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Thesis Presentation

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**THE FEMALE MIGRATION EXPERIENCE IN LATIN AMERICA:
THE CASE OF ARGENTINA**

As most of you know, the topic of my thesis is the migration experience of women from three Southamerican countries: Peru, Paraguay and Bolivia to Argentina.

First, I am briefly going to refresh your memory about my **topic**, second, I am going to mention the **theories** I think, at this stage, I am going to use and third, I am going to talk about the **methodology**.

a . Topic

As I said, my thesis focuses on women from Peru, Paraguay and Bolivia who migrate to Argentina's capital city: Buenos Aires. Historically, Argentina has been a country of immigration composed mostly of migrants of European origin. During the last thirty years this tendency has reverted and today the major intake is made up of people from South American countries.

The unequal distribution of income in the region not only determines country disparities but also displays rural-urban differences. Argentina, in comparison to the other three countries is a higher, not high, but higher income area. Particularly the Argentinean Pampas, which is a rural high income belt of the main urban centre: Buenos Aires. Here is where the population of my study migrates to. This forms part of a regional phenomenon: most of the movement in Latin America are from rural to urban areas [however, one of my groups is mainly from an urban area: Lima] and informal migration is a common practice throughout Latin America.

They are three different groups. Perhaps the similarities are more easily found in their settlement than in their places of origin. In the receiving place most of them lack resident permits, they make up the lowest segment of the labour force, they have a lower unemployment rate compared to the local population because they are more attractive to employers, since they are likely to be paid lower wages and be easily dominated. They are discriminated against on the basis of gender [in that they are overrepresented in traditional 'women's work'], class ['they are not doing just a job, they are doing a lower class job'] and ethnicity [they look different, the Argentine population is almost 100% of European origin]. Discrimination on the basis of ethnicity is probably felt most by the three groups. Although they identify themselves with their community—one of the aspects of ethnic identification—the other face of ethnicity is stronger: what Argentines ascribe to their appearance. Another similarity among the three groups is that they enter the labour force as domestic servants, home based textile

operators and street vendors. In some cases this is related to the activities they performed in the places of origin, although it is not exactly the same. For instance Bolivians, in their places of origin enter the labour force before men because men are less likely to be hired until they finish the military service, which is compulsory. What they mainly do is confection of handicraft and the subsequent sale of them, in Buenos Aires they mainly work as home based textile operators (employed by men of Korean origin) and street vendors (employed by men of their own community).

The main differences among the groups are that they have different backgrounds. For example most Peruvians have tertiary qualifications and come from an urban area. In the case of Peruvian and Paraguayan emigration single women predominate while in the case of Bolivian emigration women represent a great portion but they generally follow a man of the family who can be a brother or a partner. Peruvians and Paraguayans even if they have families, partners or children, in their places of origin have to deny their family status in order to be hired. Another difference is that although all are being discriminated mainly on the basis of the variables described before, the discrimination varies in intensity across the groups.

b. Theories

The migration of these women is supported by networks of friends, relatives and people from the same community. They all share general reasons for choosing Argentina: differential income, income in Argentina is the highest in the region; distance involved is

short therefore costs are less; they have easy access to the country despite being unauthorised residents, they do not need a special visa to enter the country, and they are supported by strong friendship and family networks which facilitate information, accommodation and contacts.

Traditional theories of migration were characterised by economic reductionism and they had the individual as the unit of analysis. I am going to test Fawcett and Arnold's theory of migration which examines the phenomenon from a more holistic perspective. This theory situates the phenomenon within the framework of a 'migration system paradigm'. This paradigm looks at migration as "a set of places linked by flows and counterflows of people" (Fawcett and Arnold, 1987: 456). This approach focuses on "both ends of a migration flow" (Fawcett and Arnold, 1987: 456) and involves the analysis of the macro-structure (government policies, political economy, etc) and the micro-structure (networks of family and friends and all 'non-people linkages') (Fawcett, IMR. 1989, 23:671).

To understand the settlement pattern I am going to use Portes and Borocz's theory which focuses on a typology of modes of incorporation of immigrant into the new society (IMR, 1989: 23: 606) with particular emphasis on government and the structure of a society.

This will be complemented with Morockvasick's theory which emphasises the role of women and women's issue in migration.

c . Methodology

I am slightly behind in my research because I did three courses in the first semester and I am currently doing my fourth. However I have made achievements in another sense by doing coursework.

So far I have defined the key concepts and planned my fieldwork.

1. Defining key concepts (conceptual framework)

Migrant, for the purpose of this research, is any person who, not being born in a country decides, to migrate with an intention other than visiting. This is regardless of the time they intend to stay, the legal status regarding resident permits, etc.

According to Argentinean terminology "illegal immigrants" are those who do not have resident permits. This thesis will not refer to them as illegals because I adhere to theories that maintain law is a social construction generally made by the elite who has the power. I examines a case of international migration, however the line between internal and international is arbitrary, in particular in this case where indigenous communities had absolutely different borders than those demarked by the former colonizers and the current governments. This has enormous implications since all migrants without a resident permit will be considered illegal.

2. Fieldwork Plan, [broken into different stages]:

The first step of this research was taken when I lived in Argentina amongst the people who now form the population of my study, observed the situation and had informal talks with them. These informal conversations cannot be considered empirical work as such, however beside providing me with the feeling of being in touch with their reality, it has offered me the basis to formulate the research questions and my hypothesis. It will also help me to evaluate all the secondary data.

The first formal part of this research was carried out during the second semester last year, that is from July until November 1994, at the University of Wollongong. It consisted of library research and organization of material previously collected in Argentina.

The second formal period of this research was conducted in Argentina from November 1994 until February 1995. During these months I visited the places where these migrants live in Buenos Aires, houses where they work, parks which are a sort of job-market, stalls on the streets attended by them and non-Governmental organisations where they seek help and where there are people who have been in contact with them for many years. They supplied me a great deal of invaluable information. I also visited some ethnic clubs and organizations where they have recreation activities in which I shared and observed. In all these places I conducted a number of informal key-informant interviews as well as interviewing migrants. However, none of this can be considered a part of my survey or any other systematic empirical study. They consisted of informal talks with non-governmental

organisations such as the Catholic Commission for International Migration. I also spoke with some government officials and some researchers. Although all of them were carried out in a non-systematic form they have given me the chance to deepen my knowledge of the topic and at the same time consolidate the basis for a latter theoretical framework.

I intend to use a combination of methods. The first method, which will be used throughout the study is library research. This consists of two main analysis, an exploration of the literature written by experts on the topic and an analysis of the official Argentinean statistics and data. [This I strongly criticise because the information about this part of the population is unclear when not omitted].

The second method involves in-depth interviews. I am not sure about the sample size as this will depend mainly on economic resources. I will also carry out structured key-informant interviews, in a more formal way than before with government officials, NGOs representatives and member of ethnic organizations.

The key-informant interviews cover five main issues which in turn are discussed in greater depth.

- o General settlement experiences. The interviewees will be required to elaborate the following points: to compare Latin American migrant women and other migrants; and to compare the three Latin American immigrant groups in question, that is, how socio-cultural and economic differences of the three countries shape the emigration and therefore their settlement

experience. The impact of the Argentinean economy on immigrants at the time of their arrival will be considered.

- o Individual qualities and skills. This point includes level of education and training, schooling and professional qualifications and level of literacy in their first language.
- o Housing. The interviewees will be required to report the type of assistance that Latin American migrants seek and receive. They will be asked to compare the previously available hostel systems and the different conception of assisted migration now. However is necessary to explain that assistance from the government cannot be expected since in general terms there is not much welfare available at all.
- o Employment. Failure to find work has not been previously reported as a major cause of concern of the community. Points to be discuss here are: 1-level of unemployment. 2- How is this compared with the image constructed by the media. 3-Migrant's level of marketable skill. 4-Type of employment before migrating. 5-Migrant's employment in relation to the formal economy (if possible).
- o Family networks and community development. Attachment to cultural values and language vary from country to country. Umbrella organisations, clubs, societies, professional associations, etc. will be examined.

The migrant women's interview covers different aspects: the first part refers to the situation in the places of origin, the second, the migration process itself (preparation, border crossing, etc.) and the third part includes settlement characteristics.

The third method of investigation will be participant observation in Argentina.

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This is "*in-progress*" work, everytime somebody see those words: "in-progress", they are generally followed by do "not disturb", "do not interrupt" or an equivalent. In this case it means exactly the opposite. All **comments** are **welcome**. For reasons of time I am not able to show all my work, a more detailed copy is available, your reading of it and all **suggestions** about any point, including grammar (since I am of NESB), are **most appreciated**.