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REVIEW SERIES

**Gender, Migration and
Communication Networks:
Mapping the Communicative
Ecology of Latin American
Women in New Zealand/
Aotearoa**

Reviewed by
Irene Ayallo

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THESES REVIEW SERIES 1/2016

Thesis Review: Gender, Migration and Communication Networks: Mapping the communicative ecology of Latin American women in New Zealand/Aotearoa by Luciana Hoffmann Nunes

By Irene Ayallo



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THESIS REVIEW

Gender, Migration and Communication Networks: Mapping the Communicative Ecology of Latin American Women in New Zealand/Aotearoa by Luciana Hoffmann Nunes

Unpublished thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of International Communication

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In this thesis, the author investigates the role of communication networks in the pre-and post-migration process of Latin American women resettled in New Zealand. This well researched and skilfully written thesis begins from the premise that while the process of migration and resettlement is complex and challenging for all migrants, it is more demanding for women. Because of socially constructed biological and social differences, which usually portray women as subordinate to men, the conventional perception is that women are dependent on their husbands and less active in the migration decision and process. This view is negated in this thesis. Latin American women in this study voluntarily migrated as skilled migrants and/or for professional reasons. The author also discusses how women use formal and informal communication networks to integrate, to maintain their culture and language, and for personal development. The narratives of Latin American women migrating to New Zealand and their communication networks were, however, absent in literature and this thesis sets out to address this gap.

The thesis is divided into six chapters, which follow a chronological and a thematic order.

Chapter One – Overview commences with the author locating herself in the study by declaring her interest in ‘women’s issues’. Notably, in this chapter the author offers working

definitions of key terms used in the thesis in a manner that is contextual, rather than assuming universal understanding. The research is further contextualised by the provision of an overview of migration trends in New Zealand, an overview of Latin American migration in New Zealand and a discussion on how Latin American culture has penetrated and/or existed alongside the many other cultures in New Zealand society. According to the author, despite the fact that New Zealand opens its borders to people from any country in the world, the country remains sensitive regarding the institutionalisation of a multicultural policy. A multicultural policy approach may “subvert bicultural power sharing” between Māori and Pākehā. Even so, there is a growing interest in Spanish culture, particularly the language – which has become a part of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes at various universities in New Zealand.

Chapter Two – Literature Review offers an extensive discussion on the topics of gender and migration. The section on migration and identity provides an analysis of how migrants negotiate between two cultures and societies. Whilst migration brings a sense of displacement to those who move out of their homelands, migrants somehow maintain a close connection to their countries of origin. For instance, in the case of this thesis, communication networks such as ethnic media support preservation of migrants’ cultural heritage, help overcome feelings of nostalgia, and enable them to respond to a lack of representation or misrepresentation in the mainstream media.

Chapter Three – Research Design presents an in-depth discussion on the theoretical and practical aspects of the research methodology and methods, including the process of recruitment which was carried out through Spanish-speaking organisations in the Auckland and Waikato regions. Grounded within a phenomenological paradigm and a feminist

theoretical framework, the author conducted focus groups, individual history interviews, and participatory photography with 10 participants, asking them about their experiences of migration and perceptions of their communication networks in New Zealand. The Latin American women recruited were aged between 21 and 60 and came from diverse backgrounds in terms of ethnicity, nationality and class. The author then employed communicative ecology maps and thematic analysis to present, organise, describe and examine collected data.

Chapter Four – Findings outlines the findings from data collected under three main themes.

These include Pre-migration Stage which consists of the women's narratives describing life before migrating to New Zealand, and the reasons for migrating. The second theme, the Migration Stage details the women's feelings and impressions of New Zealand, things they found to be culturally different and their experiences of culture shock. The first two themes set context for the final and main theme in this thesis, Communication Networks, which comprehensively describes Latin American migrant women's communicative ecology, including the way they organise the formal and informal communication networks and the role played by the ethnic media. Each of these themes is supported by direct quotes and/or photos from the women, a practice which the author states opens a space for them to tell their stories in their own words and images. Participants' narratives are presented in comprehensive individual profiles and communicative ecology maps that were approved by them. Information included is: reasons for migrating to New Zealand; their impressions of the country; their occupation; relationships status; the pathway they each followed to be where they are today; and their formal and informal networks.

The author concludes that both formal and informal communication networks are significant to Latin American women in New Zealand. Formal networks serve as means of empowerment, personal and family support, professional development, and as a way of keeping culture and language alive in the mainstream society. Informal networks are utilised by these women as a way of keeping up with their cultural and personal references. The women's use of online and social media, and ethnic media is also explained.

Chapter Five – Discussion and Analysis presents an analysis of the findings outlined in chapter four. The author discusses three main points in this chapter.

The first of these is the feminisation of migration. She observes that the women in the study initiated their migration by themselves in search of better lives, qualifications and job opportunities. The women utilised personal ties and

established formal and informal communication networks in the host country for the purposes of gaining information and overcoming economic, cultural and social barriers. Communication networks enabled Latin American women in New Zealand to develop their professional careers or start their own business enterprises, increasing their sense of freedom, satisfaction and self-confidence. Ms Nunes found a correlation between these findings and other global ethnic migrant entrepreneurship research. It has been found that an increasing number of migrant women become business owners as a way to overcome discrimination and structural challenges in host countries' labour markets.

Secondly, the author argues that communication networks influenced acculturation and gender perspectives among Latin American women in New Zealand. In contrast to their home countries where women were seen as "submissive, subordinate, and passive", in New Zealand they were able to "resist and subvert those deep-rooted gendered power relations" through social support networks. Ms Nunes discusses why it was important for the women to maintain their culture and language, and how this was achieved.

Thirdly, the research identified online media as a significant means for Latin American women in New Zealand to find or promote information about their interests in New Zealand and overseas. New technology enables migrants to maintain transnational networks as well as create ties within the host country. Notably, the author found that the women used social media as a tool for undermining gendered power relations. For example, the women stated that they felt free and comfortable in online women's groups to talk about "women's issues" because their voices would not be "censored or ridiculed".

The findings of this study parallel other research on migrants, particularly in New Zealand. Migration and resettlement processes present both opportunities and challenges. Migrants come to New Zealand for a variety of reasons, with most people looking for better lives. Some of the major challenges are well documented. These include feelings of loss of one's homeland, difficulty negotiating the social and economic structures in host countries, culture shock and/or challenges of balancing two or more cultures, and experiences of racism and discrimination. Generally, migrants to New Zealand show determination to integrate and at the same time maintain their culture and language. Extant research has mainly documented the experiences of Indian and Asian migrant women entrepreneurs, concluding that the majority start businesses as a way of overcoming resettlement challenges. The experiences of Latin American women are missing in literature, which makes Ms Nunes's research valuable. The research participants in her study were all women and

came from diverse ethnicities and nationalities within Latin America. Significantly, the participants from the onset were positioned differently in relation to decision-making in the migration process, in that they were actively involved in the decision to leave their countries of origin, or were highly qualified. This is in contrast to the majority of research, whereby the decision to move is made by the male partner. Ms Nunes also identified the various informal and formal communication networks used by migrant women and how these were used for integration, information gathering, and to strengthen local and transnational ties. The author argued that some of these communication networks, particularly online and social media, were used by Latin American women to resist and subvert oppressive gender norms and roles. For example, some of the women used online groups to discuss 'women's issues'. Overall, Ms Nunes argues that formal and informal communication networks play a significant role in women's migrating process. They help them to integrate, and to maintain connections with their country of origin, culture and language.

This thesis demonstrates an excellent understanding of the subject area. It documents the narratives of Latin American women in New Zealand, experiences that can often be difficult for 'outsiders' to access, in a way that is creative, respectful and authentic. Overall, this thesis offers nuanced and thoughtful analytic interpretations of the data collected, and provides a compelling analysis, which is robust, insightful and coherent.

Locating the Thesis

This thesis can be located within Feminist and Gender Studies scholarship, Migration Studies and Communication Studies.

Potential Publication Impact of the Thesis

This thesis would make a significant contribution to feminist research on communication networks, particularly within the areas of gender and migration.

Primary Sources

Ten oral history interviews and two focus groups conducted with women aged between 21 and 60.

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Review Author bio

Dr. Irene Ayallo, (PhD, MTh, PGDip Theology, CoP Social Justice, BDiv) is of Kenyan (Luo) descent. She has been living in Auckland, New Zealand for 10 years. Irene's research interest includes Gender Studies, Community Development, HIV/AIDS Prevention and Care, Political Theology, Spirituality, and Participatory Action Research. Irene is a lecturer in the Social Practice Pathway, Unitec Institute of Technology, New Zealand
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Luciana Hoffmann Nunes has recently completed her master's degree in International Communication (Unitec), has a Bachelor of Journalism (Universidade Estácio de Sá, Brazil) and a Postgraduate Diploma in Translation Studies (PUCRS, Brazil). Her academic and professional backgrounds also include Communications, Business Development, Photography, Languages, Literature and Linguistics. She has published academic research about Brazilian Literature and gender and conducted similar investigation about female surfers in Florianopolis, Brazil.
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