

Mapping Points of Origin in the Transnational Caribbean: The Foundational Narrative of the Puerto Rican Pioneer Family in the Virgin Islands

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Abstract

Ongoing discussions within the geographical area known as the Virgin Islands on who is a native Virgin Islander bring forth constructions of identity, space, and place in the Caribbean, a region that keep challenging its transnational nature. Following the theoretical frameworks proposed by Nora (1989) and Hannerz (1992) on sites of memory, complex cultures, and deterritorialization of identity in cultural communities, this essay explores the foundational narrative of “pioneer families/familias pioneras” used by generations of Puerto Ricans who live in the U.S. Virgin Islands. It also contextualizes these claims by exploring cultural perceptions of natives vs. foreigners in a context profoundly marked by ongoing, circular migration between Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

Keywords: Sites of memory, Complex cultures, US Caribbean Territories, Floating migration, Puerto Rican migrants, Native Virgin Islanders, Transnational identities, Pioneer families/familias pioneras

Resumen

Discusiones sobre qué define a un nativo de la región geográfica conocida como Islas Vírgenes resepepresenta una interesante instancia que propone construcciones de conceptos de identidad, espacio y lugar que desafían la naturaleza transnacional de esta región del Caribe. Utilizando los marcos teóricos propuestos por Nora (1989) y Hannerz (1992) sobre lugares de la memoria y culturas complejas, así como discusiones sobre la desterritorialización de las identidades en comunidades culturales, este ensayo explora las narrativas de origen propuestas por las historias de las “pioneer families/familias pioneras”, las cuáles han sido utilizadas por generaciones de puertorriqueños que viven en las Islas Vírgenes Americanas. Igualmente se contextualizan éstas historias como reclamos de origen explorando las percepciones culturales sobre “nativos” y “extranjeros”, en un contexto profundamente marcado por el fluir circular del ir y venir de migrantes entre Puerto Rico y las Islas Vírgenes Americanas.

Palabras clave: sitios de memoria, culturas complejas, territorios de EU en el Caribe, migaciones flotantes, migrantes puertorriqueños, nativos de las Islas Vírgenes, identidades transnacionales, “pioneer families/familias pioneras”

Introduction

This essay explores the stories of six Puerto Rican pioneer families whose members are living and/or had lived in St. Croix, United States Virgin Islands (St. Croix, USVI), according to a booklet titled Virgin Islands-Puerto Rican Friendship Committee 2007: A Partnership for Success. It applies to these stories Pierre Nora's theoretical framework of "sites of memory" (1989) and Hannerz's (1992) conceptual discussions on complex cultures and the deterritorialization of identity in cultural communities.

This essay is part of a more ambitious work-in-progress developed with linguistic anthropologist Dr. Nadjah Ríos-Villarini (the diasporaproject.org) that explores the role of cultural texts in the articulation of a social imaginary produced by the Puerto Rican diaspora and its ties with the Eastern Caribbean. By highlighting the complexities and contradictions of the meanings articulated by cultural texts, our project aims to map the "crossroads" where cultural memory is recreated and signified as "sites of memory." According to Weedon and Jordan's (2012) definition, cultural memory is "a discursive tool that signifies past experiences constituted by, and on behalf of, specific groups within which they find meaningful forms of identification that may empower" (p. 143). So far the project has worked with several cultural texts, including oral histories of Puerto Rican teachers who worked for the Virgin Islands Bilingual Education Program; a photographic collection titled "Papa Then," produced in 1992 by Puerto Rican photographer Diego Conde; Johanna Bermúdez's 2010 documentary "Sugar Pathways"; and archival materials related to the USVI Governor Juan Luis, a Vieques-born immigrant who served as the territory's governor from 1978 to 1986.

Theoretical considerations on foundational narratives, complex cultures and sites of memory

As Gupta and Ferguson (1996) point out, people have always been more mobile with less fixed identities than what classical anthropology has proposed. Traditional approaches to notions of community and identity, particularly in terms of place of origin, fall short in explaining how transnational people might be able to achieve a sense of origin. As complex cultures resignify notions of locality, the transnational experiences of

migrant people unfold the symbolic role that space and place play in the constitution of foundational community narratives and the forging of their collective memory. By tracing the migrant experience to a cultural community, foundational narratives allow for feelings of belongingness and locus of control.

Immigrants are members of complex communities that engage in practices of interactions in globalized, transnational spaces. Their cultural practices should allow for connecting with others, but when connections are limited by means of difference, immigrants might engage in the reconfiguring of sites of memory as a practical way of dealing with inner contradictions regarding inclusion and exclusion. Also known as “realms of memory,” Nora defines “sites of memory” as a moment of “rememoration,” when members who imagine to share a collective memory confronts a rupture with the past, forcing the articulation of new cultural symbols as reminders of a common origin. In that sense, “sites of memory are fundamentally remains, the ultimate embodiments of a memorial consciousness that has barely survived in a historical age that calls out for memory because it has abandoned it” (1989, p.12). Sites of memory might provide symbolic means that enable the articulation of foundational narratives for the cultural community.

Simply put, connecting with others is possible if common meanings are shared among individuals, what Hannerz calls “cultural competence.” But sometimes, as in the case of immigrants, those meanings evolve from a distinctive sense of space and place, for both are imagined by members of a cultural community. These sites of memory are linked to remembered places that often have served as symbolic anchors of community for dispersed people (Grupeta and Ferguson, 1996, p.9).

Central to the idea of a cultural community lies the assumption that foundational narratives provide the opportunity for readers to embrace imagined cultural membership with an imagined collective memory (Anderson, 1991). Culture, as Hannerz (1992) points out, is collective and the distinctiveness of a given cultural community has to come by means of rupture and disjuncture practices, whereby individuals are recognized, or not, as members. In small scale societies, Hannerz argues, these practices come by means of face-to-face interactions (p. 41), but in complex cultures—

those of city, nation and world systems (1992)—meanings are articulated by alternate choices allowed by interactions of cultural practices and localities (p. 46).

Coherent cultural communities are disrupted by the constitution of complex cultures, where people are tied to burdens of globalized interactions, transnational experiences, and “fragmented and uneven” communication processes (Hannerz, 1992, p. 45). It is for this reason that the cultural community’s forged collective memory is challenged by the impossible acknowledgment of a mythical origin—the rhetorical space where members can retrieve feelings of belongingness.

An alternative to this impossibility, argues Hannerz, is the cultural sharing and withholding practices that take place in complex cultures, providing for cultural coherence maintained only in memory. Accordingly, the fragmented practices of the cultural community facilitates the “generative power of personal and situational experience,” allowing for ready-made meanings (p. 45) and moments of rupture that will resignify both memory and the imagined community.

There is a strong relationship between people’s displacement due to migration, remembrance, and complex cultures. For example, as migrants engage in the physical act of moving from one place to another, they confront experiences of ruptures and connections that impact their cultural practices. Sometimes displacement also implies reconfigurations of immigrants’ imagined connections to cultural communities. At times, remembrance of spaces is the migrants’ only tool available for adjusting to the way they are perceived by the host culture and the resulting power relations. It can be argued then that sites of memory allow the discursive constitution of foundational narratives that operate as normalizing tools when confronting difference.

How individuals in complex cultures engage in remembrance with the help of sites of memory is apparent when analyzing Caribbean populations. From the forced migration of people brought to the islands via the slave trade and indentured work to the constant and fluid movement of people across the region, geographic mobility reveals the Caribbean as a landscape of cultural complexities. The stories of the Puerto Rican

pioneer families of St. Croix provide examples of how immigrants rememorialize their cultural community in their struggle to deal with difference and exclusion. As sites of memory, these stories provide a coherent, normalized narration about the origins of their cultural community. I propose that their foundational and narrative nature has provided the diasporic community with a coherent account of a past that validates the community's present efforts to achieve social positioning within its host culture.

Mapping the Puerto Rican Diaspora in St. Croix, USVI

Puerto Rican diaspora represents the complexities of transnational cultural intersections that result from voluntary and forced migrations. Scholarship emphasizes the study of the Puerto Rican diaspora in cities such as New York (Flores, 1993; Dávila, 1997), Chicago (Cruz, 2005), Philadelphia (Whalen & Vázquez, 2005), and most recently Orlando and Kissimmee (Duany, 2001). Rios-Villarini and González (2010), however, have argued that such bodies of research have barely recalled the importance of the Puerto Rican migratory movement to the USVI that began as early as the 1920s and founded, particularly in St. Croix, an economic, and cultural refuge. The groups of Puerto Ricans migrants to St. Croix have evolved into a distinctive diasporic community. Similarly to Nuyoricans, second and third generation Puerto Rican migrants in St. Croix consider themselves Porto Crucians—they imagine themselves as natives to the Virgin Islands while embracing a transcultural identity (Simounet, 1990; Highfield, 2007). As Hintzen (2007) argues, Caribbean diasporic communities are producing new identities that challenge the homogenizing project of the state as they struggle with notions of difference. He proposes that “diaspora is, therefore, the cultural politics of the un-included and non-included deployed in highly localized arenas” (p. 251). The Porto Crucian identity is an example of how Puerto Rican migrants are reinventing themselves in contexts where the concept of citizenship is located beyond the nation.

Migration and globalization: The case of Vieques and St. Croix

Previous works by Mintz (1974), Chinae (2002) and Dookham (2002), register the Caribbean region as a place of transit, as it has received migratory flows since its colonial conception. Many instances related to the slave-sugar complex of the late nineteenth century facilitated the movements of Puerto Ricans, “jornaleros,” and Eastern

Caribbean runaway slaves between the islands of St. Croix, St. Thomas, St. John, Vieques, Culebra, Tortola and the eastern coast of Puerto Rico (Carnegie, 2002; Rabin, 2007). Carnegie argues that there is a generalized idea of migration in the Caribbean region mostly comprised of involuntary and voluntary movements of African slaves, seasonal workers from British colonies in Asia, and mainly male European nationals who left their wives and children behind in Europe (2002, p. 143). In the case of the colonial Hispanic Caribbean, more particularly in Puerto Rico in 1700 to 1800, the local colonial government allowed asylum to slaves who had escaped from nearby islands under British, Danish, and French control (Chinea, 2002). Yet many of these people were enslaved again in Puerto Rico by means of the “agregados” system, a type of legalized coercion of free citizens (Mintz, 1974) that provided for labor control (Rodríguez-Silva, 2012). Chinea (2002) argues that these actions prompted the growth of the non-white population, a phenomenon that jeopardized the control of the white Iberian population (p. 179). Worries of having very few families of proven Iberian “pure” blood resulted in the 1815 immigration decree *Cédula de Gracia*, “a major boost to White immigrants and slave owners” meant to promote the “whitening” of Puerto Rico (p. 196).

Historical records dating back to the early 1800s evidenced an increase in ongoing migratory flows among Puerto Ricans, Virgin Islanders and other Caribbean islanders from the Lesser Antilles (Dookhan 1994; Rabin 2009). At that time, Eastern Caribbean seasonal sugarcane workers came to the Puerto Rican islands of Vieques and Culebra (considered municipalities of Puerto Rico) to work on sugarcane plantations. Using historical records, Rabin (2009) identifies these workers as: “thousands of free Black working men from the English colonies of the Windward Islands: Anguilla, Antigua, St. Kitts, Nevis and Tortola [who] lived and worked in the sugarcane haciendas in Vieques” (p. 21).

Trends in these migratory flows were profoundly impacted by the United States’ geopolitical interest in the Caribbean. With the appropriation of Puerto Rico in 1898 and the acquisition of the Danish Virgin Islands in 1917, the new colonial figure enforced strict migration policies on both of the newly added Caribbean territories. In addition, two

U.S. military bases were established in Vieques and Culebra, prompting a decline in these two islands' sugar industries. At the same time in the now USVI, the military government abolished the free entry of seasonal contracted sugarcane workers from the Eastern Caribbean islands of St. Kitts, Nevis, Guadalupe and Dominica, allowing only workers who were American citizens, "even though their labor was more expensive" (Dookhan, 1994, p. 269). This scenario allowed job opportunities for the thousands of Viequense who later on became unemployed when the U.S. military base expropriated three fourths of Vieques' land. Most of the Viequense who moved to St. Croix in search of economic improvement were working-class, light-skinned, monolingual Spanish speakers with American citizenship, granted by the 1917 Jones Act. It is in this context that the stories of the Puerto Rican pioneer families in St. Croix emerged.

Diasporic cultural texts as sites of memory: the case of the Puerto Rican "pioneer families" in St. Croix

Driven by austere economic conditions and continued encroachment by the U.S. Navy in the 1920s, dozens of families from the quaint island of Vieques set sail for St. Croix in search of a brighter future. Amongst these Hispanic pioneers was Práxedes Nieves Acosta—a young man who had heard the tales of economic opportunity from earlier migrants and enamored with the prospect of adventure, realizes that the rolling hills and emerald green pastures of Santa Cruz were to be his destiny. (Virgin Islands-Puerto Rican Friendship Committee (2007)., p. 6)

This excerpt comes from one of six stories in the booklet Virgin Islands-Puerto Rican Friendship Committee 2007: A Partnership for Success that provide descriptions of how the Marrero, Encarnación, Bermúdez, Nieves, Torres and Saldaña families, identified as Familias Pioneras/ Pioneer families, achieved social mobility and validation as "natives" in the St. Croix community. The families were selected by the friendship committee—formed when the 1964 USVI territory Legislature Act No. 1075 designated Columbus Day (Oct.12) as the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico Friendship Day—, and their testimonies were recorded and written in travel writing style. The Act, now a law, prompted USVI citizens to "observe the occasion with fitting ceremonies honoring Puerto Ricans residing in our midst and who have made substantial contributions to the advancement and progress of the Virgin Islands." Since its creation, friendship day has been celebrated by the Virgin Islands-Puerto Rican Friendship Committee, whose members are appointed by the territory's governor. In the years following the Act's

ratification, the friendship day celebration was limited to an annual community luncheon. Then, as the years passed, the celebration extended to three days, then a week, and in 2005, by the initiative of the Virgin Islands-Puerto Rican Friendship Committee, it expanded to a whole month as a way to institutionalize Hispanic Heritage Month (Vargas, 2013).

The Virgin Islands-Puerto Rican friendship festivities provide for the symbolic enactment of foundational narratives of the Puerto Rican diaspora in St. Croix. Participants' engagement allows for the (re)enactment of their imagined identities, articulating these occasions and the artifacts and discourses that emerge from them as "sites of memory." Festivities or "verbenas" in what is called Virgin Islands-Puerto Rican Friendship Village, include bomba, plena and quadriole music performed by Puerto Rican and local bands, , a Friendship Parade in the town of Christiansted, the selection of a "queen," and an official ceremony where Puerto Rican citizens are recognized.

As reported by the St. Croix Source, the 2007 celebration:

honored the very first Puerto Rican families that migrated to the VI. . . .These "familias pioneras," or pioneer families, were among the early families to come to St. Croix from the island of Vieques in the 1920s. They raised children, opened stores and businesses and are becoming an inextricable part of St. Croix society. (Kossler, 2007, p. #3)

It is important to point out that all these stories identify the island of Vieques as homeland, not Puerto Rico. However, the narrations also use the notion of Hispanics and Puerto Rican immigrants to identify the diasporic community and to document movements from St. Croix to the United States.

Homeland and well-being: space, identity and the imagined community

The excerpt that narrates the migration of Praxedes Nives Acosta from Vieques to St. Croix provides multiple readings of the experience. As an example of travel writing, it clearly indicates that the stories's main characters are the travelers. It also identifies the setting, and registers the movement from Vieques to St. Croix, placing it in a time continuous, as it is not the traveling of one but many families. As it highlights the fact that

in the 1920s dozens of families set sail for St. Croix, due to the actions of the U.S. Navy, the story also becomes a memory of the imagined community: it is the story of one and many families. It also works as a site of memory where connections and disconnections are communicated. As it frames a point of origin for the descendants of the Nieves Acosta family, the tale deterritorializes the homeland by reconfiguring its meaning. Homeland is not a place, but a space that fosters the well-being of family members. The leaving of Vieques is by no means remembered with nostalgia. This foundational narrative passed on to members of the Nieves Acosta family configures Vieques, the localized homeland, as an economically depressed setting, and St. Croix as the reconfigured land of opportunities.

Once families experienced migration, other movements were possible. For example, after the Marrero family came to St. Croix in 1926, some of the family members migrated again, moving from St. Croix to Chicago. The following excerpt of the tale about Paquita Marrero's migration illustrates this site of memory:

Once the islands became American territories many "locals" traveled to the United States to explore opportunities. Paquita also got interested in traveling and left St. Croix and lives in Chicago, Illinois. In Chicago she worked as a housekeeper for many years. She raised Rufus Marrero, the child of her sister Virginia who died giving birth to her last child Idalia. She met her husband of 52 years, Faustino Figueroa. (Virgin Islands-Puerto Rican Friendship Committee, 2007, p.2 #)

The story explains that her parents were from Luquillo and Vieques, and suggests that Paquita has no memory of Vieques: "personally, I don't remember how I got to St. Croix, I was three years old" (p.3). In that sense, it is possible to suppose that Paquita considered herself a "local," a native to St. Croix. In fact, that seems to be the reason that the story uses the term "locals" to refer to the people who migrated to the United States from St. Croix. The story also highlights that "even though Paquita went to the states, her heart remained in St. Croix. She came back to her beloved island" (p. 3). This statement clearly proposes that regardless of Paquita's point of origin, it is St. Croix that she recognizes as her homeland. Both the Nieves and Marrero family stories illustrates Gupta and Ferguson's idea that "immigrants use memory of place to construct their 'new lived world'" (1992, p. 11).

The deterritorialization of identity: Becoming the “native”

The year 2007, when the stories of “Familias Pioneras” were published, was particularly challenging for the Puerto Rican diasporic community of St. Croix. That year, on June 12th, 30 delegates were elected by USVI voters to constitute the Fifth Virgin Islands Constitutional Convention, aimed at drafting a constitution that could provide for changes in USVI’s political status as a territory within the U.S. political system. Several of the elected delegates had campaigned on the basis of protecting “the native born Virgin Islanders” (Poinski, 2009, p .5) In 2009 the delegates presented the first draft of a proposed constitution that included several controversial sections, one that stipulated that only “native-born Virgin Islanders can run for governor or lieutenant governor” and another that proposed that “ancestral Virgin Islanders” (those who had family in the territory in or prior to 1932) would be exempt from property tax (House Hearing, 111 Congress, 2010)

It is arguable that by highlighting the stories of the Puerto Rican pioneer families and articulating them as sites of memory, the Puerto Rican diasporic community of St. Croix located itself within the transnational landscape of complex communities, claiming the symbolic capital invested in the figure of the “native.” For example, all titles of the stories are identified by surnames, and each of the stories start with the family’s coming to St. Croix prior to 1932. Genealogies are well documented with photos of family members, elders, and detailed descriptions of how the families arrived to St. Croix by boat, making it their home. The stories also include statements and affirmative remarks of “native” Crucians who, on behalf of political, social, and religious organizations, publicly congratulated these families, as reported by the St. Croix Source in 2007:

The territory’s top dignitaries were there for the event [official honoring ceremony] . Delegate Donna M. Christensen, Gov. John deJongh Jr., Lt. Gov. Gregory Francis and Senate President Usie R. Richards spoke of the good relations and special bond between the people of the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, especially Vieques and St. Croix. Christensen gave her remarks entirely in Spanish and then again in English. ...“Tonight we celebrate several special members of our family,” she said. “I join you in thanking these families for their accomplishments and contributions to the Virgin Islands: Bermudez, Encarnacion, Marrero, Nieves, Torres and Saldana, Congratulations! (Kossler, 2007, p#3)

The newspaper article's record of Puerto Crucians being recognized as "members of our family," illustrates that the dual nature of the identity forged by the Puerto Rican diasporic community is invested with the cultural capital that comes from both their immigrant and native status. One might argue that this rhetorical move is possible thanks to reconfigured sites of memory, where St. Croix is, in fact, constructed as homeland.

Accordingly, honoring the homeland discursively operates by means of merit. The maturity of the diasporic community and its commitment with the common good is nicely represented in the following excerpts:

Example 1 (Bermúdez family):

Juan Bermúdez, Sr. made a very important decision in his life, the day he decided to come to the island of St. Croix looking for prosperity. Armed with the determination that he was going to be successful in life he jumped on a boat leaving the island of Vieques and only returned on scarce visits during his life. (Virgin Islands-Puerto Rican Friendship Committee, 2007, p. 4)

Example 2 (Nieves family):

This family has been on the island of St. Croix for five generations, its members continue to be up-standing citizens of this community. St. Croix is where we were born and where we have chosen to stay. Our ancestor's ashes continues to nurture this ever flourishing family tree; with its roots deeply entrenched in the soil of Santa Cruz. (Virgin Islands-Puerto Rican Friendship Committee, 2007p. 7)

The celebratory tone achieved by the word choices highlight these families' cultural capital, and this tone is prevalent in all of the foundational stories. The families' heritage is presented as generations of distinguished St. Croix community members and model immigrants. It could be argued that the positive representation of the Puerto Rican diasporic community in these foundational tales validates claims of sameness with the natives of the host culture. But it is equally important to note that none of these tales address the cultural tensions that have prevailed between the diasporic community and the locals since the early years of the 20th century.

In his seminal work from 1947 about Puerto Ricans in the Virgin Islands, Senior documented the anxieties that the Puerto Rican immigrants triggered in the local

Crucian population. Crucians rejected Puerto Ricans based on racial, linguistic, and cultural prejudices; but the newcomers equally rejected any cultural identification with Eastern Caribbean identities. Senior (1974) reports that:

There is a considerable amount of talk about a plot to “run the Crucians off the island.” It is said that the richer Puerto Ricans gather several times a week around a poker table to determine strategy in this campaign. “Evidence” is found in the aid given by the larger store owners to new arrivals which enables them to open a grocery store in competition with local merchants. Also it is said that the richer Puerto Ricans assign one of their number to buy any tract of land on the island which may be put on the market. Intelligent Crucians scoff at such rumors, but they circulate widely. (p. 34)

Keeping in mind that the migrant cultural community experienced cultural rejection it could be argued that in the remembrance of the pioneer family stories, the group’s cultural memory is reinvented by ways of forgetting and remembering. Again, by means of ruptures and disjunctures, families’ stories reconstitute the memory of the community and become new sites of memory. The symbolic construction of the pioneer family takes place as it emerges as a coherent foundational story about the cultural community by erasing a troubling past of conflicted relations with locals.

Forging transnational identities: articulating community out of disconnected and interconnected spaces

Four of the six stories describe how pioneer family members were able to attain harmonious relationships with the Crucians. The cultural text articulated by these stories is used to fix the past and promote the image of a diasporic community that has achieved a healthy coexistence with the local cultural community. Below are two examples related to the Bermudez family:

Example 1

The Bermudez family has grown to a vast number of well educated civic oriented people. The family, a united one, has always demonstrated that hard work and commitment equals success. Today, the family is well scattered on the island of St. Croix, and even though many have moved to the states and other islands, the majority continue to own property here and to call St. Croix their home. (Virgin Islands-Puerto Rican Friendship Committee, 2007, p. 5)

Example 2 :

Juan was a sociable man, who made many friends. He was the first Hispanic to come to the area of Estate Calquohoun. All his neighbors call him “Papi” and they were his loyal customers. Even though his English was not very good, he communicated well and shared food as well as culture. While Juan was cooking and sharing around rice, beans and johnny cake, his neighbors were sharing around Kalaloo and fry fish. He had many Hispanic friends who also come from Vieques looking for a better life, but he was close to the Simons, the Petersons, and many other cruzans. (Virgin Islands-Puerto Rican Friendship Committee, 2007, p. 5)

The two excerpts engage in what may be described as the showcasing of the “good citizens.” As they elaborate on framing memories of achievements and how these have positively impacted the Crucian community at large, the cultural tension triggered by inner contradictions of representing oneself as both native and migrant is resolved by discursive mediation of claims of merit.

Through their emphasis on family members’ commitment to St. Croix, the excerpts also expose a new reconfiguration of cultural practices and identity tied to space and place providing for the achievement of a sense of a transnational identity. Puerto Rican migrants in St. Croix exemplify St. Croix as a complex community. The social imaginary of the diasporic community reveals how the immigrants valued attaining social mobility, gaining access to institutions within the host culture, and reaching out to the locals. Vieques migrants in St. Croix might have forged a distinctive cultural community—resulting from rememorializing space and place—and reconfiguring a collective experience, but their community has evolved into a different imagined community:

The children of Evaristo and Marcelina Encarnacion came to St. Croix not only to improve their standard of living, but they also contributed to the improvement of conditions on the island. Each of the fourteen children that came to St. Croix in 1927: Regalado, Eulogia, Pedro, Severina, Andres, Gregorio, Petronila, Cándido, Evaristo, Antonio, Ramón, Luis, Maria, and Juan Acosta were involved in the establishments of various businesses. They were instrumental in establishing cockfighting as a sport. They brought with them an abundant of skills. The family did not remain isolated, but rather integrated itself into the culture and customs of the Virgin Islands.(Virgin Islands-Puerto Rican Friendship Committee, 2007, p. 8)

Conclusion

Duany (2003) suggests that in the last few decades of the twentieth century Puerto Rico transformed into a “nation on the move through the relocation of almost half of its population to the United States (p.431).” Luis Rafael Sánchez’s metaphor of “la guagua

aérea” (1994), where the airplane becomes an airbus, also provides for the representation of a more fluid concept of the imagined Puerto Rican cultural community that results from migration. Charles Carnegie (2002) even uses the idea of “la guagua aérea” to represent the fluid and transnational nature of the Caribbean migrant at large (2002, p.73) Duany, Sánchez and Carnegie address the current experience of migrants as instances that extend the limits of the nation to new locations.

If we consider the Caribbean as a space of complex cultures, then it is possible to argue that the region localizes the forging of transnational individuals due to floating migration (González and Ríos Villarini, 2012). In such a framework, the migration of Puerto Ricans to St. Croix has allowed diversified expressions of the imagined Puerto Rican cultural community that provokes novel readings of the Puerto Rican diaspora, as is evident in the tales of A Partnership for Success.

If it is true that inner and outer social, political and historical discourses have contextualized Puerto Rican diasporic movements, it is also true that each one of these movements provide new sites for reimagining Puerto Ricaness. By generating different arrangements of discourses about the imagined community’s history, Puerto Rican diasporic communities have exchanged meanings of difference, displacement and ruptures through new connections.

In this paper I argue that the families that migrated from Vieques to St. Croix have forged a cultural community with distinctive conditions that resulted in shared meanings of well-being attached to the imagined and diasporic community. The Puerto Rican community of St. Croix has reconfigured the concept of homeland from a located place of origin into a rhetorical tool that represents its validation and normalization within the host culture by claims of belongingness symbolized by the figure of the native.

Accordingly, in the case of the Puerto Rican community in St. Croix, the foundational tales of the pioneer families also have produced a cultural memory of displacement and embracement that allows the creation of transnational identities. The stories of the pioneer families are anchored to a fluid notion of homeland—not as a concrete point of

departure, but a remembered point of rupture.

The stories of the Puerto Rican pioneer families in St. Croix can provide clues to explore how the Puerto Rican diasporas, through their experiences and practices, are resignifying claims of belongingness that confront and reconfigure the concept of the “nation” so central to Puerto Rican studies. This experience illustrates Carnegie’s argument about “teasing out the cultural significance” of “mobility” and “border transgression” in “transfrontier” Caribbean identities. In fact, Puerto Rican pioneer families in St. Croix demonstrate the complexities and ambiguities that Caribbean people’s “strategic flexibility” articulates in everyday interactions as they deal with issues of belongingness (Carnegie, 2002, p119). To achieve a full understanding of these complexities requires a greater awareness of the transnational experiences of other community members. Governor Juan Luis, for example, is one of those figures . Such explorations will provide clues to how migrants in transit articulate social change, achieve normalizing practices, and create notions of “citizenship” tied to their more fluid nature as imagined communities.

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