

Literature Review: Feminized Immigration in Chile

Today, women make up about 50% of the world's migrants, a phenomenon that has begun to gain notoriety in some research circles, often referred to as the “feminization” of migration. However, the majority of immigration research continues to ignore gender and focus purely on global economic implications for western powers. Significant research gaps exist in the areas of intraregional migration, female-specific migration, and the experiences of migrants in destination countries. Research that has been done specifically on “feminized migration” often grants a disproportionate amount of attention to sex trafficking in Asia and Europe, ignoring both Latin America as a region and the immigrant experience of female immigrants who work in sectors other than the sex trade. While sex trafficking is certainly a problem for female migrants, by ignoring other aspects of the female immigrant experience, researchers allow policymakers to ignore the need for supportive policies towards female immigrants in other sectors of the economy.

In Chile, women make more than half of the migrant population. Chile, not traditionally a destination country, has seen a significant rise in intraregional immigration, in large part from Peru. Peruvian immigrants immigrate to Chile at an almost 60/40 male to female ratio, with Peruvian women immigrating to work overwhelmingly in the domestic and service sectors. Chile and Peru have a distinct history dating back to frontier disputes arising during the Guerra del Pacifico of 1897 and continuing today due to their close proximity and economic ties. This history has helped foster certain degrees of xenophobic attitudes towards Peruvians within mainstream Chilean culture, thus making the Peruvian female immigrant in Chile face a threefold set of obstacles, first as a newcomer, second as a woman relegated to inferior jobs in specific industries, and third as a Peruvian. Because Chile has relatively limited experience with

immigration, policies towards immigrants tend to be recent, if they exist at all. My reasons for reviewing the current academic literature on female immigration in Chile are first to determine what the female immigrant experience in Chile is like and second how policymakers – both at the government level and within nongovernmental organizations (NGO's) – approach the growing immigrant population within Chile.

Feminized immigration in the global context

Literature on feminized immigration in the global context is the most plentiful body of literature on female-specific immigration, most of it having been written in the last decade and a half. Overwhelmingly, it focuses on immigration to developed countries from developing countries, sex trafficking, and economic phenomenons of female specific immigration such as remuneration and children left behind in home countries. In Rita Simon and Caroline B. Brettel's widely cited book "international migration: the female experience," the authors argue that, contrary to traditional immigration literature; women migrate in increasingly large numbers, often as the first in their families to immigrate. B. Ehrenreich and A.R. Hochschild, in "Global woman: Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy" (2002), argue that immigration literature ignores the contributions of poor women to economies both in destination and sending countries. Their work looks at remittances, the experience of children left behind, and the effect on family structures in homes where women have migrated in search of work. In L.B. Engle's anthology of short essays "The World in Motion: Short Essays on Migration and Gender," the author focuses on "female specific" issues such as human trafficking, genital mutilation, and rape. Engle argues that gender plays an incredibly important role in an individual's decision to migrate, a psychological and social phenomenon that begs for more research. Like Simon and Brettel and Ehenreich and Hoschild, Engle takes a broad, often experiential based view of female

immigration, focusing primarily on Western, Asian, and occasionally African countries. Latin America is rarely mentioned and policy implications are only peripherally discussed.

In a paper in association with the World Bank entitled “Gender, Poverty Reduction and Migration,” Irena Omelaniuk takes a more policy-oriented approach to a discussion on gendered migration. In her analysis, Omelaniuk notes a connection between migration and poverty reduction, specifically in terms of gendered migration, arguing that migration is often a positive force in that it can reconfigure gendered relations by providing women opportunities to participate in the global market. Omelaniuk notes certain policies in emigration countries (the Philippines) that aim to support their nationals who have migrated to other countries. While her work fills a necessary niche, she completely ignores certain parts of the world (Latin America and Africa) and focuses her policy recommendations towards the reduction of sexual exploitation without noting very much about other aspects of the immigrant experience.

Feminized Immigration, Latin America specific

While general literature on gendered immigration tends to ignore Latin America, there is a certain amount of literature specifically addressing immigration to, from, and within Latin America. In “Management versus rights: women’s migration and global governance in Latin America and the Caribbean,” Tanya Basok and Nicola Piper establish an analysis of governance of International Organizations (IO’s), arguing that there has been an emphasis placed on economic aspects of immigration with border controls and human trafficking being the primary two paradigms through which IO’s establish policy. These discourses place blame for immigrant abuse primarily in the hands of traffickers and smugglers, thereby ignoring problems created by exploitive employment practices, poor immigration policies, and hostile environments in destination countries. Basok and Piper’s analysis lacks some nuance in that they tend to refer to

Latin America in general terms and not on a country or even regional basis. In “Gender and intraregional migration in South America,” (2009) another research paper conducted by an IO, this time the UNDP, Marcella Cerrutti provides thorough background on the increase of female migration in South America and the reasons behind it. The authors focus on Bolivian, Paraguayan and Peruvian immigrants in Argentina, giving economic reasons for the increase in autonomous migration of women including the increasing interconnectedness of economies and the rising demand for workers in the service and care industries. While Cerrutti lays a good foundation, she acknowledges that her research alone does not fully address the nuances of the increase in intraregional female migration within South America, and she ends her analysis calling for further research on the topic to determine the true effects of migration, namely, if the process does more to empower or disenfranchise women.

A significant body of research exists regarding immigration in the Latin American context. “New World Orders: Continuities and changes in Latin American Migration,” by Jorge Durand and Douglas S Massey analyzes Latin American migration from a historical perspective, arguing that Latin America as a region has undergone a transition from being a country of destination to a country of out-migration over the past half-century. The authors also note that certain economically successful countries within Latin America (Chile, Argentina, and Costa Rica) have become destination countries for other Latin Americans where they had not been in the past. Though the authors mainly analyze the processes, types, and push-pull factors of migration, they touch on the immigrant experience slightly in that they note that the process of adaptation for immigrants is “strongly conditioned by legal status and other structural factors in society.” This fact has significant policy implications and deserves much more investigation from the academic community.

Feminized immigration in Chile

Literature specifically addressing modern immigration in Chile is limited. While a decent amount of academic work analyzing historical (European) immigration to Chile, immigration in Chile is now overwhelmingly intraregional, with migrants arriving from Peru, Argentina, and Bolivia, a phenomenon that has yet to be thoroughly analyzed by the academic community. That said, several academics, Carolina Espinoza Stephoni in particular, have written extensively on the subject. In her book “Immigration en Chile: Una oportunidad a la Integración” (Immigration in Chile: an opportunity for integration), Stephoni begins by discussing the immigrant’s experience in Chile as one that encounters certain xenophobic attitudes from mainstream Chilean society. Stephoni continues by addressing issues faced by Peruvians and other immigrants in Chile on a day-to-day basis. While she does address the female immigrant experience in Chile in one chapter she does not go far enough in addressing the entirety of situations faced by immigrants, nor does she venture to make very many policy recommendations or analyze current policy either in the government or from NGO’s.

Fundacion Instituto de la Mujer, a Chilean NGO, released a 2002 report entitled “Migrantes andinas en Chile: el caso de la migración Peruana” (Andean Migrants in Chile: the case of Peruvian Migration). The report argues that there has been a lack of female-specific research in the immigration field, and that Peruvian migration to Chile has become increasingly female dominated. It notes that the Peruvian government has made efforts to improve documentation of its nationals in the last decade or so in an effort to improve the livelihoods of Peruvians living in foreign countries, but that the Chilean government has done very little, citing Chile’s lack of experience with immigration as the reason for this. The report goes on to argue that international statutes and laws have been more relevant than Chilean laws in protecting the

rights of immigrants in Chile. While this policy analysis is good and unique, the report is limited by the fact that it only looks at government policy and fails to note the importance of NGO's in protecting the rights of immigrants.

In "Peruvian Migration in a global context," Ayumi Tenaka, Karsten Paerregaard and Ulla Berg discuss Peru's emerging identity as an "emigrant country," noting that 10% of Peru's population currently lives abroad. They address issues leading to this including a long history of migration, economic crisis, political stability, and recent structural adjustments, noting that because Peruvians can reach Chile by bus, Peruvian immigrants tend to be poorer and to see migration to Chile as a last resort. While an important piece of literature regarding push-pull factors and historical basis for Peruvian migration, like in much of the accompanying literature on the topic of immigration in Latin America, the authors fail to make any kind of analysis regarding policy and only lightly touch on the nuances of gendered migration from Peru.

Elena Sabogal and Lorea Nunez compare the in-country experience of Peruvians in Santiago and South Florida in their article "Sin papeles' Middle and working class Peruvians in Santiago and South Florida." They argue that the Peruvian immigrant's experience in Santiago is characterized by competition and their irregular immigration status. Sabogal and Nunez argue that while immigration policies in Chile are less restrictive than in the United States, the Peruvian immigrant often faces disenfranchisement due to xenophobic attitudes in Chile arising from historical and current confrontations that "have fostered distrust and disdain that Chileans express in terms of racial and class discrimination." The authors discuss the Peruvian female's experience in Chile, looking at working conditions of women in the domestic sector, and arguing that irregular immigration status and low socioeconomic status combine to create precarious

situations for Peruvian women, often resulting in significant worker abuses. While some analysis of policy is included, the authors fail to analyze the role of NGO's.

Conclusion

The current body of literature on feminized immigration, specifically in the Chilean context, has established several important trends. First, that women are immigrating in greater numbers and increasingly as the first of their family. Second, that economic and political factors tend to be the primary reasons why women immigrate. Third, particularly specific to Chile, that women overwhelmingly immigrate from Peru to Chile to work in the domestic sector where they encounter several consistent problems having to do with irregular immigration status, low socioeconomic status and xenophobic relations to their Peruvian identity, and a general lack of support from government policies. While this information is important to discourses on immigration and has implications far beyond just Chile and Peru, much remains to be investigated in terms of how mainstream attitudes among local people affect the immigrant experience and on policy implications, both from governments and from NGO's.

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