The violence during the life course of Venezuelan migrant women in Chile

La violencia en el trayecto de vida de mujeres migrantes venezolanas en Chile

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Abstract

During the last years, the female migration from Venezuela has been characterized by leads family migrant projects to Santiago of Chile. In this sense, the aim of this article is analyzing the events that provoked different changes during the life of Venezuelan women, motivating leave their home country to search better life condition in a different place. Using a qualitative approach, which deep interviews were the main technique to gather data, this analysis focus on histories of life of migrant women highly educated and skilled whose paths are immersing in violence episodes. The findings show that different kind of problems that forced them out from Venezuela yet are part of their daily life despite that they have migrated to Chile between 2016-2019, it represents an opportunity to design representative public policy oriented to help migrant communities in the host society.

Keywords: female migration, violence, course of life, Venezuela, Chile.

Resumen

En los últimos años la migración femenina originaria de Venezuela se ha caracterizado por liderar los proyectos migratorios familiares con destino a Santiago de Chile. En ese sentido, el objetivo de este artículo es analizar los acontecimientos que provocaron cambios en la trayectoria de vida de mujeres venezolanas para motivarlas a dejar su lugar de origen en busca de mejorar su calidad de vida en otro país. A partir de una metodología cualitativa, donde las entrevistas en profundidad fueron la principal técnica para obtener datos, se presentan las historias de vida de mujeres altamente calificadas cuyas trayectorias se encuentran inmersas en episodios de violencia. Los hallazgos muestran que los problemas que las obligaron a salir de Venezuela aun forman parte de su vida diaria a pesar de haber migrado a Chile entre 2016 y 2019, lo cual es una oportunidad para diseñar políticas públicas que favorezcan a la población migrante.

Palabras clave: migración femenina, violencia, trayectos de vida, Venezuela, Chile.

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Introduction

The need to improve quality of life is undoubtedly one of the main drivers of migration in Latin America and the Caribbean, where flow is significantly accentuated by economic gaps, social and political problems, and deficiencies regarding health, education and public safety that occur between different countries. In this sense, Chile stands out in the Southern Cone region as one of the territories of greatest attraction for migrants, where particular interest is focused on the metropolitan region of Santiago, a space in which the largest number of foreigners reside in the country.

According to figures obtained from the population census and the Department of Immigration and Migration (Departamento de Extranjería y Migración-DEM), the migratory wave that began in the 1990s with the end of the dictatorship registered, until 2019, the presence of almost 1 492 522 foreigners settled in Chilean lands, representing a difference of 242 157 with respect to what was recorded in 2018 (1 250 365); that is, there was a relative increase of 19.4% in the migrant community, mostly from Latin American and Caribbean countries. The age range of the migrants was mainly between 20 and 39 years old (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas & Departamento de Extranjería y Migración, 2019, 2020).

In this context, currently, the presence of communities from nonborder countries is represented significantly by migrants from Venezuela who, beginning in 2017, increased their presence in the country as part of the exodus generated as a result of social, economic and political problems in that nation (Pedone & Mallimaci, 2019; Stefoni & Silva, 2018). In particular, of the total number of foreign-born residents in Chile, 30.5% are people born in Venezuelan territory, positioning this country first regarding importance in terms of immigration; it is followed in importance by Peru (15.8%), Haiti (12.5%), Colombia (10.8%) and Bolivia (8.0%) (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas & Departamento de Extranjería y Migración, 2020).

By 2019, the crisis in the last decade in Venezuela had caused approximately 4.3 million people to leave their place of origin; therefore, at least 10% of the Venezuelan population lives outside the national territory (Martínez Espinola & Insa, 2021), in a context in which the economic, political and social deterioration in Venezuela has led to a shortage in food and medicines and problems with access to public services such as health and education, further resulting in a substantial increase in the poverty index (Gandini et al., 2019). Undoubtedly, Venezuelan migration was generated by the crisis, with the main purpose of finding the optimal options that guarantee survival (Koechlin & Eguren, 2018) in the face of a criminal and violent panorama that through the beginning of 2021 continued to increase with respect to incidences involving and effects on the general population (Reyes, 2022). This illustrates that governments have been overwhelmed; they lack migration policies designed and implemented on the basis of good practices that fully ensure the well-being of those who decide to migrate (Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración, A. C., 2021b).

The increase in the Venezuelan migratory flow to Chile from 2017 generated at least two important changes in migration in this country of the Southern Cone. First, Peruvians, after decades of being the most prominent population in Chilean lands, probably due to proximity, became second to Venezuelans, which became the population with the greatest presence in Chile; similarly, Haiti became the third most prominent community. Second, the gender distribution began to present

interesting changes; a slight masculinization of migration was observed until the beginning of 2020, with the female migrant presence increasing slightly, a finding that is consistent with the life stories presented herein, where women are the leaders of migratory projects.

The Department of Immigration and Migration in Chile reported that in 2018, 51.6% of the migrant population was men, and 48.4% were women. In 2019 (early 2020), the gender distribution changed minimally, 51.2% and 48.8%, with males remaining the majority in percentage terms. However, the data presented illustrate a relevant change in female migration because although migration is still lower for women than for men, a slight increase is observed in contrast to a decrease in the migration of men, a finding that is aligned with the global trend in recent decades (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas & Departamento de Extranjería y Migración, 2019, 2020).

Although these variations may be insignificant, in quantitative terms, they represent a starting point to explore gender roles within migratory projects on the American continent, where beyond serving as a companion or support in the decisions and trajectories of men, in recent years, women have taken the reins to plan, lead and carry out migration plans, opening the possibility of analyzing their experiences and interpretations of migrant life in a context in which, within studies on international migration, investigations of the masculine context predominate, as seen from research conducted in recent decades (Acosta González, 2013; Carrère Álvarez & Carrère Álvarez, 2015; Valdebenito & Lube Guizardi, 2015).

In this sense, it is important to analyze the dynamics and problems that migrant women face as individuals, that is, beyond the family structure or their role as wife and/or partner. It is necessary to delve into their own agency in the context of the host country (Donato et al., 2006; Tittensor & Mansouri, 2017), not only with the purpose of learning their life history in general but also to analyze the specific moments and/or experiences that motivated the decision to migrate to another country and take control of the family migration project. Although studies that focus their efforts on women are only beginning to gain strength in Chile, there are already some that address public health, particularly the issue of fertility; the findings indicate that social and economic integration is linked to reproductive behavior (Grande & García González, 2019).

Analyzing the migration of women from Venezuela to Chile from a gender perspective not only allows us to delve into the complications derived precisely from migration projects and their social, economic and even political complications but also helps us to understand how gender inequality positions this population in a place of vulnerability that generates greater violence, insecurity and uncertainty in the destination.

The configurations and tensions associated with the arrival of Venezuelan migrant women to Chile that are generated among the local population are a subject for which the gender perspective (Gissi Barbieri & Martínez Ruiz, 2018; Lube Guizari et al., 2018) is a relevant component that helps highlight the problems of discrimination, xenophobia, racism and violence experienced by female migrants in the labor market (Carrère Álvarez & Carrère Álvarez, 2015; Ojeda, 2016; Silva Segovia et al., 2018), which is characterized by exploitation, low wages and high segmentation, as shown by Acosta González (2013) in his study on domestic work. The focus of other research has been on sociocultural inclusion, where socialization practices are a fundamental part of the analyses (Stefoni & Bonhomme, 2014; Valdebenito & Lube Guizardi, 2015).

Although some topics were addressed by studies conducted in the 2010s, it is important to generate a deeper understanding of the migration of women in Latin America (Lube Guizardi & Gonzálvez Torralbo, 2019), specifically the current conditions in which people live and the chain of events that generated the migratory project because past experiences constitute a fundamental part of the present and provide a glimpse of the future.

Based on this urgency to understand the recent changes in the migration of women in South America, particularly in Santiago de Chile regarding women migrants from Venezuela, the aim of this article is to analyze, from the perspective of the life course and the concept of *turning point*[1] (Wingens & Reiter, 2012), the specific moments that changed the life trajectory of the women included in this study. There are two questions that guide this research: What are the *turning points* that modified the life *trajectories* of Venezuelan migrant women residing in Chile? What are the problems faced by this population? The answers to these questions arise from the life stories of these women, who describe well the change in their life trajectory from specific moments associated with violence, economic difficulties, political persecution, kidnappings and psychological affectations, prompting them to make the decision to seek a better quality of life outside their country of origin.

Next, the theoretical guidelines linked to the life course are presented, specifically the concept of *turning point,* which supports the analysis of the data obtained from the ethnographic work with migrant women. Then, the methodology implemented to collect and analyze the testimonies included in this article is presented. Following this, the main findings are discussed, and some conclusions are presented.

Life trajectories and migration

It is unlikely that the life trajectory of people develops in a linear way without the complexities that characterize social dynamics and the practices attached to them within society. Rather, it involves processes where moments of uncertainty, change and breaking points are important components that give sense and meaning to each of the actions undertaken in daily life (Shanahan et al., 2003). The general theory of the life course illustrates well those moments that led to specific modifications to the projects of the women who participated in this study by emphasizing those ruptures that redirected the trajectories.

This approach allows the analysis of these changes, particularly from the concept of *turning point,* which is defined as the events that have caused substantial modifications and changes in the direction of people's lives, representing an important discontinuity within the trajectories themselves (Blanco, 2011). Thus, an event that is stressful or disturbing for an individual can trigger changes that lead to life course changes (Levy & The Pavie Team, 2005). Some examples of the above can be acts of violence, criminality, health problems, natural disasters, and limited access to public services, all of which can represent a *turning point* that can potentially become a catalyst for change.

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[1] Because there is not a definition in Spanish that gives a precise meaning of this concept (Blanco, 2011), it is used in English to preserve its theoretical and methodological essence.

Levy and The Pavie Team (2005) note that the above refers to a transition or perhaps, more frequently, to an event, implying a change in the orientation of a trajectory and not a mere confirmation of it (Moen, 2003; Shanahan et al., 2003). Importantly, the concept of *turning point* can only be identified retrospectively, as it is linked to a specific moment in the past, which in turn provides elements for the construction of the future (Wingens & Reiter, 2012).

Elder (1985) notes that the trajectories that are modified are constituted both by individual elements and by other structural elements linked to specific institutions, elements that generate a constant modification in the biography of a subject (Elder, 1985, 1998). Therefore, the conceptualization regarding the search for crucial moments in trajectories is presented not only as theoretical elements that allow understanding the reality that permeates the migratory phenomenon but also as a methodological tool that guides the analysis.

Taking into account that the trajectory of migrants in Latin America and the Caribbean occurs in environments in which violence, in its different types and modalities, is recurrent and generates effects that lead to important changes, different studies have reported on the relationship between migratory movements and violence (Massey et al., 2020), with crime, state repression, gangs and other types of conflicts serving as the main generators of migratory practices.

In a scenario in which violence can be the cause or the consequence of migration (Cook Heffron, 2019), particularly with regard to women, it is highly relevant to incorporate the concept of gender violence into the analysis. Gender violence is defined as "harmful acts directed at an individual or a group of individuals based on their gender. It is rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power and harmful norms" (onu-Mujeres, 2021, p. 1). Violence can be psychological, physical, sexual, patrimonial and economic (Landeros Jaime, 2021), and it is likely to occur at different moments of a life trajectory, even, at certain moments, in multiple forms simultaneously, generating contexts of extreme violence and complexity for those who suffer it (Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración, A. C., 2021a).

From Bauman's perspective, these violent changes, which represent a *disturbance* in the life course, reconfigure not only the trajectories but also the values that are embedded in the victims (Bauman, 2003, 2017). Finally, violence represents one of the most accentuated concerns of the migrant community, where the cultural aspects of the country of origin are intermingled with those of the destination, as has been recently reported (Landeros Jaime, 2020). Importantly, the decisions that emerge from specific *turning points* always imply a risk that prevents ensuring *a priori* the success of redirections in trajectories, as the literature mentions (Shanahan et al., 2003). The Venezuelan women who participated in this article were willing to assume numerous risks as part of their migration project.

Methodology and data

The research was conducted from a qualitative perspective. The methodological strategy for obtaining data and information was based mainly on ethnographic work that included observations and different ethnographic interviews (Sherman Heyl, 2001) with Venezuelan migrant women living in a Santiago commune; the purpose of this approach was to reconstruct the life stories of the women. A greater number of conversations were held inside the homes of the participants as part of observation sessions aimed at understanding the family dynamics of Latin American migrants in Chile. Importantly the interest is far from seeking general information regarding current migration but rather focuses on analyzing the experiences, complexities and challenges of Venezuelan migrant women.

Six Venezuelan migrant women participated in this study. In general, they left their country of origin due to political, social, and economic conditions, whose main impact manifested as massive human rights violations (Gandini et al., 2019). During 2018 and 2019, constant communication was maintained by text messages, calls and formal interviews, interactions that also constituted part of a school ethnography conducted in the same period. The women were originally from different areas of Venezuela, and most reported having a university education, practicing Catholicism, being married and having at least one son/daughter in the home; some women reported being survivors of violent acts such as attacks, kidnappings, and extortion. The common denominator is that they are leaders in their family migration projects, where they conducted initial planning, development and execution, in a context in which their husbands followed the trajectory designed by them while living in the place of origin.

The sample was obtained by approaching women at the elementary schools where their sons and daughters were enrolled. Although the women in this study are part of a family structure, the focus of this article is on their own individuality, with the purpose of learning about their achievements, goals, and aspirations, understanding their fears and identifying their satisfaction with being a migrant woman in Chile. The conversations lasted approximately one hour and took place between March 2018 and February 2019.

The topics addressed during the conversations were related to living conditions, particularly in economic and social terms; access to public services such as health, education and decent housing was also discussed. The women were asked to describe events that marked their lives in terms of educational and work achievements, violence, discrimination and general problems encountered in the destination country. As an ethical approach, the dialog was always guided by the reactions of the interviewee; that is, if a topic seemed uncomfortable, time and space were given for the participants to think about the answer. On occasion, interviewees refused to talk about specific topics.

For the data analysis, we constructed a matrix of codes linked to the conceptualization and preliminary reviews of the empirical material collected; the matrix formed the basis for the analysis of thematic categories[2] (Kuckartz, 2014; Rädiker & Kuckartz, 2020), i.e., particular moments that led to drastic changes in the life course of the

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[2] Data processing, interview transcription, coding and analysis were carried out using MAXQDA 2020 software.

women who participated in this study. Thematic analysis (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2019) was the main strategy to understand, identify and, above all, better describe the stories of those who participated in the research.

The life stories included in the study not only provide an understanding of situations at the individual level but also illustrate well the political and economic aspects that, across time, have generated changes in Venezuelan society. It is a connection between important elements of the past that shape the present and form the future trajectory. In this sense, the main methodological challenge of life stories arises when deciding whether to analyze them from a chronological, in terms of events, or thematic perspective (McLeod & Thomson, 2009). This study focuses on the latter, where the identification of break points in life courses constitutes the central axis of the narrative.

The following section discusses the main findings from the empirical work; the findings are presented following a narrative that illustrates the complexities that, across time, have marked the life course of migrant women and that currently continue to constitute some of the main challenges they face.

"I became a migrant overnight"

In recent years, planning vacations at a beach or somewhere abroad have been a common practice. Going to exclusive places and enjoying high-quality coffee in the morning before arriving at work, either in a transnational company or within the Venezuelan government, has also been common. These activities were part of the daily life of women from Venezuela before modifying their life trajectory and migrating to Santiago de Chile, a modification that was motivated not only by the economic problems that the country is experiencing but also by widespread social decomposition, which has generated an increase in the rates of violence, persecution and criminality.

All of the migrant women interviewed agree on the assumption that it will take years, if not decades, for Venezuela to recover from the attrition, violence and instability that it is currently experiencing. "The initial motivation (to emigrate) was that we saw that it would take a long time for Venezuela to get out of this situation" (VC1, personal communication, April 2018). "The crisis led us to leave the country; everyone knows the crisis that is happening: the social, moral, economic crisis" (VC3, personal communication, May 2018).

Thus, from the testimonies, the main modifications in life trajectories arose from themes and/or situations mainly linked to violence, economic problems and political persecution, where time was a relevant element in the design of migratory projects. That is, the decisions made by the migrant women who participated in this study are the result of several years of reflection and preparation in response to situations that gradually emerged but were likely to worsen in the country, as happened.

"I was kidnapped in my own home"

Violence in Venezuela in recent decades has reached an unprecedented level; therefore, people seek to leave the country by any means in search of a better quality of life and access to public services that meet their basic needs, with the additional purpose of recovering their freedom in the face of confinement, a product of the fear of being violated in public spaces.

Although this generalized violence, which is nested in other problems of an economic and political nature, has presented itself in different ways and generated psychological, patrimonial, political, economic, and other problems, physical violence has been the primary trigger for turning points in the life trajectories of Venezuelan women. This is aligned with the initial assumption of this article, i.e., violence is the main motivator for emigrating from the country. For Venezuelan migrant women to decide to start their migration project, several years had passed.

> The last straw was one Sunday afternoon. [That day] we decided to leave the house to visit my mother, and they robbed us. They pointed at my husband [with a firearm], and they pointed at my children, telling them to get out because they were going to take the car. We had to sell things to recover it at the time. We did not have the money; we had to sell our wedding bands to recover the car. It was something that we could recover, which was material, but we needed the car because it was our means of transportation to school and work. (VC2, personal communication, April 16, 2018)

On a recurring basis, physical and psychological violence in public spaces is one of the most prominent problems in the testimonies collected. In this context, the impossibility of going out freely to a park or consuming products in a cafeteria is notable, consequences aligned with the economic restrictions resulting from government policies.

> We could not go out to a park. There was no money to take a bus and go to the park. There was no certainty that you can walk down a street at 9 pm without thinking that they will steal your phone or do something to you. There at 7 pm-8 pm, everyone is at home. People are very afraid. Both children and adults live in fear; that is the truth. (VC3, personal communication, May 19, 2018)

Leaving the home represented exposing oneself to crime that prevails in different areas of the country, indicating that living in confinement provides feelings of security in one's own space: "because if you go out, you could be robbed; they rob and even kill you. So, we lived in total confinement, where there was not much freedom" (Personal communication, VC3). However, the reality of the other women interviewed is very different. The day on which the eldest son of VC4 was on a walk with his grandmother and the youngest daughter had a medical appointment with a pediatrician, the family was kidnapped in their own home. Construction workers who had been in the home for several days were the perpetrators.

> We arrived at the house and entered... in December, the house was painted for Christmas and New Year. We were organizing [everything], and seven men came in and tied us up. The house was torn down [destroyed]. They wanted to grab the girl, and I told them no. I was very strong, neither shouting nor crying. After you live through that, I said, I need to protect the lives of my children. More than anything, it was for my children. (VC4, personal communication, March 18, 2018)

Violence in the past was recorded primarily in public spaces. However, in recent years, there has been a change, reaching the private sphere, gradually becoming crude and normalized by certain sectors of the population but not with those who participated in this study. The characteristics of this violence are intertwined in the history of VC6, for whom the implementation of her migration project did not generate great changes now that she is in Chile: "We are surviving only one step above what we were living over there. Over there, we survived to eat" (VC6, personal communication, February 12, 2018).

Being a political refugee in Chile, this Venezuelan woman not only faces the consequences of the physical violence of which she was a victim in the past but also the psychological, economic and patrimonial consequences that, in the present, complicate her life journey and that of her son, who has also experienced these complex moments, resulting in episodes of stress, anxiety, and depression derived from psychiatric disorders.

> Any Venezuelan who you ask why they left tells you that you cannot live there—a lot of crime and economic problems. I was kidnapped and shot by simple and common (crime)—kidnapped for hours. They did not rape me, thank God, but they beat me and threw me into a river to see if the animals would eat me or if I drowned. But, I was able to save myself because it was not my time. (VC6, personal communication, February 12, 2018)

The above illustrates how the life trajectories of Venezuelan women in Chile are consistent with what has been mentioned in the literature, indicating that the identification of *turning points* allows an understanding not only the past but also the practices, dynamics and complexities of the present (Bauman, 2003, 2017; Elder, 1985, 1998; Wingens & Reiter, 2012). VC6, who worked for the government opposition, also illustrates how gender is a differentiating factor that positions women in a condition of vulnerability and violence in a Venezuelan political environment dominated by men. In this sense, although Venezuelan migrant women, by leaving their place of origin and settling in Santiago de Chile, managed to get out of a dangerous social environment, the component of violence is still present in their lives. That is, the modification in their life trajectory was mainly due to the effect of the physical violence of which they were victims, a single type of violence that was eliminated with the displacement; however, economic, patrimonial, and psychological violence are still present in the daily lives of the migrant Venezuelan women living in Santiago de Chile.

"We were doing well, but this crisis ended everything"

The standard of living that VC2 could afford in Venezuela was high. As a professional in education and with a jewelry company, the economic issue was never a problem; however, "the crisis ended everything in the country. Education began to decline. I had a business there of buying and selling gold" (VC2, personal communication, April 24, 2018). Fatigue increased considerably across time. Faced with insecurity and shortages resulting from a volatile economy, "I decided that we should leave" (VC2, personal communication, April 24, 2018), in a scenario in which the acquisition of certain products limited access to others due to the high prices in the formal and informal markets.

> Nothing was achieved there. If we wanted meat, we could not because it was (inaccessible). We could buy it, but we did not cover the expense of a month. We did not have flour; there were very long lines to buy a product, and that causes a lot of physical wear and tear. Food, insecurity... there (Venezuela) they kill for a cell phone, and then it began. (VC2, personal communication, April 24, 2018)

> After we saw how it was (crisis in Venezuela), my husband gave private classes, but the point came when people preferred to spend that money on food than on classes (music). Work was diminishing. I worked, but the salary was not enough. We could not eat apples because they are expensive. (VC3, personal communication, May 26, 2018)

Economic problems in turn made access to services and products of different types complex, forcing the migrant population to think about strategies that would allow them to use savings to cover the expenses that would derive from the migration project, in a context in which women migrants did not plan to emigrate from the country, seeing it only as the last option to solve the difficulties derived from the economic and patrimonial violence that they had faced for decades. This describes how decisions to seek better opportunities and quality of life abroad are the product of planning initiated years in advance, where the passage of time involved defining the routes and dynamics to mark the trajectory. As all the interviewees pointed out, the first step was to convert their savings to a currency other than the local currency and determine who could help them in this process.

> (Then) the issue of starting to exchange currency began. Every time we could, we sold something; "We are going to exchange and save", we said. Exchange from bolivars to dollars. After 2011, when we were in this (crisis)... we began to have more fear because what happens in the country is scary. I had sold my apartment, and we had changed the money to dollars. (VC4, personal communication, February 27, 2018)

> Initially, there was an aunt of my husband (in Chile). In fact, when we arrived, we had transferred the dollars to him to have an apartment when we arrived. It was with the savings that we had there. Well (it was not) savings, but what we were accumulating and buying dollars. Currently, it is much more complicated to buy dollars. (VC1, personal communication, May 17, 2018)

These economic resources that the women together with their families managed to save became their main capital to undertake their migratory project to Chile, partially addressing, at that time, the difficulties that sometimes occur when reaching a destination whose codes and dynamics, despite sharing the language, were very different. These differences generate other types of complications that initially placed them in a situation of "invisible poverty" (Landeros Jaime, 2020), whose main characteristic is the absence of support networks (social capital) and the null value of university credentials (cultural capital) in the host location.

With the passage of time, things are calmer. Life passes, and the fear of being assaulted, kidnapped and physically violated is much lower than in the past. However, access to services continues to be limited due to the lack of formal employment. The majority of the Venezuelan migrant women who participated in this study perform poorly paid work in the informal market, despite being part of a skilled migration community that began to increase in past years until becoming the largest migrant community. This peculiarity is accentuated taking into account that Venezuela is a country that does not border Chile. In short, the economic and patrimonial violence of which they are victims in the destination is framed in a moment of crisis in Venezuela, which represents for these women an endless cycle of problems.

> Initially, (it was) the economic impact. It has been the day to day impact. We cannot go out to eat or go for a walk. In fact, we have not been to the movies. The fact of being in another country… It is important to have money. We have one goal: to save. We bought beds, a television, and we already bought what we need for winter. (VC1, personal communication, May 17, 2018)

The *turning points* linked to economic problems show that female migration from Venezuela is a social phenomenon whose participants are informed, with high cultural capital, and transversal characteristic of investing time in valuing all the possibilities before executing their plan. However, economic difficulties continue to represent one of the main obstacles to improving quality of life in a context in which Chile is considered one of the countries with the highest cost of living in Latin America.

"I was shot, beat and threatened. That's why I left"

The economic shortages that modified the life trajectories of migrant women are sometimes mixed with events of another nature. For VC6, physical and psychological violence is combined with economic and political violence. The lawyer and mother reported that working for the government opposition translated into an income sufficient to think about vacations in any country in the world, new cars, private school for her children, and even multiple properties such as apartments and other types of buildings. Everything changed overnight:

> I participated (as) a member of the polling station in the elections for Henrique Capriles (Venezuelan politician), and he won. We said that he won. (The government) wanted us to alter the results and say that he did not win. I said that I would not do that because that is a crime. I signed (Capriles

victory). Then, they shot me down (shots)... (and) the car was destroyed (shot), and they killed the bodyguard I had. I presented these here, and they gave me preapproved political asylum. (VC6, personal communication, February 12, 2018)

Despite the preapproval of asylum in Chile for political reasons, it has been impossible for her to have access to the labor market, much less practice as a lawyer. The situation of this Venezuelan woman living in Santiago de Chile is unique because she is the only person with a request for political asylum, which prevents her from returning to Venezuela or leaving the country during the process. In addition to the aforementioned complications, her life is in danger not only if she decides to abandon the process and return to Venezuela but also now in Santiago de Chile because, due to lack of documents, she has not been able to access health services, in a context in which she suffers from depression, anxiety and generalized emotional distress.

For this reason, VC6 must acquire drugs that arrive in Chile from Colombia through smuggling networks, which she considers dangerous because she is not certain of the quality of the products; however, she assumes the risk so that her mental health does not worsen, leaving her unable to care for her only child. "The lack of medication in Venezuela made me have an abort of my second child. I lost the child and was almost on the verge of dying. Now, I need medicines to overcome that, but I do not have them" (VC6, personal communication, February 12, 2018). This problem described by VC6 is consistent with the literature that delves into access to the labor market as one of the main difficulties of migrant women in Chile (Carrère Álvarez & Carrère Álvarez, 2015; Gissi Barbieri & Martínez Ruiz, 2018; Silva Segovia et al., 2018).

From this, it is observed how violence against Venezuelan migrant women living in Santiago de Chile manifests and intersects in different ways, where physical violence, serving as the main turning point in their life trajectory and the main driver of leaving the country, has disappeared; however, economic, psychological, political and patrimonial violence is still present, as illustrated by the low economic capital generated by the null access to the labor market, nonexistent access to health services, persecution by members of the Venezuelan government, and waiting times so long that they prevent the generation of wealth in the place of reception. In short, the Venezuelan women interviewed continue to be violated in different ways, perhaps not by the government of Venezuela but by different actors in the destination, evidencing a significant relationship among violence, migration and gender inequality that promotes vulnerable living conditions.

Thus, in addition to the *turning points* linked to violence, economics and politics that forced women to leave Venezuela, there are other problems that prevent the total overcoming of those moments of the past that modified their life trajectories; That is, even when these turning point moments are identified, it is necessary to identify the problems that, in the present, complicate overcoming these moments of difficulty, as mentioned in the literature (Wingens & Reiter, 2012).

"I am a university graduate, but my degree is not valid here"

The women interviewed reported having university studies, including postgraduate studies; however, the cultural capital accumulated in Venezuela at the time of arrival in Chile lost validity because their education is not recognized by some institutions or by employers. For VC2, who is an educator with a master's degree in educational management, the problem is due to the equivalences of the school systems; her degrees will not be recognized until she completes a series of courses, which require time and money: "Something that I cannot afford at this time because my children come first" (VC2, Communication person, May 16, 2018). Although the result is the same and is linked to not having access to well-paid jobs, there are those who reported having completed all the necessary procedures so that their degrees were recognized at the time of arrival in Chile.

> With time in advance, we prepared all the paperwork so that we could come here. We spent about a year getting everything set; getting official copies of titles, documents, birth certificates. I am a teacher; I am a chemistry teacher. I studied five years at the University of Venezuela. (VC3, personal communication, May 5, 2018).

> I am an industrial engineer; I graduated there in Venezuela, from a very good educational institution. Then, I was trained in quality assurance. I have done many courses. Everything that has to do with ISO standards. I am an internal auditor of integrated management systems. I am very trained, and I am always learning. I like it. (VC5, personal communication, May 16, 2018)

Although the Venezuelan women in this study are part of the highly skilled migration to Chile that began some time ago, in their entirety they perform tasks that are not in accordance with their abilities and academic training; therefore, their salaries and working conditions place them in positions of vulnerability. Furthermore, waiting times have been reported as a resource of domination and exercise of power in other studies (Auyero, 2011) and are another problem faced by migrants in Chile; across the years, the Department of Immigration and Migration (Departamento de Extranjería y Migración - DEM) has increased the waiting times to access visas and work permits, another important requirement for entering the formal labor market in the country.

> What happened is that my three-month tourist visa expired. I paid the extension, and I went to the Department of Immigration and Migration to see what I could do. They told me, "You have 10 days to present documents, a job offer or a contract. Otherwise, you must vacate the country. I am waiting for my documents because my temporary permit only arrived a month ago. I do not have an ID or a temporary visa. (VC2, personal communication, May 16, 2018)

This aggravates the economic, social and political situation experienced by Venezuelan migrant women in Chile. These problems are linked to institutional aspects whose relationship is evident with the identified *turning points*; however, the participants also reported other types of complications related to labor discrimination, xenophobia, racism and gender violence, representing a window of opportunity

for future research that focuses primarily on social aspects of migration, unlike the institutional aspects analyzed herein.

Conclusions

The female migrant population from Venezuela faces serious challenges in Chile that are related to the same reasons that motivated them to leave their country of origin to improve their quality of life. That is, the execution of their migration project solved only some of the problems that afflicted their daily lives in the Venezuelan context, where the thematic category of violence, particularly physical violence, considerably decreased. However, the women herein, based on their testimonies, continue to be violated in economic, political, and patrimonial terms beyond borders, as happens in other regions of the continent (Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración, A. C., 2021a; Landeros Jaime, 2021).

The main *turning points* that repeatedly modified the life trajectories of Venezuelan women were linked to the complexities resulting from violence, both by civil society itself and by the government; in turn, it is presented in a context of crisis and a lack of respect for human rights. The economic aspects that led to complications of access to health and education services initially motivated the design of a migration project. Likewise, the political situation, which, as observed in the analysis, is intertwined with other factors, was, and continues to be, the main motivation for people to seek new opportunities outside their country of origin.

Based on the analysis, although the economic and sociopolitical context of Venezuela modified the life trajectories of the women herein, acts of violence were the drivers of the execution of the projects that these women led, in an environment in which, for years, planning included waiting, with uncertainty, for possible improvement in the country. However, when they are shot, kidnapped or beaten, motivation was potentiated to the point of making the decision to travel to Santiago de Chile.

Regarding the main problems faced by Venezuelan female migrants living in Chile, wait times to resolve Department of Immigration and Migration approval processes is one of the greatest complications because such approval includes work permits that would allow the women to access the formal labor market; this finding is consistent with those of other studies conducted in Chile on female migration (Acosta González, 2013; Carrère Álvarez & Carrère Álvarez, 2015; Ojeda, 2016). The recognition of educational credentials constitutes another complexity because employers, even government authorities, do not recognize university degrees, forcing the women to accept poorly paying jobs without a contract or working conditions that do not provide them with the certainty they seek.

The aforementioned contributes directly to the fact that the *turning points* that motivated the migration of women to Chile represent an obstacle today. That is, economic problems, fear of insecurity and persecution (in the case of political asylum), and difficulties regarding access to health and education, which were recurrent in Venezuela, currently continue to be part of the complexities of migrants, which makes sense from the perspective of the life course, where *turning points* are not only part of the past but also help to understand the present and build the future (Wingens & Reiter, 2012).

Although the findings presented in this article are far from generalizable to the trajectories of life and especially the current situation in which the migrants from Venezuela living in Chile are found, they do reveal the complexities faced by this migrant community through the life stories, experiences, interpretations and complications of highly qualified women, who in a Chilean context have not managed to position themselves in the formal labor market or meet the objectives initially proposed in their migration project. In this sense, what is presented here provides elements for the design, implementation and evaluation of public policies aimed at improving the quality of life of migrants from a gender perspective; the violence and inequality that permeate at different levels generate serious complications, specifically, decreases in mental health, for migrants. Although physical wear and tear was a problem before leaving their place of origin, in the place of reception it represents one of the main effects that worsens with the passage of time, as indicated by the testimonies herein.

In short, the assumption that violence significantly influences migration is supported by the testimonies presented in this article in a context in which it is important to analyze the life trajectories of migrant women from the perspective of gender. From this perspective, it is possible to identify additional elements that make the development of migratory projects for women in Latin America and the Caribbean even more complex.

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