Making whiteness in the context of South-South migration

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Abstract

In the context of rising South-South migration into Chile, this article examines how Chileans redefine and claim whiteness in a multicultural working-class neighborhood in Santiago. It contributes to regional racial studies by analyzing how whiteness is constructed in multicultural neighborhoods where different national and racialized identities that share a colonial past converge, and where the nation-state has historically pursued a progressive whitening through racist state politics. Drawing on a 17-month ethnography, 70 in-depth interviews and 2 focus groups with Chileans and migrants, I show how Chileans construct a white racial identity with the presence of Latin American and Caribbean migrants in their everyday lives. Whiteness is an ongoing everyday social construct that not only is conveyed as a discourse, but also as a practice of power that takes place in the social textures of urban life in contemporary Chile. Making and enacting whiteness becomes a way in which racial hierarchies of belonging are materialized in the everyday, reinforcing migrant social exclusion. This study reveals that Chileans claim to be ‘white(r)’ in contrast to migrants through everyday practices, interactions and discourse, reproducing anti-indigenous and anti-black racism in order to achieve a higher status in an unequal racialized society.

Short bio

Macarena Bonhomme is an Assistant Professor in the PhD in Social Sciences at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities of the Universidad Autónoma de Chile. She is an Adjunct Researcher at the Millennium Nucleus in Digital Inequalities and Opportunities (www.nudos.cl) and the Centre of Social Conflict and Cohesion Studies (www.coes.cl). She holds a Ph.D. in Sociology from Goldsmiths, an MSc in Culture and Society from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), and a bachelor’s degree in Sociology from Universidad Católica de Chile. She was awarded the LASA/OXFAM Martin Diskin Dissertation Award 2020 for her doctoral thesis and, more recently, the Best Paper Award 2022 in the International Migration Section 2022, given by the Latin American Studies Association (LASA). She has been studying migration, racism, racialization, ethnicity, and conviviality for over a decade, and in the last few years, she has started focusing on migrant work and digital platforms.