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Research Essay

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Essay Title: Female Migration and Exploitation

I, OLUWAYEMISI JOHNSON, hereby confirm that I have read and understood the
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Abstract:

This paper seeks to address the issue of female migration. It discusses how women migrate from developing to developed countries, facing oppression and exploitation especially as female migrant workers. To analyse the statement, the case study of the United Arab Emirates and Italy was discussed, specifically looking at the experiences of female migrants in these countries. The paper concludes by stating that many female migrants face exploitation in developed countries, yet they choose to stay in the developed countries rather than going back home.

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INTRODUCTION

With the rise of globalization, international migration has become a global reality today making the world more interconnected. Many people are constantly moving in search of better living standards, opportunities, as well as education. Simultaneously, with the rise of poverty, low standards of living and conflicts, people are forced to leave their countries in quest of obtaining a better future for themselves and their families. Nevertheless, out of the many migrants seeking better opportunities, it is estimated that women and girls are half the population of international migrants (United Nations Population Division, 2000); and as stated by the Danish Refugee Council (2018), many women and girls have been faced with the danger of oppression, sexual exploitation and even death when they decide to migrate. In this essay, an attempt will be made to discuss how female migrants from less developed countries are oppressed and exploited in developed countries. A case study of migrant workers in the United Arab Emirates and Italy will be used to explain the subject matter of this essay.

This essay begins by defining the key concepts relevant to the discussion. It then examines female migration and explores the ways in which migration policies shape the experiences of women migrants. The essay subsequently analyses the cases of the United Arab Emirates and Italy, focusing on the challenges and experiences of female migrants within these contexts. Finally, it concludes by summarizing the key arguments and findings.

KEY CONCEPTS

According to Perruchoud and Redpath- Cross (2011:62), migration can be defined as the process whereby an individual or groups of people move, either within the state or across an international border. To further understand this concept, Perruchoud and Redpath- Cross (2011:32 & 49) distinguish that the process of leaving one country with the hope of settling in another country is known as ‘emigration’, while ‘immigration’ is the process of moving into a state for settlement purposes. In other words, a migrant can be described as any individual moving beyond their national border to another country in pursuit of a better livelihood abroad, to avoid natural disaster, to join their family or for other reasons (United Nations Human Rights Commission, n.d.:1).

FEMALE MIGRANTS

As stated by Anti-Slavery International (2006:3), for over 40 years now, the amount of females internationally migrating has been almost the population of male migrants. As at 1960, female migrants were estimated to be about 35 million in population, while the male migrants were about 40 million. Nevertheless, in the early 2000s, the overall number of migrants had doubled. This estimate consists of women who migrate for a variety of purposes, including those migrating for employment, education or in general, a better livelihood (Anti-Slavery International, 2006:3). Furthermore, many women from developing countries migrate either as domestic workers or as skilled professionals. However, both their opportunities for migration and their ability to participate fully in these forms of employment are often constrained by persistent gender inequalities (United Nations Population Fund and International Organization for Migration, 2006:33).

Additionally, many females are said to migrate from developing countries to make more money and to help their families back home, contributing enormously to the development of their country and the host country. It was estimated that in 2015, the amount of remittances sent by international migrants to developing countries was \$432.6 billion (United Nations Women Organization, n.d.). An instance can be seen in the Philippines, the world's third highest remittance receiving country with many female migrant workers migrating to Europe and North America, who have been seen to be the main source of income for their families. Shashi (2018) explains that, due to the remittances that flow as a result of migration, oftentimes many citizens are encouraged by their governments to migrate because of the much needed capitals they provide to their home countries. Nevertheless, many female migrants still remain exploited and oppressed as they are more vulnerable than men in the society and especially as international female migrants. Many of these women migrants are said to relocate to developed countries and find employment in informal occupations such as, maids, nannies, aged care workers and so on; and these occupations are said to be often unprotected by the labour legislation (Anti-Slavery International, 2006:3). Whether these migrants migrate alone or as members of a family unit, they are at great risk of being underpaid, exploited, trafficked, raped and discriminated against.

HOW MIGRATION POLICIES IN DEVELOPED COUNTRIES AFFECT FEMALE MIGRANTS

The United Nations (2013:5) explains that migration policies are a significant part of determining the flows, circumstances and outcomes of global migration. These policies are the “rules and regulation that impact the movement of individuals and involves travel and temporary mobility, immigration, emigration, nationality, labour markets, economic and social development, industry, commerce, social cohesion, social services, health, education, law enforcement, foreign policy, trade and humanitarian issues” (Migration Data Portal, 2018). Today, many developed countries have migration policies that are unfavourable to citizens of developing countries hoping to migrate. For this reason, many migrants from developing countries engage in illegal acts such as prostitution, because of how the migration policies makes them unqualified to work in the host country or underpaid in certain jobs.

CASE STUDY

Female migrants in the United Arab Emirates

According to McPhillips (2017), “the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is one of the most densely migrant populated countries in the world, with about 90% of the inhabitants being foreign-born and most working on temporary employment contracts in a range of white-collar, blue-collar and service industry jobs”. In line with this, the Human Rights Watch (2014), states that tens of thousands of women every single year migrate to the UAE, leaving their families and their very young children behind and hoping to secure salaries for their family’s future. Unfortunately, they have no guarantee that they will end up with such salaries or even good working conditions. For example, many female migrant workers from the Philippines who had returned back home from the UAE were found to be subject to egregious levels of abuse, with very long working hours and some also found to be physically or sexually assaulted (Human Rights Watch, 2014). Many of them worked as maids; cleaning, ironing and doing lots of house chores they did not necessarily do back home. The UAE has been one of the highest reported countries to facilitate and foster the abuse and exploitation of female migrant workers.

Furthermore, based on the migration policies, many female migrant workers are rarely allowed to transfer employers even if they have been abused or receive far less than what they were promised. As a result, many female migrants are trapped with that same employer

and only face the option of returning home if things go wrong. This is an exact representation of migration policies that are unfavourable to migrants. In actual fact, the labour law specifically exempts them from its protections. This leads to many female migrants being incapable of enforcing agreements and their inability to exercise their rights as individuals.

Female migrant in Italy

A second case study is Italy, where gendered narratives surrounding migration have become an increasing concern in recent years. According to Oloruntoba et al. (2018:1130), media portrayals of female migrants frequently associate them with trafficking, sex work or domestic labour, reinforcing harmful stereotypes. Although Italy has a long history of both internal and international migration, recent years have seen a significant increase in the number of migrants arriving in the country, many of whom are from Nigeria. The experiences of Nigerian women in Italy provide a useful case for examining how gendered migration narratives shape the realities and perceptions of female migrants. As stated by Tondo (2019), about 40,000 Nigerian women migrated to Italy, with various women trafficked as sex workers. It is widely believed that many Nigerian women in Italy go into prostitution to make money, or are often trafficked and victims of exploitation in the hands of criminals and smugglers.

A number of factors have been seen to drive female migrants to these conditions. One out of the many factors includes poverty and gender inequality. According to the United Nations Population Fund and International Organization for Migration (2006:30), it has been estimated that the annual number of women and children trafficked internationally are over a million. Gender inequality and discrimination make women more vulnerable to trafficking than men. As noted by the United Nations Population Fund and International Organization for Migration (2006:34), poor or non-existent employment prospects and low wages encourage the trafficking of women, particularly into the sex industry, while some women also voluntarily migrate through internet-based marriage arrangements.

With the growing information about migrant exploitation, many countries and organizations are making the effort to protect the rights of migrants. For example, in Bangladesh, the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, alongside several private

institutions and non-governmental organizations, works to protect and support female migrant workers (Shashi, 2018). In addition, the government has introduced several legislative measures aimed at preventing the exploitation of female migrants. These include the *Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Act* (2012), the *Overseas Employment and Migrants Act* (2013), the *Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Migration Policy* (2016), and the *Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking Rules* (2017) (Shashi, 2018). Despite these legal and policy frameworks, many female migrants in developing countries continue to experience exploitation and oppression, highlighting the gap between legislative protection and its effective implementation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this essay has highlighted how inadequate attention to the aspect of female migration has led to human rights infringement and a decrease in the possibilities of achieving a global development. It is therefore evident that many women are constantly migrating from developing countries to developed countries, and this would continue increasing. However, if measures aren't put in place for these vulnerable women; many of them will continue to face the danger of oppression and exploitation.

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