switzerland. In the foreword of its *2014 Annual Report*, the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), the principal research agency funded by the Swiss government, reminds its readers that “there is no way around internationality” (3). The necessity of spending an imprecise period of time outside of one’s home country is reiterated early enough to graduate students, both men and women, with or without children, who show an interest in an academic career path. So much value is placed on international experience that the SNSF sponsors research stays through granting competitive fellowships to the most-promising early career scholars. While a stay abroad is not a technical requirement to be employed in positions such as sessional instructor or junior lecturer, for positions of a higher rank, that of assistant professor,¹ for example, international experience might weigh heavily in a hiring decision between two candidates with equal qualifications. Although not always underappreciated, this international dimension of research appears to be less important in Canada and in the USA.

In “Second Wave Silence and Third Wave Intensive Mothering,” motherhood scholar Lynn O’Brien Hallstein reflects on her experience as an American-trained academic and a feminist after moving temporarily to Zurich, the largest city in the German-speaking part of Switzerland, in the early 2000s. She felt “like a fish out of water” and experienced Swiss “cultur[al] expectations of women as being like the American 1950s ideal for women” (112). Because I was raised and worked in the French-speaking part of the country, where expectations of motherhood are slightly different, I do not share her perspective, although I understand the cultural elements that can prompt a characterization of Switzerland as “a country that is so different in terms of its culturally understood beliefs about women” (112). For instance, the fourteen weeks of paid (80 percent) maternity leave became a legal right at the national level only in 2005, although many companies in the private sector, most state-funded universities, and Swiss states (*cantons*) already were offering some maternity leave to most female employees (as civil servants).

If discriminations against *women* are slowly becoming less pervasive in Switzerland, those against *mothers* remain an issue. I am not suggesting that I am now living in a country where everything is perfect for mothers. Yet, in contrast with O’Brien Hallstein’s perception of Switzerland as a newcomer,

my recent move to Canada felt like jumping into an advanced “feminist pond” (at least in theory) rather than feeling like “a fish out of water” (112). It has made me even more aware of the extent of gender inequality and of “processes of gendered exclusion” in my country of birth in general, and in academe in particular (Leemann, Boes, and Da Rin 127). The first empowering effect that my research stay at a major Canadian university personally had on me was exposing me to a plurality of family-friendly discourses, practices, and models that do not (yet) exist in the Swiss academy. Some of these discourses, practices, and models are effectively supporting mothers and increasing the proportion of women in academe. For Swiss researchers, going abroad thus constitutes a unique opportunity to witness the concrete results of such policies: more mothers who become professors, more professors with children in diverse family configurations, and more mentors willing to talk about these issues.

The decision to move abroad for the principal purpose of academic research requires having not only individual agency, conjugal consensus, and family balance (if applicable) but also financial resources and administrative clearance. For Swiss researchers, a fully funded mobility fellowship from the SNSF is one of the most convenient tools to carry out such an academic and personal project. In 2014, this government-sponsored agency and major actor in shaping Swiss research politics granted 353 early postdoctoral mobility and 146 advanced postdoctoral mobility fellowships to young researchers—and 38 percent and 35 percent of them, respectively, were women—trained in Switzerland² in all disciplines, in order for them to spend periods ranging from twelve to thirty-six months at a host institution abroad (SNSF “2014 Annual Report” 33). Even though the organization strives to promote more egalitarian models of career support, and despite recent improvements, some programs and policies of the SNSF nevertheless remain gender biased (Fassa and Kradolfer). Moreover, the core of gender inequality issues lies in the universities themselves as they are the only institutions to offer long-term and stable positions; this reality contrasts with the SNSF, which supports individual career phases as well as independent and collaborative research projects limited in time.

From a feminist perspective, the difficulty in such debates is to acknowledge the specific challenges posed to mothers by the demand of international mobility without essentializing women as mothers and without framing this as only a women’s issue, but rather as everyone’s concern. In the following, after showing how both academic careers and motherhood are framed in a rhetoric of sacrifice in the context of Swiss academe, I go on to explain how the “demand to be readily mobile and to gather research experience at a research institution abroad” (Leemann “Gender Inequalities” 609) impacts academic mothers, their partners, and their families. In an attempt to combine the au-

thority of an academic perspective in motherhood studies with the authenticity of personal trajectories, I include reflections derived from conversations about international academic mobility that I have had during the past five years with graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, and professors in Switzerland, Canada, the U.S., and elsewhere.³ I call attention to the ways in which maternal (and, more generally, personal) voices of fellows (i.e., scholars who have been granted a research fellowship) tend to be silenced in official events promoting international mobility to early career researchers in Switzerland, especially at the postdoctoral level. I will also consider some of the concrete, and sometimes unexpected, consequences of international mobility on family life. Finally, my conclusion highlights which policies work best to empower mothers pursuing their academic careers with an enriching postdoctoral research stay outside of their home country.

Sacrifices and “Women’s Issues” in the Swiss Academy

A rhetoric of sacrifice—as defined by Adrienne Rich’s notion of motherhood as an institution—and of suffering to achieve one’s academic goals are frequently deployed in discourses about (potential) academic careers of women of childbearing age. This rhetoric persists to this day even in official discourses in Swiss academe. In the English version of a November 2014 blog post entitled “Promoting the Research Careers of Women,” the president of the Gender Equality Commission of the SNSF correctly writes that “there is no significant gap in education in Switzerland, yet there is a pronounced gender gap when it comes to the senior or managerial levels, and in the amount of funding allocated” (Gasser).

Several studies focusing on the specificities of the Swiss academic system in international comparison (Leemann et al.; Fassa and Kradolfer; O’Brien Hallstein; Wiedmer) have pointed out how “the matrices of Swiss academia and the steep hierarchical power structures that saturate them have produced and continue to produce a body of academics that, in terms of the classic triad of class, ethnicity, and gender, is quite homogeneous” (Wiedmer 56). Caroline Wiedmer further explains that “the particular way Swiss power relations in academia have worked in the past to withhold from its mid-tiers academic security, influence over the way the academy is run, and direct access to resources has brought forth a body of academics of relatively little diversity, and unequal gender representation” (60). This is the case in other countries as well, whether or not they implement gender equality programs such as those of the SNSF. In a 2011 publication of the Swiss Federal Office of Statistics (OFS), we learn that “in the Swiss institutions of higher education, men account for as much as 83 percent of all professorships” (OFS “Perspectives de la formation” 12). As of

2012, 49 percent of women professors in Switzerland did not have children, compared to only 36 percent of male professors (Dubach, Graf, and Stutz 11). Contemplating such “sobering” statistical results, the SNSF official quoted above points out in her blog post that “[m]ore women are involved in early career stages, but they are not promoted, and often *decide* to quit research and *sacrifice* their academic careers” (Gasser; my emphasis).

Shrouding these facts in a rhetoric of opting out, the blog poster then gives her interpretation as to why women quit: “I believe they do this based on subconscious assumptions or misdirected beliefs, for instance, that having a family and an academic career are mutually exclusive, or even—god forbid—that men are better suited for science than women” (Gasser). The rest of her blog post makes it clear that such “subconscious assumptions or misdirected beliefs” are attributed only to these highly educated women of Switzerland at an age when they face choices regarding maternity (including the options of *not, not yet* or *not again* becoming a mother) and, frequently too, the demand for an international research stay. That senior members of committees who would be able to fund or hire these early career scholars into stable positions should also share such biased assumptions is never questioned. In some institutions, though, these researchers face discrimination not so much as women but as mothers who are implicitly, or sometimes very explicitly, assumed to be less dedicated to research than their colleagues—women without children and men without *or with* children. Contradicting these assumptions, many researchers who *mother*—in Sara Ruddick’s sense of *mother* not only as a noun but also as a verb—in fact have to consider very practical and financial issues in organizing their day-to-day schedules, with resources that may not allow for childcare or a stay abroad as their partners may not be able to take an unpaid or minimally paid leave. That the SNSF grants some supplementary funding for the accompanying partner who remains unemployed during the stay abroad is helpful, but income is not the only criteria in such decisions.

In recent years, a compelling discourse on gender equality is challenging the “current structure, and its implied hegemonic discourse on what constitutes academic fitness and excellence” by Swiss standards (Wiedmer 58). The SNSF and other agencies (such as the equal opportunity offices within Swiss universities) are doing their best, at the local and national level, to promote the advancement of women’s careers through gender equality.⁴ Although there is no major issue with these successful programs themselves, the rhetoric that they are enshrined in is problematic because it constructs early career women scholars as “deficient” and as “needing extra help.” Certainly, it is not the sole responsibility of funding agencies to question either the unfairness of certain elements of current academic systems or the reproduction of social constructs. Easier to dismantle, however, through critical discourse analysis, are this per-

sistent rhetoric of sacrifice and its diffusion of views on motherhood that see it as major impediment to an academic career. In both formal and informal conversations, it would help empower early career women scholars to avoid positioning motherhood as an obstacle to academic success and as a personal development luxury, something to be only sought after the almost mandatory research stay abroad, or even upon becoming a tenured professor, usually at an age when fertility is already declining. The now well-documented gendered “leaky pipeline” (Leemann, Dubach, and Boes) will not be fixed as long as the issue of work-life balance is considered only a women’s issue, or, worse, as each individual woman’s issue, further privatizing it.

Moms on the Move, International: Academic Ex-Matriation

Academic institutions and funding agencies insufficiently address questions about the reconciliation of motherhood not only with an academic career in general but also with the requirements of a stay abroad. The picture of the ideal academic researcher, and in particular that of the (future) applicant to positions at the professorial level, still remains that of “an individual who is young, unencumbered and totally dedicated to his occupation” (Fassa and Kradolfer 192, quoting Fassa, Kradolfer and Paroz 3). Being unencumbered in particular seems to be a prerequisite for mobility, whether in the short term (conferences, invited talks, job interviews) or in the long term (international postdoctoral research stays, permanent professional expatriation). Mothers typically are not regarded as “unencumbered” or as “totally dedicated” to academic endeavours. As also noted by Leemann,

[a]cademics who are less able and willing to meet the requirements of the outlined ideal of an academic entrepreneur—female and older academics, without academic family background, living in partnership, dual-career constellations and with children, less frequently supported by mentors and without funding support—are at a disadvantage in the contests for recognition in the academic field. (“Gender Inequalities” 623)

In addition to not corresponding to the “ideal type of academic entrepreneur,” mothers are often perceived as immobile because the mother work they perform is generally tied to local structures and networks of kin and peers (family, friends, daycares, schools), which facilitate their professional and their other personal engagements with society at large.

Departing from one’s home country and arriving in a new one involves a significant amount of administrative work (securing legal immigration doc-

uments, finding appropriate housing, dealing with several types of insurance, social security, bank accounts, communications, enrollment in new daycare or school, etc.). Once the period of preparing for departure (disenrollment from daycare, cancelling subscriptions, administrative processes, buying airplane tickets, etc.) is over, outbound fellows start it all over again with the process of settling in. All of this is done in addition to preparing and starting the academic research project itself. Obviously, both men and women experience the administrative hassles of expatriation, but in addition to these, mothers also experience a situation of *ex-matriation*. By this term, I mean the situation of mothers with children who live as expatriates and far away from their extended family and relatives (such as mothers, grandmothers, sisters, aunts, cousins, and any other relative, male or female, who could help with caregiving). I will now outline some aspects of ex-matriation.

Taking some distance from one's alma mater after completing a graduate degree is intellectually beneficial. However, it is rarely acknowledged that moving abroad cuts academic mothers off from their traditional support networks (if any) that they are privileged to access at home. In the case of Switzerland, these networks tend to function through feminine and in particular maternal kin support and connections: because collective structures often do not meet real needs (e.g., daycares might offer only three days of caregiving out of the five needed in a week), many parents in Switzerland work part time and/or rely on help from relatives not only in cases of emergencies (e.g., a child's sickness) but also for regular childcare. In most families, mothers are in charge of constructing and maintaining such support networks. Unless they can rely on their partner while abroad, mothers will continue to try and coordinate events but in a more complex situation. Ex-matriate mothers cannot just find or access such trusted networks of caregiving upon arrival, even if they have the means to do so: they strive to build them. Mothers (generally more than fathers) work towards establishing relationships of trust in which the mutual providing and requesting of caregiving services feels appropriate and safe. This takes social skills and time. The duration of international stays abroad often does not allow academic mothers, who are meant to focus on their research and to participate in academic events, to establish such support networks. Moreover, moving abroad jeopardizes networks at home that need continuous maintenance: a long stay abroad might mean starting all over again at the bottom of a long waiting list for daycare or for enrollment in before- and after-school care upon returning. Such situations, which result from what I call ex-matriation, are rarely addressed in the official discourses of the SNSF, but this does not mean that they are never talked about: alternative spaces of discussion emerge where relevant questions are asked, even if they are not always answered.

Silencing the Personal and Maternal Experience

At the end of a SNSF mobility fellowship, researchers must account for their results, most often in quantitative terms (i.e., number of publications). They seldom are given the opportunity to speak publicly about the administrative, social, familial, or health issues that they have encountered (and most of the time solved) during their stay abroad. Admittedly, these might not be of interest to everyone, as these situations are extremely diverse and indeed very personal. Family situations have ceased to be a complete taboo and are discussed in official reports of the SNSF (for instance in that authored by Leemann and Stutz), but the status of those who “[take] responsibility for children’s lives and for whom providing child care is a significant part of his or her working life” (Ruddick 40), whether the applicants themselves or their partners, is left out of most public discourses by SNSF representatives at events regularly organized to promote mobility fellowships to young Swiss researchers. Academic success and career enhancement are the main focus, but issues that concern very practical family matters are also regularly brought up, by attendees rather than by the SNSF contact persons, during the more informal question-and-answer sessions and peer-to-peer discussions that follow information sessions. My own experience is that such topics also surface in conversations happening at the receptions following such events.

Furthermore, tales of interrupted or uncompleted stays usually are silenced both by fellows and by funding agencies, even if regulations about such cases do exist (e.g., concerning the reimbursement of interrupted fellowships). Disruptions of initial research plans due to accidents, illness, death, or pregnancy are bound to happen more frequently than the master narrative of seamless, publication-productive, research-focused and career-enhancing stays, where family situations and spousal relationships play no role at all, would have you believe. We rarely hear about Swiss researchers in relationships with non-Swiss nationals whose mobility is more restricted than that of Swiss citizens. And what about an academic mother who is divorced and whose ex-spouse will not allow her to take the children, even for a short vacation, out of the country? For these mothers, it is impossible to pursue their research abroad unless they go alone. Are they expected to choose between residing in the same country as their children or their academic career? Whatever their choice, mothers take the risk that either their social or professional networks will interpret their decision as sacrificial: sacrificing their socially constructed status as good mothers, sacrificing the well-being of their children, or sacrificing their careers.

International research stays that are delayed, cancelled, or interrupted because of pregnancy constitute another example of silenced experiences. Because much fear remains that such interruptions will be interpreted as failures, these

stories are discussed only privately and told only to sympathetic ears. Moving to another country while pregnant might prove difficult for women requiring continuity in their pregnancy care. It is already enough of a challenge to change healthcare providers in one's home country. Dealing with the intricacies of a new healthcare system and finding access to a suitable specialist of pregnancy and childbirth right upon arrival is something that most future mothers probably would like to avoid, even though it is technically possible, especially in countries that offer free universal healthcare coverage. Even in Canada, where this is the case, newcomers on a work permit (like postdoctoral fellows) in Ontario are excluded for a three-month period from the Ontario Health Insurance Plan that offers basic coverage to everyone. Subscribing to a private insurance care provider upon arrival is the only option if the tight budget of a mobility fellowship can afford it. Being pregnant and giving birth while abroad also raise the issue of the quality of insurance and healthcare and the associated costs. Because their status is not clearly defined in certain host universities, postdoctoral fellows might not access the same health insurance benefits as regular graduate students, faculty, and staff. This is especially true when they are funded by an external international agency and not through the university's payroll. In the case of serious complications not covered by the health plan of her host institution, a pregnant woman might even be forced to return to her home country to benefit from provided healthcare services.

As scholars seeking international experience, we are moving not only our brains but also our bodies and our families abroad, preferably in a carefully planned move. This is not just stating the obvious, but it is also passing on valuable, concrete, and practical information or tips that will save others time and trouble and allow more time for the research itself. I am not suggesting that returning fellows should be forced to disclose to funding committees the personal hurdles that they might have encountered. It is understandable that they might not wish to do so and, instead, focus on their research achievements. Some may be hesitant to share their experience not only as a researcher but also as a mother (or a father) because of the fear that this might undermine their academic status. Many academics still feel that such a disclosure might be read as an ungrateful complaint or seen as a failure. However, it would be empowering for mothers in academe to be given space to share their personal and practical tips about international mobility, perhaps anonymously. Such conversations are already taking place anyways: at this moment, formal and informal discussion groups on social networks (e.g., LinkedIn) provide an alternative space where aspects of mobility stays, other than purely academic ones, are discussed between outbound, current and, returning international fellows as well as with the SNSF and other funding agencies. While such questions are left out of official discourses promoting mobility, they nevertheless surface

regularly, sometimes as central concerns, in personal narratives and conversations among those who experienced international mobility or wish to do so.

Virtuous Sacrifices? Families Living Apart

In 2012, I obtained one of the competitive SNSF international postdoctoral fellowships⁵ in order to pursue postdoctoral research in Toronto. A few weeks before my family's set departure date to Canada, I attended a workshop on mobility and family life, organized in the framework of a collaborative program offered by the equal opportunity offices of francophone Swiss universities. This was one of the very few occasions, before the departure date, in which I could hear maternal tales of mobility in an official context.

The already mentioned trope of "virtuous sacrifice," both professional and maternal, was present in the workshop's conversations. Most of the invited speakers were successful women who had secured stable positions in various Swiss institutions and thus were potential role models. Other speakers were men whose uncommon work arrangements were presented as potential models, although, the fact that they were exceptional—and somehow subversive—innovations was repeatedly underlined. We also heard about a case (then apparently still unique in Switzerland) of academic job sharing for a position where each one of the (now-tenured) professors held 50 percent of the workload and kept 50 percent of the salary. If they could not have been imitated, because they corresponded to specific personal and institutional situations, these arrangements, at least, should have inspired us, as emerging researchers, to revolutionize academe's hierarchical and pyramidal system from the bottom up.

At this workshop, one of the speakers recounted how she had lived away from her husband and children for a few months during her research stay in a European country. She achieved her international mobility goal and subsequently obtained a stable position in Switzerland. She had kept in touch daily with her school-aged children through Skype. In reaction to this testimony of a temporary long-distance family relationship, a participant hailed the husband of the speaker as a hero for taking full childcare responsibility during this time. But the participant also wondered how her partner, working in a full-time position with many responsibilities, could afford to do so. Others noted that delegating childcare to paid caregivers is not a solution for everyone.

My intention is not to criticize such arrangements. The particular family experiences discussed in this workshop apparently resulted from consensus. I was surprised, however, that these arrangements were presented as models to aspire to rather than as the compromised results of dealing with existing policies and confronting a socially conservative mentality that still assigns to

mothers the primary or exclusive responsibility for childrearing (OFS “Enquête sur les familles” 29). While trying to bring in some nuance about the status of such arrangements, the moderators made commendable efforts to place authentic maternal voices at the centre of the conversation in a context where they usually are silenced or, worse, they self-censor. While such models might be perfectly acceptable for some mothers and children, separate family living, which could be considered forms of “non-resident motherhood” (Gustafson), might not work for every family. Furthermore, we should also appreciate the qualitative and quantitative difference between being away for one week, or even a whole month to attend academic events, and spending a semester or longer abroad researching. In such cases, the age and needs of the children should be taken into consideration, and how the mother feels about such arrangements must not be ignored.

After the workshop, I wondered if anyone else felt that this rhetoric of sacrificing was unappealing and discouraging. I was also baffled by the fact that the assumptions underlining such discourses were so rarely questioned. I noticed that none had mentioned cases of single parenthood or the risks of breakups and divorce that might arise from long-distance relationships over an extended period of time (and, I would add, particularly in academic ones, even if many other factors play a role). At the informal reception following the workshop, other participants, mostly women, shared their thoughts about the session. The general take away message was that the invited speakers had succeeded in their mobility project and careers in spite of motherhood. A doctoral student and mother of two children said that family could never do this. Another participant explained that her husband, a specialist in Swiss family and divorce law, could not possibly leave his law firm, even for just six months. The workshop had just smashed their dreams of mobility and, subsequently, of an academic career. Instead of encouraging them to continue scholarly work after their PhD, even while remaining in Switzerland, the workshop had only made them painfully more aware of how impossible the demands of such arrangements were in their particular situations.

My own husband, working in the field of academic library management, could not get a long-term unpaid leave and had to resign from his position in order for us to live together in Canada as a family during *my* postdoctoral research stay. Was I actually jeopardizing *his* career? How high a price to pay was it for us to trade his relatively secure position against my participation in a now international but still precarious academic job market? What about common pension plans and savings? Like many other couples with one or both partners engaged in an academic career, we faced a “complicated decision that required us to try to balance both of our professional ambitions in light of what we believed was best for our family” (O’Brien Hallstein 111).

Regula Julia Leemann, who has conducted the most extensive studies on gender equality in the Swiss academy, is probably right to assume that “academic mothers are under more pressure to care about planning options and arrangements and finding compromises that are conceivable for the whole family” (Leemann “Gender Inequalities” 621) and not just for themselves. Participating in this workshop on academic mobility and family life before departing Switzerland at least confirmed that I was not the only one looking for answers to such questions.

Concluding Remarks

In order to retain talented researchers who happen to be parents in academic research, the Swiss academy needs to keep up with the progressive and efficient policies set up at the turn of the twenty-first century in the framework of the Federal Program for Gender Equality from which many concrete initiatives for promoting women’s academic careers derive. In addition to upholding and creating new policies and programs, changes in mentality are also needed, even if these might be more difficult to bring about. If specific support continues to be directed towards young women researchers, under the form of “*womentoring*” programs for instance, discussions about motherhood and its reconciliation with the imperative of an international stay abroad deserve a more central place, while also taking into account that some women do not wish to become mothers. In line with this, it is necessary that both the official rhetoric and the advice that early career scholars receive privately from a variety of mentors, both men and women, with or without children, move away from the tendency to blame leaving research solely on academic mothers by overstating their agency, which is rather limited. It would empower both early career and more advanced academic mothers to encounter fewer metaphors of sacrifice and fewer views of motherhood as a liability and as a privatized burden on the academic path.

Another helpful policy, which the SNSF already implements, allows greater flexibility for the effective start date of the stay abroad, with the hope that the host institution will be able to accommodate. Scholars who have been granted a fellowship may postpone for up to one year the effective start date of their stay abroad or of their return grant to Switzerland. While family planning is controllable to a certain extent, academic career planning may sound like an oxymoron to many researchers in the postdoctoral phase. Planning sometimes translates into concrete job applications and interviews, but many other times, it takes the form of wishful or positive thinking about an uncertain future. Academic mothers often have to deal with both family and career planning, simultaneously, with surprises along the way in both domains. In case of a

pregnancy, just a few months might make an enormous difference in being (physically, mentally and materially) able to accept a fellowship (or a tenure-track position), especially one that implies relocating one's family across international borders. Similarly, funding agencies notifying their applicants more quickly of acceptance or rejection would help them to more effectively make arrangements for their family. This would be especially helpful to those applicants who have an accompanying partner. With this in mind, funding agencies should consider research calendars as indicative rather than as strictly binding. It must be acknowledged, however, that other partners in the research project might not always show as much flexibility: a specific research lab or a department might plan to host only one fellow at that time and cannot allow him or her to arrive later; or the host professor with whom one plans on collaborating might be unavailable during a sabbatical.

Although Swiss institutions still have a lot to learn in terms of nondiscriminatory policies and family-friendly mindsets, Canadian funding agencies could also study some of the new tools recently implemented by the SNSF. For instance, women postdoctoral fellows may request an extra allowance for the explicit purpose of attending professional development and mentoring workshops. Another example is the "120% support grant," a new tool described in gender-neutral language on the SNSF website, that "is aimed at postdoctoral researchers who need to look after children during an important stage in their career and who therefore need more flexibility. The grant helps researchers to find the right balance between their academic career and family commitments by enabling part-time employment" (SNSF "120% Support Grant").

Concerning international mobility, other models could be developed, too, such as providing extra funds to cover the fees of any persons, even if they are not the spouse, accompanying the fellows abroad and taking up the responsibility of childcare. If establishing a support network of "othermothers" upon arrival to a new country and within a short span of time proves difficult, it may be possible to transport at least part of this network abroad to mitigate the effects of ex-matriation. Another possibility would be to reimburse effective daycare expenses rather than paying a lump sum as a child allowance.

An international research stay at the postdoctoral level undoubtedly brings benefits. However, it is legitimate to question the forms that mobility can take. Will it be accepted, in the future, that several short stays abroad or participation in collaborative transnational projects count as international experience for parents who cannot afford a continuous extended stay? Funding agencies could find other ways to make the international stay easier to access, even for scholars whose partner is not privileged enough to afford an unpaid leave and for single or divorced mothers. Unfortunately, in addition to the necessary selection based on a criterion of excellence, another form of social

preselection is taking place, informally, even before applications are sent. This does not serve the pursuit of scientific excellence in academic settings and does not empower mothers.

International mobility is an amazing step in career development. It is also, in many cases, a great experience for children and for one's partner, even if this is rarely acknowledged or talked about due to the tendency to silence personal stories. Motherhood complicates the equation in which locally established careers (that of the applicants or their partners) and financial security are well-known variables (O'Reilly): it places into the picture, often centrally, the children's lives, their health, their schooling, their adaptability to change, and their particular emotional attachments to other caregivers that academic ex-matriation disrupts. Without turning funding agencies into travel agencies specialized in family trips, a way to promote such international stays to researchers facing both the demands of an academic career and of parenting could be to make some more room for the voices ready to share personal and maternal experiences of academic mobility that, for the most part, are positive and empowering.⁶

¹In this context, being hired in a tenure track position as assistant professor right after or even before finishing one's PhD is extremely uncommon.

²The *2014 Annual Report*, available for download from the SNSF's website, features these and other statistics. Applicants must prove their ties to Swiss academic research, but Swiss citizenship is not a formal requirement.

³I am grateful to them for allowing me to use parts of our informal and constructive conversations for this article. For the purpose of protecting their privacy, I have omitted or changed identifying details in their personal stories that I have integrated within my own narrative, although without being able to fully embrace an autoethnographic approach within the limited scope of this article.

⁴Discriminations linked to sexual orientation, ethnicity, or class, have only recently entered the debates. Most considerations about equality or equal opportunity in Switzerland still focus exclusively on equality between men and women.

⁵In 2013, the SNSF changed the structure of some of these funding schemes. These fellowships are now known as "Early Postdoc.Mobility" and "Advanced Postdoc.Mobility." Spending most of the research time abroad still is a key requirement.

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