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GEOGRAPHIES OF GENDERED MIGRATION
Place as difference and connection
Eleonore Kofman and Parvati Raghuram

Introduction
In the past two decades, there has been a resurgence of interest in migration and its gendered nature as the population on the move has grown. In this chapter, we will explore the reasons for its importance, the key achievements of existing research and some future directions. Towards this end, we explore how one key geographical concept, place, is deployed in two ways: as a marker of difference; and through theorizations that connect places in different ways. In doing so, it highlights how geographies of gendered migration bring place into play in various ways.

The chapter begins with an empirical outline of gendered migration processes, including some of the key stocks and flows in contemporary migration at a time when the numbers, theorizations and research questions that female migration\(^1\) poses are receiving increasing attention. The subsequent section identifies selected significant concerns that have shaped theoretical discussions of gendered migration and draws out how place has been viewed in these debates. The chapter ends by summarizing a research agenda for geographies of migration that encompasses both missing geographies and incomplete theorizations.

Geographies of gendered migration
In 2015 there were 244 million international migrants, 3.3 per cent of the world’s population. Much of this migration was from middle-income towards high-income countries. The largest senders at that time were India (15.6 million), Mexico (12.3 million), Russia (10.6 million), China (9.5 million) and Bangladesh (7.2 million), while the largest country of immigration was the US. The other important destination countries were Germany (12.0 million), Russia (11.6 million), Saudi Arabia (10.2 million) and the UK (8.5 million) (International Organisation for Migration [IOM] 2017). Intra-regional migration also accounts for significant proportions of migrant flows. Recent conflicts, especially in the Middle East, have led to a sharp increase in refugee stocks, which in 2017 were calculated at 22.1 million people globally (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR] 2017).
International migration is overshadowed by the much larger flows of internal migration, estimated at 763 million in 2013 (United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs [UNDESA] 2013). Data on internal migration are limited in both availability and accuracy, but in 2010 Chan (2013) estimated that there were 155 million such migrants in China alone. Moreover, the growth in urbanization globally has generally been driven by migration. Although internal migration, and especially internal displacement of people within a country due to conflict, is an important socio-economic issue, particularly in the Global South, public debates have centred on the problem of international migration. Tied in with nationalism and xenophobia, it has created political ripples in many countries. Given its importance and for reasons of brevity, we will view the question of migration through an international lens, incorporating internal migration only as it meshes with international migration.

Women are an important part of both international and internal migration. In many countries, women, because of marriage migration, are the primary movers. However, in measurements of internal and international boundary crossings (provinces or states) as well, women may move within the region or across neighbourhoods rather than over administrative boundaries. Internationally, approximately 48 per cent of migrants are women (United Nations [UN] 2015). In 2016, there were more female migrants than male in Europe and North America, in part because women migrants are the majority in family flows, which constitute the main form of permanent migration, while in Africa and Asia, particularly Western Asia, migrants were predominantly men due to their predominance in labour migration.

The differences between female and male migration patterns were first noted by Ravenstein (1885) but, at least in Europe, interest in the differences between the two was sparked particularly by concerns over labour migration in the 1970s (Morokvasic 1984). The political interest in migrant lives was underpinned by the possibility of gender equity that migration, particularly from Global South to North, seemed to promise. Europe was seen as modern and gender equitable, while sending regions were marked as traditional and patriarchal, so that migration allowed women to shake off traditional gender roles and enter modernity. Gender discrimination and inequalities and oppressive social norms are now increasingly acknowledged as reasons that lead to female international migration (Ferrant and Tuccio 2015). The right to move also remains important for women engaged in migration advocacy, as it is argued that women should be allowed to move from a less to a more gender-egalitarian society, escaping gender-based violence, for instance.

However, it is the growth of female labour migrants since the late 1990s, alongside the availability of gender disaggregated data on migration from the UN (Zlotnik 2003), that has catapulted the topic of gendered migration into academic and policy debates. The number of women crossing borders to work as domestic workers, carers, teachers and nurses in the female-dominated caring professions has increased. Men continued to migrate, working in sectors such as construction, seafaring and agricultural work. Through the 1990s and 2000s there was a sharp increase in highly skilled migration, especially in the male-dominated sectors such as information technology and finance. However, women play an important, albeit little acknowledged (Kofman 2000), part in these skilled flows, too, especially in welfare sectors such as medicine, nursing and teaching, where migration continues to be seen through the lens of brain drain (Raghuram 2009). Education enables women from poorer countries to migrate – 20 per cent of highly educated women from sub-Saharan African have emigrated, but only 0.4 per cent of the least educated have moved (Dumitru and Marfouk 2015, 40). Moreover, an increasingly important form of migration is international student mobility, which has gone up from 0.8 million in 1975 to 4.5 million in 2012 and is expected to rise to 8 million by 2025 (OECD 2014).
Women move not only to continue their reproductive roles in waged work but also within families, as family migration remains the largest source of permanent migration in OECD countries, ahead of labour and humanitarian migrations (OECD 2017). Around 38 per cent of all migrants entered through this route. The largest group is of spouses entering as marriage migrants, especially where family reunification is not permitted for the lesser skilled. This is followed by children and parents (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD] 2017). In Asia, such migration has increased (Chinsung, Keuntae and Piper 2016) in countries like South Korea, Japan and Taiwan, where it intertwines with labour flows from poorer to richer countries. Women marry men who have a weak position on the marriage market but are in a higher socio-economic location due to labour migration. Nicole Constable (2005) calls this ‘global hypergamy’. A location in the Global North or in richer countries makes men desirable partners.

Refugee flows and internal displacement also have increased with the proliferation of protracted conflicts and political instability in the Middle East and Africa (Hyndman and Giles 2017). Syria has become the largest refugee-producing country (4.2 million in mid-2015), with the largest numbers seeking safety in neighbouring countries such as Turkey (2.7 million in March 2016). Although women comprise the majority of the internally displaced, a much smaller percentage manage to cross international borders to seek asylum in the Global North, because moving a long distance requires considerable resources and frequently necessitates smugglers. Not all asylum seekers are escaping from generalized conflict but may be seeking to get away from gender-related forms of persecution, such as domestic violence, forced and early marriage and genital mutilation, as well as experiencing difficulties in openly expressing their sexual orientation and gender identity (Freedman 2017).

These patterns reflect changing migration regimes, economic conditions in the Global South and North and how they are intertwined through various forms of gendered mobility. Thus, the masculinized labour migration to the Global North, which, for instance, was required for post-war reconstruction in Europe and drew in people from the Global South (especially the ex-colonies), and the agricultural and construction sectors in countries like Canada and the US, are now accompanied by a feminized migration. However, elsewhere, as in the Gulf region, men still dominate labour migration. Families continue to shape migration through all kinds of householding strategies (Douglass 2012), generating diverse forms of transnational living. Regional migration has been enabled in some contexts by the opening up of free-movement areas, as in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries, the European Union (EU) and the 12 countries of South America that now form part of the Union of South American Nations (UNASUR). However, increasing nationalism accompanies this change, in some parts of the world, with fears over migration driving anti-immigration sentiments and regulations that seek to radically reduce the number of migrants. This has manifested itself in the UK’s decision to exit from the EU and in the criminalization of migration. These variegated gendered migration patterns have been analysed through new theorizations, as we will go on to see.

**Analysing gendered migration geographically**

Migration is deeply geographical (Raghuram 2013), as migrants are ultimately moving from place to place. Focusing on these flows from place to place and the connections that precede, enable and succeed these movements has been a central part of migration theorizations. However, the focus has largely remained on the flows or, when place is investigated, it is the empirical particulars of place and how this affects the theorizations that become the focus. This
section steps back from these details to see what analytical manoeuvres about place are used in such studies. This section uses place as difference and places as connected as two distinct tropes through which gendered migration has been analysed, albeit often in unacknowledged ways.

**Place as difference**

A dominant mode of understanding place is through specificity; what makes a place unique and what are the meanings imbued to place (Massey 1994). Place is particularly important in analysing migration, because the differences between places are, arguably, what drive migration. In this sub-section we explore various aspects of these differences: i) economic differences between places; ii) gendered variations in the ability to migrate; iii) dissimilarities in the performance of gender identities in each place; iv) the differences that migration can make to these performances; and v) how the meanings of place are themselves changed as migrants inhabit place.

Economic differences between places were central to early gendered interventions into an implicitly male-dominated analysis of labour migration. The causes for migration are captured in this analysis by the hyphen between receiving-sending countries or here-there. It was argued that there are not only differences between places but also a hierarchy of places, especially in labour market conditions that drive migration. This analysis continues to dominate narratives of female labour migration. Here, the target of feminist analysis is global inequalities and the ways in which gender is reinscribed into migrant working lives. However, gender itself continues unchanged in many of the theorizations of female migration. For instance, research has emphasized elements of femininity, such as a caring disposition, either in paid work or through the feminized and masculinized roles that women and men take up. Women may be employed as domestic workers and cleaners and sometimes in skilled work like teaching and nursing; and men find work as gardeners and odd-job men or in professions like information technology (Perrons et al. 2010; but see Raghuram 2008; and for a discussion of femininity and work see Kofman and Raghuram 2013). Similarly, research on sexuality and gendered migration has primarily emphasized sex work. Sexuality has also often been conflated with compulsion and, problematically, merged with trafficking. Sex work by choice and the ways in which sex work may be combined with heterosexual and homosexual relations have been much less considered (Walsh et al. 2008).

Second, the difference between places is not just in economic opportunities or in work but also in the diverse social contexts from which people migrate and how gender is performed differently in different places. These differences can influence who migrates, as well as what happens to them when they migrate. For instance, Bylander (2015) differentiates between the pressures that young Cambodian men feel to move in the context of a stagnant economy and the possibilities that are still open for women to stay put. Thus, mobility is inscribed with particular gender codes and what ageing and youth means can be variable and dependent not only on biology but also societal expectations and roles. Both the meaning of what constitutes being a woman or man and what it implies for mobility can vary.

Third, how women and men perform their gendered identities may also vary across place. Thus, Aija Lulle and Russell King (2016), in their study of older Latvian migrants, found that the ability to quadruple their pension by moving from Eastern to Western Europe was accompanied not only by better economic prospects but also by finding new sexual and emotional relationships, rewriting how they performed gender after migration. Similarly, younger migrants may move for a number of reasons – to take up new opportunities and for excitement. Here, too, gendered performances may be rewritten, as Sondhi and King (2017) describe in their study of Indian students in Canada. They found that both the women’s clothing and the physical
displays of affection, such as hugging among men – commonplace in India – had to be adjusted to fit the Canadian norms of heterosexual femininity and masculinity. Thus, what constituted appropriate gendered performances were adjusted according to place.

Although these and other studies have attempted to dismantle the ‘vulnerability trope’ that has haunted migration at both ends of the age spectrum (King et al. 2016), social upheavals, such as conflict or disease and economic compulsions due to the death of parents or because they are trafficked, remain important causes of migration. These examples also point to the fact that migrants move for multiple reasons at different periods of their lives. The notion of vulnerability is also commonly used in relation to refugees, which tends to represent women and children as exploited and therefore more deserving of protection and additional resources than men. The concept is attached to the person rather than the circumstances creating the vulnerability (Turner 2016).

Fourth, as in the 1970s, something that continues to fascinate academics is the question of what happens to gender identities, roles and responsibilities and relations, not only in themselves but what it means for the inequalities in gender that exist prior to, during and after migration and in these different places. Given the almost-universal nature of patriarchy, the question that arises is: is patriarchy transcended, transformed or transported during migration? The evidence is mixed. For some, migration has been empowering. Migration and gender research provides us with contradictory findings that demonstrate, on the one hand, the empowering potential of migration for women (Duda-Mikulin 2013), where women are able to transcend many of the limitations due to patriarchy, to cases where patriarchy may be reinforced due to migration (Walton-Roberts and Pratt 2006). But much more common are stories of limited changes, where some aspects alter but others do not (Kofman and Raghuram 2015). For instance, women may escape control of older patriarchs and matriarchs but, on the other hand, they also have less help with childcare and, in some cases, may be limited to the household because of it. This leads to deskilling among the highly qualified and can also cause mental health issues for migrant women. An ability to form new, satisfying social relations while maintaining old ones in their country of origin seems to be the best response.

It is not only women whose gender roles are transformed by migration but also men. Female migration can lead to men taking on more responsibility for care of the children and the household (Asis 2006). In other instances, the pressures of these responsibilities can lead men to themselves migrate, leaving the children behind with other women. The prevalence of female labour migrants means that the proportion of male migrants who come through the family reunion route is increasing. This is specially so for the spouses of women in highly skilled sectors; less-skilled migrants usually face limitations in family reunion, as difficulties come into operation concerning meeting the minimum thresholds of salary, appropriate accommodation or the nature of the visa through which they enter. Normative notions of masculinity may be reinscribed as women become the wage earners and men have limited or no access to the labour market. Moreover, the impact of being removed from male-dominated societal norms as they become separated from their kinship groups can have an effect on how masculinity is defined (Friedman 2017). As Friedman argues, migrant men no longer benefit from what Connell (1987) defines as the patriarchal dividend, or the cultural, economic and material benefits that are societally reproduced and that all men supposedly enjoy.

Fifth and finally, there is a vibrant literature on questions of home and belonging and the meanings imbued to place by migrants. For instance, Wilkins (2017) explores how women alter their attachments to home as house, as well as nation, as they traverse the Myanmar–Thailand border. She recounts the personal transitions that women make in the face of the insecurities of border crossings.
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In sum, although place differences drive migration, so too does gender difference. Moreover, as people migrate, both place and the meanings of gender and how it is performed alter in place, so that place is a powerful way of understanding migration.

Connecting places

Although places may be seen as distinctive and posited against each other, the connections between places have also played a part in theorizations of gendered migration. In this section we will explore three ways in which these connections have been theorized: through causation of migration as in notions of a care chain (Dumitru 2017); through a transnational lens (Bastia 2015); and as physical connections between places through which migrants transit (Stock 2012).

The neo-Marxist take on gendered migration is encapsulated in theories of the global care chain, where the emotional and material labour of care is transferred from the Global South to the North through the movement of care workers. This arises out of poverty in the sending areas, caused in part by the flow of money and resources to the Global North. But it is also underpinned by local changes in the receiving areas. For instance, the growth of the two-wage family, prompted by a shift in welfare policies from the family wage to the adult worker model, has drawn more and more women into the workplace and has led to a care deficit in some households in the Global North. Drawing on Rhacel Parreñas’s work (2001) on the migration of nannies from the Philippines to the US, Arlie Hochschild (2000) argues that such migration simply transfers the care deficit from households in the US to households in the Philippines as women from poorer countries migrate to perform paid care work in richer countries. The next link in the chain is when women move from poorer parts of the Philippines to look after the families of these international migrants, and each cascading chain of care results in its performance being less well remunerated, and sometimes unpaid. The care chain identifies a hierarchy of places based on the movement from the periphery to providing care and making good a care deficit in a Northern context. Emotional and material labour connects places.

Although this pattern was first observed in the Philippines, similar movements have been noted globally, from Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Latin American countries such as Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru. These studies show how care is redistributed from poorer to wealthier countries but, as Dumitru (2014) has argued, many of those taking up such work are nurses and teachers, so that what is seen as a care drain is also actually a brain drain. She rightly emphasizes the skills of the carers and also the methodological nationalism that underpins this analysis, whereby the nation state becomes the primary way of thinking about migration. In this instance, international migration is the arbiter of the first link in the chain. However, as Dumitru (2014) points out, such chains may also exist internally, within a country.

The focus on care as the primary activity that female migrants take up has some limitations. Care is both an important set of activities and an ethic, but it only connects loosely to the world of production and the debates therein. As a result, care can become relegated as important but unconnected to the (male) world of production. Returning to the language of social reproduction is therefore important (Kofman and Raghuram 2015). Social reproduction involves the production of people through various kinds of work – mental, manual and emotional – aimed at providing what is necessary to maintain existing life and to reproduce the next generation (Laslett and Brenner 1989). It includes ‘the varying institutions within which this work is performed, the varying strategies for accomplishing these tasks, and the varying ideologies that both shape and are shaped by them’ (383). Thus, social reproduction is necessary for production: for biological reproduction, for the skilling and training including the social comportments,
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and the generational reproduction of the next round of labour (Kofman and Raghuram 2015). It connects places, generations and the social and economic fabric of society. Moreover, migrant men, too, are involved in social reproduction, as Gallo and Scrinzi (2016) have shown in studies in the domestic sphere, where they are more likely to undertake the care of the elderly. Other activities in the international division of reproductive labour, such as gardening and handiwork, are dominated by men (Perrons et al. 2010).

A second form of spatial connection that is widely catalogued in the literature on gendered migration is transnationalism. Transnationalism highlights the interconnectivity between people in different nations. It challenges the exclusivity of belonging to one place, often ascribed to theories of assimilation, for instance. Instead, migrants, it is argued, do not simply leave behind their past attachment to the places they left behind and the social relations there, but continue to maintain them while developing social relations in the receiving context (Bastia 2015). For instance, although there is some global transfer of care and social reproductive activities, migrants often continue to fulfil their responsibilities in the country of origin. In effect, place connections are not sequential but simultaneous across places; social reproduction occurs in both places. This has been documented in a growing number of studies of transnational parenting, especially of mothers, and the impact on their children, based on research in Latin American and South East Asian migrations (Bastia 2015; Hoang and Yeoh 2015). However, much less is known about the impact of recent African migrations on the circulation of care and transnational parenting, or of fathers (Mazzucato 2015). Though most attention has been paid to children, in recent years studies have focused on elderly parents, who may both be looking after grandchildren and needing care themselves (Hoang and Yeoh 2015).

Finally, migration involves physical movement through places. These places may be varied, from ships to aeroplanes, but most commonly over land. These technologies of movement are themselves places that migrants inhabit in differentially gendered ways, although there is little literature on it thus far. The little literature that does exist shows the overwhelmingly masculine assumptions made about transit migrants and a tendency to see women in transit primarily as victims, particularly of sexual violence (Stock 2012).

Future research

Migration is always a movement of people from one place to another. As such, place specificities and connections have been an important, albeit implicit part of research on gendered migration. This chapter takes a step back and outlines how gender and place are differently configured in this analysis. It does so because these relations between place are crucial to a feminist agenda in unpacking suppositions and for achieving gender equity.

Although there is a wealth of research on gendered migration which recognizes these place relations, there are still a number of gaps in the existing research. We explore this through three questions relating to place. First is the relative absence of some places and associated mobilities, given their importance in migration patterns. Second, we argue for a recognition of the entanglements between migrants and the objects, including cash flows, that make up migrant lives. Finally, we suggest the need for further research on immobilities: of having the option of staying in one place and not moving.

Although there is considerable literature on migrants, much of it focuses on South–North mobilities. This is slowly changing in some parts of the world, with more work on intra-regional migration in East and South–East Asia, for instance, which explores key issues of care, remittances and the long-term implications of changing family life in both the sending and receiving countries (Hoang and Yeoh 2015). As Wall and Bolzman (2014, 75) comment, ‘examining the
changes in female migration trajectories is a key issue for understanding the emergence of new forms of transnational families. Women are migrating more often alone (as single, divorced or widowed) and initiating migration, as well as moving with their partners and children. Their migration changes family life. Yet the impact of mobility on family dynamics has been poorly understood due, in part, to the tendency to treat the family as a secondary consideration, unlike the primacy accorded to labour migration and remittances.

Second, migrant connections between places are always entangled with flows of money, goods, ideas and knowledge but, so far, the migrant’s own mobility is still prioritized. One of the main ways in which material resources circulate through the global economy and transnational families is remittances. Though they decreased in 2015 and 2016, remittances have steadily increased over the longer period and are expected to increase to $596 billion in 2017 (World Bank 2017). In the past, the interest in remittances focused on the economic aspects of transfers but, increasingly, research in remittances has turned its attention to the social and gendered practices of remittance sending and receiving (King et al. 2013). Complex processes of negotiation within households determine how the remittances are spent and who has the power to determine their usage, who benefits from them and what effects they have on the welfare of the family. They also embody values and serve to reconstruct social identities within families and communities (Hoang and Yeoh 2015). These entanglements between places that arise through money and goods transfers need more attention.

Another area that has been little studied is gendered immobilities. For many people, migration has become a necessary means of earning a living. For some, development offers the opportunity not to migrate. But for others, societal development has not produced gendered freedom and so national development has not been adequate. When do women and men have the ability not to migrate, and how can that be fostered? The increasing importance of environmental changes and natural resource depletion by international companies in shaping migration, as well as how that links to the above discussions around migrant labour, needs further attention.

Since the 1980s, and particularly in the past two decades, our understanding of gendered migrations has advanced enormously. However, there remains much to do in relation to the implications of gendered migrations in the Global South, their interaction with internal migrations, which remain significant, and the impact of changing places on family lives and gender and generational relationships. Gendered migration is driven both by differences between places and by unequal connections. Furthermore, place then interplays with gender as a variable that acts, not as a static variable, but rather as a performance that can be altered as men and women move between places. As migration continues to dominate political agendas nationally and globally, these notions of how place and gender interact will become increasingly salient.

Notes

1 This chapter, for reasons of space, has adopted a binary approach to gender and is largely focused on the insights into female migration from feminist research.

2 The OECD bases its figures on those who are given family permits rather than on those stating that they have migrated for family reasons. Entering on a family permit does not mean that one is not intending to enter the labour market immediately, as part of a family project.

Key readings


**References**


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