RETHINKING MIGRATION: HAVING ROOTS IN TWO WORLDS

Abstract

Recent studies by Sutton and Chaney and our observations indicate that Caribbean life in New York City is the product of the continuous circular movement of people, cash, material goods, culture, life styles and ideas between the Caribbean and the United States. To some extent the migrants have Caribbeanized New York City rather that assimilating into the dominant traditions of earlier European setters.

In terms of policy we must consider the impact of a significant population of frequent movers without a vested interest in either assimilation into the dominant culture or in maintaining their cultural baggage intact. Policy-making within Caribbean society and within the metropolis must formulate policy seen through this prism of dynamic cultural impact predicated on existence of frequent movers capable of influencing economic, social and even political outcomes at both ends of their journeys.

More and more Puerto Ricans are 'multiple movers'. This characterization is often labeled circular migration by the experts who have found that the circularity effects mental health negatively. Nevertheless a substantial portion among the P.R. movers participate in highly migratory styles of life for whom there is no hard and fast rule between those who leave and return frequently due to family or other pressures and those who become multiple movers by preference.

The possibility to structure a different and better lifestyle organized in function of movement and the variety of opportunity at both destinations should not be taken as indicative of a disorganized or incompetent life. Within this setting there is no a priori presumption of a lack of community or mental health among frequent movers. We would like to entertain a view of this type of mobility as one which can be accompanied by competent coping behavior. Rather than community lost, findings from our studies support the position that for multiple movers both community and home have been restructured at a larger scale that incorporates the social experience of a highly mobile lifestyle.
Introduction: The Problem

Theoretical models for migration studies in Puerto Rico can be located within a longstanding intellectual tradition of viewing Puerto Rican social structure and personality within a context of pathology, of cultural dependency, of structural and individual incompetence. The anatomy of Puerto Rican reality has typically presupposed that a lack of social and personal harmony should be understood as if it were an indicator or more to the point a deficiency in mental health. It should have been apparent that if one assumed a state of social harmony as the norm then all change, all conflict, all innovative life styles (i.e. changes in migratory behavior) would carry high risk of being evaluated as evidence of social-structural and personality failure as was indicated in an article first published by Hernández together with psychologist-criminologist Pedro Vales twenty years ago.¹

The twentieth century has witnessed the transformation of settlement space in the United States with parallel changes after World War II in Puerto Rico, from a relatively static internal structure to one that is sustained and affected by the larger social system. Business activity, for example, plays itself out against a backdrop of a global system of production, commerce and finance.

Most crucially, the conditions of personal life in metropolitan environments have also been fundamentally transformed. The classic city neighborhood and rural community have long ago, with some notable
exceptions, passed from their stability to be replaced by personalized networks of people who commute across regional space and an ocean in order to experience social communion.

Against such views are numerous critics of the status quo, including academics and other dreamers, who see the current patterns of change as producing mental illness, cultural genocide, anomie and political impossibilities. From an urban ecological perspective the dominant sociological paradigm is that we have an "organic" growth process--propelled by technological innovation and demographic expansion.

Our contribution to this debate of whether Puerto Rican spacial dynamics, location and organization is good or bad is for the present irrelevant. The important issue, instead, is how such a redefinition of living spaces is produced. The magnitude, parameters, causes and consequences of such patterns should become a central concern of migration studies. In our view a science of locational movement must be based upon a knowledge of the articulation between social organization and space. As we are told by geographer M. Gottdiener, places and forms by themselves do nothing--only people within social organization networks possess that power. (1985)

More and more Puerto Ricans are 'multiple movers'. This characterization is more often labeled circular migration by the experts who have found that the circularity effects mental health negatively. Nevertheless a substantial portion among the Puerto Rican movers participate in highly migratory styles of life for whom there is no hard and fast rule between those who leave and return frequently
due to family or other pressures and those who become multiple movers by preference. Many are building social and economic capital at both ends.

More and more Puerto Ricans are putting down roots in two worlds. These multiple movers fall into a number of categories. First, our empirical studies have identified a population who are low-income, mostly women and children, who regularly shuttle between Puerto Rico and New York. A minority are on public welfare in one or both places while they and the others receive enough family support to maintain two homes.

Second, there is a population, primarily male, who were employed primarily as migrant farm workers. Currently more that half are employed as seasonal factory, retail sales, hotel and other service workers.

Some of these as well as less repetitive single trip part-year migrants fall into yet another third category which consists of those who have returned to Puerto Rico to repose. These are persons according to geographer Aaron Segal who have not met their expectations, whether for study of jobs overseas and who have come home for a sojourn before trying again. These are the people who desire permanent migration but may never achieve that objective.

Fourth, there are many Puerto Ricans who have stretched their families over geographic space. These stretched households exist within Puerto Rico as well as the Caribbean generally. For example, as adults move from the Dominican Republic to Puerto Rico in search of work leaving their children behind in which the costs and
responsibilities of child-raising are shared between generations and
spread over space. Similarly, we find broken stretched families,
following divorce of the parents, with children shuttled from one
parent in one space to another.

The predisposition to engage in frequent movement has been cited
as a characteristic endemic to Caribbean migration by anthropologist
Charles V. Carnegie.

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moving is an unusual thing to do, has led some scholars to
assert that West Indians as a people are lacking in self-
confidence, and, as one scholar has argued, "subservient to
metropolitan norms..."

"Anthropologists have for some time come to recognize the
limitations of studying social life with the assumption
that people live in discreetly bounded social and cultural
units. Yet these lessons seem not to have translated to
the study of migration... The migrant from the Caribbean
is not acting out an aberration but is doing something for
which his culture has prepared him just as it has prepared
him for making tools and raising children. (1982:53-54)

The migrant here depicted is someone highly spatially mobile.
As a consequence of his openness, his flexibility in the face of
changing circumstances, his biography will result in many locational
choices. Carnegie labels this "strategic flexibility" because the
life situation of many of these people is that there are no long term
benefits from staying in one place. Rather the key for advancement
lies in sufficient flexibility to take advantage of changes in
circumstances and opportunities which may be available in the short
term. The movers develop an acute awareness allowing them to
anticipate changes in circumstances. In other words they do not live
in a bureaucratically tenured world so they always have to be ready
to meet changes and movement is their means for coping with the situation.

There is no hard and fast rule between those who leave and return frequently due to family or other reasons and those who become multiple movers by preference. Many are building social and economic capital at both ends. For Puerto Ricans inexpensive flights and personal support networks facilitate shuttle migration and reduce psychological stress. Some observers, including ourselves, believe that what is occurring is a new concept of personal and social roots.2

Selective Review of Literature

A substantial portion among the Puerto Rican population is participating in highly migratory styles of life which have gone unrecognized and, therefore, unreported by experts in the field of migration studies.

To the extent that attention has been given it disproportionately has been conceptualized within a labor market theory of economic determinism. Frank Bonilla tells us that circular migration is a product of labor market demands of a world economy... Which "has cast a majority of the population into forced idleness, underemployment and a restless circulation between colony and metropolis." Contributing to this hypermovement he indicates slippage of both class bonds and ethno-national unity with the rise of individualistic mobility-striving and survival strategies prevailing as adaptations to the shortfall of market and state. This argument is both economic labor market dependent and assumes that all P.R. migrants are suffering and involuntary and typically deleterious diaspora situation. In terms
of social acceptance, of ‘respecto’ the frequent mover according to Bonilla would not satisfy the demands of U.S. assimilationists nor those of traditional nationalists in Puerto Rico. (1992:182-186) Classic as well as theoretical position on under development’s tie to capitalism. We see parallel conceptualizations for other Caribbean Migrants (Cuban and Haitian) as well as the classic theoretical position on the tie of under development to capitalism by sociologist Alejandro Portes (1985, 1978.)

A relatively recent source for studies of migratory behavior can be found in the literature of area studies. In one paper from that specialization shows a new theoretical perspective has emerged rejecting the parallel of the new migrants (i.e. African-Ameriqans, Chicanos and Puerto Ricans) with their European predecessors. This causes a shift in analysis from that of over population of the place of origin to that of a relatively surplus population produced by the capitalist mode of production. "Thus the majority of the workers class in Puerto Rico and of the Puerto Ricans in the United States occupy virtually the same economic and social function..." (1987:87)

The proponents of this emerging and dominant analytic perspective hail from a variety of academic disciplines, and are often situated as faculty at both the metropolitan center and Puerto Rico. The best example can be found in the volume titled Colonial Dilemma edited by the Meléndez brothers one of whom, Edwin, is a professor of Urban Studies and Planning at M.I.T. and the other who is a professor of Political Science at the U.P.R.
We are appreciative of the relevance we have found in relatively recent large scale studies published in geographic journals and in volumes some of which make theoretical contributions on our topic. At the more theoretical level we see such new classics derived from M. Gottdiener, whose essays in *the Social Production of Urban Spaces* (1985) and no less in *The City and the Sign* (1980) by himself and some of his followers who have inspired us.

At the most practical empirical research level we see many studies in the highly quantitative mostly descriptive geographical literature such as one on linked migration systems. Immigration and Internal Labor Flows in the United States by economic geographer, regional scientist Robert Walker. The surprise of that study is its particular relevance to our theoretical perspective since it criticizes the neoclassical economic theory of mobility which assumes that migrants improve their situations by moving. Walker argues that this assumes an economically rational actor which requires critical investigation. (1992:245)

Most studies of migration implicitly treat migration as a one-time event and make no effort to distinguish repeat moves from first-time moves. We believe this is a crucial distinction which cannot be garnered from an examination of official statistical reports on population movement.

Anthropologist Carnegie makes the following observation:

"Migration studies have relied heavily on the presentation of statistics, staccato fashion, that mask the nature of social reality just as much as they illuminate it. Today’s migrant, for instance, may have been yesterday’s returnee, and may have lived in two or three places before making his way back; yet even the most sophisticated presentation of
statistics will not show this. It is not even just a question of finding out the motivations of particular migrants, it is being able to find out the ideas of a cultural system, whether those who came from it are in fact "migrants" at all, in their perception of the situation.

In popular usage and as conceptual tools, "migration" and "migrant" sometimes have distinctly pejorative connotations. Folks remain "migrants" even after second and third generation. In the case of the Caribbean, the implicit assumption that moving is an unusual thing to do, has led some scholars to assert that West Indians as a people are lacking in self-confidence, and, as [more than] one scholar has argued, subservient to metropolitan norms. Such claims are usually poorly substantiated; indeed that author then went to great lengths to demonstrate the resourcefulness and achievements of West Indian migrants abroad. That alone suggests that cultural subservience is little more than an artifact of the perspective that argues that migration, rather than staying put, is the unusual phenomena. Discussions of social disorganization and anomie said to be consequent to migration must also, at least in part, be regarded as induced by the same blinkers." (1982:54)

Demographers have also demonstrated, however, that most moves are made by people who have moved at least once before, and in developing countries, such alternative forms of mobility as commuting, circulation, and seasonal migration appear to be prevalent. Some studies by economists have recognized this from a labor market perspective and a few have investigated the differences among people moving for the first time and those returning to a place where they have lived before.

The best review of theoretical studies of repeat migration by demographers and economists is available from the DeJong and Gardner edited volume on Migration Decision Making, (1981) which includes attention to the patterns we see in our studies for studies of interstate movers within the continental U.S. Review of works related
to migration of Puerto Ricans makes no reference to this pattern, with two exceptions, and in these two cases, the attention is minuscule.

The final page of sociologist Barry B. Levine's volume, Benj López, tells us about the migration equilibrium. Levine states that, "The exodus to the mainland and the modernization of the island have created a kind of migration equilibrium--or circuit--for Puerto Ricans, in that many individuals now have the option of going from one place to the other in search of economic and social opportunities. The result is that today Puerto Ricans who want to work in industry, for example, can do so on the mainland or on the island. And those who want to lead a particular style of life can choose to do so in San Juan or in New York. (1980:199)

Some Puerto Ricans will alternate, migrating and returning at various intervals and for various lengths of time, said sociologist José Hernández Alvarez. His studies, a quarter of a century ago, indicated that only the more successful would, alternate periods of work in the United States with their main occupations on the Island and even become scheduled commuters while the less successful might drift from having no fixed employment to having no fixed residence in a pattern of almost aimless search for small job advantages. (1967)

It should be understood that despite our original intention to understand the impact of migration on P.R. women exploration of the sociological literature for the past two decades provided us with virtually no studies on that topic. A chapter in the 1991 Annual Review of Sociology titled Women and Migration: The Social Consequences of Gender by sociologist Sylvia Pedraza fully documents
our experience. Her first sentence declares that "Despite the overwhelming presence of women in migration flows, until recently the role of women in migration had been totally neglected" (1991:303) Demographers Houston et. al. said that there was a longstanding assumption that the migrant was a young, economically motivated male which ignored the fact that women for the last 50 years have dominated migration streams. (1984)

While the study of migration is by its nature interdisciplinary Pedraza indicated that only anthropologists "relate to the impact of emigration and return on the sending communities in underdeveloped nations... while sociology was contained by the delimiting capacity of functionalism to explain male-female differences; of empiricism to treat gender as a variable, rather than as a central theoretical concept, of marxist sociology to ghettoize it; and by the underdevelopment of feminist [and migration] theories" themselves. (1991:304-5)

In sociology the traditional micro approach was classically developed by Everett Lee’s (1966) theory of push and pull which focussed on the individual migrant’s decision to migrate that hold, attract or repel people as well as intervening obstacles (distance, physical barriers, cost) the influence of personal traits (stage in the life cycle, contact with earlier migrants) and the effect of transitions (marriage or retirement).

The more recent approach to migration even in sociology, has focused on structural level variables such as those of unequal development by sociologists such as Manuel Castells (1975) and
Alejandro Portes (1978). They and others seem to us to be dominated by economically deterministic theories which ignore the knowledge that there is no economic man nor woman.

**Theoretical Implications**

Modernity in modern culture is characterized by an increase in secularization and rationalization of behavior and attitudes. What we mean is that the importance of traditional or affective considerations for the definition of human action is diminished or lessened. Rather than affect or tradition defining goals and means of decision-making, social actors increasingly subject themselves or their actions to conscious choice. The model for behavior, in other words, increasingly approaches a model of economic rationality. Whatever choices movers make will less often be determined by traditional considerations but increasingly by conscious calculus. This can be viewed as the consequence of the modern experience or life style. We posit this as the model for the subjective drama of self in modern society.

The frequent mover develops a critical evaluative capacity as regards coping with social demands and opportunities at both ends of his or her journeys—which may be termed heightened social competence. One of the factors that fosters this cultural characteristic is the experience in biography wherein a person travels from a familiar cultural context which is typical of these particular expectations and solutions but are no longer predictable solutions to adaptation in the place of destination. Familiar routines can no longer be taken for granted. Nothing can be taken for granted since even when returning
to the formerly familiar location that which was taken for granted in the past has lost its taken for granted quality via unsuccessful application in the place of destination.

These women and men on the move reflect the interplay of bureaucratic and traditional value orientations in the development of a mobile life style. We should recognize that for some of these movers their motivation, opportunities and limitations exist in function of the interplay of traditional family and community commitments as well as the institutionalized bureaucratic definitions of their situation in both places. By this we mean that family life is defined and impacted by both traditional cultural expectations and opportunities as well as by a legal rational order which defines a formal set of social opportunities and expectation in both destinations.

By example there are social and economic opportunities available in the U.S. that are virtually impossible to reject due to the greater capacity of the richer location. Cases in point include higher A.F.D.C., greater and more specialized public health and educational programs. We are cognizant of the possibility that these manifest social support systems for the family may in fact be at odds with traditional family orientations.

**Broadening the Concept of Migration**

Population change has always been accepted by planners as required base information. The conceptual grounding for this information has consistently relied on demographic methodology. The sources have been primarily from planning boards, U.S. Census and
Department of Health data. The demographic basis for population estimates have been birth, death and migration rates. It is important to note, as an example of level of debates, that the P.R. Planning Board population estimates, which were based on secondary data collected by the Department of Labor for other purposes, were shown to be in substantial error by Professors Gutiérrez and Caldari of the Graduate School of Planning, U.P.R. Since their findings were derived from a quantitative model and improved the accuracy of the findings, they incorrectly felt that there was no question of its relevance to planning. (1979)

In contrast, Scheff and Hernández question the basic definition of migration which we see as unacceptable. We felt that the first task was to indicate empirically that the Puerto Rican reality of migration was much more complicated than the simple concepts of permanent outmigration and the later recognition of return migration. It is from this start-off that we began our project. We believe that planning for Puerto Rico requires a fundamental redefinition of community, or region, to include where Puerto Ricans are. We further argue that Puerto Rican reality is dynamic despite comfort taken by many analysts and politicians with a relatively static concept of both residence and community.

For many Puerto Ricans home is elusive. After World War I, many Puerto Rican migrants to New York City were nicknamed "Marine tigers" since that was the name of the steamship that brought them into Red Hook in Brooklyn. That trip was similar to those of other migrants (non-U.S. citizens) from Europe and elsewhere. For most of these
migrations, that move was perceived as permanent. Nonetheless the feelings of uncertainty and nostalgia for the place of birth were common for many immigrants of the past. At the period of heaviest migration from Europe to the United States (turn of the century), four Europe. We have parallels among some early Puerto Rican migrants who retained direct ties to their place of birth at least for burial.

But, after 1960 return to Puerto Rico for a short visit or for a longer time became more feasible due to the greater availability of air transport. Having that option seems to have had a significant effect on attitudes and behavior. These travelers or migrants may well maintain strong ties to both locations. For many, no longer is that move a once and for all decision. No longer are we seeing only the delayed round-trip which is termed return migration; no longer can all return shorter trips be labeled native tourism. What we are finally recognizing is that the numbers or statistics on population movement constructed on the basis of arrivals and departures (i.e. origin-destination surveys), as well as the labels attached misrepresent the reality of Puerto Rican movement. What we are seeing is a kind of "infolding" in terms of philosopher Teilhard de Chardin's view from which is seen a world that would be progressively united by increasing geographic mobility. Chardin sees this process as one that is spasmodic and a generally imperceptible fusion of separate and so often hostile parts. (1977)

In the Puerto Rican case we see an expanded environment or community resulting from a home base in parts of the United States
that is the other component (beyond Puerto Rico) for the dynamic nature of this style of life. In other words, we are redefining community as much as enlarging the demographic definition of migration. We are arguing that recognition of this reality by internationally renowned Puerto Rican novelists such as Emilio Díaz Valcárcel (1982) and Luis Rafael Sánchez (1980-1984) tell the planners to realize the message we cannot ignore.

Because we are focusing on a subsample of migrants -- i.e. frequent movers -- who at this point in their life cycle have not fully disengaged from their place of origin nor have the intention of full assimilation or total commitment to their place of destination we cannot accept the dichotomy of uprootedness or assimilation. This subsample is neither totally integrated nor totally marginal to either their place of origin or their place of destination.

In terms of the societies at each end of the journey these frequent movers may be seen as neither eccentrics nor deviants but simply different or marginal and not necessarily provoking hostility or rejection by the majority culture. The traditional hostility which both immigrants and return migrants experience as competitors or threats for limited societal resources (cultural, political, economic) is to a great extent ameliorated by the veteran residents expectation that they will leave and they do. In point of fact, however, they return so that while in the short-run they are not targeted as actual rivals in the long-run their impacts may be felt. These migrants escape some of the stigmatization or victimization which is typically the lot of newcomers. But, we must distinguish here between the adult
population who initiate this pattern of movement and their offspring. We pose a question about the immediate and longer term benefits and costs to the primary decision makers and the legacy to their children and to others who adopt this nomadic pattern.

We should also point out that not all frequent movers commit themselves in the long-term since they may become either return migrants to their birthplace or permanent migrants at another point in their life cycle. This presents us with both a theoretical and empirical challenge. To what extent is there commitment to this nomadic lifestyle? How permanent is return migration or, immigration for former frequent movers and for how many? To what extent is this movement experimental, casual or habitual?

There is limited understanding as to the temporal dimensions of migratory status changes. The motivations, the social impacts and the temporal dimensions of these migratory status changes have not been either theoretically or empirically studied. Due to this lack policy planning for both societies' populations is inadequate. Are these movers status changes considered by population planners?

Policy Implications

The broader aim of our effort is to stimulate social scientists and urban policy planners to focus on the nature of geographic movement today; to plan multidisciplinary cooperative research on issues of coping behavior, and adaptations of transient, or so-called high risk populations; to devise institutional mechanisms for practical action designed to bridge the distance between Puerto Rico
and the United States. A way is needed for people in either space at a single point in time, to receive the attention they may require.

Much remains unknown about this type of geographic mobility. In order to understand it we need to look beyond outcomes or predictors of relocation. We need to explore the processes that mediate peoples' decisions to remain in an area or to move. Further complications ensue due to the lack of communication by the institutions of the recipient locations. Particularly this latter point has resulted in little effort to bring the pieces together in order to more fully understand mobility. This is so despite the expertise of individuals in diverse disciplines and mobility-related data collected by planners, geographers, sociologist, demographers, and others at both ends of the migration pendulum.

The opportunities to structure a different and better lifestyle organized in function of movement and the variety of opportunities at both destinations (U.S. and P.R.) should not be taken as indicative of disorganized and incompetent life. Rather it can be seen a design for the maximization of available resources by a highly mobile sector of the population. In this case mobility is a useful and necessary component of the urbanizing experience. This is a lifestyle which emerges out of a relatively new set of urban and bureaucratic opportunities.

Within this framework there is no a priori presumption of a lack of community or mental health among frequent movers. Rather we would like to entertain a view of mobile behavior as one which can be accompanied by competent coping behavior.
We have witnessed the growth of attitudes and innovations which have loosened the structural ties to traditional places of residence and to traditional family and friendship social networks. This has occurred in an urban cultural context where the traditional concept of small community-based social alliances and localities have been eroded. Rather than community lost, our findings support the position that community or "home" has been restructured at a larger scale that is able to incorporate the social experiences of a highly mobile lifestyle.

In terms of the policy making implications one important consequence of not having an adequate appreciation of the physical and qualitative dimensions of this population trend is that there is a significant neglect of adequate and satisfactory information on a significant sector of the society. We take this position albeit in the absence of quantitative data for the P.R. case and we would attest that to the best of our knowledge this information is unavailable for scholars in their respective societies throughout the world.

It is obvious that public policy is operating to some extent in the dark. The rational bases for decision-making is not there. However, there is a second and perhaps even more important and deleterious consequence. The recognition, to a great extent in a terribly distorted fashion, of this particular movement phenomenon is that it has been basically left to the purview of professional economists to interpret this situation. This is exemplified by the conceptualization of this phenomenon in basically labor market terms.
As a consequence information generated has been an incomplete presentation of the situation confronting planners.

From our perspective this population movement is a process not only of demographic impact but one which continues to shape history, enrich culture and extend linkages with other locations. One might refer to this process as the positive alternative reality to the totally negative dependency theory preferred by many economists and others.

In the past people seen as marginal were expected to have no stake in either their place of origin or of destination. In point, of fact they may claim a stake in both places.
1. The theoretical framework for this paper relating to the impacts of bureaucratization on society was developed by coauthor sociologist David Hernández together with sociologist Pedro Vales more than twenty years ago. Their classic construction was credited in a major volume by historian Francisco Scarano published by McGraw Hill during this year. Within sociology the delimiting capacity of functionalism to explain social change, of empiricism to treat migration as a variable rather than as a central theoretical concept, of marxist sociology to ghettoize the migrant and by the demographer's underdevelopment of theory in the name of pragmatism have resulted in conceptual and theoretical needs which this presentation confronts.

Works by anthropologists have traditionally related the impact of emigration and return on the sending communities of underdeveloped nations and the development of the Hernández-Vales theory in this effort is most indebted to the publications of anthropologist Charles V. Carnegie and the combined outputs of the sociologist-anthropologist team of Constance Sutton and Elsa Chenay.

2. Following three exploratory, empirical, conceptual efforts that the authors undertook during the past decade which were modestly funding by the University of Puerto Rico's research-student training center with the results of each presented at annual meetings of the Caribbean Studies Association and in our classes at the U.P.R. at the Graduate School of Planning and the Department of Sociology we determined that for this year we were ready to present theoretical statements by Scheff at the International workshop on Immigrant Absorption - The Interface between Research and Policy Making Sponsored by the Klutznick Center for Urban and Regional Studies at the TECHNION in Haifa, Israel (May 30-June 2, 1993) and by Hernández at the 18th Annual Meeting of the Caribbean Studies Association taking place during the same period at Kingston, Jamaica. Said conference theme is - Caribbean Public Policy: Preparing for a Changing World.
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