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Nadine Sika

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Socio-Political Module



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Consortium for Applied Research on International Migration

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This publication is part of a series of papers on Gender and Migration written in the framework of the CARIM project and presented at a meeting organised in Florence: “Gender and migration in Southern and Eastern Mediterranean and Sub-Sahara African countries” (18-19 October 2010).

These papers will be discussed in two meetings between Policy Makers and Experts on the same topic in winter 2011. The results of these discussions will also be published.

The entire set of papers on Gender and Migration are available at
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CARIM

The Consortium for Applied Research on International Migration (CARIM) was created at the European University Institute (EUI, Florence), in February 2004 and co-financed by the European Commission, DG AidCo, currently under the Thematic programme for the cooperation with third countries in the areas of migration and asylum.

Within this framework, CARIM aims, in an academic perspective, to observe, analyse, and forecast migration in Southern & Eastern Mediterranean and Sub-Saharan Countries (hereafter Region).

CARIM is composed of a coordinating unit established at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies (RSCAS) of the European University Institute (EUI, Florence), and a network of scientific correspondents based in the 17 countries observed by CARIM: Algeria, Chad, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Palestine, Senegal, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, and Turkey.

All are studied as origin, transit and immigration countries. External experts from the European Union and countries of the Region also contribute to CARIM activities.

CARIM carries out the following activities:

- Mediterranean and Sub-Saharan migration database;
- Research and publications;
- Meetings of academics and between experts and policy makers;
- Migration Summer School;
- Outreach.

The activities of CARIM cover three aspects of international migration in the Region: economic and demographic, legal, and socio-political.

Results of the above activities are made available for public consultation through the website of the project: www.carim.org

For more information:

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Abstract

This study demonstrates a weak link between gender-migration and development in Egypt, a direct result of the small percentage of female migrants compared to the number of males. On the other hand, the empowerment of women, especially in terms of human capital, is positively correlated to male temporary migration, as a result of the role of remittances in the development of human-capital skills.

The Egyptian government's policies impedes the development of gender migration, through restrictive laws and sanctions against the migration of single women abroad. Policies concerning the employment of foreign females in the Egyptian market are also restrictive, which poses a problem for bringing out the full potential of migration for development.

Résumé

Cette étude démontre que la migration de genre n'a qu'un faible impact sur le développement en Égypte, en raison du faible pourcentage de femmes qui émigrent par rapport aux hommes. Toutefois, l'émigration des hommes a des conséquences positives sur l'émancipation des femmes, en particulier sur le capital humain, grâce à l'utilisation des remises pour le développement des compétences.

En matière de politiques publiques, le gouvernement égyptien dresse des obstacles au développement de la migration de genre, à travers des lois et des sanctions restrictives à l'encontre de l'émigration des femmes seules. Par ailleurs, les politiques publiques en matière d'emploi des femmes étrangères en Égypte sont également restrictives, ce qui restreint le potentiel de la migration sur le développement.

Introduction

The increasing feminization of international migration, in the past decades, resulted in an astounding number of studies concerning this phenomenon. Yet, the extent to which females contribute to migration and development in the MENA region is still debatable. How did the feminization of international migration affect countries there? What is the percentage of female migration compared to male migration in this vital area of the world? What are the characteristics of female migrants? To what extent does migration encourage female development and empowerment? What are state policies regarding female migration?

Previous literature has shown that migration can both be a catalyst for development; and underdevelopment. Migration is interlinked with development through the remittances sent by migrants to their families in their country of origin, which result in an increase in the human capital of those family members left behind. The other side of the story, however, is the case of brain drain. Not only do highly-skilled migrants leave their country of origin, and leave unskilled labour behind. There is also a grimmer aspect – when highly skilled migrants leave their country of origin, and work in their host countries in lower skilled jobs, compared to the level of education they had attained in their country of origin. The distribution of gender migration here is still widely contested.

The international debates concerning migration have mostly favoured migration for the development of both sending and receiving countries. More recent studies have even linked migration to the Millennium Development Goals, which were set forth by the United Nations in the year 2000 (IOM 2005; Usher 2005). Nevertheless, the impact of migration on gender empowerment has remained scarce thus far. Mainstream migration theories have not been able to develop more comprehensive understanding of how gender affects migration and development in specific countries. According to Mahler and Pessar (2006), the most inclusive studies on gender and migration have been conducted by qualitative research methods of ethnographers, who have taken the lead in segregating the impact of migration on gender relations and gender development. Gender and migration ethnographic studies have flagged up the growing number of demands for female labourers abroad doing gender sensitive work, like domestic servants, childcare and care for the elderly (Morokvasic 2002; Escriva 2005). Women migrants who are able to migrate are more empowered than those who do not migrate. For example, when a woman's wage and her remittance is higher than her male counterpart, she is able to leverage and negotiate household decision-making processes more than the non migrant (Pessar 2006; Hirsch 2003; Pribilisky 2004). However, other ethnographic research found the exact opposite, where migrant women have been abused emotionally and physically by their male members of the household, and gender roles have been reinforced (Pessar 2006; Pena 1991; Abdulrahim 1993).

The globalization effect has had an enormous impact on female migration, given the demand for international domestic work and export-oriented manufacturing. However, women have also contributed to the unconventional labour migration market, especially in the fields of domestic work, in trafficking and the sex industry, and in the organized migration for marriage purposes (Carling 2005, 2; Brennan 2004; Law 2000; Kempadoo 1998; Pessar 2006). These different forms of female migration resulted in the feminization of migration in the international context (Carling 2005). From a global perspective, women migrants constitute almost half the number of their male counterparts. Important reasons for this feminization are family and refugee migration, where, especially in the second, females outnumber males. Thus in the past few decades, women have constituted an important part of labour migration, and have been adapting to migrating independently for work purposes (Carling 2005, 2).

Taking these broader international issues into consideration, this paper will first analyze the extent to which women in Egypt contribute to the migration process. Second, it will shed light on the types of labour that women undertake when they migrate. This part of the paper, will also analyze the extent to

which women are empowered when their spouses migrate and they are left as the *de facto* heads of households. Third, the paper will highlight government policies regarding female migration.

Gender and Migration in Egypt

Gender-sensitive quantitative data were very scarce, until the most recent attempts by the World Bank in 2005 to generate more gender-sensitive data (Morrison, Schiff and Sjoblom, 2007). Research thus far indicates that women in the MENA region constitute the lowest percentage of female migrants in the world, with only 38.4 percent of the total migrant population (Morrison et.al. 2007, 4); compared to a world average of 49 percent (UNESA, 2010).

Since the 1970s, the number of Egyptian migrants to the OECD and Gulf countries, Libya and Jordan, has increased tremendously. The traditions of migration patterns from Egypt to different countries have changed though over the years. For instance, permanent migration is mostly to the United States, Canada and Australia, which includes the whole household. Accordingly, women migrants constitute half the migrant population (CAPMAS, 2010). On the other hand, migration to the GCC, Libya and Jordan, is mostly a temporary phenomenon, where males migrate unaccompanied by their spouses and/or the rest of their family members (Morrison et. al. 2007, 36). Of the 1.1 million Egyptian temporary migrants in 2008, ninety-seven percent are males, compared to 2.94 percent of females. Thus, concerning temporary migration, females do not constitute a considerable number, amounting to several thousands (CAPMAS, 2010).

A major reason for Egyptian migration is the high unemployment rates, especially amongst intermediate and highly-skilled migrants (Hassan & Sassanpupr, 2008). However, the unemployment rate is twice as high among highly-skilled females (Assad, 2009). For instance, according to Hassan and Sassanpour (2008: 6), female unemployment rates in 2005 were 25.1 percent, compared to 22.7 percent in 2000. Yet the numbers for of female migration remain low, which is mainly a result of family pressure not to migrate (ETF, 2007). The social context of patriarchal Egyptian society is very important in this regard. When men do not find work, they seek employment outside of the country. However, in the case of women, even if they do not find a job in their own country, the majority does not attempt to travel to find employment abroad. The general idea for women in this context, especially for young women is to get married, rather than to find a job. Considering this social context, it is important to know the characteristics of Egyptian women migrants.

Mapping Characteristics of Egyptian Women Migrants

Studies concerning female temporary migration have been scarce. The Ministry of Manpower and Migration, in cooperation with the International Organization for Migration and the Italian government conducted an important empirical study on the characteristics of Egyptian migrants (2003). This study found that the majority, i.e. 75 percent, migrate either to accompany their spouses, to get married to an Egyptian living abroad, or to travel for family reasons. Accordingly only one fifth of migrant women migrate for economic reasons. Hence, the patriarchal Egyptian social context is important in understanding why females refrain from migrating on a large scale.

Even though the main reason for migration is not economic, it appears that women who migrate are more likely to receive a job outside of their households, than women who do not migrate. For instance, the same study¹ found that only 32 percent of return Egyptian migrants from 1998 to 2003 were housewives, compared to 66 percent housewives amongst the non-migrants (Ministry of Manpower and Migration, IOM, Cooperazione Italiana 2003, 53). Recent studies on temporary Egyptian migrants in Europe, mainly Italy (IOM and Cooperazione Italiana, 2010), found that only ten percent of Egyptian women who reside in Italy are involved in entrepreneurial activities, compared to 45 percent of all Egyptians in Italy. However, the activities these women undertake require highly-skilled individuals, with the majority of work concentrated in commerce activities (Ibid.). Taking these

limited studies into consideration, it might be concluded that gender migration, is mostly associated with high-education standards. Thus, the better educated a woman is, the higher her chances for migration, independently from her family. Thus, even though the main reason for migration is not economic, and, indeed, is only to accompany the male member of the family, the outcome of migration empowers women to seek employment outside the household.

Another important study concerning the role of gender in migration is the ETF study, which surveyed a thousand Egyptian return migrants from different countries in the OECD and the Gulf, of which only 60 were females (ETF 2007, 38). This low number of respondents makes the result of the survey questionable. Yet, due to the lack of information in this field, it is necessary to use the survey concerning female migration patterns. Accordingly, most women return migrants were coming home from the Arab Gulf. In accordance with previous studies, which showed, that most Egyptian women migrants accompany their spouses, rather than travel on their own, this study confirmed that 60 percent of these migrants accompanied their husbands and/or family. 80.6 percent of these women were highly educated individuals compared to 35.5 percent of their male counterparts (ETF 2007, 38). Nevertheless it is believed that migrant women are mostly employed in the informal sector: particularly domestic work and restaurant businesses (Bilsborrow and School 2006).

All this is in general agreement with another study conducted in 2010, on Egyptian migrants from four different governorates (IOM, Cooperazione Italiana and Ministry of Manpower and Migration, 2010). Here, 91 percent of studied individuals were males, while the rest, 18 individuals were female. Fifteen of these were married with children and twelve were accompanying their spouses. The majority of these women, (16 out of 18) were employed, mostly as teachers (Ibid., p. 33). Accordingly migrant women tend to have higher educational levels and tended to be employed outside of their households.

However, looking at female migration in the context of permanent migration, the likelihood of traveling is based on family considerations, and in this regard, the majority of MENA women in Australia, (with Egyptians as the second highest percentage of migrants), do not have high education levels (Foroutan, 2009). They also constitute a very low percentage of the total female employment levels of the total female migrant stocks in Australia. Nevertheless, those who are employed, are likely to have professional and managerial positions. "While in terms of employment status (that is whether "employed" or "not employed") female migrants from the MENA region hold the lowest employment level, their occupational pattern is completely different.." (Ibid., 2009: 981). Thus, this confirms again the importance of the education and the high human capital of Egyptian women migrants. Education is an important determinant for empowerment and independence in decision-making processes. Employment especially in highly-skilled professions makes women more able to participate in the family earnings and thus accords more power within the family decision-making concerning the allocation of money for instance.

In the case of temporary women migrants, when they return to Egypt, they mostly report fairly good socio-economic conditions, compared to their male counterparts (Bilsborrow and School 2006). It is not necessary then that they continue working outside their own households when they return to their country of origin to retain their socio-economic standards. Therefore temporary migration might induce personal development and empowerment of women in the short run, but in the long run, the extent to which females continue to work outside their households and have an independent life in relation to their spouses is questionable. Moreover, due to this low level of female migration from Egypt, the extent to which these women can contribute to the broader development process is debatable, since even the remittances they send back home, would not contribute such a large percentage of cash as those sent by their male counterparts. The studies concerning the characteristics of female migration have been scarce, yet, another type of studies has emerged in the past few years, concerning the empowerment of women whose husbands migrate and leave them behind in Egypt.

The Impact of Male Migration on Women Empowerment

Due to the scarce quantitative data on female migration from Egypt, an important question posed for this paper is: to what extent does a spouse's migration enable the empowerment of his wife and /or mother left behind? Empowerment is believed to be "a condition in which women hold or are in the process of obtaining educational, legal and political rights that are equivalent or nearly equal to those of male citizens. Further, women are able to work, and advance in any career they select; possess economic rights to own and dispose of property, and pay for goods at the same rate as others" (Zuhur, 2003).

Studies found that during the migration process, females attained more decision-making powers, and begin to make important household decisions pertaining to the education of their children, welfare and household maintenance of the family (Assad 2010; Elbadawy and Roushdy 2009). Nevertheless, it is argued that these empowerment measures are short term, "and is essentially reversed when the migrant returns. In fact, the typically more conservative gender norms of the host countries Egyptian migrants are likely to go to may even come back with them, resulting in less progressive gender roles and attitudes among migrant households than among households whose men stayed home" (Elbadawy and Rousdy 2009).

Female empowerment and employment levels differ between female heads of households who receive remittances from their migrant spouses and those who do not receive remittances. Women who are left behind by migrant workers, live in better socio-economic conditions, compared to those whose male relatives have not migrated. For example these women work less hours in their own households, as a result of the remittances they receive, which are mainly spent on household electronics. The impact on the employment of female relatives who are left behind is positively correlated with fewer working hours for these women as compared to others whose relatives have not migrated, as a result of the remittances they receive (Assaad 2010, 37). Moreover, remittances are highly correlated with increased female school enrolment, especially for girls ages 15-17 years (Assaad 2010). This age is typical for the average girls' drop-out rates, particularly among the rural poor (AHDR 2009). Thus remittances ensure that the girls acquire a higher level of education. The number of hours in domestic work conducted by these girls also decreases according to Assaad, as a result of the higher incomes and the electrical and time-saving devices that these households attain. Even though the likelihood that male migration induces and reproduces gender roles, it is positively correlated with higher human capital for women.

Government Policies

The role of the state in developing and enhancing the role of female migration also varies, with some states being more protective of their female migrants. For example, in some countries, especially MENA countries, the state is chary about issuing female passports, and in many cases, the issuing of a passport is dependent on the agreement of either the spouse or the father of the female concerned² (Pessar 2006). These restrictions are also to be found in Egypt. The government enables women to get passports mostly for women who want to reach their families abroad. However, females who want to migrate alone and attain a working permit abroad find the government far more restrictive. For instance, in 2008, the Ministry of Manpower and Migration was relatively open to issuing work permits for women who want to travel to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait to work as hairdressers, and servants. But, as a result of societal and media pressure, and as a result of media reports concerning the abuse of these women in their host countries, the government became more restrictive, and by 2010, had completely banned the issuance of work permits to single women who seek employment in the Gulf (Masrawy 2010). The problem with such restrictive measures, however, is that they impede women's rights within the framework of the freedom of movement and equality before the law as required by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Trafficking in Women

Human trafficking is,

“the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for the purpose of exploitation” (UNFPA 2010).

According to the UN, Egypt is a source, a place of transit and a destination country for trafficked women and children. The United States TVPA report states that the number of trafficking incidences in Egypt has increased dramatically over the past few years (UNFPA 2010). The most disturbing type of human trafficking affects poor young Egyptian girls. These girls are victims of so-called “tourism marriages”. This type of marriage is part of the growing Arab tourism to Egypt, where many Arab men travel to Egypt to purchase young girls for marriage (UNFPA 2010). Marriage brokers who convince poor family members to accept such marriages in return for money arrange these marriages. Poor households allow these marriages to generate money for their families. However, the money gained does not contribute to the overall development of the family, since the money is only a lump sum and is not typically used for the education of illiterate members of the households, nor is it used for the long-term development and access to more human capital within the family. It contributes to the abuse of young girls and to the psychological disturbance of their mental well-being.

As to coerced prostitution in Egypt, it is believed that a large number of female Sudanese refugees are forced into this business by family members or by Sudanese gang members (UNFPA 2010). The government of Egypt had brought through some amendments to its Child law to prohibit trafficking in women and children. Sentences for offenders stand at a minimum of five-year imprisonment. Yet, progress has not been dramatic to date. There has been no formal identification of victims and no protective measures enacted for the protection of victims.

Concerning female transit migrants in Egypt, these are believed to be mostly of Sudanese and Ethiopian origin, seeking employment in Israel. However, due to Israeli measures combating irregular migration, Egyptian policy makers are also eager to combat irregular migration of Africans. Nevertheless, many national and international human-rights organizations criticize the Egyptian government for using violence against these women. It is reported that women are either abused or shot at by the police authorities as part of their general policy against irregular migration (HRW 2010; EOHR 2010).

Female Asylum Seekers, Refugees and Migrants in Egypt

A large number of foreign nationals residing in Egypt are either refugees or asylum seekers, the highest proportion and number of them are Palestinians who amount to almost 70,000, 47 percent of whom are females (UNHCR 2010). These are followed by 10,000 Sudanese where females are 38 percent of the total (UNHCR 2010). Somalis have the highest number of women to men: 51 percent of the 6000 Somalis in Egypt are female. Asylum seekers and Refugees are mainly under UNHCR jurisprudence and are treated in Egypt as immigrants. According to Egyptian law, particularly law 12 for the year 2003, immigrants in Egypt are not allowed to work, and do not receive work permits (UNHCR 2010). Article 28 stipulates that, foreign workers including domestic servants need to have a work permit before they enter the country (Jureidini, 2009). Consequently, refugees in Egypt turn to the informal economic sector, where women are mostly employed as domestic workers. These women are denied most of their rights, and work more than the regular employment hours, specified by the ILO. Having to abide by these harsh measures, some women report being harassed by their employers and/or police harassment. As a result some refugees, especially women, tend to seek asylum in the agricultural sector of Israel, more so after the ban on Palestinian labour workers to Israel from the Occupied Palestinian territories (UNHCR 2010). Yet, when irregular migrant workers are caught in

Israel, they are forcibly sent to Egypt to be returned home. Some immigrants and/or refugees in Egypt, who find it hard to find a decent job, and are not able to migrate, stay in Egypt and turn to commercial sex work (UNHCR 2010).

Conclusion

The above-mentioned sections show an urgent need for more government policies concerning female migration, which have been far from sufficient thus far, and that need further development, in accordance with International human-rights standards. The policies should effectively be utilized for the promotion of Egyptian female migration, as is the case for male migrants, especially given that Egyptian women have higher employment rates than Egyptian men. Even though studies show the disinterest of a large percentage of females to migration, government policies should take into consideration the rights of the female migrants who do want to migrate yet are obstructed because of uncalculated government policies.

Therefore, studies show a very weak link between gender migration and development in the case of Egypt. First, the numbers of female migrants from Egypt is very low compared to other parts of the world. Temporary migration is the most significant migration type in Egypt, and in most of these cases, men travel without their wives and/or mothers. As for women who accompany their spouses, the study yields some positive implications for female empowerment, since a large number of females who migrate abroad with their family members are employed, both during the period of their migration and on their return to Egypt. The percentage of females who migrate independently from their families is very low, and needs to be further analyzed and investigated to understand the characteristics of these women, and the type of employment that they seek when they migrate. It is also important to investigate the extent to which these women send back remittances to their families, and the percentage of these remittances compared to men.

As to the impact of male migration on female empowerment, it is only positively correlated with regards to the attainment of higher education levels for girls. As to the impact of male migration on female heads of household, studies thus far have shown a negative correlation in the cases where male return migrants were employed in conservative Islamist countries of the Gulf. Since more than 90 percent of Egyptian temporary migration is to the Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia, this means that the majority of return migrants enforce stricter gender roles on their spouses than would have been the case if they had not migrated.

Foreign females who reside in Egypt as Asylum seekers, refugees and temporary labourers, work mostly in the informal sector, and their impact on the development process in Egypt is very scarce. The impact of their employment in Egypt on the development process of their country of origin is also unclear.

Last but not least, the government of Egypt's policies concerning gender migration is only applicable in the cases of trafficking, and in the case of limiting female migration without their spouses. Therefore, the interface between government policies and gender migration is more linked with Egyptian patriarchal gender roles, (Usher, 2005) rather than with global human rights and migration standards. Thus, further policies need to be implemented to put in place positive migration policies that can effectively induce further development.

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