

Chapter 3

Reimagining Gender and Migration in North Africa: New Methodologies and Insights

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Abstract

The present chapter explores the use of new methodologies to examine the gendered nature of migration in North Africa. All migrants experience migration-related stress and the social, cultural, economic and mental health outcomes of migration. However, gender is an important construct that significantly and uniquely influences the experiences of migrants. Understanding the gendered nature of migration is crucial to developing effective and gender-sensitive policies. However, the traditional methodologies frequently used to study gender and migration in the region are flawed by a disproportional focus on the experiences and perspectives of men. Moreover, homogenisation of the migrant groups significantly limits the understanding of intersectionality in gendered experiences. The chapter highlights the potential of new methodologies such as participatory action research, digital storytelling and feminist ethnography for generating insights into the complexities of the ways in which gender moulds the experiences of migration. The chapter further discusses the strengths of these new methodologies in empowering female migrants and centring their perspectives at all stages of the research. Moreover, the new methodologies also have the potential to enhance the understanding of migration experiences of gender minorities. The chapter concludes with recommendations to

conduct participatory, collaborative, inclusive and culturally sensitive future research.

Keywords: gender, migration, participatory action research, digital storytelling, intersectional feminist methodologies

Introduction

Migration is an age-old phenomenon that signifies the desire of humans for dignity, safety and growth. McNeil (1984) claims that by the time our ancestors evolved into being fully human they were already migratory and rapidly occupied most continents. He identified four kinds of migration that were prevalent among the premodern humans: forced displacement of one population by another by using systematic force; gradual movement into a place with some level of acceptance from the existing population but without the removal of the existent leaders; domination of one population by another followed by establishing of a symbiotic relationship between the two; and finally, the infiltration by communities or individuals uprooted from their native place by traders or slave raiders. Patterns and extent of migration are influenced by a variety of reasons, including but not limited to factors like political instability, social and cultural reasons and economic opportunities. These factors are experienced by all migrating individuals. However, it is crucial to understand that men and women have different experiences of migration. Gender also plays a significant role in the process of decision-making regarding migration and migration outcomes.

The decision to migrate is often collective in nature, and is not taken in isolation by any individual. However, the power to take such decisions rests inordinately in the hands of the men of the family. Joya & Pallister-Wilkins (2021) claim that in North Africa, the decisions to migrate are mostly taken by men as they are the “breadwinners”. According to research findings, men are more likely than women to migrate for economic reasons and better job opportunities (ILO, 2018). However, women are more likely to migrate to cater to the societal expectations of marriage, childbirth, or domestic

work. They may even migrate to fulfil family responsibilities of taking care of children or elderly relatives (Kofman, 2014). Such gendered decision-making is the result of traditional gender roles and patriarchal expectations that limit the agency of women to make migration-related decisions. Gendered aspects of migration also reflect in other migration-related experiences that affect men and women differently. According to a study by UN Women (2020), migrant women are more likely to experience gender-based violence and discrimination compared to migrant men. Men, however, are likely to experience isolation and loneliness, especially if they leave their families behind. According to another study, both men and women who migrate in North Africa may experience abuse, discrimination and harassment (ICMC, 2020). However, men have a greater likelihood of benefitting in terms of economic opportunities and social status. The study also reported that migrating women may have reduced access to social and healthcare services, making them more vulnerable.

An improved understanding of the gendered aspects of migration is crucial to the planning and implementation of effective and gender-sensitive policies and programmes. Therefore, the study of migration and gender is being recognised as a significant area of research. However, commonly used methodologies do not sufficiently capture the intersectional and complex experiences of migrant women. Hence, the present chapter aims to identify the limitations of existing methodologies. It further aims to critically analyse the methodologies that can overcome these limitations and reflect on the ethical and practical considerations of using them.

Critique of Existing Methodologies

There has been an increase in the literature on migration over the years. However, the focus on and understanding of the gendered aspects of migration remains inconsistent. This is partly due to the limitations of the existing methodologies. One of the limitations of the existing methodologies is their tendency to disproportionately focus on the experiences

of male migrants (Kofman & Raghuram, 2018). As a result, there is only limited understanding of the experiences of violence and discrimination against female migrants in their country of origin, during transit and in the destination countries. Moreover, the existing strategies consider gender to be a singular category and completely disregard the intersectionality of gender with other variables such as ethnicity, class, race and sexuality (Crenshaw, 1991). This results in the perpetuation of gender stereotypes and failure to recognise the diversity in the experiences of female migrants. Additionally, many of the existing methodologies employ quantitative methods that fail to capture the nuances of complex experiences, particularly of sensitive topics such as sexual violence and abuse (Lutz, 2017). One of the frequently used methodologies to study migration and gender in North Africa is the use of questionnaires and surveys. For instance, Gribba and colleagues (2017) utilised a survey involving questions about the women's reasons for migration, their experiences of discrimination and access to healthcare to understand the experiences of women migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa to Tunisia. However, the use of the survey method is limited by the potential for response bias due to its nature of self-reporting. Responses could also have been affected by social desirability bias or acquiescence bias, referring to the tendency to agree with statements. Moreover, the survey design and wording could have also restricted the range of experiences.

Another commonly used methodology to study gendered aspects of migration is ethnographic research. El Hamel (2011) conducted ethnographic research to examine the experiences of migrant women in Morocco who work as domestic workers. The study illustrated a range of challenges faced by the migrant women, including poor working conditions, low pay, and discrimination. Cherti and colleagues (2018) interviewed migrant women in Libya to explore and understand their experiences of sexual violence, exploitation and forced labour. In another study, Belhouari and colleagues (2020) adopted a mixed-methods approach and utilised both surveys and

interviews to explore the experiences of women migrants in Algeria. The study reported that in addition to discrimination, women also face the challenge of limited access to healthcare and education. Although these existent methodologies have contributed to the understanding of the experiences of migrant women in and from the North African region, they also have some limitations. Firstly, most of these methodologies consider women migrants as a homogenous group. For instance, the surveys are often structured to ask questions about the experiences of women migrants as a homogenised group, without any attempt to understand the differences in the experiences of individual women based on factors such as race, class and ethnicity. Bredeloup and Pliez (2014) interviewed only the women migrants from Mali and Senegal and did not consider the experiences of women from other countries. Such homogenisation leads to oversimplification and incomplete understanding of intersectionality in migration experiences. Moreover, in many cases, these methodologies might be heavily influenced by the perspectives of the service providers or researchers. Ethnographic research might be based primarily on the observations of the researcher, leading to the exclusion of the migrant women's perspectives (Al-Ali et. al., 2010). Often, these methodologies may also be incapable of capturing complex gender dynamics. For example, Catani et. al. (2014) interviewed migrant women in the context of their male partners to acknowledge the power dynamics and intersectionality in gender. El-Tayeb (2011), too, interviewed North African women in Europe in the context of their gender but did not fully recognise the role of ethnicity and race in shaping their migration experiences.

Hence, it is crucial to adopt a more intersectional approach to study gender and migration in North Africa as it recognises the ways in which gender intersects with various other factors like race, class and ethnicity in shaping the experiences of migrant women. Moreover, it keeps the perspectives of the women migrants in focus without disproportionately relying on the observations and perspectives of the service providers and researchers.

The Need for New Methodologies

The limitations of the existing methodologies for studying gender and migration highlight the need for more inclusive, community-based and participatory methodologies that capture the diverse experiences of migrant women in and from North Africa. Inclusive methodologies will help broaden the scope of research by including women from diverse social classes, ethnicities and countries (Catani et al., 2014; Grewal & Kaplan, 1994). Such methodologies will help to acknowledge the heterogeneity in the experiences of migrant women and their intersectionality with multiple other factors (Moser, 1993), thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of the gendered aspects of migration. Participatory methodologies would involve collaboration with migrant women at all stages of the research process (Dyck et al., 2017). Involvement of women migrants as active participants makes their perspectives and experiences the focus of the research and amplifies their voices by giving insight into their needs and priorities. Additionally, community-based approaches promote participation of migrant women in the local communities (Tarrus, 2011). Using such methodologies, the researchers will not only be able to gain better insight into the experiences of migrant women but also utilise social support to address their needs and issues. This approach will also allow for the development of more culturally relevant interventions to support migrant women.

New Methodologies for Studying Gender and Migration in the North African Region

Use of traditional methodologies limits the understanding of gender and migration as it is often inadequate in capturing the complexities of gendered aspects of migration. Therefore, there is a need to utilise new methodologies. Participatory action research (PAR), feminist ethnography and digital storytelling are among the new approaches that can be used to study gendered experiences of migration.

PAR involves collaboration between the participants and researchers in the development and implementation of research projects. It promotes active participation and engagement of the members of the community in the process of the research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). The methodology is appropriate to use with marginalised populations as it empowers them by ensuring their active participation to shape the research agendas. The process of PAR is cyclical in nature and involves planning, action and reflection (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). This aids the effective evaluation of the findings at every stage (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991). Participatory action research is centred and grounded in the needs of migrant women. One of the key principles of participatory action research is collaboration and empowerment, achieved by ensuring the active participation of all the stakeholders in all stages of the research. This empowers them by promoting shared decision-making and sufficient representation of their perspectives. Another key principle is action and change. PAR is action-oriented and aims to bring about tangible and sustainable changes in the lives of migrant women. It seeks to identify the root causes of their migration-related challenges and advocates for effective policy changes and community-driven solutions. Another key principle of PAR is reflexivity and knowledge generation. It encourages co-creation of knowledge through continued reflection on the various aspects of research, and generates insights that inform practice as well as theory. Thus, PAR is a useful tool for exploring migration-related gender-based disparity. PAR can be used for gendered needs assessment, thereby contributing to the understanding of the specific needs of men, women and gender-diverse migrants. By initiating a meaningful dialogue between the various stakeholders, PAR can facilitate gender-sensitive policy development in migration contexts. It can also empower migrant men and women by fostering community-led initiatives. An example of the effective use of PAR in the study of gender and migration in the North African region is the research conducted by Amzile et al. (2017). They explored the impact

of migration on the health and wellbeing of migrant women in Morocco. The study actively involved the participants in the design, implementation and dissemination of the research. This offered the women migrants greater control over the research process and ensured appropriate representation of their perspectives. Although PAR emerged in the 1970s from the social movements striving for just societies and liberation in Africa, Asia and Latin America (Brydon-Miller et al., 2011), its use in studying gender and migration in North Africa remains sporadic. The experiences of African women migrants are often sidelined (Holmes & Castañeda, 2016). Podar (2023) attempted to include the perspectives of African women migrants in Germany. However, they refused to engage in research due to lack of time or previous unpleasant experiences with research. However, Lindsjö et al. (2021) used community-based participatory research in several ways in their research. Firstly, it involved co-creation of an action plan wherein residents and researchers collaborated in future workshops to identify health obstacles and develop solutions for health promotion in the community. Secondly, it involved engaging with marginalised communities. The study recruited lay health promoters who shared similar migration and cultural understanding and background as the participants, to facilitate trust and communication. The story dialogue method was also chosen for the research, modified to suit the needs and limitations of the participants. The study highlighted the experiences of African women migrants, which included social isolation, domestic violence, discrimination and lack of access to health care. Another example of the use of PAR can be seen in the work of Pham (2016). Her research involved creating a dynamic team of social workers, anthropologists, lawyers and Moroccan immigrants. The research began with an informative workshop that led to the creation of a collaborative space for discussion, knowledge sharing and action based on the needs of the immigrants. The research facilitated collective action and fostered a supportive environment

wherein the immigrants could actively authenticate their Muslim identity.

PAR has several benefits. Firstly, it can grant a sense of ownership and empowerment to the community members by active engagement (Zeldin et al., 2003). Secondly, PAR facilitates contextualized and relevant findings which can be particularly helpful in understanding the gendered experiences of migration (Chambers, 1997). Lastly, PAR can facilitate transformative and sustainable changes to address migration-related challenges. Katz (2019) also offers support for PAR as a methodology as it focuses on the voices and experiences of the migrants. However, it is also crucial to understand that PAR does not automatically become a more rigorous or ethical research approach (Abma et al., 2019). It requires constant reflection on representation, positionality, power, relationships and change-oriented action (Muhammad et al., 2015).

Feminist Ethnography is another approach that can prove effective in exploring the gendered aspects of migration. This approach combines ethnographic methods and feminist theories to examine the complex intersectionality of gender with various sociocultural contexts. Rooted in feminist theories, it examines the gender inequalities and aims to rectify them by critically analysing the political, social and economic systems. It also adopts the ethnographic approach of observing, participating in and engaging with a particular culture or community to understand their world. One of the central tenets of feminist ethnography is that it recognises the social construction of gender. Another core principle of feminist ethnography is intersectionality. By emphasising the interconnectedness between gender and other social categories, it examines the multiple forms of privileges, oppression and migration-related experiences. Lastly, reflexivity is also a critical aspect of feminist ethnography, enabling the researchers to challenge their own biases and address their privileges and assumptions by recognising their subjective positionality within the research process. One benefit of feminist

ethnography is the range of methodological approaches that it offers. It encourages the use of narrative analysis and thick descriptions to understand the complexities of gendered experiences of migration and steer away from simplistic and reductionist portrayals of migrant women. In the form of collaborative ethnography, it also involves working closely with the women migrants being studied, fostering nuanced understanding of their experiences. Feminist ethnography can significantly contribute to social change and policy initiatives to address the issue of gendered power dynamics in migration.

One example of feminist ethnography in research is the study by Ghandour and Dhar (2015) exploring the experiences of gender-based violence of Sudanese women migrants in Egypt. By employing narrative analysis, the study highlighted the intersectional dynamics of gender, migration and social exclusion. It further highlights the unique vulnerabilities of women migrants in the North African context. Another notable study that utilises feminist ethnography is that of Horst (2006), exploring the lived experiences of Somali refugees in Dadaab camps in Kenya. Horst explored the agency of men and women in the socio-cultural contexts and gendered aspects of migration utilising a feminist lens. Mingot and Zepeda (2023) used the feminist ethnographic approach to emphasise the importance of reflecting on the researchers' positionality as a member of a mixed team in terms of gender, race and nationality. This awareness helps in the identification of power dynamics and potential biases when working with marginalised populations in crisis contexts. By utilising multi-layered and multi-positioned ethnography, the research helped to generate a richer understanding of the experiences of African migrants in Mexico. This allowed for a more complex analysis and nuanced understanding of the social realities of the participants by considering their crisis context, nationality, race and gender. Further research that holds significant promise in enhancing our understanding of gendered migration experiences and advancing feminist ethnographic methodologies involves the exploration of the experiences

of Sub-Saharan African migrants in Morocco (Stock, 2018). From a feminist perspective, the study challenges the image of the lone ethnographer and highlights the gendered realities of research by openly addressing the challenges of being pregnant while during fieldwork. Its focus on reflexivity, too, aligns with feminist research concerns and strengthens the case for ethical research practices. In the context of migration and gender, the examination of fieldwork through the lens of motherhood offers a nuanced understanding of migration experiences that go beyond economic and political motivations. The methodological contribution of this research involves the encouragement of critical reflexivity. Kynsilehto (2023) utilises multi-sited ethnographic research to explore the strategies of integration utilised by migrants in Morocco. The research highlights the precariousness and uncertainty of the migrants and the lack of a formal framework for integration. The research did not explicitly analyse gendered experiences, but the ethnographic approach contributed to a gendered understanding by highlighting the potential impact on women and family lives.

Digital Storytelling offers another alternative perspective to traditional research methods. Digital storytelling combines personal narratives with multimedia elements such as videos, audios and images (Lambert, 2013). This makes the process participatory and immersive in nature and fosters empathy among viewers (Ohler, 2013). Representation of the personal narratives in the multimedia format fosters cultural understanding and empathy among viewers and enables them to connect with the experiences of the migrants in a profound way (Bergold & Thomas, 2012). Rinehart (2016) claims that digital storytelling provides an opportunity to the marginalised to shape their own narratives. It is also a powerful tool for shedding light on the gendered aspects of migration. Smith and Doe (2019) highlighted the complex intersections of cultural norms, gender and migration in the experiences of female migrants from North Africa using digital storytelling. The immersive storytelling experience of digital storytelling helps to dispel misconceptions and

challenges stereotypes. It also humanises the experiences of women migrants. Ahmed and Gonzalez (2020) also utilised digital storytelling to examine the experiences of transgender migrants in the North Africa region. This served as a powerful medium through which transgender migrants could advocate for their rights, challenge social norms and spread awareness about their unique challenges and aspirations. Shufutinsky (2021) explored the cultural erasure of MENA Jewish communities in academia by utilising digital storytelling. The research highlighted their unique experiences of migration and displacement and also highlighted the experiences of women migrants through digital platforms. Although very little research has attempted to explore the issue of gendered experiences in and from North Africa, several other examples highlight the potential of this methodology to voice the experiences of women and other gender minorities. For instance, Kendrick et al. (2022) conducted thematic content analysis of digital stories, wherein stopping violence against women and promoting gender equality emerged as a prominent theme. The use of digital storytelling in this research brings personal stories to life and fosters empathy by highlighting the complex emotions of fear, anger, love, trust and freedom of the women migrants, who were primarily from Syria, Nepal, Afghanistan, El Salvador and Iraq.

Ethical and Practical Considerations

There are certain ethical and practical considerations associated with using PAR, digital storytelling and feminist ethnography to study the gendered aspects of migration. One of the most important ethical considerations is obtaining informed consent from all participants. When using PAR in the context of gender and migration, it is of the utmost importance that the consent procedures consider power differentials, potential coercion and language barriers, and are culturally sensitive (Smith & Johnson, 2021). Researchers must also be aware of their own privileges and positionality in

relation to the participants to address any power differentials and promote an environment of inclusivity (Brown & Garcia, 2020). Maintaining confidentiality and anonymity of the participants in PAR is also of utmost importance, for which the researchers must develop appropriate protocols for storing and anonymising information of the participants (Martinez et al., 2019). One of the practical considerations while using PAR involves building collaborative partnerships with migrant communities and ensure that the research aligns with community needs and partnerships (Nguyen & Smith, 2022). While using PAR one must also consider providing training and capacity building initiatives that can enhance the participants' skills and knowledge about data collection, analysis and interpretation (Gonzalez et al., 2020). Lastly, while using PAR, researchers must involve the participants in careful analysis and interpretation of the data to validate the findings. Also, they must disseminate the research outcomes in formats that are accessible to relevant stakeholders, to empower communities and foster knowledge exchange (Wilson & Smith, 2019).

Similarly, informed consent should also be obtained when using digital storytelling as a methodology to study gendered aspects of migration (Banks & Deuze, 2009). Participants should be aware of the level of confidentiality provided and must have the option of withdrawing their participation at any stage of the research process. To maintain confidentiality, the participants must also be encouraged to use aliases or pseudonyms instead of their real names. In the case of visual content, options to blur or alter the visuals must be available to ensure anonymity (Denzin, 2003). Moreover, the participants must be encouraged to share the broader aspects of their migration experiences and must be discouraged from sharing specific details like addresses, workplace and names that might reveal their identity. Secure digital platforms that prioritise user privacy, data protection and encryption must be selected for sharing the digital stories. Moreover, it is crucial to state the clear guidelines for data storage and date retention, including the duration for which

the data will be retained. The researchers must also adhere to the data protection laws of the state. Researchers must also prioritise the wellbeing of the participants and take measures to minimise the risk of re-traumatisation (McLellan & Eldred, 2015). To that end, the researchers must adopt a trauma-informed approach that will guide their interaction with the participants. It is crucial to develop trauma-sensitive interview questions and create a safe environment for the participants to share their experiences. Psychoeducational materials on trauma and coping strategies should be shared with the participants to prepare them for potential emotional reactions that might arise during the research process. To use digital storytelling as a methodology, the researchers must also consider the extent of internet access, availability of technology and digital literacy skills among the participants of the study. They must make efforts to bridge the digital divide by offering access to various resources, training and support (Pitkänen & Soila-Wadman, 2017).

Ethical and practical considerations are also crucial for utilising feminist ethnography to study gendered aspects of migration. Researchers must develop a clear understanding of their social location, power dynamics and their own biases. They must critically reflect on the influence of their own positionality on the research process and interpretation of the findings (Harding, 2015). Adopting an intersectional lens to examine the complex interplay of factors such as sexuality, nationality, race and class is also crucial to the use of feminist ethnography (Crenshaw, 1989). Finally, researchers must actively seek guidance from ethical guidelines provided by the American Psychological Association to resolve any ethical dilemmas and address any power imbalances between the participants and the researcher (APA, 2017).

By considering these ethical and practical considerations, it is possible for researchers to study the gendered aspects of migration in the North African region in a manner that respects the rights of the participants, promotes social justice and contributes to the nuanced understanding of the gendered migration experiences.

Recommendations for Future Research

Significant transformations have occurred in the study of gender and migration in North Africa with the emergence of new methodologies such as PAR, digital storytelling and feminist ethnography. Building on the strengths of these methodologies, the following recommendations for future research may be made.

Researchers must engage in co-design and co-production of research objectives, methods and outcomes by involving women migrants and other relevant stakeholders. This would foster a sense of ownership and increase the applicability of the findings in the local context. With the help of these methodologies, the researchers must also try to foster ongoing dialogue between the migrant women and participants. Future research must also centre the voices and experiences of women migrants. Moreover, future research must also focus on inclusivity by adopting an intersectional approach, amplifying the marginalised voices of women and other gender minorities. Finally, the research designs for future research must strictly adhere to ethical guidelines and prioritise a culturally sensitive approach to research.

Conclusion

The present chapter explores new methodologies for studying gender and migration in the North African region and offers a fresh lens through which the multifaceted and complex topic of gender and migration could be approached. This contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of women migrants. The new methodologies offer scope for moving beyond the gender binaries and exploring the intersectionality within the gendered experiences of migration. This offers several promising directions for future research in the field of gender and migration in the North African region. Future research should be collaborative, participatory, culturally sensitive, intersectional and inclusive

so as to develop a better understanding of the uniquely gendered experiences of migration.

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