AMERICAN REVIEW OF POLITICAL ECONOMY

Volume 8, Number 2

Special Issue on "Migration and Caribbean Society"

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December 2010

AMERICAN REVIEW OF POLITICAL ECONOMY

Volume 8, Number 2

December 2010

http://www.ARPEJournal.com

AMERICAN REVIEW OF POLITICAL ECONOMY

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Migration and Caribbean Society

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JEL Codes: J61, Z13
Key Words: Caribbean Society, Diaspora, Migration

INTRODUCTION

Modern Caribbean society was formed as a result of waves of migration–forced and unforced–from Africa, Asia and Europe. Migration, whether historical or recent, is therefore, very much part of the Caribbean experience. In the immediate post-world war period, migration of Caribbean people to industrialized countries was encouraged and indeed celebrated within the Caribbean. Many Caribbean-descended persons, who have achieved success on the world stage, credit the migration of their parents from the Caribbean for that success. However, the experiences of Caribbean emigrants have not always been positive, since many suffered (and continue to suffer) from poor treatment and prejudice from those receiving countries.

The articles in this collection discuss Caribbean migration focusing on specific effects on wider Caribbean society or its Diaspora. They reflect different themes and consider the different angles associated with migration, thereby emphasizing the complexity and multi-dimensionality of this phenomenon.

INTRA-CARIBBEAN MIGRATION

Fraser and Uche, for instance, focus on patterns, motivation, costs and benefits of intra-regional migration. Intra-regional migration has now become one of the most sensitive and potentially explosive topics within CARICOM. The 2009 announcement of an amnesty for so-called undocumented CARICOM citizens by the late Prime Minister of Barbados, David Thompson; the deportations of Jamaican and Guyanese citizens by the Antigua Government, and the warnings issued by the Bahamian Government to

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their immigration officials regarding the poor treatment of some Jamaicans to that country, all point to the need for a better understanding of the problem from both the perspective of the migrants and the host communities. Based on the limited data available, more Jamaicans are now living in other Caribbean countries in search of work and a better life than ever before. Most of these emigrants appear to be travelling to a few select countries: The Bahamas, Cayman Islands, British Virgin Islands, Turks and Caicos, Antigua and to a lesser extent Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago. Samuels (n.d) points out that "intra-Caribbean migration has been minuscule compared with the volume of extra-regional migration" (p. 6). Understandably, much more research has been conducted on Jamaicans who emigrate outside the region than within the region. Nonetheless, leading migration researcher, Elizabeth Thomas-Hope, in examining intra-Caribbean migration argues based on the 1991 CARICOM census:

> the total migration stock or numbers of persons living in the region other than in their country of nationality was 104,669. (The data excludes (sic) Jamaica, Cayman and the Turks and Caicos Islands). Of this total, Caribbean nationals accounted for the majority, other immigrants were chiefly from the United States and Canada, United Kingdom and India. (Thomas-Hope, n.d, p. 2)

Since the 1990s, following the introduction of the CSME, intra-regional migration has increased. The International Organization for Migration (IMO) estimates that intra-regional migration is approximately 10% of overall migration within the Caribbean (Parker, 2007). This increased traffic among the territories probably led Fernandez (2006) to argue that the lack of research on the causes and effects of intra-regional migration is a problem for policy making and policy makers. Fernandez argues:

> So far, little policy-oriented thinking has been directed towards the management of intra-Caribbean migration with a view not only to preventing violent conflict, but to managing migration in a law-abiding and constructive manner through cooperative arrangements, involving governmental authorities and interested civil society organizations. (p. 10)

The shortage of research may, in part, explain why seemingly ill-informed statements have been made by a number of regional leaders with respect to benefits and costs associated with migration. A number of the statements fail to point out benefits to host communities and costs to migrants who travel to host communities. Findings from

Fraser's and Uche's study should not only provide additional information to academic researchers who work in the field, but also inform policy making at the national, regional and international levels. In addition, the findings should help potential emigrants make more informed decisions regarding the benefits of migration.

MIGRATION AND CRIME

Scholars of migration point to the fact there are push and pull factors associated with migratory patterns. In many Caribbean countries high crime rates and low levels of security have had a devastating impact on development, as has been witnessed in Jamaica and Guyana. These two countries have experienced high levels of out-migration to industrialized countries over the past four decades. Natasha Parkins in her article contends that crime has been a critical push factor for Jamaican migrants seeking their fortunes in the metropole. Accordingly she writes:

> "…[o]ver the last 30 years, the emigration rates have increased substantially, with alarming rates in particular, of highly skilled individuals… This study suggests that both the direct and indirect effects of crime in general and violent crimes in particular, combined with suitable employment for the migrant's skill set, have forced some members of Jamaica's professional class to gravitate towards First World countries, taking their skill set which their home country has financed." (p. 6)

Parkins argues, as do other writers in this collection, the high level of migration robs the country of many highly skilled persons. Although Parkins points to benefits from migration for Jamaica and the Caribbean (such as remittances), the skill gap created by this situation has long term negative consequences for the development of the countries in question. On the other hand, receiving countries are placed in "…an advantageous position as these skills contribute to that country's development and growth" (p. 6).

MIGRATION, ETHNICITY, GENDER AND IDENTITY

At a different theoretical level, the papers by Allahar and McFarlane attempt to address complex issues related to Diaspora and migration. Both writers focus on the intersection of race and culture in providing a variety of narratives of the migrant and

diasporic experiences in North America. However, there are important differences in regard to the points of departure of both writers, including method of analysis and conclusions of the two papers. Allahar's essay on the political economy of race and class in Canada's Caribbean Diaspora concentrates on the treatment of Caribbean migrant labor in the context of Canada's capitalist economy. Allahar contends:

> Access to cheap labor is key to the functioning of any competitive capitalist economy, and racism is a tried and tested way of cheapening labor. To this extent members of the Caribbean-Canadian diaspora are seen to play a key role as cheap, flexible and expendable labor that is integral to the overall economic prosperity and stability. In developing the argument concerning the relationship between "racism" as a technique to cheapen labor and have a diaspora that is "classed," a crucial distinction between the Caribbean population and the Caribbean diaspora, must be made, as not all Caribbean immigrants belong to the diaspora. (p. 82)

Allahar's essay introduces another often neglected analysis of Caribbean migration, that of the role of cheap labor to satisfy the global capitalist economy. Much of what has been written about migration in the Caribbean tends to privilege 'push' factors, or those that push the Caribbean citizens away from the region to metropolitan countries, over pull factors. Allahar quite rightly concentrates his attention on the content and character of some of the dominant "pull" factors.

Unlike Allahar, McFarlane focuses on migrant and diasporic experiences of women in New York, showing how those experiences are shaped and are shaped by inequality, race, ethnicity, gender and identity. In discussing migrant experiences in respect of college educated females in New York she writes:

> . . . Caribbean-born female college students in New York City experienced exclusion on the basis of their race, ethnicity, nationality and individual characteristics. However, these same social markers formed the basis for their experience of belonging – and to varying degrees, represented the goals for which they strove in their efforts to create and maintain their sense of self. For this group of women, as is the case with other groups, identity is constructed and re-constructed, sometimes in ways that appeared spontaneous but was actually deeply rooted in who they were, are and hope to become. However, for these female immigrant college students, their perceptions of difference and community were infused simultaneously with the various social messages they received from their home countries and the U.S. society. (p. 109)

Thus, it may be argued Caribbean migrants are constantly constructing and re-constructing identity. The experience of leaving home and living in another country so transforms the individual that he or she is no longer the same on return home.

McFarlane's "narratives of resistance" allow us to empathize with the migrant or person from the diaspora's longing for a sense of recognition–the desire to impose their consciousness on others.

Overall, it is clear that to understand the phenomenon of migration, it is critical to have a sense of the sociological, economic and psychological forces which shape the mind of the migrant. It is also necessary to understand the various macro and global forces which are behind the "push" and "pull" factors for the potential migrant.

To conclude, the papers in this collection demonstrate that Caribbean migration is a very complex issue and that to have a critical understanding one needs to look at it from different angles, recognizing the intersection of various factors including the social and economic context of the migrant's environment, the conditions in the host country and those factors which determine the process of identity re-construction of the migrant.

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