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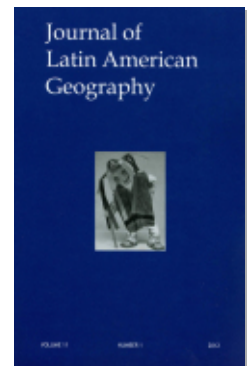
*Blurred Borders: Transnational Migration between the
Hispanic Caribbean and the United States* (review)

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Book Reviews

Blurred Borders: Transnational Migration between the Hispanic Caribbean and the United States. Jorge Duany. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011. xvi + 284 pp., diagrams, notes, and index. cloth (ISBN: 978-0-8078-3497-8) pbk. \$29.95 (ISBN 978-0-8078-7203-1)

Blurred Borders represents a long journey for the author both intellectually and personally. Born in Cuba, raised in Panama, and residing in Puerto Rico with frequent visits to the United States, the author draws heavily on his life experiences in developing his focus on transnationalism as it pertains to three Caribbean diasporas –Cuba, Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico. The rationale for his intellectual inquiry, I believe, can be traced to his own life history where he, like other immigrants from the Caribbean, are asked a seemingly simple question – “what is your national identity”? For the millions of Caribbean emigrants who straddle two or more national identities, complex responses to that simple question are required.

In the introduction and chapter one the author introduces the concepts of diasporas and transnationalism generally and in the context of Caribbean populations. To him transnationalism involves the construction of social interactions that involve the circulation of ideas, information, material goods, money, and people across sending and receiving nation states. This definition places the author in the “middle” (his words) of the growing literature on transnational migration. In chapter one he poses a number of rhetorical questions to drill deeper into the concept of transnationalism – why does it happen; does it matter; is its growth a form of resistance to assimilation; and what are the generational dimension of sustaining close ties. All of these, while duly noted, are not fully elaborated and leave the reader wanting a richer discussion both generally and through the lens of the Caribbean experience. In closing this section the author raises four propositions as to the why a transnational framework is essential to understanding Caribbean diasporas: it calls to attention the important roles of sending and receiving nations in shaping circulations; situates the Caribbean in the broader context of global circulations of capital, labor and technology; highlights the bifurcated identity tensions faced by migrants; and provides a context for discussions of nationality, nation states, and other dimensions of migration.

The remaining chapters of the book, save for the conclusions, focus on the migration experiences of Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Dominicans historically and in a contemporary context. Using secondary data, field observations, and personal accounts, the author describes now the transnational migrations of these three populations are similar but also very different. Indeed, the reason for *Blurred Borders* is to demonstrate that although transnationalism is the appropriate lens for interpreting Caribbean migration, significant variations in its manifestations occur across nation states because of conditions in the receiving and sending states; because of economic, political and cultural relationships between the two; and because of the vestiges of historical antipathy towards the United States in the three countries.

Chapters four through ten are organized by the three nation states and have different points of entry into the general theme. Chapter two provides the historical context useful in interpreting current dimensions of the circulation. Chapter three is more central to the comparative theme that the author posited. Six aspects were analyzed: the spatial pattern of the three migrant populations within the United States; the spatial dimensions of the transactions that link home to their current residences in the United States; how emigrants are incorporated into the US labor market; the level and types of remittances for each group; how migrants are labeled by public discourse in sending and receiving societies; and finally, the racial composition of the migrants.

The comparisons are very nicely summarized in the final chapter in a table that illustrates where differences and similarities are drawn. Space does not permit elaboration of all the findings and comparisons. These are captured, however, in the labels the author assigns to each country's transnational experience. Cuba is the "disinterested and denouncing state" stemming from its long animosity to the United States. This antagonism has significantly influenced how migrants are able (or unable) to maintain linkages across borders. The Dominican Republic, in contrast, is a "transnational nation-state" with its own unique history of relationships with the United States, where barriers to transactions across borders are more permeable. Puerto Rico's unique form of transnationalism is shaped by the "transnational colonial state" status it holds with the United States.

The book is a valuable addition to the literature on Caribbean migration. Moreover it comes at an important time as the public discourse on immigration, particularly from Hispanic nations, is satiated with hyperbole. Contributions that help us comprehend the nature of contemporary migrant behaviors can help provide a better understanding of the issue. The transnational framing provides an excellent lens for interpretation of the migrations and helps move the dialogue beyond rhetoric. The author's personal experiences in the region add an important, albeit measured, perspective to the volume. My criticisms are minimal and certainly do not detract from the overall value of the work. I found the case studies of individual countries less helpful in developing the comparative summary. One can easily draw a straight line between chapter three, the comparative analysis, and the summary at the end by touching ever so slightly the content in the country cases. Indeed the book could have presented a stronger argument by pushing the summaries at the end into the comparative chapter and then using the case studies to reference back to those. Finally, I believe the author became too cautious at the end when posing the question of whether borders are really blurred. Also posing some new directions to move transnational research forward would have been valuable.

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Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainability in the Americas. Francisco Dallmeier, Adam Fenech, Don MacIver and Robert Szaro (eds.). Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press. 2010. ix + 183 pp., color plates, figures, tables, bibliog. \$48.31 cloth (ISBN 978-0-9788-4607-7).

Seldom does the title of a book promise themes so alluring to earth scientists as climate change, biodiversity and sustainability, such that the temptation to own an