

Expatriate Women: A Dream Waiting to Come True

Claudia Carvalho and Carolina Feliciano Machado

Abstract In a context of a globalized economy, business is no longer limited by national boundaries. To maintain their competitiveness, organizations are increasingly establishing and strengthening their presence overseas. For this reason, and to accomplish their projects more successfully, many firms take the option to deploy employees from the home's company to their subsidiary. This way, we have inevitably assisted to a strong rise of these professionals in international assignments. However, this rise has been very disproportional to men and women, with a clear disadvantage do women. Indeed, women represent a clear minority compared to men. *What explains such a huge difference that sets apart men and women?* The present critical literature review starts from this issue in order to obtain a greater understanding of the gender effect in the process and in the experience of the expatriation (one of the many international forms of mobility in the organizational contexts).

Introduction

In a context of a globalized economy, in order to stay competitive and, in some situations, to guarantee its survival, organizations are, more and more, *spreading its wings* as well as expanding its businesses across borders. For this reason, and in order to realize its projects with great success, worker's displacement from the home's company to other international contexts where they operate has been increasingly an option to these organizations. Inevitably, we have been witnessing to a strongly grown of professionals in international missions. However, in a great disproportionately way for men and women, with a clear disadvantage for women. Indeed, women represent a minority in these worker's total universe. *What explains such a huge difference that sets apart men and women?* This present chapter of

C. Carvalho · C.F. Machado (✉)
Department of Management, School of Economics and Management,
University of Minho, Campus Gualtar, 4710-057 Braga, Portugal
e-mail: carolina@eeg.uminho.pt

critical literature review starts from this issue with the aim to understand gender effect in the expatriation process and experience (one of the possible ways of international mobility in the organizational context). To this end, we will present, in a first step, the expatriation concept, exploring some statistical data about the same. Then, we are going to focus the concepts of gender (male and female) and gender stereotypes. Clarified the main concepts that guide this chapter, we will move to the core of this critical review, in other words, the relationship between expatriation and gender. The discussion will be focused in three specific issues, namely, the different perspectives about women role in the expatriation process; the factors that explain women under-use in these international assignments; and the change that had occurred over the last years.

Expatriation: Concept and Statistical Data

According to the Priberam Dictionary of Portuguese Literature [1] expatriation means “to send out motherland” and “Go out of their motherland to live abroad.” By this side expatriate is “that one who lives, willingly or not, abroad its motherland.” This concept analysis, further removed from scientific research, is important in order to understand the broad sense of expatriation, reason why different authors use the concept in a very distinct way. Indeed, this concept scientific use changes greatly, not only due to the fact but also the process had been started by the Government, by an organization or by the person itself, as well as on the basis of being or not a voluntary process [2].

To the scope of this work, we will consider the expatriate organizational vision which define him/her as the worker who, continuing to perform duties in his/her organization, is temporarily transferred to another country (by an established period of time), accompanied by their family [3–5]. It is important to highlight that, even when the expatriation focus is limited to this level, we find a variety of visions about the concept, essentially in what concerns the expatriate period of time. Many authors (e.g., [6]) understand expatriation as that who occurs until 5 years. Many others also define a minimum period of time, usually from 6 months to 2 years (e.g., [4, 7]). Moreover, Bonache et al. [8], Banai and Harry [9] and Fenwick [10] draw attention to most varied forms of mobility which go beyond the expatriation conventional vision that include workers who travel regularly to another country, not implying necessarily moving to it. However, it is important to point out that, due to its distinctive characteristics, some authors consider that these new mobility ways cannot be included in the great expatriation cluster [5].

To better understand the expatriation process, we must bear in mind that it involves three phases: pre-expatriation; expatriation and repatriation [11, 12]. The first phase assumes an assessment of the need of expatriation, including the entire recruitment and selection process as well as the applicant’s preparation. The second phase refers to the international mission development. Finally, the third phase is related to the expatriate return to the home organization. Regarding to this last

phase, it is important to clarify that expatriation implies that the worker contractual relation remains after the international mission and, once finished, the worker shall have the right to return to the home organization to a task to be defined, which should be compatible with the repatriated worker profile [13].

Expatriation has been used by organizations with a strategic character, as a way of more easily reach a well succeed internationalization process. Indeed, research has shown, in an extensive way, the expatriation potential to the internationalization success, by a diversified set of reasons among which we can highlight the need to anchor the subsidiary organization in the home organization policies and values (e.g., [5, 9, 14, 15]). Maybe by this strategic character, expatriation has been greatly associated to management positions. Indeed, expatriation begun to be confined to this type of positions, initially very associated to diplomats and professionals with military career, whose professional nature required to stay out of the country [16]. However, nowadays expatriation includes a great number of professionals [17], as it is confirmed by data in the “Global Relocation Trends: 2012 Survey Report” where it is revealed, inclusively, that the number of expatriate workers in technical tasks overpass those that are in management tasks [18]. The option by workers expatriation with a profile highly technic is usually relate with the difficulty in finding this type of worker locally (in the host country) [13].

Given the relevance of internationalization and expatriation to organizations, this is a phenomenon in great expansion. According to the study developed in 2011 by Pricewaterhouse Coopers, international assignments increased 25% in the last decade, forecasting an increase of 50% until 2020. At the Portuguese national level AEP [14] forecast that expatriation can increase about 20%. The study “International Assignment Survey—Portugal 2010” developed by Mercer Consultancy, reinforce the increase trend of workers’ expatriation processes of the Portuguese organizations.

Gender and Gender Stereotype: Concepts

Defined the expatriation concept, it is critical to clarify the concept of gender, frequently confounded with that of sex (female or male). When we refer to one’ person sex, we are pointing out the basic differences that exist between men and women in a physiologic way [19]. By this side gender is the identity—female or male—that each of us interiorize and which include specific behavioral roles and standards (Oakley 1972 referred by [20]). This is, so, a sociocultural construction; a construction that, as Delphy [20] highlights is imbued of an intrinsic asymmetry and hierarchy that split groups. This happens because “They are assumptions, however, that have tended to be developed and refined in contexts dominated by males and, hence, have been disadvantageous to females” [21, p. 352]. So, in a context characterized by a traditional male domain, women were during centuries associated to the private/domestic/familiar sphereprivate spherepublic sphere and men to the public/productive/of work spherework sphere [21]. It is from these roles internalization that result female and male identity female identity [22], the first

associated to a great sensibility and emotionality and the second to a great independence, aggressiveness and dominance [23].

This woman and man image become, this way, a “kind of prototype that come into being as a norm to a team” [19, p. 10]. Thus, often, people form an opinion about others characteristics and behaviors based only in their gender—female or male [24, 25]. This type of beliefs about different attributes and roles of men and women (gender stereotypes) are widely shared and are extremely embedded in societies [25, 26]. Izraeli et al. [26] distinguish three types of gender stereotypes—*gender characteristics stereotype*, *gender role stereotype*, and *gender professions label*.

Gender characteristics stereotype refers to the embedded beliefs about differences in personality traits between men and women [26]. As noted before, women are considered as being more emotional, dependent, conformist, passives, and less ambitious and rational; the opposite is valid to men [23, 26].

Gender role stereotype concerns to beliefs related to behaviors considered appropriated to men and women [26]. This type of stereotype is based in beliefs such as those that defend that women primary responsibility is to look after children; women should not give orders to men, and men should not receive orders from women [21, 26]. While the first type of stereotypes (*gender characteristics*) has a particular descriptive character—how men and women *are*—; this second type of stereotypes has a prescriptive component—how men and women *should behave* [26].

Finally, *gender professions label* is associated to the expectation that a profession is more suitable to a gender than to the other (e.g., police should be men and nurses should be women) [26].

Despite not having, necessarily, a correspondence to reality, these differences have been understood as natural, “as being within individuals,” in other words, as a result of the physiological differences [25, p. 12]. This narrative was built over centuries by the own science and fueled by media, even in the face of subsequent scientific evidences that do not support it (for instance, [27]). In addition, a number of empirical studies have demonstrated that men and women are not quite so opposites and that there exist more similarities than discrepancies, and that when they exist “are usually small and based in the group medium behavior” [25, p. 16]. However, this is not a thematic free of controversy, considering that are, also, various the studies that still focus differences between man and women (for instance, [28]).

The first aim of stereotypes “is that of simplify and organize a complex social environment, becoming it less ambiguous. But they also interest to justify team discrimination and originate biases” [25, p. 13]. In the case of gender stereotypes, once they convey beliefs of superiority and male dominance (and in the reverse of the medal, of female inferiority and submission), these can originate preconceptions related to womenwomen, and so, to discrimination acts that look to harm and impair women exclusively because they belong to the “female group” [25]. These acts can assume a way, more or less explicit, more or less subtle [26]. At the professional world they have been, over time, strongly hard to women [24], as we will have the opportunity to explore in the following pages.

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Expatriation and Gender: “Who Should We Choose?” and “Who Is Really Chosen?”

In a context with a strong tendency in the expatriation increase (as showed above), of course that one of the first questions that researchers and human resource managers immediately face is “*Who should we choose?*”. The answer to this issue is not, far from, linear. However, studies have demonstrated that this choice should attend not only to the hard skills (namely, technical professional competences), but also to the soft skills (namely, personal competences such as the adaptation to new cultures/realities, the ability to new challenges/flexibility/ability to adapt to the change) (e.g., [5, 13, 31]). Moreover, literature has pointed out to the need to not neglect some contextual variables (namely, *The candidate profile matches the host country and the specific business sector characteristics?*) (e.g., [32]), as well as familiar issues (*What is the family situation?, Are there family difficulties not possible to be managed by the organization?*) (e.g., [13]).

Related to this last issue, but not less important than this one, researchers have, also, looked to answer to the inevitable issue: “*Who is really chosen?*”. If we take into account the set of selection factors previously announced, the answer will be variable, although it becomes important to refer that scientific research has pointed out to a generalized tendency under which organizations select their collaborators based in the experience and the previous performance of the organization [31, 33]. However, when we consider only gender variable, this is frighteningly uniform. Indeed, in what concerns gender, literature points out, in unison, to the answer “Men” [24, 34–37]. While it is true that the growing women participation in the workforce has been one of the most striking features of the global labor market since the latter half of the twentieth century [38], it is no less true that it has been lacking a women full inclusion and that their participation has been limited.

Nancy Adler, one of the main researchers that has dedicated her studies to the understanding of the gender inequalities in the international management area, wrote in 1984 [39] a pioneer article entitled “*Women in international management: Where are they?*”. That time, this author studies pointed to the existence of only 3% of expatriate women. *More than 30 years after what have changed in expatriates selection?* The most recent research has revealed that too little. We verify, from a

consistent way, the persistence of a women subrepresentation in these international assignments. Indeed, and according the literature review developed by Altman and Shortland [40], although it appears some changes, women representation in expatriate processes is still very low. Reviewed studies identify variable percentages; however, never exceeding 15%.

The own language used in the literature about international management reinforce this disparity. Indeed, in the scientific context it is deeply used the concept of “expatriate,” except when exists a clear intention in making reference to women in this situation. In this case, the “expatriate” concept is replaced by the “expatriate woman” concept, highlighting her status of outsider, as in the case of, for instance, “firefighter woman” and “police woman” [41]. This inequality is such relevant that has deserved the edition of specialized journals in gender studies in organizations, such as, “*Women in Management Review*” and “*Gender, Work and Organization*.”

In addition, it is important to highlight, henceforth, that gender inequality observed in the expatriate process is not an isolated reality. Indeed, inequality between men and women is felt in a transversal way in different areas, not only in profession, but also in health, education, politic, among others [25]. At the professional level, disparities go well beyond expatriation. We highlight, among others, women difficulties in having access to management jobs, specially, leadership positions, where we observe a male predominance [42], as well the gap in compensation received by men and women, significantly lowest in the second group [43, 44].

Expatriation and Gender: “*Chose We Well?*”

Although expatriation contains within itself a success potential, not always international assignments follow the ideal course (e.g., [45, 46]). Expatriation process failure might result not only in the premature return, as well as, and according to some authors view, in less tangible ways, namely at the attitudinal and behavioral level [47–49] behavioral level. Some research [48, 49] have been highlighting to the fact according to what failure could not be so high as initially considered (some studies pointed out to early return rates around 40%). Notwithstanding, although numbers cannot be as distressing, they must be valued; specially if we consider that an unsuccessful expatriation process implies high costs (and not only economic) to the organization and the expatriate [5].

Of course that, looking to the high costs of an unsuccessful expatriation process, we immediately face the following question: ***But, what has caused this failure in the expatriation process?*** The answer seems to lie particularly, in the expatriate and/or his family intercultural adaption difficulties (when a join displacement happens), but also in family problems that appear when the family is separated (when the family does not go to the another country jointly with the expatriate) (e.g., [50–52]). According to Harris [36, p. 181]. “The most significant feature of

the research into expatriate failure rates is that it is based on a male population. This research contains actual evidence of male expatriates facing cross-cultural adjustment problems and family problems. In contrast, research conducted on the outcome of women's global assignments indicates that female expatriates are successful in their assignments." ***What kind of evidence supports this statement? Are women effectively more qualified to this kind of assignments?***

Answer to these questions is not consensual being shrouded in discussion. The idea of "female capacities" to missions have received, simultaneously, an intense support and opposition, as further we can observe in regard to the general belief that women and men are completely different, as we have focused earlier.

The concept of "female capacities" have been supported in a considerable number of studies that, on the one hand, have shown the personality characteristics relevance to the expatriation success and, on the other hand, have revealed gender differences in these characteristics. In 2000 [53] Caligiuri, in her literature review, had found effectively strong support arguments to the personality role in the expatriate adaptation and success. However, she had also verified the inexistence of validation studies that support these arguments. So, the author had decided to develop a validation study in which had collected data related to the well known personality traits "Big Five" (also known as McCrae and Costa 5 factor model) and to the performance of 143 expatriates in mission in 25 different countries. According to her results, expatriates that had a highest rank in extroversion and kindness factors showed a less desire in finish their mission early; in addition, the performance of those that showed higher conscientiousness, was assessed more favorably by their supervisors. Based in this knowledge, as well as in studies that support personality differences between men and women, it started to emerge, which Altman and Shortland [40] in their literature review call of, "challenging speech," with many voices advocating the possibility according to which women are more appropriate to international assignments and others strongly claiming it (e.g., [24, 28, 36, 38, 54, 55]). On the whole, these studies have revealed that women show best interpersonal competences than men, namely in what concerns sensitivity, flexibility, empathy, and sociability. Guthrie et al. [28] begin their article with the title "*Are women 'better' than men?*" and conclude that women have personality traits (extroversion, conscientiousness, and kindness) that make them naturally better candidates. These "female characteristics" seem to be associated to a greater ability for women to interact and establish alliances with other expatriates and the local community, favoring this way their adaptation and the assignment success [38, 53].

Altman and Shortland [54] compare women in international assignments to "aliens" that became masters in the art of survival in a foreign environment strongly dominated by men. The "alien" concept runs from a resilience capability of these women who manage to be successful as well, in more adverse conditions than men. Indeed, studies have showed that, even in the most hostile environments, expatriate women are so successful than men (e.g., [38, 56, 57]). In their literature review, Altman and Shortland [40, p. 210] pointed out that "Mounting recent evidence confirms that women adapt better than men in cross-cultural business situations."

But, why are women subject to more adverse conditions than men? It has been observed that expatriate women are effectively exposed to more challenges than men, both at professional and personal level [58]. According to many studies, women not only are strongly subject to discrimination from their expatriate colleagues [26, 59], but they also have to deal with more family conflicts, have yet the primary responsibility to take care of the child in an atypical and challenging situation [60]. All this is exacerbated by the fact that these women can feel that they are receiving less organizational support than their male colleagues [61, 62], at the same time that they have the “need” to be extraordinary competent in order to reach the recognition of their work [56, 63]. Indeed, it has been verified that, since women belong to a minority on the expatriates whole (phenomenon described by Kanter, in 1977, that has designated it by *tokenism*), they must be exceptionally competent to obtain the majority acceptance [24].

Therefore, since they were better prepared to deal with adversity, and that their presence in international assignments origins a great positive impact in local relationships, it has been defend that women are the *ideal* candidates to international assignments [54].

Not all authors agree, however, with this type of position. To the authors that have criticized this perspective, these studies are feeding a superior concept, concept against which these same authors have protested in relation to men and that now defend in what concerns women. Hofbauer and Fischlmayr [64] are two of the authors that present a strong confrontation to the “female abilities” concept, arguing that this concept suggests these abilities universality and does not have in attention social diversity, both female and male. These authors do not call into question the great emphasis of women relational abilities identified in the study; what they inquire is that “Given the evidence about women showing high amounts of those skills, we still ask whether it makes sense to characterize them as ‘female,’ that is, to assign a set of skills to the entire group of women and thereby suggest that other types of skills characterize men only” [64, p. 49]. The authors challenge this universalistic and essentialist concept of gender characteristics, supported in Kanter research, particularly when they highlight that “To put it in more general terms, Kanter holds that features that we address as gender specific do, in fact, arise from certain patterns of conduct that emerge under certain situational circumstances” (Kanter 1977, referred by [64, p. 51]). For instance, power conditions held by a person can promote or hinder certain attitudes or behaviors. Thus, it is no logic, to these authors, and in line with that showed by others regarding to other areas of strong debate about gender, such as leadership (e.g., [65]), to consider women more or less appropriate to international assignments. An individual characteristics and capabilities presumption cannot, in the light of this perspective, be based only in its gender. It must also consider their life and work experiences, their professional position and their training. Moreover, Wajcman [65] and Hofbauer and Fischlmayr [64] consider that the focus in “individual female characteristics” draw attention away from structural barriers that they face. Recognize the value of “female qualities” in management and in international assignments is important but not necessarily sufficient so that asymmetries can be correct and that more women can

be included in these positions. On the other hand, these authors consider that it is possible that, while a still dominant force, men can hold this “female” rediscovery and include it in the traditional “male repertory”. Thereby, adding new qualities to those that, allegedly, they already possess, men will be in advantage and women will continue to be seen as endowed only with the traditional “female characteristics”. This focus in the differences could, this way, contribute to an organizations’ reinforcement in traditional gender stereotypes. Authors advocate, alternatively, the need to a focus in any stereotype challenge, positive or negative, relative to women, or men.

In her article “*Global managers: no longer men alone*” [66], Adler directs the debate about differences between men and women to the idea of diversity and complementarity between both. Although focused in differences in management skills between men and women, the general idea of this perspective add value to the discussion and could eventually, be applied to expatriation (we cannot forget that many expatriates held management positions). The author defends differences between men and women; however, considers it imperative that they cannot be understood in the light of any value judgement. In other words, both men and women have strengths (as well as weaknesses), either innate or socially constrained. However, these differences must be view complementary, i.e., as contributing synergistically to the all, without a superiority or inferiority character being assigned to them. In a word characterized by a strong globalization and competitiveness, and according Adler vision, other authors have pointed out to the strong contribution that women can offer to organizations [67, 68], not because they are, in any way, “superiors,” but because they add greater diversity, diversity this that has been pointed has a source of innovation and competitive advantage [24, 34].

Although the different perspectives addressed have a different focus, they have in common the recognition of the need of women be considered by organizations at the moment when they decide to recruit collaborators to the expatriation process. Alluding, thus, to the issues that has served as theme to Harris article [36, p. 175, 177]: “Why are women not selected for international management assignments? Why, therefore, do organizations continue to under-use such a valuable source of diversity and a potentially powerful aid towards developing a truly global mind-set?” Next chapter looks to help to clarify these questions.

Expatriation and Gender: *Why Are Women Less Chosen Than Men?*

In recent years research has been addressing in an extensive way on the reasons to women be consistently underrepresented in the expatriation processes.

Regardless the different explanatory factors that have been presented, it is crucial contextualize, since now, these gender inequalities in our History. Indeed, we must be keep in mind that these inequalities are deeply rooted in the men and women

historical journey, and in the different roles traditionally given to them, as focused earlier in relation to the concept of gender. In this context, it has been consistently verified the existence of a number of barriers (discriminative) which limit women progression and access to leadership positions and international experiences (and, particularly, to the participation in expatriation processes). These barriers power is such that, metaphorically, to report to the same, authors often use concepts like *glass ceiling* (Hymowitz and Schellhardt 1986, referred by [69]), *glass border* (Mandelker's 1994, referred by [70]), and *expatriate glass ceiling* [71].

Understanding these differences roots on the choice of men and women to expatriation, we must now list and analyze some of the specific motives that have been present in the literature.

Result of an extensive body of work, Adler had identified three factors that help understanding the female shortage in international assignments and that the author denominate as "myths" [34, 56, 72]: (1) "Women do not want to be international managers," (2) "Companies refuse to send women overseas," (3) "Foreigner's prejudice against women renders them ineffective, even when interested and sent" [56, p. 176]. These myths were test by a wide research body in order to check their correspondence with reality.

In what concerns the first myth, some data pointed out that women interest is at the same level of that of their male colleagues (e.g., [36, 72, 73]). However, there are some contradictory results that suggest gender differences in expatriation interest. According to Lowe [74] cultural distance and the host country development will be at the origin of a less female interest in some reference countries.

With regard to the second myth, there are strong arguments that lead us to presume that it has correspondence with reality [57, 73, 75–78]. It seems to be a persistent bias in women selection process based in gender stereotypes, assuming, for instance, that they are less available due to family reasons, they do not have the necessary skills suitable with the expatriate profile, at the same time that potential risks as well as the prejudice against women in host countries is also mentioned [36, 72, 73, 75].

Finally, relative to the third myth, in 1987 Adler [56] verified that there is no base to the women fear of discrimination in host countries. The author verified that these countries nationals' attitudes to these foreign women are different from their attitudes regarding to local women. What happens is that the condition of foreign prevails subject to the condition of woman, so that in this case women are judge by different standards from those of local women. Thus, it is not expected from foreign women the same behavior of local women. This phenomenon was designate by *Gaijin* syndrome (Japanese word that means "foreign"). Foreign woman is, this way, first seen as foreign, not as woman. These results were replicate in many research papers (e.g., [36, 77, 79, 80]). There is thus a great support to the idea that being woman is not necessarily a problem in host countries. There are also evidences that not only this is not a problem, as can represent an advantage, namely by the supposed easiness of woman in establish more positive relationships [53, 80].

In an alternative explanation, some authors have also considered these women influence to their scarcity in the international management. Inadvertently, they can

self-induce barriers that can difficult their access to international experiences [61, 71, 81]. At this point, literature highlights to the fact of woman behave herself according to gender stereotyped expectative, assuming a passive role, revealing low self-confidence, relegating to a second level their career perspectives rather than their husbands/partners. These barriers are, according to Altman and Shortland [40] reinforced, among others, by an absence of social and organizational support and a weak organizational networking.

Expatriation and Gender: *What Changes?*

Over time, different authors have done their forecasts relative to the evolution of the women presence and role in the expatriation processes. Some of them with optimistic perspectives about the women future in these international assignments, believing in the barriers overcoming (e.g., [36, 54, 66, 82]), others with more doubts and a greater criticism (e.g., [61, 64]). Whereas it is undeniable that women sub representation remains the same, this is also undeniable the increase (even when reduced) that had occurred since Adler [39] research about 30 years ago. ***What has caused this change? Will we be moving to a gradual but effective and deep change? Will we be assisting to a barriers' removal that have blocked the women international presence?***

Has we had the opportunity to exploit previously, according to some studies, women present in a greater degree interpersonal and intercultural competences indispensable to a well-succeed international assignment [28, 40]. For this reason, Adler [34, 66] defend that, in order to remain competitive, organizations are forced to overcome gender stereotypes and to recruit according rational criteria, such as qualifications and competences. Only in that way will be possible to achieve diversity that will guarantee the necessary innovation and distinctiveness. In the same line of thought, Altman and Shortland [40] consider that this increase may be due to the claimed ability that women present to deal with adversity, and therefore become better candidates to this kind of assignments. Thus, and according to this position, through a greater awareness of the women role in international markets, organizations have provided the required lever to change.

Other authors (e.g., [61, 71, 75, 76]) have placed the main emphasis, not in the organizational thinking change, but in the individual thinking and behavior change. Fischlmayr [61] notes, in her study, the relevance of women to assume a proactive attitude in their own international mobility. While the majority of expatriate men of her study were approach by the organization in order to engage in these assignments, the majority of women needed to apply their transfer. However, the author also shows that these women are an exception to the rule, claiming that the majority continue to take on a passive role. ***It will not, however, reasonable, to assume that we will assist increasingly to a change in women relation with work?*** Altman and Shortland [40] answer in the affirmative to this question. In their literature review, the authors draw the attention to the further women guidance to career. Indeed,

there are strong evidences that new generations have more ambitious women, with professional ambitions similar to men, willing to give up their family and personal life to the detriment of their career shaping and that are opposed actively to the discriminatory barriers that are put upon them. It is possible, thus, that if this trend continues (which has been consistently consolidated over time), women are the key players of their own growth in the international paths.

Hofbauer and Fischlmayr [64] present a different reinterpretation of this tendency. In their critical analysis study, the authors conclude that: “Thus women entering the domain of international management may turn out to be the conquerors of ‘empty castles,’ as men actually deserted the terrain and moved on to more prestigious positions in international organizations” [64, p. 48]. Effectively, an extensive range of empirical studies (e.g., [48, 57, 63, 70, 76, 83]) have revealed that it is common women occupy lower hierarchical positions compared to those of men.

Moreover, it has been argued that international assignments are becoming less attractive to men who are, thus, less available to accept them, “forcing” organizations to extend ever wider its access to women [40, 64]. Traditionally, the collaborators participation in international assignments has been see as a lever to the career development and the access to leadership positions [5, 84]. ***What discourage, therefore, collaborators to join to the expatriation processes?*** The answer to this question lies in the potential adverse effects of expatriation, which have become increasingly emphasize, raising a cloud over the “glamour” formerly associated with this type of experiences.

First of all, although some contradictory results exist (e.g., [85]) on the whole it has been verified that participation in expatriation processes does not imply necessarily changes in professional development, at least not in the short term [54, 86–90]. Indeed, it has been consistently verified that skills developed by expatriates during assignments are underutilized by organizations when they come home; collaborators are not integrated in new positions suited to the new skills; and they do not receive compensation superior to those received by their no’ expatriate colleagues. Hofbauer and Fischlmayr [64] claim, therefore, that given the less connection of international assignments to career progression, men opt to stay at the parent company, believing that “near the sight, near the heart,” they will have more hypothesis in developing their career [64].

As Benson and Pattie [86] emphasize, however, research about these experiences long-term impact have shown that individuals with significant international careers occupy positions hierarchically superiors; are more frequently promoted; and have higher compensation. Notwithstanding, it is possible that nowadays, in a context of crisis, this is not so true and that, anyway, short-term effect become the most visible to the no’ expatriate colleagues, acting as a deterrent of their interest in these processes. ***However, and as Hofbauer and Fischlmayr [64] also questioned, would not it be reasonable to assume that if this question is present to men, will not it be even more to women?*** Effectively it seems to be. Selmer and Leung [63] verified in their study that, even having equal position and previous experience in expatriation processes, women tend to be reintegrate in lower hierarchical positions.

Thus, should not be women feel even less enticed to participate in this kind of international assignment than men? Not necessary. According to the literature review developed by Altman and Shortland [40] expatriation becomes less interesting to men but not to women who sustain their interest.

Can we assume that short-term results at the expatriates' career level are sufficient to discourage male collaborators (once interested) to search these experiences but not women? Will be women particularly focused in long-term effects? Several studies (e.g., [85, 86, 90]) have been demonstrate that collaborators that accept to participate in expatriation processes develop positive expectations about the experience impact. Even when they return home, and facing an inadequate integration of their organization, some studies have verified that these collaborators still maintain optimistic relatively to the experience results, although in the long term and in a different organization [86, 90]. ***Will have women a great desire in access to these international experiences? Will be women making use of this gap that was open to them to claim their role in the organizations and assume more prestigious positions (even though they may not be so much than formerly and that the impact is less than the obtained by men and not immediate)?***

Furthermore, we must bear in mind that the collaborators that accept the expatriation process are not only tempted by the leverage that the professional experience can give to their career (e.g., [91, 92]). Personal challenge and learning opportunities also appear to be key factors [90]. ***Will be women more motivated for reasons other than directly associated to the career development?***

Lesser attractiveness of international experiences has also been associated to major collaborator concerns with safety issues (since the September 11 attacks) and with the stress associated to the repatriation in their family and, in particularly, with their children educational and social development [93]. ***Once again, these concerns will not arise also to women?*** Some studies have verified that expatriate women still correspond to a very selective and restrictive group of women that are not married [48, 57] and are, usually, young (under 35 years of age) [48], responding to that that we have verified concerning women that assume management positions [40, 76], and contrasting with the verified concerning men. It is possible that this kind of questions do not arise in the same way to these youngest and single women.

Finally, the importance depreciation given to the expatriation processes has been associated to the change trend of their term structure. Shorter assignments have become increasingly frequent [94, 95], which, while on the one hand, represent an advantage to the organization (essentially because allow them a cost reduction) [96], on the other hand can represent a disadvantage to the collaborators as they decrease their impact in the professional development [97]. Indeed, as they are shorter, there are a decrease of the depth of the cultural exhibition in these assignments and, therefore, a much more limited competence development [97]. These assignments can, therefore, lost its relevance at the men eyes. ***At the same time that they are depreciated by men, will not it be possible that this kind of assignments become more attractive to women who will be able, therefore, to manage more easier their family life?*** This is one more issue that needs to be explored.

Some Final Remarks

Inequality between men and women is a presence so significant in our society that has justified the establishment, at the national and international level, of innumerable legal diplomas, Ministers and Commissions that seek to alleviate the differences between these two groups. Despite all the efforts, the dream of equality in the different spheres of the women life remains to be done. It is a “phenomenon” in such a way rooted, that has persisted over time, crossing generations, resisting to the diverse social efforts and circumventing legal obligations. Following the analysis conducted over the course of 9 years in 142 countries, and based in the found course, the World Economic Forum [44] conclude that *maybe* we can reach gender equality at work in 2095. At best, they will therefore occur 79 years until the dream can be achieve. Researchers and human resource managers have a critical role in this process of change, and cannot ignore their role. In what concerns research, it is necessary, however, that this start moving its attention from women that are missing in the expatriation process, to those that are in these processes as well as in other international assignments. It is necessary to deeply understand how human resource managers and the own women can contribute to an adequate management of the expatriation process.

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