ENGENDERING MIGRATION STUDIES
THE CASE OF NEW IMMIGRANTS IN THE UNITED STATES

Patricia R Pessar

This review highlights contributions made by scholars who have treated gender as a central organizing principle in migration, and it suggests some promising lines for future inquiry. When gender is brought to the foreground in migration studies, a host of significant topics emerge. These include how and why women and men experience migration differently and how this contrast affects such processes as settlement, return, and transmigration. A gendered perspective demands a scholarly reengagement with those institutions and ideologies immigrants create and encounter in the "home" and "host" countries in order to determine how patriarchy organizes family life, work, community associations, law and public policy, and so on. It also encourages an examination of the multiple ways in which migration simultaneously reinforces and challenges patriarchy in its multiple forms.[1]

THE MIGRANT AS MALE

More than a decade ago I wrote,

> Until recently the term "migrant" suffered from the same gender stereotyping found in the riddles about the big indian and the little indian, the surgeon and the son. In each case the term carried a masculine connotation, unless otherwise specified. While this perception makes for amusing riddles, the assumption that the "true" migrant is male has limited the possibility for generalization from empirical research and produced misleading theoretical premises. (Pessar, 1986, p. 273)

To appreciate why women were largely absent from empirical research and writings produced in the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s, it is useful to consider the theoretical assumptions guiding much of the migration scholarship of that period. Most scholars were influenced by neoclassical theory, and according to one popular variant, those individuals with the ability to project themselves into the role of "Western man" headed off to the cities where the benefits of modern life could be attained (Lewis,1959; Redfield, 1955). And it was males, indeed, who they alleged were more apt to be risk takers and achievers, whereas women were portrayed as guardians of community tradition and stability. Migration research of this period also suffered from the more general tendency to disregard women's contributions to economic, political, and social life.

Not surprisingly, researchers of the day designed studies of immigrant populations that included only male subjects.

A male bias also existed in the works of many immigration historians of the period who either assumed that only male immigrants' lives were worthy of official documentation and scrutiny (Handlin, 1951; Howe, 1976) or that the history of male migrants was gender neutral, thus making it unnecessary to treat women at all, except perhaps in a few pages on the family (Bodnar, Weber, & Simon, 1982).

SCHOLARSHIP ON IMMIGRANT WOMEN

Once feminist scholarship gained a foothold in migration studies, it progressed through a series of stages common to the broader engagement between feminism and the social sciences. In the 1970s and 1980s, researchers attempted to fill in the gaps that resulted from decades of research based predominantly on male immigrants.

Although there is now a sizeable body of empirical studies on women immigrants, which is aimed at redressing a tradition

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of male bias, we are only beginning to take the next step in reformulating migration theory in light of the anomalous and unexpected findings revealed in this body of work. The remainder of this essay reviews the key components needed to more fully engender migration studies.

ENGENDERING MIGRATION THEORY AND RESEARCH

For several decades, the United States has attracted proportionally more female migrants than other labor-importing countries have, and women constitute the majority among U.S. immigrants from Asia, Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Europe (Donato, 1992). This dominance reflects economic restructuring in the United States and the subsequent growth of female-intensive industries, particularly in service, health care, microelectronics, and apparel manufacturing. According to Yen Le Espiritu (1997), immigrant women, as feminized and racialized labor, are more employable in these labor-intensive industries than their male counterparts are due to "the patriarchal and racist assumptions that women can afford to work for less, do not mind dead-end jobs, and are more suited physiologically to certain kinds of detailed and routine work" (p. 74).

Revisionist scholarship on immigrant enclaves provides a further example of the power of engendered inquiry. The earliest writing on the Cuban enclave in Miami praised it as a mode of economic incorporation that, unlike the secondary sector, provided immigrants with significant returns to education and previous job experience as well as opportunities for training and comparatively higher wages (Portes & Bach, 1985). More recent research on the Cuban enclave (Portes & Jensen,1989) and the Chinese enclave in New York City (Zhou,1992; Zhou & Logen, 1991), which control for gender, reveal a far different pattern, however, with women receiving few, if any, of the advantages their male counterparts enjoy. In the case of the New York City enclave, Min Zhou (1992) writes, "Better-paying jobs in the enclave economy tend to be reserved for men because male supremacy that dominates the Chinese culture (and the Western culture) reinforces gender discrimination in the enclave labor market" (p. 182). Greta Gilbertson (1995), too, concludes in her study of Dominican and Colombian immigrants employed in Hispanic firms in New York that rather than conferring benefits to women, enclave employment is highly exploitative. Indeed, she claims that some of the success of immigrant small-business owners and their male workers comes at the expense of subordinated immigrant women. Finally, in a sobering piece on U.S. immigrants' "progress" over the decade of the 1980s, Roger Waldinger and Greta Gilbertson (1994) find that although male immigrants from select countries (e.g., India, Iran, Japan) were able to convert their education into higher occupational status rankings than were nativeborn Whites of native parentage, none of their female counterparts were able to do the same. Waldinger and Gilbertson's research shows that "making it" in America may sadly, yet, be a story about men despite the inclusion of women (p. 440). Migration studies has not only benefited from an appreciation of the ways in which gender operates within the processes of economic displacement and the demand for immigrant labor. A gendered optic is also essential to appreciate the role played by mediating institutions, such as households and social networks, in international migration.

MIGRATION AND EMANCIPATION

Many scholars have examined the impact immigrant women's regular wage work has on gendered relations. A review of this literature points to the fact that despite gender inequities in the labor market and workplace, immigrant women employed in the United States generally gain greater personal autonomy and independence, whereas men lose ground (e.g., Grasmuck & Pessar,1991; Guendelman & Perez-Itriaga, 1987; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Kibria, 1993; Lamphere,1987; Pedraza,1991). For example, women's regular access to wages and their greater contribution to household sustenance frequently lead to more control over budgeting and other realms of domestic decision making. It also provides them with greater leverage in appeals for male assistance in daily household chores. There is some indication that the smaller the wage gap between partners' earnings, the greater the man's willingness to participate in domestic work (Espiritu, 1997; Lamphere, Zavella, & Gonzales, 1993; Pessar, 1995b). We find further evidence that migration and settlement bring changes in traditional patriarchal arrangements in the words of immigrant men and women. In what Nazli Kibria (1993) describes as a tongue-in-cheek description of gender transformations, several Vietnamese immigrant men told her, "In Vietnam the man of the house is king. Below him the children, then the pets of the home, and then the women. Here, the woman is the king and the man holds a position below the pets" (p.108). Conversely, a Mexican female returnee told her interviewers, "In California my husband was like a mariposa (meaning a sensitive, soft, responsive butterfly). Back here in Mexico he acts like a distant macho" (Gundelman & Perez-Itriago, 1987, p. 268).

The pioneering work on women and migration tended to couch its concerns in stark, either-or terms: Was migration emancipatory or subjugating for women? Most soon concluded that immigrant women did not equally or consistently improve their status in the home, workplace, or community (Morokvasic, 1984). For individual immigrants, like many of my Dominican informants, gains have been most pronounced in one domain (e.g., the household), whereas gender subordination continues in other arenas such as the workplace and ethnic associations (Grasmuck & Pessar, 1991). For other immigrant women, "gains" within a specific sphere, like the household, are frequently accompanied by strains and contradictions.

Although there is now broad consensus that immigrant women attain some limited, albeit uneven and sometimes contradictory, benefits from migration and settlement, we await the next wave of scholarship.

SETTLEMENT, RETURN, AND TRANSNATIONALITY

A gendered approach is essential to account for men's and women's orientations to settlement, return, and transmigration. Indeed, gender-free models of migrant settlement and return (e.g., Piore, 1979) are hard to defend in light of informants' statements such as the one cited above by the Mexican return migrant who saw her "butterfly" turn back into a distant macho and the joking remark of a Laotian refugee, "When we get on the plane back to Laos, the first thing we will do is beat up the women" (Donnelly,1994, p. 74). Research shows consistently that gains in gender equity are central to women's desires to settle, more or less permanently, to protect their advances (Chavez, 1991; Georges, 1990; Goldring, 1992; Hagan, 1994; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994). In contrast, many men seek to return home rapidly to regain the status and privileges that migration itself has challenged. In my own work, I document how many Dominican women spend large amounts of money on expensive durable goods, such as major appliances and home furnishings, which serve to root the family more securely in the United States and deplete the funds necessary to orchestrate a successful reentry back into Dominican society and economy. Conversely, men often favor a far more frugal and austere pattern of consumption that is consistent with their claim that "five dollars spent today meant five more years of postponing the return to the Dominican Republic" (Pessar, 1986, p. 284). Further strides in our understanding of how immigrant women consolidate settlement have been made by Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994), who observes that, as traditional family patriarchy weakens, immigrant women assume more active public and social roles-actions that at once reinforce their improved status in the household and ultimately advance their families' integration in the United States.?

IMMIGRANT FAMILIES AS BASTIONS OF RESISTANCE

Relatively few studies address the question of whether migration promotes or hampers a feminist consciousness (Shukla,1997). Most of these report, not surprisingly, that the majority of the immigrant women studied do not tend to identify as feminists or participate in feminist organizations (Foner, 1986; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1995; Pessar, 1984). Immigrant women, we are told, are more likely to base their dissatisfactions and complaints about life in the United States on injustices linked to class, race, ethnicity, and legal-status discrimination than to gender. For example, according to Nancy Foner (1986), her Jamaican female informants experienced racial and class inequalities more acutely than those based on gender, and this sense of injustice gave them a basis for unity with Jamaican men. Moreover, the many domestic workers in their ranks felt no sense of sisterhood with their upper-middle-class White employers, whose "liberation" these immigrant women facilitated by providing inexpensive child care so that their female employers could compete in the male occupational world (Foner, 1986). Nonetheless, Hondagneu-Sotelo's (1994) point is well taken when she concludes that although none of the Mexican immigrant women she interviewed identified "gender subordination" as a primary problem, rearrangements induced by migration do result in the diminution of familial patriarchy, and these transformations may enable immigrant women to better confront problems derived from class, racial/ethnic, and legal-status subordination. Their endeavors may prompt more receptiveness to feminist ideology and organizations in the future. (p. 197)

CONCLUSION

Migration scholars have made great advances in moving beyond an earlier male bias in theory and research. And the days when gender was treated as merely one of several equally significant variables, such as education and marital status, are mostly behind us. We are now moving toward a more fully engendered understanding of the migration process. This article has noted several key advances and has signaled the way to future developments in theory and research. We are starting to accumulate case studies documenting how men and women experience migration differently, how they create and encounter patriarchal ideologies and institutions across transnational migration circuits, and how patriarchy is reaffirmed, reconfigured, or both as a consequence of migration. The time is ripe to build on and move beyond these rich individual case studies toward a more comparative framework of migration and patriarchy. In doing so, it will be necessary to discard the notion that gender oppression transcends all divisions among men and women. Rather, we must develop theories and analytical frameworks that allow us to capture and compare the simultaneity of the impact of gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, class, and legal status on the lives of immigrants and native-born men and women. Thus, we await the next wave of research that is at once committed to comparative studies among immigrants yet refuses to stop there. We should resist disciplinary precedents that tempt us to ghettoize the gendered study of immigrants within migration studies. We are all far better served by taking the next step to relate our investigations of the representations, identities, and social conditions of immigrant men and women to those prevailing among members of the majority White and minority "brown" segments of U.S. society as well.