

BOOK REVIEW**Roli Misra. 2020. *Migration, Trafficking and Gender Construction: Women in Transition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE. 230 pp.**

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Migration, Trafficking and Gender Construction brings together scholarly articles suitable for academics, policy experts and politicians, as well as curious and open-minded readers on the issues of migration and trafficking from a feminist perspective. The book is beneficial to understanding global occurrences of mass migration and trafficking across and within continents. It goes beyond the observable to uncover hidden everyday practices that deepen the gender bias in migration. As a reader, the book is deeply rooted in the issues on migration, with a lesser focus on human trafficking.

Containing 10 chapters, the book covers narratives of participants living in Asia (Bangladesh and India) and Europe (Finland, Slovenia and Bosnia). The contributors are from various social science fields, with migration and gender studies as common interests. Some are university professors, whereas others are affiliated to research institutions. Structurally, the book has two sections: part one focuses on migration, trafficking and work, and part two is dedicated to migration and assimilation.

Broadly speaking, themes such as migration, work, power relations, religion as a point of discrimination, ethnicity and nation demarcation are covered in the book. These themes are presented with the overarching notion of 'otherness' and 'being indigenous' female in an entrenched patriarchal environment. The common feature of participants, whose rich narratives bind the stories in the book, is being female. Findings of this book paint vivid pictures of: (1) Gender patterns in migration being even between male and female. As Mahapatro (see Chapter 2, page 82, figure 2.1) noticed, the female migration growth rate is slightly higher. (2) Females are migrating not only as male supports but also as individual autonomous beings with agency in search of self-actualisation (Krilic, Chapter 7). (3) The search for a better life could be an involuntary decision by some indigenous populations who internally migrate after being forced off their natural habitats by purposeful governmental policies of assimilation (Tripura, Chapter 1). (4) In migrating as women and in a labour force dominated by patriarchal and/or religious discrimination, sexual exploitation is possible (Hembrom, Chapter 3).

Considering labour migration in Bangladesh, attention has been drawn to the Chittagong Hill Tract (CHT) indigenous women. Located in South-eastern Bangladesh, CHT has several communities, each with its own language, culture and mode of dressing (see Tripura,

Chapter 1). Often identified by their way of dressing, minority indigenous women are internally forced off their land and exploited in garment factories where they work longer hours under hazardous conditions, with low wages compared to their male counterparts and Bengal Muslim women. The need for CHT indigenous migration was carved through political marginalisation and mischief in forcing the population to assimilate to the majority Muslim culture. A picture is painted of a grand scheme by the National Bangladesh government to dispossess them of their land involving the re-demarcation of their settlements, allotting their territory to non-indigenous groups and constructing a dam that caused the flooding of their farmlands. Forced off their indigenous lands, most young unmarried women fled to factories in cities where their manual labour and weaving abilities were required but less valued. Property owners, mostly Bengal, also discriminated in renting to unmarried CHT women, perceiving them as promiscuous. Conditions as this forced some indigenous women to share accommodation with fellow Bengal women, who perceived them as dirty people whose traditional meals are unwholesome and festivals unworthy of celebrating. For survival, some CHT women had to assimilate to the Bengal culture, portrayed through dressing attire and eating of certain meals at their own displeasure.

In India, strong socio-cultural norms were cited as probable explanation for gender bias in migration patterns. These norms prevent Indian women from registering their actual migration intentions, rather tying the declared intentions to marriage (Mahapatro, Chapter 2). In Jharkhand, India, Hembrom (Chapter 3) notes the trafficking of tribal girls for bonded labor and sexual exploitation. However, the chapter lacks a discussion on what constitutes trafficking, how different it is from migration and the inter-connectedness between migration and trafficking. Apart from this, the blurriness of the definition of trafficking has been deepened. The author, Hembrom, mentions the existence of a protocol on human trafficking without presenting it (see UN 2004). A holistic approach that brings together several agencies is also suggested as a trafficking intervention strategy (p. 100). The discussion on the approach could have been furthered by clarifying the perceived contributions of the agencies and by giving a place to social capital and culture in the trafficking discourse.

Chapter 3 could have further contributed to understanding the complexity of child trafficking had the intersectionality of trafficking, migration and domestic servitude been critically explored. It would have also been helpful to brief readers on the effects of trafficking on the victims and their families, some of which are noted in Beegle, Dehejia and Gatti (2005), Bezerra, Kassouf and Arends-Kuenning (2009) and Hamenoo and Sottie (2015). Meanwhile, trivialising other means of trafficking is a blow to many victims who did not make a conscious decision for their relocation.

Gender discrimination is further illustrated in a Bangladesh camp hosting Rohingya refugees by Sengupta (Chapter 6). Exclusion of the Rohingya population of Myanmar from the citizenship law, making an indigenous population stateless, is very striking. Tracing the route of the Rohingya population, their expulsion from Myanmar into neighbouring countries of India and Bangladesh, has been explored. The role of gender and international politics amidst religious beliefs placed women in disadvantaged positions. Recognised by UNHCR as refugees, camp members received food allocations inadequate to feed the family. Those with employable skills secured work with non-governmental organisations to supplement these rations. Despite opportunities to work, Rohingya women were not allowed by male figures within the camp to work outside their allocated camp space. In extreme situations, females were not allowed to join women groups within the camp to access help tailored to the needs of refugee women. Families that allowed their daughters to work outside were threatened until these women gave up their work.

There is, however, some level of autonomy in the settlement of widows within the refugee camp. Losing their husbands violently, the widows played the role of both father and mother to their children. Notwithstanding their loss, they expressed the joy of being able to make decisions on their own for the first time in their lives. This was only possible in the absence of men within the family. Despite threats from other male figures within the camp, the widows had no intention to give up their autonomy.

The second part of the book is centered on migration and assimilation. Chapter 7 by Kritic questions the pre-requisites of belongingness in Slovenia where dual citizenship is not accepted. Issues of identity are more complicated for the second-generation immigrants who only know the host countries of their parents as homeland but at the same time are being discriminated against as belonging to the 'other group'. This notion of 'otherness' forms the basis of discrimination in the job market and pushes immigrants into jobs regarded by nationals as 'dirty' or 'unpaid' in the social eye, which are often unregulated. Typically, women are hired as domestic hands, and depending on their employer, they may face abuses that cannot be reported to law enforcement agencies as work contracts are verbal, hence no legal proof of their engagement.

For others, residency in Slovenia was gained through marriage to a national because of strict immigration policies. Such women are faced with giving up their original nationality to become Slovenian citizens. In case of divorce, the women are treated as non-nationals should they return to their native countries such as Russia (see Chapter 7). Meanwhile within Slovenia, they are recognised as 'others' and acquisition of the local language is necessary for gaining employment. Most women, despite their high educational status and previous affluent occupational status, accept unskilled jobs, which are physically demanding for income.

In summary, *Migration, Trafficking and Gender Construction: Women in Transition* presents women in migratory discourse as capable of making decisions and thriving. The primary difficulties faced by women migrating in search for a better life are male dominance and political suppression. Although some of the challenges noted could be faced by men, their impact on women was disproportionately severe.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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