

Gender and Migration Scholarship: An Overview from a 21st Century Perspective

Estudios de género y migración: Una revisión
desde la perspectiva del siglo XXI

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Gender and migration research has grown vastly in the last thirty years, but where does it stand today, at the outset of the twenty-first century? Much of immigration scholarship shows continuing androcentric blindness to feminist issues and gender (Morakvasic, 1984; Pedraza, 1991). That's old news, but it's still true. That, however, is not the story that I narrate here, as today there *are* vibrant studies on gender and migration. The scholarship remains somewhat balkanized, and in this short essay, I outline six distinctive streams of gender and migration research.¹

Gender and Migration: Carrying the Flag

In the first category of “gender and migration” scholarship, I see researchers—almost all of them women—pursuing what some might call a mainstream social science approach. Here, the goal is to make gender an institutional part of immigration studies. It is not, as is often mistakenly suggested, solely about gauging gender gains for immigrant and refugee women. Rather, a small group of intrepid scholars are carrying the flag to establish legitimacy for gender in immigration studies.

¹Given the space constraints for this short essay, this review is not a comprehensive overview of gender and migration scholarship, but rather an analytic overview of recent trends in this subfield.

In the United States this includes prominent scholars such as sociologist, demographer and co-editor of the *American Sociological Review*, Katharine Donato, as well as historian and former president of the Social Science History Association Donna Gabbaccia, and anthropologists Patricia Pessar and Sarah Mahler.

Some of these authors edited a special issue of *International Migration Review* in 2006, with the title of “A Glass Half Full?: Gender in Migration Studies”. This was a twenty year follow-up to a 1986 special issue of *IMR* that had focused on the category of immigrant *women*. By the 1990s, research had shifted away from a focus on “women” and was emphasizing migration as a gendered process. This research sought to break simplistic gender binaries, and drew attention to gendered labor markets and social networks, the relationship between paid work and household relations, changes in family patriarchy and authority that come about through migration, and gendered and generational transnational life (Pessar and Grasmuck, 1991, Kibria, 1993,

Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994). Later, Stephanie Nawyn (2010) emphasized the ways that refugee resettlement NGOs shape refugee women’s ability to challenge patriarchy in the home, yet simultaneously reaffirm patriarchal capitalism in the workplace, while Cynthia Cranford’s (2007) research emphasized how economic restructuring, and workplace and union politics allow Latina immigrant janitors to challenge gendered constraints in multiple spheres. In all of these works, gender was promoted as a dynamic and constitutive element of migration and immigrant integration.

In the special issue of *IMR*, Donato *et al.* (2006) addressed some of these key themes and offered a multidisciplinary review of the field of migration and gender, and the results reflect the pattern identified by Stacey and Thorne (1985) more than two decades ago: more openness in anthropology, less change in the more quantitative fields of demography and economics. Scholars such as Donato and Gabbaccia seek to discover what they call the “gender balance” of major mi-

gration movements around the world and in different time periods. They seek to measure when migration flows tip from being primarily male to largely female. In the U.S., that happened at an aggregate level in the early 20th century.

In Europe, especially Spain, there is burgeoning new research on transnational motherhood, and South American women's labor migration to Spain and their roles as pioneers in family migration (Escrivá, 2000, Pedone and Araujo, 2008). Research in Asia focuses on gender, migration and the state (Oishi, 2005, Piper and Roces, 2003), and there is diverse gender research in Mexico, the nation with the longest continuously running transnational labor migration (e.g., Ariza, 2000, Arias, 2000, D'Aubeterre, 2000, Oehmichen, 2000, Woo Morales, 1995, 2007). In the U.S., a new book by Gordillo (2010) focuses on Mexican women's gendered transnational ties, and a 2009 book edited by Seyla Benhabib and Judith Resnick carries the gender flag into the territory of debates about citizenship, immigration law, sov-

ereignty and legal jurisdiction. The topic of domestic violence in immigrant women's lives has also garnered deserved attention (Menjívar and Salcido, 2002). These are some varied and ongoing efforts that seek to reform immigration scholarship so that it acknowledges gender as fundamental to migration processes.

Migration and Care Work

A second stream has focused exclusively on the link between women's migration, paid domestic work and family care. The key concepts here are "care work", "global care chains", "care deficits", "transnational motherhood", and "international social reproductive labor". The development of this literature has been deeply transformed by theories of intersectionality. Beginning in the 1980s, and guided by the paradigm changing work of feminist scholars of color in the U.S., the unitary concepts of "men" and "women" were replaced with the idea that there are multiplicities of femininities and masculinities, and that these are interconnected, relational, and

intertwined with inequalities of class, race-ethnicity, nation and sexualities.

In this body of research, the focus shifts away from relations between women and men, to inequalities between immigrant women and nation, the way these are constituted by the international unloading of domestic reproductive work from women of the post-industrial, rich countries onto women from the less-developed, poor countries of the global South. Often, this mandates long-term family separations between migrant women and their children. This is a large body of literature, and still growing, but key contributors have included Parrenas (2001), Chang (2000), and Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997), Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001, 2007) in the U.S.; Constable (1997) and Lan (2006) in Asia; Lutz (2002, 2008), Escrivá (2000), Parrenas (2001) and Anderson (2000) in Europe and the UK; and Hochschild and Ehrenreich's (2003) edited book, covering global ground. Newer research examines the integration of immigrant men into domestic jobs, such as Polish handymen in

London (Kilkey, 2010) and Mexican immigrant gardeners in Los Angeles (Ramirez and Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2009).

Why did this literature begin emerging around 2000? The late twentieth-century was marked by the rapid increase in women migrating for domestic work. During the peak periods of modernization and industrialization, migrants were mainly men—usually men from poorer, often colonial societies—recruited to do “men’s work”. Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Irish, Italian and Mexican men, for instance, all took turns in being recruited and brought to build infrastructure in industrializing United States. In some instances, family members were allowed to join them, but in many cases, especially those involving immigrant groups perceived as non-white, family members (women and children) were denied admission. Government legislation enforced these prohibitions on the permanent incorporation of these workers and their families. The Bracero Program and the Guest Worker Program are constitute exemplars of these modern

gendered systems, which relied on male labor recruitment and subjugation, and the exclusion of families.

Things have changed today. Factories migrate overseas in search of cheaper labor, and hi-tech and highly educated professionals have joined labor migrants. But among them are legions of women who criss-cross the globe, from south to north, from east to west in order to perform paid domestic work. Consequently, in some sites, we are seeing the redundancy of male migrant labor, and the saturation of labor markets for migrant men. In places as diverse as Italy, the Middle East, Taiwan and Canada, Filipina migrant women caregivers and cleaners far outnumber Filipino migrant men. The demand is triggered in different ways by different nations, raising questions of how state policies facilitate women's migration, and here there is a lot of variation. What is clear is this: Women from countries as varied as Peru, Philippines, Moldavia, Eritrea and Indonesia are leaving their families, communities and countries to migrate thousands of miles away

to work in the new worldwide growth industry of paid domestic work and elder care. What remains puzzling is the marginalization of this literature in immigration scholarship. That could be explained by the fact that the topic draws together three elements usually thought to be unimportant: women, the domestic sphere, and carework.

Sexualities

A third branch of gender and immigration research has been more related to the humanities, queer studies, and cultural studies. Here, the focus is on sexualities, including gay and queer identities, as well as hetero-normativity and compulsory heterosexuality, employed both as a form of legal immigration exclusion as well as inclusion. The posthumously published book by Lionel Cantú, *The Sexuality of Migration* (2009), edited by his former mentor Nancy Naples and colleague Salvador Ortiz, shows how sexual relationships among Mexican gay men are related to international tourism, transnational networks and sometimes, legal asylum. The debates over gay

marriage also resonate in immigration policies that deny entrance to queer, gay, LGBT and transgender immigrants. Eithne Luibheid (2002) takes up these themes in *Entry Denied: Controlling Sexuality at the Border*, where she shows how implicit and explicit definitions of heteronormativity have been integral to laws that govern immigration control. In most nations, heterosexual citizens can sponsor their foreign partners for legal residence. But only 19 countries around the world permit lesbian and gay citizens to sponsor their foreign partners. The U.S. is not among those 19 nations. As sociologists Danielle Hidalgo and Carl Bankston (2010) point out, the 1965 Immigration Act made heterosexual marriage the most important avenue for legal entry to the U.S. We usually think of the 1965 Immigration Act as liberalizing immigration legislation, as it ended the Asian racial exclusions and institutionalized legal family immigration—but it is also exclusionary because it reifies a narrow heterosexual definition of family. Another

book that addresses the long-

standing invisibility of gay and queer immigrants is Martin Manalansan's (2003), *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora*, an ethnography conducted in New York City.

Too often “sexualities” gets translated as a focus on queer sexualities, and a book that makes a significant contribution to this field and important intervention in studying “up” is Gloria González-López's (2005) *Erotic Journeys: Mexican Immigrant Women and their Sex Lives*. This book looks at normative heterosexual practices and values of Mexican immigrant working class women in order to reveal how processes of invisible power organize Mexican immigrant women's lives. Rather than taking the familiar approach of focusing on social problems such as teen pregnancy, or the transnational transmission of HIV, González-López examines Mexican immigrant women's sexual practices and how they feel about them. It's the sociological imagination at its best, making visible the socially constructed and problematic nature of something previously taken as normative and acceptable.

Sex Trafficking

The fourth stream of gender and migration research is centered on debates about sex trafficking, and migrant women engaged in sex work. In Europe, this is a huge area of scholarship and activism, one where the moral crusade often masks structures of labor exploitation (Anderson, and Davidson, 2003, Anderson, and Andri-jasevic; 2008, Oso, 2010). One of the strongest critics of the “rescue industry” is scholar/activist Laura Agustín (2007). Originally from Latin America, but based in the UK, she maintains a very up-to-date blog offering a commentary on sex tourism, sex work migration, and crackdowns by police and immigration authorities. Sex work draws migrant women from Eastern Europe, the Caribbean and Latin America, Asia and Africa. Highly influenced by Anzaldúa’s borderlands thinking, Agustín seeks to break down the duality of seeing migrants as unwanted intruders or powerless victims. She views migrant women’s sex work through the lens of labor markets and informal economies,

and favors a perspective that is devoid of moralizing, one that prefers agency to victimization.

The U.S.-based scholar Rachel Parrenas is best known for her work on transnational Filipina domestic workers and their family forms, but she is now writing about her research on Filipina migrant entertainers and hostesses in Japan. Some of this writing has already appeared as a chapter in her 2008 book, *The Force of Domesticity*.

Like Laura Agustín, she views migrant women sex workers through the lens of labor markets and structural constraints, rather than as immoral women or hapless victims of exploitation. Unlike Agustín, Parrenas provides close up ethnography of the Japanese sex industries’ reliance on Filipino women and transgender hostesses and entertainers. Until very recently, there was an entire visa system set up to facilitate temporary labor contracts for Filipina/o hostesses in Japan, but this ended with U.S. pressure from the “war on trafficking” which assumes that all commercial sex transactions are tantamount to exploitation, regardless of consent. The United States funds

over 100 projects around the world to stop sex trafficking. Parrenas and Agustín agree: many of these U.S. campaigns are tools to control women, and to spread American colonialist culture and morality.

Borderlands and Migration

The fifth arena is a broad one that owes its legacy to Gloria Anzaldúa's classic *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, published in 1987. The scholarship which it generated brings together a Chicana studies focus on the hybridity of identities, and the hybrid space of borderlands. Influenced by socialist feminist thought, and internal colonialism, the focus here is on both mestiza identity, *and* spaces that defy easy opposition between dominant and dominated, here and there. *Women and Migration in the US-Mexico Borderlands*, edited by Denise Segura and Pat Zavella (2007), best exemplifies this stream. Here the contributors argue that there are feminist borderlands and theoretical emphases: structural, discursive, interactional and agentic. New destinations re-

search that focused on the gendered reception for Mexican immigrants in the South and Midwest also highlights diverse borders and crossings (Deeb-Sossa and Binkham Mendez 2008, Schmalzbauer, 2009).

The notion of a "gendered borderlands" reverberates in research far beyond the U.S.-Mexico border zone. As already noted, Laura Agustín, the scholar/activist who focuses on sex trafficking, is also inspired by Anzaldúa, and very deliberately employs border thinking, challenging the alleged oppression and victimization of migrant women sex workers, and rethinking women's migration rights in a broader framework. Bandana Purkayastha's (2003) research on South Asian immigrant women also brings together intersectionalities and transnational social life. And Yen Le Espiritu (2003), underscoring the role of U.S. imperialism, military intervention, and multinational corporations in fomenting refugee movements and labor and professional class migration, also draws attention to the United States as the primary border crosser. It is a scholarly twist on the old Chi-

cano T-shirt slogan: “We didn’t cross the border. It crossed us”. And it resonates with the political slogan used by Caribbean and South Asian immigrant activists in the UK, signaling the colonialist legacies of contemporary migration and demographic transitions: “We’re here because you were there”.

Gender, Migration and Children

An emergent area of scholarship focuses on gender, migration and children. Less cohesively developed than the other arenas reviewed here, the research on children and the gendered ramifications of transnational migration is nevertheless a critical emergent field. Gendered social constructions of childhood mediate transnational migration processes and childhoods (Orellana, *et. al.*, 2003; Thorne, *et. al.*, 2003). Researchers have examined gendered dynamics surrounding “the children left behind” as their mothers migrate as transnational domestic workers (Parrenas, 2005); the negotiated narratives of sexuality and purity among second-generation young women

(Espiritu, 2001); the gendered and racialized work experiences of second generation youth (Lopez, 2003); and the gendered concerns and strategies that immigrant parents employ in organizing their children’s transnational trips home (Smith, 2005). Another body of scholarship looks at the gendered labor performed by the children of poor and working class Mexican immigrants (Valenzuela, 1999; Estrada and Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2011). Research has also examined children’s gendered expectations for family migration projects (Pavez Soto, 2010) and more generally the gendered options of pursuing education vs. migration (Paris, 2010).

Conclusion

Where do we go from here? The answer, as I think I’ve shown, is that the gender and migration research momentum is advancing in many directions. This includes new and continuing research on global care chains, labor market processes and activism around sex work and anti-sex trafficking campaigns, women and bor-

derlands hybridity, continuing projects on the gendered and generational processes of transnational migration, gendered social constructions of childhood, and sophisticated tabulations in demography. Many of these involve a subtle shift from a “migration and development” paradigm toward one that focuses on gender and “immigrant integration”. I think these are all valuable. But two trends are particularly notable: Researchers in these different

spheres are mostly not in conversation with one another. Secondly, there is a near total deafness from scholars working on other core areas of immigration studies, on segmented assimilation, immigrant religion, transnationalism and citizenship. The former is due to the increasingly specialized and balkanized nature of social science research today and the latter remains a concern that should be remedied.

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