

Migration in the Caribbean

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ABSTRACT

Ten years ago, at the tenth anniversary of the Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers held in Muncie, Tom Boswell reviewed the last two decades of research work on migration in the Caribbean and concluded that much of the substantive work was being conducted by social scientists other than population geographers. In this review of geography's progress during the intervening period, the 1980s, I want to achieve two purposes. The first is to review and update the record that Tom Boswell presented back in 1980, specifically focussing on geography's recent contributions to Caribbean migration research. It turns out our record has improved considerably. The second objective is to present a challenge for the nineties: to propose a set of research questions that Latin Americanist and Caribbeanist geographers should find intellectually and professionally interesting.

Migration is by definition a multi-disciplinary topic. It is a major demographic component, having complex interrelations with the other two major components of population change, fertility and mortality. It is a spatial and therefore geographical process because a displacement movement of persons occurs. It is of sociological and anthropological interest because migration (the process) and migrants and non-migrants (the involved people) occurs within and because of societal contexts. Yet it also affects society because it brings about changes in source and destination communities, changes the involved individuals, and even has societal repercussions on non-migrants in source and destination communities. Economists view migration as a fundamental process of labor transfer, a major factor of production.

Flows of migrant labor, like flows of capital, are of essential interest to economic forecasting. In addition, the consequences of labor flows, their patterns, selectivities and behaviors have national and international economic importance. Political scientists have viewed Caribbean migration in terms of receiving and sending nations' policy-making, and migration-development relationships have attracted considerable attention from that fraternity. More recently, structuralists, Marxists, neo-Marxists and social theorists of all disciplinary persuasions have interested themselves in the causes and consequences of internal and international circulations of labor as the political economy landscapes of regions, nations and the international sphere have been formed and transformed through eras of capitalist accumulation, crisis, restructuring and incorporation. (See, for example, Patterson 1978).

It is scarcely surprising, therefore, to find that through this decade of inquiry, the eighties, other social scientists greatly outnumber geographers in their contributions to research on migration in the Caribbean. On the other hand, and contrary to the rather self-critical evaluations of previous CLAG commentators like Boswell (1981) and Augelli (1971) on the limited nature of our discipline's impact on regional scholarship, the eighties' record has seen considerable progress accomplished, even if by a gallant and outnumbered few.

In the seventies review, four basic research questions were identified and progress in these areas was documented. They were: 1) spatial patterns of movement; 2) migration motivations, or "why people move;" 3) migrant selectivity; and 4) the consequences on source (sending) and destination (reception) areas (Boswell 1981b). Classifying types of migration according to socio-spatial distance, Boswell (1981) reviewed social sciences' research accomplishments in intra-urban, internal and international migration arenas with a Caribbean focus. Today, looking back on the eighties, one definite cause for optimism is the expansion of questions asked and the progress made by geographers and others in developing more searching questions, more theoretically informed analytical frameworks and more interdisciplinary perspectives on Caribbean migration research.

It is not that the early questions were irrelevant. Rather the more comprehensive views of recent scholars affords us more-informed and coherent answers. What are the improvements? Without suggesting an order of importance, the following perspectives have been brought to bear on Caribbean migration-related research: socio-historical perspectives; cultural ecology perspectives; structure/agency perspectives; gender and class analyses; attempts at micro- and macro- scale linkages; refinements and redefinitions of mobility strategies and policy-related [end p. 91] and informed analytical constructs. And, among the Caribbeanist scholars utilizing these "new perspectives," geographers can be found.

One indication of geography's new-found respectability in regional scholarship are the several overview contributions made by our colleagues and published in major regional journals such as *Caribbean Review*, or in major regional texts, including Marshall (1983), Richardson (1989), Boswell (1989) and Conway (1986c, 1989a). All these comprehensive reviews held to a socio-historical perspective and thereby provided thorough and well-received treatments of the centrality of migration in Caribbean societal transformations. Dawn Marshall made several seminal contributions in her empirical and theoretical arguments on migration as a fundamental societal mechanism (Marshall 1980a, 1980b, 1981, 1982a, 1982b, 1983, 1985). Much of this creativity was based on Marshall's central involvement in two large research projects, one the Man and the Biosphere Project and the other her own directed longitudinal research project investigating the international migration behavior and adaptations of Eastern Caribbean emigrant families to New York and Toronto (MAB, 1981; Marshall, 1984a, 1984b). Bonham Richardson made contributions to Caribbean migration research in his earlier work on labor mobility in Guyana (Richardson 1975). The eighties, however, evidenced several important and seminal works (including two books) by this geographer, who blended historical study and archival investigation with theoretical insights concerning the cultural ecology bases for Leeward and Windward Islander intra-Caribbean mobility (Richardson 1980, 1983, 1985, 1988). Richardson's latest overview contribution to a regional text was due recognition of his authority in the field (Richardson 1989). Tom Boswell's earlier research had focussed on the spatial patterns of Puerto Rican internal migration in the recent past (Boswell 1976b, 1978), on Bahamian patterns of redistribution (Boswell and Chibwa 1981) and on Puerto Rican international flows to the mainland (Boswell 1976). During the eighties, his geographical focus shifted to concentrate upon the adjustment processes and resultant demographic and cultural changes in recent Caribbean immigrant groups, primarily those resident in Florida (Boswell 1982, 1985; Boswell, Diaz and Perez 1982). This thorough research of the comparative experiences of Haitians, Cubans and Puerto Ricans as inner city immigrant communities attempting to adjust to their new metropolitan communities culminated in co-authorship of a comprehensive demographic treatment of Cuban-Americans (Boswell and Curtis 1984). Recently, he authored the four Caribbean chapters in the third edition of West and Augelli's *Middle America*, where one chapter specifically dealt with the contemporary processes and patterns of migration and urbanization throughout the region (Boswell 1989). To round off this introduction to the contributions of this first group of Caribbean migration enthusiasts, a review of my own research and writing would reveal an initial focus on urban residential change and intra-urban migration (Conway and Brown 1980) and on stepwise internal migration processes in Trinidad (Conway 1984a). This was followed by a switch to questions concerning Caribbean peoples' international mobility patterns (Conway 1986b, 1986c, 1990a), the formation of international mobility strategies (Conway 1988, 1989a, 1989c), and theory development (Conway 1987; Conway, Ellis and Shiwadhan, 1990). In these more recent arguments and empirical explanations, a structure/agency perspective has come to inform the analyses (see Desbarats 1983; Massey 1989; Thrift 1983). This presents an "explanation" which is considerably more complex than can be encompassed within one disciplinary framework, be it geography or any other social science. The theoretical constructs developed in these writings draw essentially on a socio-historical perspective, but the as yet unfulfilled objective is to work towards a synthesis of structural and behavioral theoretical constructs (Bach and Schraml 1982; Conway 1987). Further analysis currently underway and a sharper focus on international circulation patterns is expected to yield more interesting findings, which are intended to contribute to geography theory as well as migration theory writ large (Conway 1990d).

Although not specifically concerned with migration, one historical geography *magnum opus* stands out as a

major contribution to Caribbean scholarship in the eighties. This is David Watts' book *The West Indies: Patterns of Development, Culture and Environmental Change Since 1492* (1987). Throughout this seminal work Watts records the trends and influences of population growth and migration on West Indian cultural landscapes and this research warrants recognition here in spite of its more general cultural-historical mission.

If the areas of migration research are classified according to the scale of the "system of interest," or the geographic scale, then research on Caribbean extra-regional international migration trends and patterns predominate. By contrast, intra-regional studies of international transfers between and among Caribbean countries are few in number. Haitian illegal and legal migration and international circulation to and from the Bahamas was the only intra-regional flow which received geographical attention (Marshall 1981, 1985). In comparison, historical studies [end p. 92] of the livelihood traditions of external migrations and international circulations to and from Barbados and St. Kitts-Nevis (Richardson 1983, 1985), examinations of contemporary circulations to and from Puerto Rico (Conway, Ellis and Shiwadhan 1990) and between Haiti and Florida (Boswell 1982) tended to dominate geographers' interest. Traditions of emigration from Jamaica and the historical (pre-1962) trends of movement to and from the English-speaking West Indies to their mother country, Britain, were also the focus of considerable research and conceptual thought by Elizabeth Thomas-Hope (Thomas-Hope 1978, 1983, 1986). Although Kittian and Nevisian migration futures are very much tied to Antigua and the United States Virgin Islands, one geographical study on their contemporary migration behavior failed to extend its survey to this circulation dimension (Mills 1988).

Another "impact" theme related to international migration that attracted considerable attention among geographers was the issue of return migration and the impacts, potential or real, of remittances (Stinner et al. 1982). Either studies were country-specific, such as on Guyana (Strachan 1983), Jamaica (Thomas-Hope 1985), St. Vincent and the Grenadines (Conway and Glesne 1986; Marshall 1984b), and the Leeward Islands (Richardson 1982), or they deliberated on the potential consequences for remittance investments to serve as development vehicles (Conway 1985).

At the national scale, rural-to-urban migration was recognized as a salient process of societal transition among geographers commenting upon development and policy issues pertaining to rural-sector problems and rapid urbanization (Boswell 1978, 1981a; Conway 1989b, 1989c; Monk and Alexander 1979; Momsen 1986). The most innovative of such studies was that proposed by Potter (1989a), who conceptualized a model of rural-urban interaction within which a whole range of rural-urban linkages, including mobility, could be explained. Potter's specific focus was on Barbados, but his construct, with some "place-specific" modifications, could be applied elsewhere in the insular Caribbean.

Earlier (pre-1980) geographical commentary dwelt upon the problems facing rapid urbanization in the Caribbean and included intra-urban migration or residential mobility as a process exacerbating the uncontrolled sprawling nature of urban areal expansion and uneven settlement (Clarke 1971, 1973, 1974; Clark and Ward 1980; Conway 1984b, 1989b; Conway and Brown 1980; Hudson 1980). The eighties demonstrated small increase in interest in intra-urban migration processes among geographers. Rather, continued work on Caribbean urban geography topics shifted to housing issues, employment issues and evaluations of spatial planning initiatives (Conway 1984a; Potter 1983, 1986, 1989a; Strachan 1981; Susman 1987). This genre of geography study culminated in an edited volume wherein country vignettes were commissioned addressing the common theme of urbanization problems and inadequate spatial planning, and where rapid cityward migration and conurbation sprawl appeared to be a region-wide phenomenon (Potter 1989b).

One remaining area of migration-related research that continued to interest a few geographers concerned the adjustment, accommodation and adaptation processes of Caribbean immigrants in receiving metropoli, predominantly United States urban communities. Immigrant waves to Florida of Cubans and Haitians were

"high-profile" subjects of research undertaken by Boswell (1982) and his associates at Miami (Boswell, Diaz and Perez 1982). Caribbean immigrant residential differentiation in New York City was investigated by Conway and his associates (Conway 1990e; Conway and Bigby 1983, 1987). Toronto, as another host metropole for West Indians from the Eastern Caribbean, was the focus of one of Marshall's migration projects, which sought answers to questions concerning the adaptation processes of "small island" emigrant families and individuals (Marshall 1984a). By and large, the volume of pre-1980 research on Caribbean immigrant settlement in European mother countries such as Britain, France and the Netherlands, was more substantial than this eighties' effort. Consider studies of the Surinamese experience in Amsterdam (Vanavers and Cortie 1973), the West Indian experiences in Britain (Lowenthal 1972, 1978; Peach 1978), for example. Furthermore, this interest by geographers in the differentials of Caribbean peoples' experiences in metropolises in North America and Europe was minuscule compared to other social scientists' efforts, but at least two edited volumes attempted to present a geographical view on the "new ethnicity" in contemporary "traditional" receiving societies (Clarke, Ley and Peach 1984; McKee 1985).

MIGRATION QUESTIONS FOR THE NINETIES

What are the "cutting edge" questions for Caribbean migration research in the nineties? With the current wave of 1990/91 census enumerations completed or scheduled for completion by the end of 1991, the publication of this next set of decennial inventories of migrant stocks within Caribbean countries and of emigrant presences in the United States and Canada will be useful benchmark data for research to assess the continuity or changes in patterns of [end p. 93] international migration and emigration residuals; that is, *via* net estimates. At the same time we would need useable estimates of emigrant "return" volumes from such traditional receiving countries as the United States and Canada to go beyond the "static" cross-sectional perspective on emigrant presences, but none are likely to be forthcoming (see Warren and Kraly 1985). Indeed, given the uneven nature and general paucity of information in the official statistics on entry and exit volumes, of the characteristics and durations of stay of visitors, residents, returnees and emigrants/immigrants alike, few of the questions we may want to ask can be readily addressed on a region-wide basis (see Conway 1989c). With official data unable to provide Caribbean migration research with an adequate base, nineties' research will need to rely on survey data, on primary sources of data, and on co-operative efforts between regional and international policy-oriented institutions and Caribbeanists to advance our collective knowledge and understanding of this complex and dynamic process. Given that such resources can be mobilized to undertake primary studies and to generate survey data, what are some of the salient questions?

Without inferring an order of importance, the following research areas come to mind. First, the variety of contemporary international mobility strategies, made by individuals, by families or by households needs attention. The type of international move, whether short- or long-term by intention and in actuality, whether reciprocal movement, displacement, or return retirement movement is undertaken, or whether legal (documented) versus illegal (undocumented) entrant refugees are involved in international movement, requires more specific attention if we are to gain a better understanding of the complex nature of present-day Caribbean migration processes.

Second, and since international movement now has both legal and illegal components, the policies and practices of both the sending and receiving nations need to be better incorporated into our explanatory frameworks of this region-wide tradition. An interesting range of questions revolve around the ways in which application procedures and options, legal restrictions and loopholes in entry and exit procedures, and visa lengths and renewal procedures, never mind amnesty agreements such as IRCA, influence movement decision-making, initiate new responses and generally influence migration intentions, duration of stay intentions and return intentions.

Third, noting the latter behavioral option, another unresearched area concerns return migration and returnee and remittance impacts on Caribbean communities, societies and development prospects. Unknowns abound. Who has returned from earlier diaspora? Who is returning during this latest era of global restructuring and are such return migrant flows selective by demographic indices other than age? Where are the returning migrants going, what progressive or regressive roles/activities are they undertaking and what is their contribution to societal change, transformation and development? What is the scale of remittance flows and where and how are they being invested, spent or distributed in Caribbean space economies? How can remittances and returnee resources be utilized in progressive and creative ways, and how can governments be assisted by population geographers in their development of policies to maximize benefits gained such potential productive resources?

Fourth, many Caribbean migrants have established themselves in their new host countries, within and outside the region. Many questions remain unanswered concerning the functioning of the various Caribbean migrant enclave communities in the United States and Canada, as well as in traditional receiving hosts within the region, including Puerto Rico, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados and Antigua, to name a few. "New" host countries within the region are now experiencing immigrant enclave development, such as the Bahamas and the United States Virgin Islands. The development of extensive networks between such enclave communities and their home communities, between Caribbean individuals resident in heterogeneous metropolitan residential areas and between other non-Caribbean immigrant entrants and Caribbean immigrants in overseas metropoli, also networking with dual/multiple Caribbean home communities, makes the study of such international linkages an interesting domain. What are the linkage functions with the singular or plural Caribbean home communities? What are the facilitating mechanisms for illegal (overstaying) or longer duration sojourning within these enclaves? What are the informal and formal economic functions of such metropolitan communities and how do they incorporate the sojourners and the newcomers into their neighborhood economies? Questions of accommodation versus assimilation and acculturation remain when examining Caribbean migrant experiences in the United States and Canada and the relative dearth of **[end p. 94]** geographers focussing on French/patois- and Spanish-speaking Caribbean minorities and their North American experiences is a situation requiring immediate attention.⁽¹⁾

Fifth, migration within Caribbean nations and rural-urban linkages that facilitate and incorporate spatial displacements of individuals, families or family members and rural-urban community networks are expected to be central mechanisms in the continuing uneven patterns of transformation of Caribbean landscapes. Internal migration, intraurban relocation, rural-to-peri-urban and suburban locations, commuting versus household relocation decisions, even frontier or rural new settlement movements, are displacement mechanisms of considerable importance in contemporary Caribbean societies. The patterns of flows, the rural-urban linkage networks, the spatial arrangements and territorial functions of new reception communities and the complex of informal and formal economic functions that arise in them as the national space economy re-structures in its uneven way, are research topics of region-wide interest as well as of interest in specific nations, such as Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, Guyana, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago.

Sixth, migration is undeniably becoming the most important of the three demographic dimensions of population change within the Caribbean. Fertility rates are still high enough to receive their much needed attention among regional demographers, but migration and its interrelations with fertility and even mortality, has scarcely received the analytical attention it deserves. In part, data deficiencies are to blame for this neglect. Furthermore, the problems of rapid population growth and of high population densities, uneven patterns of settlement and residential densities, when matched to the geographical situations of limited resource bases throughout the Caribbean, were voiced in earlier commentaries (Augelli 1971; Zelinsky 1970). These demographic dilemmas are still with us and continue to be on the nineties' agenda, but the movements of human resources need to be given a more central position on the stage of regional scholarship, than

population pressure and its other surrogates. The challenge is considerable, but the domain remains fascinating. Perhaps I can speak on behalf of "the few" and extend an open invitation to others to join us in the nineties.

1. This observation does not take into account current Ph.D. and M.A. research, or indeed book manuscripts in preparation on Haitian or Dominican minority experiences, but relies on my overview of geography literature. If I have omitted reference to colleagues' work in this area, I would welcome the disclaimer to this rather negative assessment of geography's research record in this ethnic/minority area.

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