CHAPTER 1

Introducing and Contextualising Feminised Migration

Fethi Mansouri and David Tittensor

Discussions on gender and migration are both important and timely within the current global policy agenda, as we are currently witnessing at once an upsurge in human mobility in general and a diversification of female mobil-ity, both at the levels of regional concentration and sector specialisation. The increased prominence of female migration, along with a much wider array of push and pull factors, has often led scholars to focus on isolated issues as they pertain to women and migration, such as human trafficking, sex exploitation or remittances (see Kempadoo, Sanghera, & Pattanaik, 2012; van Naerssen, Smith, David, & Marchand, 2015). Indeed, as Piper (2008) notes, it is a rare thing for an edited collection to focus on more than one particular aspect of the migratory experience, with much of the literature focusing on the plight of domestic workers (see for example Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2003; Huang, Yeoh, & Noor Abdul, 2005; Kontos & Bonifacio, 2015).

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Notable exceptions to these trends are recent collections on family migration (Kraler, Kofman, Kohli, & Schmoll, 2011), refugees and immigration policy (Schrover & Moloney, 2013) and skilled migration (Triandafyllidou & Isaakyan, 2016). Though, these nevertheless still focus on just one aspect of what is a vast and diverse field of enquiry. Thus, the aim of this volume—whilst making no claim to be exhaustive—has been to provide a wider analysis that captures a variety of migration drivers and resultant policy formations across a range of regions. As many chapters in this volume show, a number of important changes have affected the global community, with significant implications for manifestations of human mobility, particularly across the Middle East and Asia, where much of what will be referred to hereafter as 'feminised migration' is currently taking place. Two key manifestations of feminised migration that have had significant implications for relevant policies and research agendas and merit reflection here, are the regional specificities and theoretical challenges female migration tends to engender.

In terms of regional manifestations of female migration, an important shift can be detected whereby the old Global North-Global South[1] paradigm no longer holds as the ultimate paradigm accounting for (female) human mobility. As of 2013, South-South migration just surpassed South-North migration, with 36 percent and 35 percent respectively (United Nations [UN], 2014). Much of the recent growth in female migration flows has taken place within a strictly South-South framework, with sending countries concentrated in the subcontinent and South East Asia, while the majority of migration flows tend to be in the direction of West Asian (Arab) countries (see Fig. 1.1) and more recently affluent East and North Asian societies, in particular Korea, Hong Kong and Japan (Chanda, 2012). For example, between 2005 and 2010, Southeast Asia and West Asia saw an increase of 3.8 and 3.3 percent in female migrant stock, compared to 2 percent for Asia overall. Further, out of the 27.35 million female migrants in Asia at that time, West Asia accounted for 11.32 million (41 percent) (Thimothy & Sasikumar, 2012).

The challenge here is that receiving countries with no well-established traditions in receiving permanent migrants, and in some cases with questionable track records in terms of human rights agendas (as is the case with many Arab Gulf states), are unlikely to offer the most caring and supportive environments for female workers perceived to be the most vulnerable, as they seek to support their own families back home. Indeed, as of 2016, the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families established in

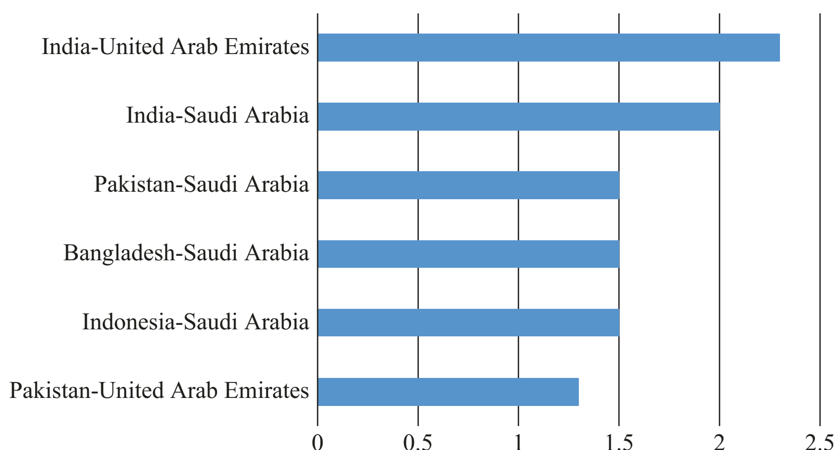

Fig. 1.1 Select key South-South migration corridors 2013 (millions) (*Source*: World Bank, 2016)

1990, has only 49 ratifications and 17 signatories. Presently, a further 132 countries have taken no action (Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 2016). The Domestic Workers Convention recently established in 2011 also fared poorly, with only 23 ratifications to date (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2016). Therefore, and in terms of the spatial and geographic distributions of these flows, the new South-South flows tend to carry within them more ethical and policy challenges than more traditional migration routes have exhibited in the past.

Related to these difficulties are some theoretical considerations for those wishing to examine, account for and understand the nature of the feminisation of migration. Here the challenge pertains to ethical as well as conceptual challenges. From an ethical standpoint, and given the state of vulnerability and control that most female migrants are subjected to, it is often a difficult task to obtain the required access and for them to find the courage and freedom to speak out in order to conduct meaningful in-depth exploratory research into the associated problems.

But perhaps one of the key dilemmas facing researchers in this area is the extent to which certain assumptions of vulnerability and agency can be made a priori without adequate testing within empirical settings. It is acknowledged that in the field of migration there has been less-than-adequate theorising (see Castles & Miller, 1998; Meilaender, 2001;

Vargas-Silva, 2012), particularly around the issues of structure and agency, which has developed into an impasse between the macro and micro levels of analysis. Namely, there is the view that those that are governed by the macro (i.e. global forces or structures) are aware of this and reflect on it, but have relatively little room to manoeuvre (Bakewell, 2010). A good example of this is Sassen's (2000) analysis of the forces behind what she calls 'feminised circuits of survival'. These circuits have been brought about by the globalised economy, which through Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), have undermined key sectors of the economies (i.e. health, education) of developing countries and not reduced debt, leaving those from the lower classes, particularly women on account of increased male unemployment, little option but to engage in the 'shadow economy'. This parallel global market, often aided by governments, is characterised by illegal border crossings and human trafficking, where individuals are underpaid and abused. In other words, for Sassen, many female migrants appear to simply be victims of circumstances largely beyond their control.[2]

Conversely, there is the atomistic view that people are individual, autonomous agents that simply have the capacity to choose, even under the most extreme forms of coercion (Bakewell, 2010). This position is exemplified by the neo-classical school in migration theory that saw migrants as individuals simply governed by expected earnings and did not regard other motivations or the fact that migrants belong to various social groups, namely households, families and communities (see De Haas, 2010; Wright, 1995). Neither of these totalising views are sufficient as they either signifi-cantly deny migrants any agency or grant them too much. Rather, what is required is a bridging of the two that takes into account the structural drivers behind migration and the considered thinking that takes place as individuals within their immediate social networks thoughtfully negotiate these forces to provide more balanced accounts of the migration experi-ence. Thus, an attendant aim of the chapters in this volume has been to provide balance between the exploration of the structural factors at the global and sub-regional levels, without losing sight of the individual.

In doing so, several contributions raise the question of whether research conducted predominantly by scholars residing in the Global North can and should make assumptions about notions of victimhood, vulnerability and (lack of) agency in a context where a lack of appreciation of the specific local, social and cultural conditions might prevail. In other words, what might be understood within feminist approaches for example, as being a manifestation of exploitation can sometimes be explained by those affected as being an agentive, deliberative choice undertaken to create economic opportunities

for self and family in a situation where such opportunities are lacking in the local community (see for example Tuider, 2015). Nevertheless, such expla-nations as exemplified by Tittensor and Mansouri, and Fanany and Fanany in Chapters 2 and 4 respectively, should not conceal the extent to which blatant human rights violations are taking place in the absence of adequate transna-tional regulation and local protections.

Book Structure

The book includes seven inter-related chapters that highlight both the breadth and depth of research into this complex phenomenon. Indeed, the book ranges across marriage migration, domestic work, forced migration, policy, transnational caregiving, remittances and the questions of agency and victimisation. Most importantly, the chapters collectively offer an important lens to some regional case studies, as they highlight the intersections between the different streams of inquiry and the challenges facing female migrants at the level of local stigmatisation in the countries of origin, and basic rights and work conditions in the host societies.

The two opening chapters by Tittensor and Mansouri discuss the phenomenon of feminised migration from a number of inter-linked per-spectives. Chapter 1, with the aforementioned discussion, has sought to provide an introduction to the nature of the literature on female migra-tion, the aims of the volume and give a brief account of the relevant theory before introducing the structure of the book. Chapter 2 explores the key historical drivers of female migration from both within sending nations and receiving societies. In doing so, it highlights that the key to understanding the increased prominence of female migration is the evolving nature of gender relations across the spectrum, as well as the critical role played by local, national, regional and transnational socio-economic factors in creat-ing the need for a women-centric form of human mobility. Alongside this, the chapter explores the issue of agency in relation to female migrants in the Indonesian and Mexican contexts, and how this is often overshadowed by discourses of exploitation and victimisation.

Chapter 3 by Oishi discusses shifting trends in feminised migration within Asia, highlighting emigration policies as among the critical factors for shaping the volume and direction of women migration flows. The key argument here relates to welfare states becoming weakened while popula-tions in many developed and wealthy societies are aging quickly, hence creating what has become known as the ‘care gap’, which is expected to continue to widen worldwide.

Fanany and Fanany in Chapter 4 examine the experiences of Indonesian female workers in the Arab Gulf region. They focus on the exploitation and abuse suffered by Indonesian female workers, which manifested in under-pay, work conditions, violence and sexual abuse. But Fanany and Fanany caution against a dominant Western narrative dressed in femi-nist, human rights language that fails to recognise the agentive aspects of Indonesian women working in the Middle East. This relates in par-ticular to economic empowerment that affects not only the individuals concerned but more importantly their immediate families and communi-ties. Therefore, the depiction of these women as naïve victims does indeed belie their individual awareness of the social context of the employment they are seeking and entering into willingly.

The following chapter by Hyndman-Rizk explores Lebanese female migration to Australia, specifically through arranged cousin marriages, which increasingly accounts for a large proportion of female brides coming to Australia from Lebanon. Hyndman-Rizk questions the impact of female migration from Lebanon to Australia on family dynamics, and whether this feminisation of migration generally is a progressive or regressive form of mobility. She shows that Lebanon's complex migration history, together with the increasingly restrictive immigration policies pursued globally, including in Australia, has resulted in both the feminisation of the homeland emigration flows on one hand and the masculinisation of immigration sites among the diaspora on the other. Further, it is illus-trated that the mobility of women as brides between the homeland and diaspora therefore reflects complex national, regional and global processes of earlier migration waves that all combine to produce what on the surface appears to be a neo-feminised flow between particular sites in Lebanon and migration-receiving nations, such as Australia. Though Hyndman-Rizk ultimately finds that, while this form of female mobility balances the skewed population profiles between the homeland and the diaspora, it remains more of a regressive form of female mobility in terms of empow-erment and agency.

Chapter 6 by Davies focuses on women (and children) who attempt to cross borders through dangerous journeys in search of asylum and examines the reasons behind such perilous feminised flows that place women and their children at risk. Davies then explores the conditions for women who have been unable to flee from the camps where they remain, focus-ing specifically on the cases of Myanmar and Syria. She outlines the vul-nerable conditions that women asylum seekers find themselves in and

argues strongly that the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine needs to be applied in the case of the Australian government's approach to displaced women and their children in crisis zones, most notably Syria and Myanmar. In doing so, Davies reminds us that the three key conditions, or pillars, for R2P are already met in these situations. Namely, the state responsibility towards its own population, the international community responsibility to assist, and the international community's responsibility to act in response to the failure of the state to protect its own, as is the case with the current situation in Syria for example. Finally, she argues that Australia needs to broaden its commitment to human rights protection to include vulnerable women in conflict zones where the risk of violence, exploitation and discrimination is likely to be even greater.

Lastly, Baldassar in Chapter 7 examines the notion of care and caregiving as key drivers of human mobility in general. The chapter argues that within a care-driven human mobility, women have been the major actors involved, hence the emergence of dramatic feminisation of migration which includes domestic workers, middling migrants and flying-grandmothers phenomenon. She contends that a focus on the portability of care offers a fresh perspective on the more prominent political, economic and legal migration agendas, extending current understanding of migrant trans-local manifestations of agency and vulnerability both within the countries of origin (through remittances as a form of socio-economic care) as well as being the essence of the migratory journey (care provision to receiving societies).

Concluding Remarks

As discussed earlier, the aim of this volume has been to break with the tendency to focus on a specific aspect of feminised migration and provide a much needed, more comprehensive survey of the multiplicity of push and pull factors that drive women to emigrate. Thus, the chapters cover a wide array of issues that range across forced migration and the issue of refugee rights, the plight of domestic workers in the Gulf countries, marriage migration from Lebanon, the 'care gap' in Asia, and the portability of care more broadly as it relates to public policy. Whilst seemingly eclectic, these contributions, when read as a collective, provide a more holistic

account of feminised migration by showing the intersections between the global, sub-regional and local factors at play. Though more than this, many of the contributions, through their focus on the structural factors and the capacity of the individuals to make informed decisions about the need to migrate for work or well-being—decisions that often involve risk-benefit analysis—highlight the need for scholars to not overplay one factor at the expense of others. Rather, it shows that migration studies needs to find a middle ground that accounts for globalisation and its impacts, but avoids the often resultant determinism, thereby allowing for the complex interplay between the global and local that manifests in a multitude of different ways through both geography and culture. That said, it is not the intention of this volume to solve this long-standing conundrum but to humbly contribute to the discussion and hopefully move it forward.

Notes

1. The Global North and Global South do not refer to the northern and southern hemispheres. Rather, they are abstract concepts that delineate between countries that are wealthy and poor. For example, the Global South is seen as a less politically charged and hierarchical replacement for ‘Third World’ and ‘Developing World’ (Hollington, Tappe, Salverda, & Schwarz, 2015). Illustrative of this is the fact that Australia, although located in the southern hemisphere, is regarded as a developed country. According to the United Nations, the Global North comprises just 43 countries, leaving the rest to make up the Global South, constituted largely of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean (United Nations, 2016).
2. Indeed, a failure to explore the issue of agency is a major critique of Sassen’s work. For a detailed account of this, see Robinson (2009).

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