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Promoting and Restricting Marriage Migrations: When Marriages Are Not Such a Private Matter

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Introduction¹

The link between dynamics of migration and marriage has been renewed since the 1980s owing to the opening of a large number of borders – particularly those of the former communist republics – and the increasing closure of certain other borders – those of the rich countries. The increase in marriages between people who are geographically, and often culturally, distant is therefore both an indication of greater freedom of movement, giving rise to an extension of the possibilities of matrimonial choices, and the result of alternative strategies in response to the difficulty of crossing some borders. Several terms exist to refer to this phenomenon: ‘cross-border marriages,’ ‘transnational marriages,’ ‘international marriages,’ or ‘marriage migration.’ In addition to these terms, aimed at capturing a category of migrants, there are also less academic terms which aim either to condemn the phenomenon by stressing the illegal nature of these migrations (‘sham marriage,’ ‘green card marriage,’ ‘marriage of convenience’) or to condemn the commodification of women’s bodies that they may entail (‘mail-order bride’).

The migration-marriage nexus is not a new phenomenon: the continuity between traditional practices of travel for marriage and today’s cross-border marriages has been addressed with regard to a number of geographical contexts (for India see Palriwala & Uberoi, 2008; for China see Davin, 2008; for Japan see Nakamatsu, 2003). Traditions of exogamy (the injunction to find a spouse outside the village of the local group) and patri-virilocality (the injunction for couples to settle in the husband’s father’s village) in many countries mean that migration through marriage has long accounted for the majority of cases of women’s mobility. Furthermore, in contexts spanning from the colonisation of the American territories to the more recent flow of workers to rich countries, migrations, which are often initiated by men, have subsequently generated, with a time lag, the migration of women into the communities that have been created in the host countries.

The main development in recent decades is that these long-distance marriages no longer take place mainly within migrant communities. On the other hand, these marriage migrations continue to involve mainly women. To give some telling examples, in the Philippines, 91% of those leaving the country on a spousal or fiancé(e) visa are women. In Russia, surveys indicate that approximately 75,000 women migrated to the United States on fiancée visas during the 1990s (Patino, 2009). East Asia is probably the

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to Marylène Lieber and Gwenola Ricordeau. Discussions we had around the publication of the special issue *"Migrations par le mariage et intimités transnationales"* were very important for the writing of this chapter.

region of the world where the phenomenon is most visible: whereas bi-national marriages between Japanese, Korean, or Taiwanese women and foreign men increased very slowly in the 1990s, marriages between local men and women from other Asian countries increased very rapidly over this period, reaching a peak in the 2000s (Chung, 2020). In these three countries, the rate of dual-national marriages as a proportion of all marriages reached 13.6% in South Korea in 2005, 27.4% in Taiwan in 2004, and 5.8% in Japan in 2005. These rates are surprisingly high, if one recalls that in the latter country the resident foreign population is low, standing at less or around 2% in the 2000s (Le Bail, 2017).

The democratisation of long-distance travel and the emergence of the internet have undeniably played a major role in the globalisation of this phenomenon and in the diversification of intermediaries, matchmaking services, and methods for meeting potential partners. Cross-border marriages, which involve a geographical distance between the future spouses, presuppose a certain degree of involvement from an intermediary. In the case of specialised tour operators (conducting so-called ‘romance tours’ or ‘marriage tours’), matches are entirely organised by mediators (Schaeffer, 2012; Wang & Chang, 2002). International marriage agencies, whether online or offline, offer a variety of services depending on the level of autonomy of the clients and the complexity of administrative procedures involved (Yamaura, 2015; Vartti, 2001; Nakamatsu, 2009). Similarly, on social networks, people sometimes act autonomously, and in other cases they are assisted by an intermediary who is familiar with the platforms in question and the intricacies of online communication (such as the ‘monitors’ assisting people in cybercafés in Yaoundé; Mfou’ou, 2005). Finally, mediation is sometimes provided simply by a relative or a person known by word of mouth who has followed the same route a few years earlier.

Beyond these intermediaries who are directly involved in bringing people into contact, many other actors come into play in a less direct way in this globalised marriage scene, whether they are promoting and regulating these marriages, or alternatively condemning and restricting them. Central and local public authorities, administrative services, feminist, humanitarian, and even religious associations are all actors motivated by one of two main logics: on the one hand, the issue of depopulation and a concern to remedy a perceived dysfunction in the family unit and reproductive work, and on the other hand, the protection of women from poor countries who may be exploited via this matrimonial market, or the protection of the values attached to marriage and promoted by the country of arrival or departure.

This chapter examines how the interests of the various actors respond to and confront each other around the issue of marriage, which is in principle a private matter, but which raises questions that go beyond the couple and the family, and lead many actors to shape these private and intimate relations.

Depopulation, the Care Crisis, and the Promotion of Cross-Border Marriages

In the field of research dealing with the process of globalisation of reproductive work, the feminisation of migration flows is explained by the need for labour in sectors of activity commonly viewed as women’s work. These needs are created by ageing populations, the increase in the proportion of women who work, the rapid increase in the number of people remaining unmarried (Lu and Yang, 2010), and the demographic imbalance between men and women in certain Asian countries, as well as the revival of paid domestic work (Milkman et al., 1998). Like migrant care assistants, nannies, and domestic staff, migrant wives can be considered to contribute to the feminisation of

migration. Indeed, even in migration, reproductive work is carried out, whether in a paid or unpaid manner (Benería, 2007). Transnational marriages may thus correspond to the search for a source of labour in a context of restrictive migration policies.

In the following two sections of this chapter, I shall first highlight how, in the context of globalisation and demographic transition, the matrimonial choices of spouses (both migrants and those receiving migrants in host countries) and the advice of potential intermediaries are orientated by the choices of states in terms of family and migration policy, and secondly, I shall focus on the role of local authorities, whose measures in favour of cross-border marriages can position them as a sort of intermediary in these unions.

A Tool for the Reorganisation of Reproductive Work

On a worldwide scale, female migrants whose journeys are connected to marriage – not only as wives, but also as mothers and as daughters-in-law – are contributing to a change in the organisation of reproductive work in the context of a ‘care crisis’ (Ito, 1996). In migration studies, ‘marriage migration’ has become a field of study in its own right (among the large number of works published since the early 2000s, see Piper & Roces, 2003; Constable, 2005; Palriwala & Uberoi, 2008; Wang & Hsiao, 2009; Yang & Lu, 2010; Maskens, 2013; Charsley, 2013; Ishii, 2016; Fresnoza-Flot & Ricordeau, 2017; Le Bail et al., 2018; Groes & Fernandez, 2018.). A number of studies analyse these marriages from the perspective of labour migration, specifically that of reproductive work (Piper & Roces, 2003; Lee, 2012). In the 1970s, the concept of the division of labour between men and women made it possible to explain the devaluation of highly feminised jobs, and this subject of study has been renewed over the last twenty years in order to analyse the feminisation of migration. With regard to domestic work, talking about ‘reproductive work’ was a way of recognising the value of unpaid tasks without which ‘productive work’ could not be done. It was also a way of deconstructing theories that viewed the division of labour as the result of a biological difference, arguing instead that it is a social construct (Benería, 1979). In the same way, the current use of the term ‘reproductive work’ in the context of migration marks a desire to emphasise that the same tasks continue to be assigned to women, and that the work carried out by migrant women continues, to varying degrees, to lack visibility, to be undervalued, and above all to be unpaid or poorly paid.

The concept of reproductive work covers three main tasks: firstly, that of renewing the productive labour force, that is, procreating, having children, and carrying out daily domestic work, including cooking, cleaning, laundry, and shopping, but also maintaining emotional and sexual relations; secondly, that of caring for dependents (in the narrow sense of care work), especially children and elderly parents; thirdly, that of social reproduction, that is, renewing the productive force at the qualitative level, which includes overseeing children’s education and socialisation, as well as the tasks related to the socialisation of the household in general and its participation in community life (Truong, 1996; Parreñas, 2012). Our use of the term ‘reproductive work’ relates to all these aspects of reproduction.

In migration studies, this term makes it possible to draw connections between analyses of migration routes that would otherwise be considered separately, from the perspectives of labour migration (domestic workers, care assistants, etc.) or family migration (wives of nationals or foreign residents) respectively. It allows us to reintroduce the case of unpaid work carried out in the private sphere into the overall field of the globalisation of care work (Benería, 2007) and that of studies devoted to the

new forms of international divisions of labour (Falquet et al., 2010), while highlighting the continuities to be found between migrant women workers and migrant wives (Kofman, 2012).

The term 'reproductive work' also brings to light the fact that the choice of migration destination often depends on the immigration policies of the destination country (Yeoh et al., 2013). The concept of reproductive work, with its critical dimension, is preferred to that of 'care work' by researchers who wish to bring out the ethno-racial hierarchies that are combined with the male-female or class divisions present in the organisation of these tasks. Thus, following on from work analysing the 'racial division of reproductive labor' within a society (Glenn, 1992) (for example, that of Black American women in the United States), some studies demonstrate the existence of an 'international division of reproductive labour,' in which migrants of certain nationalities perform this work for people of other nationalities (Parreñas, 2012) (such as Filipino domestic workers in Hong Kong or the Gulf States, and North African nannies in France). Historically, as economic, social, political, moral, or demographic transformations have taken place, reproductive work has been transferred to people of other classes or ethnic groups, or to other nationalities through immigration (Truong, 1996).

Today, in many countries with very low fertility rates, it is above all demography that is driving the need to reshape the organisation of reproductive tasks. Researchers in migration studies are therefore interested in observing how these tasks are transferred to migrants, whether through targeted migration policies or more informally through local measures.

Case studies from Asia are the most representative of this reality, for reasons described by Emiko Ochiai (2011), a family sociologist. Firstly, the destination countries have extremely low fertility levels and have experienced a 'compressed' demographic transition (a rapid change in the ageing of the population and in the decline in rates of marriage; see Chang, 2010). These countries also favour family-orientated social policies, that is, policies that encourage 'self-help and mutual support within the family and the community,' which has the effect of favouring the maintenance of unpaid reproductive work (Ochiai, 2011, p. 231). As a result of these two factors, many Asian societies favour keeping reproductive work within the family unit.

In 1997, Nicola Piper's article on Japan was one of the first to approach marriage migration in terms of work. The author describes these marriages as a cheap way for men to obtain domestic and sexual services. Out of all the rich countries in East Asia, Japan is the one that has the most restrictive migration policies with regard to the care work sector, and, even more so, the domestic work sector. However, cross-border marriages are also common in countries that have long since opened their doors to foreign workers. Researchers have thus pointed out that, in Taiwan and Singapore, migration through marriage is an alternative for families who cannot afford paid care services (Yeoh et al., 2013).

Two studies from the case of Taiwan are worth considering in greater detail. Melody Lu (2012) studied the special case of veterans who were refugees from the mainland at the end of the Chinese civil war and had no family in Taiwan. At the time of the study, veterans represent about 10% of all migrant husbands and the average age of these veterans at the time of their marriage is particularly high (69 years). The motivations for these marriages are formulated clearly in terms of the services that are

sought: ‘We need someone to care for us in old age. It is cheaper and easier to marry a mainland or a foreign wife than hire a maid.’ (p. 240) The negotiation of exchanges between the spouses is sometimes very clearly contractualised: for example, it might be a question of caring for the elderly veteran in exchange for the financial support of the foreign wife’s children in China (their education and housing). Wako Asato (2010) has also studied the case of disabled spouses, who represent 9% of cross-border marriages in Taiwan. Based on an analysis of statistics and reports from the Taiwanese Interior Ministry, he shows that among disabled people were married in 2006, 10.2% were married to a migrant wife, and the proportion rises to 34.1% in the case of people with a mental disability.

In both cases, the strategy of the elderly husband or of the Taiwanese family of people with disabilities is one of finding a solution to the care crisis, taking into account the country’s immigration and social policies, in order to provide care services within families.

From the Sustainability of Family Units to That of Local Communities

The reciprocal exchange does not only concern the migrant spouse and the husband, but also the family, and even with a community that values or supports cross-border marriages. These migrations, aimed at supporting the sustainability of families, are also intended to support the maintenance of local businesses and communities. In some of the countries that have experienced the arrival of large numbers of foreign brides, the fertility rate is below replacement level. Within these countries, peripheral or rural areas, sometimes in a state of depopulation, have been prime areas for marriage migration.

In Japan, for example, the increase in cross-border marriages is linked to anti-depopulation initiatives. As early as the 1970s, many rural localities started to use rural depopulation funds to finance programmes aimed at promoting marriages among their residents: this involved the recruitment of marriage counsellors, the provision of financial support for the wedding ceremony, the organisation of matchmaking at parties, sports outings, and trips to which women from neighbouring towns were invited (Yaguchi, 2004). In this context, some localities chose to favour cross-border marriages. As these initiatives were faced with criticisms related to the risk of human trafficking, local authorities stopped engaging directly in the promotion of international marriages, but such measures continued for a long time, such as in the village of Kamikoani (Akita prefecture), where, between 1987 and 2004, cross-border marriage couples received a settlement bonus of 300,000 yen (Takeda, 2011, p.85).

A few decades after the implementation of such schemes in Japan, the Korean authorities introduced marriage promotion programmes in the 2000s. The major difference between Japan and Korea is that the latter legislated at the national level (the International Marriage Support Law for Rural Singles). As in the case of Japan, this is a measure that aims to address the problem of men remaining unmarried in rural areas (whereas the proportion of unmarried women is a significant issue in cities). This law has been implemented in 26 municipalities (Lee, 2014).

Field surveys highlight the role that migrant women play in sustaining local activity. In regions marked by ageing and depopulation, these migrant women, who settle in the long term, represent a cheap labour force for small factories and family-run agricultural or service businesses, which often face financial difficulties (Freeman, 2011; Le Bail, 2017). In Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, the phenomenon of migrant

wives is most visible in rural areas concerned with the renewal of families and sustaining local activity. In this respect, research on marriage migration is illuminating in that it extends research on the links between the ‘care crisis’ and female migration (Ito, 1996; Constable, 2007; Huang et al., 2005; Parreñas, 2000; Ehrenreich & Russell Hochschild, 2004), beyond the domain of paid work, and also beyond the context of global cities (Sassen, 1998, 2004).

Fighting against the Commodification of Women’s Bodies and Controlling National Borders

The second part of this chapter deals with the actors who, faced with the rise in the number of transnational marriages, are involved in restricting this phenomenon. We will here speak mainly of the associative and humanitarian context, and of administrations that implement laws on marriage and rights of residence (both in countries of departure and arrival). These actors are involved for very different, even opposing, reasons – such as the protection of individuals or, conversely, the protection of morals or borders – but they all contribute in some way to controlling private relations.

Condemning the Commodification of Marriage and Women’s Bodies

Analyses in terms of care work or reproductive work offer a very utilitarian picture of migration through marriage. Indeed, since the 1980s, these marriages have generated debates on the question of the commodification of women in a globalised and unequal marriage market. A number of research studies, using an approach dominated by the radical feminist movement, describe the work provided by migrant women (wives, care workers, or sex workers) as the equivalent of work carried out in the gold, ivory, and rubber trades in the Third World in the nineteenth century, that is, as labour extracted from the South for the benefit of the North (Russell Hochschild, 2004).

Thus, early research in the 1980s on migration through marriage was mostly linked to public debates on women’s rights and focused on the commodification of women. These works describe the methods of marriage agents, who tended to offer standardised images of women to men in wealthy countries by means of catalogues of ‘mail-order brides’ (Wilson, 1988), which, in the 1980s–1990s, took the form of newsletters to which men could subscribe, or classified advertisements in mainstream magazines, which would then lead to an exchange of letters (mail-order brides, see Villapando, 1989). Other agents organised trips for groups of single men, during which there would be meetings with groups of single women (with female participants generally being more numerous). The study of these agents and ‘romance tours’ continues to the present day, taking account of the internet revolution, but with approaches that better account for women’s agency and that are less condemnatory in their approach (Luehrmann, 2007; Johnson-Hanks, 2007; Schaeffer, 2012). Furthermore, critical analysis of the unequal nature of these marriages has focused on how these marriages are embedded in colonial histories and the construction of exotic and erotic imaginaries, centring their perspective less on gender and more on race (Piper, 1997; Suzuki, 2007; Tseng, 2016).

NGOs are also important actors in promoting representations of these marriages that influence the treatment of migrant women. Although the work of most NGOs involves either helping people, carrying out advocacy, raising public awareness, or pursuing funding for these activities, the discourses that they disseminate tend to

reinforce the negative stereotype of the passive, victimised migrant woman. This type of stereotype is negative because it contributes to representations and policy practices that are based on the idea that migration through marriage is in itself a social problem (Hsia, 2007; Bélanger & Flynn, 2018).

The victim-based approach to migration through marriage, which is often favoured by the media, humanitarian organisations, and feminist networks (some feminist researchers are important actors in these debates) carries the risk of feeding into discourses that are more concerned with values and moral standards than with the reality of human trafficking. The underlying principle of such discourses is that ‘real marriage,’ that is, ‘romantic marriage,’ should not have anything to do with money. Drawing boundaries in this way between, on the one hand, the sphere of private relations and the home (viewed as the domain of more authentic and emotional social relationships), and, on the other hand, the sphere of the market (viewed as a harsher and more impersonal domain) has long been questioned (Zelizer, 2005; Constable, 2009). In response to the tendency to speak in moralising terms about private relations and to deny the agency of migrant women, a number of studies (some of which explicitly adopt feminist analytical frameworks) have focused on migrant women’s capacity for agency and resistance, and have described in much greater depth the complex realities of power relations in these situations (Patico, 2009; Grillot, 2013; Constable, 2003). This work also helps to question the supposed undesirability of these marriages by highlighting the porosity between commodified forms of private relations and marital relationships (Brennan, 2004; Piper & Roces, 2003; Faier, 2009).

However, radical feminist and humanitarian discourses are very influential in terms of policy choices and administrative practices (front-line practices or street level bureaucracy). The main feature of such discourses is the condemnation of the commercial character of cross-border marriages as opposed to romantic marriages (those that would be motivated only by interactions and emotional bonds between individuals), where the latter are presented as a guarantee of equality between women and men, and as a constitutive value of democracies (for Taiwan see Lan, 2008; for the Netherlands see Bonjour & de Hart, 2013; for Denmark see Fernandez, 2013). In the name of protecting the authenticity of marriage, monitoring techniques for identifying ‘real’ marriage have proliferated and given rise to numerous field studies. Research has focused on how agents of consulates and prefectures, in order to combat forced marriages and marriages of convenience, participate in the control of people’s bodies and private lives (Maskens, 2015; Block & Bonjour, 2013; Lavanchy, 2014; Geoffrion, 2018). They require women and men to demonstrate affection and both physical and emotional intimacy as proof of consent, and to prove that their motives are amorous rather than financial (Lan, 2008). These discourses maintain that, in the host countries, migrant women endanger the values and norms of gender equality, whereas in the countries of departure, the emigration of women through marriage is evidence of a society where women are not emancipated, where romantic (‘real’) marriage has not yet become the norm, and thus evidence that this society has not yet modernised (for Vietnam see Lee, 2014). Countries have therefore put in place regulations to control cross-border marriages, with the aim of meeting international standards for the protection of women, and based on a rationale of combating human trafficking: Cambodia passed laws restricting foreign marriages since 2010, and Vietnam passed similar laws in 2002 and 2006 (Lee, 2014). In the Philippines, the law has prohibited mail-order marriages since 1990 (Ricordeau, 2017). Furthermore, since the stigma of prostitution (Pheterson, 1996) is attached to migrant women through marriage, they are

seen as eroding national morality (for Thailand see Suksomboon, 2011; for Vietnam see Lee, 2014). The monitoring of private relationships is thus also carried out by the countries of departure. However, just as in the host countries, controversies about emigration through marriage revolve more around national identity than they do around the protection of women's rights.

The approach of conceiving of borders as administrative practices makes it possible to bring to light state agents' representations regarding the ideal marriage, and implicitly, the founding imaginaries of the nation. Indeed, representations of gender roles structure national ideals (Yuval-Davis, 1997), and the positive or negative characteristics associated with foreign partners, whether male or female, also reveal the characteristics that, in the eyes of agents of the state, should be possessed by people in order to be capable of embodying the nation (Wray, 2011).

Protecting National Borders and Values

Cross-border marriages are subject to tensions between political priorities and individuals' plans for their private lives (Maskens, 2013). The assessment of matrimonial intentions is the responsibility of state representatives, who have the dual injunction of respecting an individual freedom enshrined in the Constitution or the law and defending the value of the institution of marriage and the country's borders. However, the proliferation of measures that have been implemented in many countries calls into question the respect for individual freedoms.

Administrative practices in consulates, prefectures, and other places where borders are negotiated on a daily basis, and where, in particular, the authenticity of marriages is assessed, are based not only on considerations of norms and values (such as those of romantic marriage and gender equality), but also on the objective of limiting immigration and combating the circumvention of restrictive immigration policies. A number of countries, wishing to control immigration, have strengthened their laws with a view to combating marriages of convenience. Public debates present it as both an obvious fact and a threatening reality that there is an increase in marriages of convenience for the purpose of migration. Research highlights some discrepancies between the dominant discourses in Western and Asian countries. In the West, discourses constructing migration through marriage as a threat are strongly centred around endogamous marriages, and it is the couple or citizen of immigrant background who is stigmatised, whereas in Asian countries it is migrant women who are represented as a threat. In the West, work on the link between migration and marriage has long focused on the marital choices of single migrants and their descendants, on the assumption that this choice is indicative of their level of integration into the host society (Qian & Lichter, 2007; Safi, 2008). Cross-border marriages with a person from the country of origin are thus analysed either as the result of immigrants' lack of access to the marriage market, or of their refusal to integrate, or of the imposition of so-called 'traditional' or even 'undemocratic' matrimonial practices by continuing sociability networks in their cultural community. Some studies deconstruct the assumed link between spousal choice and cultural integration (Casier et al., 2013; Streckx, 2015). Others describe how arranged marriages are sometimes no more than a façade behind which young people from immigrant families are exercising increasing autonomy in their choices, and where parents themselves privilege feelings over social obligations (Qureshi et al., 2012). Despite this, public opinion continues to be dominated by the imagined risks, which include: the creation of ethnic enclaves that escape social control and threaten the country's political stability; the rise of forced marriages that threaten the lives of young

people; the undermining of an already fragile welfare state; and a deligitimisation of the whole migration control system (D'Aoust, 2013). The issue of ethnic enclaves and forced marriages are clearly connected to the alleged practices of migrants.

The problem is not presented in these terms in those Asian countries where cross-border marriages do not largely involve migrants. Immigration through marriage is a much more visible reality in South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore than elsewhere in the world. It is understandable that the discourse has become more extreme in Taiwan, for example, given the scale of the phenomenon in this country: out of those who acquire Taiwanese citizenship, currently 97% do so through marriage to a Taiwanese person, and out of that 97%, 99% are women (Cheng, 2013). In Taiwan and Hong Kong, foreign wives are perceived by the host society as poor and uneducated. Yet migrant women are at the heart of the family unit through marriage and take on part of the work of social reproduction. They are considered to be poorly qualified in their role as mothers, and there is concern that the next generation, being less well educated, could undermine the country's competitiveness. The media in Hong Kong portrays migrant women by marriage as lazy, irresponsible, and opportunistic (Newendorp, 2010). They are therefore viewed as representing a risk for nations such as Taiwan, Singapore, or Hong Kong that owe their recent success to the 'quality' of their population and identify themselves as elite centres with successful societies (Hsia, 2007; Cheng, 2013; Newendorp, 2008, p. 33), as well as for nations that are in the process of redefining their position on the international stage, such as China (Barabantseva & Grillot, 2019). The boundary between 'us' and 'them' is thus based more on considerations related to the level of education, and to the ability to carry out social and cultural reproduction, than on progressive considerations (gender relations in the couple, romantic marriage, etc.), as is the case in European countries. Consequently, many works describe the linguistic and cultural training that is put in place to make these women into good mothers capable of managing the education of future citizens (for Hong Kong see Newendorp, 2008; for Japan see Faier, 2009) and reveal the façade of multicultural policies that are actually designed to limit these women's cultural influence (for South Korea see Kim, 2013). In Taiwan, discourses on foreign brides have even developed around considerations of biological heredity, health, and morality (Lan, 2008).

Among the Asian countries that receive large numbers of foreign brides, South Korea stands out for the direction that official identity discourses have taken. Under pressure from NGOs, South Korea legislated for the regulation of marriage agents in 2008 (as did other countries that are net recipients of women migrants by marriage, such as the US in 2005; see Jehle & Miller, 2010), yet debates on the commodification of these unions have been overshadowed by mobilisation against the discrimination and stigmatisation of migrant women and their families. Accordingly, the first measure taken by the government in 2007 was to ban discriminatory expressions in marriage agency advertisements, and then the framework for reflection on future laws in this area came to be centred around the concept of the 'multicultural family.' Representations of migration by marriage have benefited from the context of the promotion of a new multicultural Korean national identity, but also from the numerous measures aimed at promoting cross-border marriage with a view to supporting a familialist regime (Lee, 2012). The particular orientation of South Korea can be explained by the need to maintain this familialist regime while responding to extremely rapid demographic and social changes, and without having made the choice, as in Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, to favour the outsourcing of domestic tasks (partly through immigration).

However, in Korea, these official discourses and legislative choices should not blind us to the fact that there remain pressures on foreign wives, who are asked to ‘reproduce Koreans’ (Kim, 2013).

Conclusion

The field of research on the link between migration and marriage has been productive over the past two decades, and has highlighted the many actors involved, including migrants and their networks, the private sector (such as marriage agencies), states and local authorities (whose interests may differ), feminist associations, and humanitarian organisations. The interactions between these actors with their different objectives – the provision of productive labour, the protection of women and migrants, and the protection of national borders and values – seem to converge overall on a strong state interventionism in the private domain of marriage.

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