

New directions in gender and immigration research

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Immigration studies has grown vastly in the last 30 years, but glance at the principal journals and publications in the United States, and immediately you get it: gender is still ghettoized in immigration scholarship. Basic concepts like gender, sex, power, privilege, sexual discrimination, and intersectionalities are regularly absent from the vocabulary and the study designs. The cottage industries of segmented assimilation, transnationalism, and citizenship—with a few significant exceptions—remain like hermetically sealed steam trains from another century, chugging along oblivious to developments in gender scholarship of the last 30 years. I went through all of the recent issues of the *International Migration Review*, the premier social science journal in this field, and I found that in 2007, 2008, and 2009, there were a total of seven articles with “women” or “gender” in the title. In 2006, there were none except those included in a special issue on gender. Why is that? Gender remains one of the fundamental social relations that anchors and impacts immigration patterns, including labor migration as well as professional class migrations and refugee movements. Gender is deeply implicated in imperialist, military, and colonial conquests, which are widely recognized as the roots of global international migration flows. Once immigration movements begin, they take form in markedly gendered ways. In addition, immigration processes bring about life-impacting changes, de-stabilizing and remodeling the gendered way daily life is lived.

Sociology experienced an increase in feminist research in the 1980s and 1990s. In the 1970s, feminist research projects had emphasized the ways in which institutions and social privileges are constructed in ways that favor men. Since then, most feminist-oriented scholars have dispensed with unitary concepts of “men” and “women.” Multiplicities of femininities and masculinities are recognized today, as interconnected, relational, and intertwined in relations of class, race-ethnicity, nation, and sexualities. The focus on intersectionalities in immigration studies is palpable in gender and immigration studies elsewhere around the globe too, but from what I can see, it is perhaps less institutionalized in Europe, Asia, and Latin America. Outside of the United States, there is also less focus on men and masculinities, and sexualities (with the exception of trafficking, which I discuss below).

Looking at scholarship on gender and migration today, I see two seemingly contradictory trends. On the one hand, an androcentric blindness to feminist issues and gender remains. It is business as usual, the missing feminist revolution. Morakvasic made this observation in 1984.

and Silvia Pedraza in 1991. That's now an old song, and I don't want to sing it here. On the other hand, there is a vibrant scholarship on gender and migration, but not only is it not reaching or shaping some of the debates at the core, but it is also balkanized. In fact, there are several distinctive arenas of gender and migration scholarship, and there appears to be a lack of communication among these arenas. Researchers working on, for example, the subject of migration and transnational sexualities may not be aware of the research on migration and care work. As I see it, there are at least five different streams of gender and migration research. In this chapter I provide a brief overview of these areas.

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. 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. This is not only a US issue of concern. In Spain, the anthropologist Carmen Gregorio Gil has published numerous articles on feminist debates in gender and migration, as has geographer Brenda Yeoh, on the topic of migrant women domestic workers in Singapore, and Marina Ariza and Ofelia Woo Morales and others on Mexico. In Europe, Annie Phizacklea and Mirjana Morakvasic published some of the earlier works on this topic, followed by Elinor Kofman, Helma Lutz, and others.

In the United States Donato, Gabbaccia, and others edited a special issue of the *International Migration Review* (IMR) in 2006, with the title of "A Glass Half Full? Gender in Migration Studies." This was a 20-year follow up to a 1986 special issue of the journal that had focused on the category of immigrant women. By the 1990s, the 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 (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Kibria 1993; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). Later, Stephanie Nawyn (2010) emphasized the ways that refugee resettlement non-governmental organizations (NGOs) shape refugee women's ability to challenge patriarchy in the home, yet simultaneously reaffirm patriarchal capitalism in the workplace, and 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. All of these works emphasize that gender is 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 migration movements around the world and in different time periods. They seek to measure when migration flows tip from being primarily male to majority female. In the United States, that happened at an aggregate level in the early twentieth 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 (Escriva 2000). Research in Asia focuses on gender, migration, and the state (Piper and Roces 2003; Oishi 2005), and there is diverse gender research in Mexico, the nation with the longest continuously running transnational labor migration (e.g., Arias 2000; Oehmichen 2000). In the United States, 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 (2009) carries the gender flag into the territory of debates about citizenship, immigration law, sovereignty, 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 relation between women's migration, paid domestic work, and family care. The key concepts here are "carework," "global care chains," "care deficits," "transnational motherhood," and "international social reproductive labor." The development of this literature has been made possible by theories of intersectionality. Beginning in the 1980s, and guided by paradigm changing work of feminist scholars of color in the United States, 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 to 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 big literature, and still growing, but key contributors have included Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila (1997), Chang (2000), Parrenas (2001), and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2007) on the United States; Constable (1997) and Lan (2006) in Asia; Anderson (2000), Escriva (2000), Parrenas (2001), and Lutz (2008) in Europe and the UK; and Hochschild and Ehrenreich's (2003) edited book, covering global ground. Newer research examines the integration of immigrant men in 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 the 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, the 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 the exemplars of these modern gendered systems which relied on male labor recruitment and subjugation, and the exclusion of families.

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of women who crisscross 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 activated 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 marginalization of this literature in immigration scholarship. That could be explained because 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 with 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 Cantu, *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 and LGBT 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 United States is not among those 19 nations. The 1965 Immigration Act made heterosexual marriage the most important avenue for legal entry to the United States. 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 longstanding 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 an important intervention in studying up is Gloria Gonzalez-Lopez'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 and men 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, Gonzalez-Lopez 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 working 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. One of the strongest critics of the “rescue industry” is the scholar/activist Laura Agustin (2007). Originally from Latin America, but based in the UK, she examines 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, Agustin 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 she favors a perspective that is devoid of moralizing, one that favors agency over victimization.

The US-based scholar Rhacel Parrenas is best known for her work on transnational Filipina domestic workers and their family forms, but her most recent research focus is 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 Agustin, 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 Agustin, Parrenas provides a 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 US 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 Agustin are in agreement: many of these US campaign are tools to control women, and to disperse 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 on 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 research 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 US–Mexico border zone. As already noted, Laura Agustin, the scholar/activist who focuses on sex trafficking, is also inspired by Anzaldúa, and very deliberately employs border thinking, challenging the supposed 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 US imperialism, military intervention, and multinational corporations in fomenting refugee movements and labor and professional class migration, also calls attention to the United States as the primary border crosser. It is a scholarly twist on the old Chicano 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,

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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 (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 versus migration (Paris Pombo 2010).

Concluding thoughts

Gender and migration research momentum is advancing in many directions. This includes new and continuing research on the global care chains, on labor market processes and activism around sex work and anti-sex trafficking campaigns, on women and borderlands hybridity, continuing projects on the gendered and generational processes of transnational migration, gendered social constructions of childhood, and sophisticated tabulations in demography. I think these are all valuable. But two trends are notable: researchers in these different spheres are mostly not in conversation with one another. Second, there is a continued and 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.

We can also detect a subtle shift away from a "migration and development" paradigm toward one that focuses on "immigrant integration." I think future scholarship in gender and migration must also grapple with the fact that we are living in a national and global crisis of immigration restrictionism. Transnationalism is a way of life for many, but unlike some of the celebratory commentators, I do not believe transnationalism or post-nationalism provides a viable framework for immigrant rights. We do not appear to be approaching the erosion of nation-state borders, so with that reality, it is important to focus on immigrant integration. And in this regard, I think we need new young feminist scholars dedicated to unraveling the gendered processes and institutions that promote immigrant restrictionism, exclusions and violence, and prohibit immigrant integration.

Along these lines, I want to conclude by noting how gender is used in the current vilification of immigrants. Since the beginning of immigration legislation in the United States, gender and race have been used as central categories of exclusion. The Page Act of 1875, the first precursor to US federal immigration law, excluded Chinese women who were held to be immorally suspect prostitutes. The big mid-twentieth-century contract labor programs in the United States

and Western Europe, the Bracero Program and the Guestworker Program prohibited women and selected prime working age men as the ideal labor migrants, as they would not bring social reproduction costs nor, it was thought, contribute to demographic transformations. During the 1980s and early 1990s, the “immigrant danger” was largely seen as feminine one. The bodies of immigrant women—namely poor immigrant women, women of color, and especially Mexican women—were seen as a threat to the United States. Perceived as pregnant breeders, they were also construed as racial threats to demographic homogeneity, social welfare drains on public schools and hospitals, and as the culprits responsible for the social reproduction of immigrant children and entire communities.

In the last decade, we’ve seen a switch in the gendered construction of immigrant danger. The new danger is a masculine one, one personified by terrorist men and “criminal aliens.” These are racialized men. Muslim terrorists, Mexican narco-traffickers, and gang bangers are the new racialized and gendered immigrant danger. The majority of criminologists agree that there are no obvious connections between criminality and the foreign born, but in spite of this, we have seen a rapid increase in the number of immigrant men detained and deported. Between 1980 and 2005, the proportion of incarcerated immigrant men in the United States increased fourfold. Why? It is largely due to draconian immigrant restrictionist legislation, IIRIRA (Illegal Immigration Reform, and Immigrant Responsibility Act) of 1996, aggressive practices of imprisoning those awaiting asylum decisions, and ways in which many drug crimes—even possessing a small amount of pot or cocaine—are now considered deportable crimes for legal immigrants. The increasing rate of incarceration of immigrant men also corresponds with the rise of private, for-profit prisons run by corporations. The popular mass media has covered these issues in such a way that lead to the conflation of undocumented immigrants, “criminal aliens,” and terrorists, all of them configured as dangerous men.

It’s a moment in history where racialized and gendered xenophobia have greased the chutes of deportation, and blocked the ladders of immigrant integration. This is an issue of great urgency for women, men, and children of all nations. As this review essay suggests, gender and migration scholarship has flourished, but it has remained somewhat balkanized. The next generation of gender and migration scholars has a strong scholarly foundation on which to build, and given the current social and political climate, the challenges of understanding the gendered dimensions and repercussions of immigrant restrictionism should emerge as the among the pressing new arenas of focus.

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