

Puerto Rican Labor Migration To the United States

Modes of Incorporation, Coloniality, and Identities*

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Abstract

This article discusses the Puerto Rican migration within the broader context of Caribbean migration to the United States. The first part is a discussion about the theoretical framework. The second part is a discussion about the historical origins of Caribbean migration to the United States. The third part discusses the post 1960's Caribbean migrants' class origin. The fourth part is a discussion about the modes of incorporation to the host society. Finally, the last part discusses the challenges of the identification strategies of Puerto Ricans to traditional conceptualizations of identity.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The traditional sociological paradigms on immigrants in the United States have been based on ethnicity approaches: the assimilation school (Park, 1950; Gordon, 1964) and the cultural pluralist school (Glazer & Moynihan, 1963). Both schools used the turns of the century European migrations as a model. According to the assimilation school, all groups pass through several stages in the process of assimilation to the host society. First, they become acculturated to the values, norms, and culture of the host society. Usually it takes two or three generations to lose their native language, values and culture of origin. Secondly, once assimilated to Anglo-American culture, which eliminates any

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discriminatory obstacles that could affect their successful incorporation to the labor market, they are structurally assimilated to the mainstream American economy. The first generation normally makes the big economic sacrifices to uplift the next generations.

The cultural pluralist school assumes a similar teleological stageism but with one main difference. Even though ethnic groups eventually assimilate, this does not mean that the new identity is a melting identity that belongs to a homogenous American culture. Groups lose their language and customs but ethnicity continues to be recreated in a new form of identity that is neither a melting pot nor a simple repetition of their communities of origin. It is a new hyphenated identity (i.e., Irish-American, Italian-American, Polish-American) that emerges out of common political interests. They are interest groups that deliver political power that is eventually translated into economic gains, leading to upward mobility for the whole community.

The more sophisticated versions of both schools recognized that their models need to take into account processes of discrimination through extraeconomic means such as the Black experience in the United States (Gordon, 1964; Glazer & Moynihan, 1963). They recognized that despite the cultural assimilation of Blacks, they experienced discriminatory obstacles that affected their integration to the mainstream of the American economy unlike European ethnic groups. However, the cultural pluralist and the assimilation schools shared two basic assumptions. First, the longer an ethnic group is in the United States, the more structurally assimilated or integrated it becomes to the mainstream American economy unlike European ethnic groups. Secondly, once equal opportunity legislation was enforced, Blacks, Hispanics, or Asians experienced the same processes of integration as any other ethnic group in the United States. The timing of the

migration as well as the racial discrimination suffered by immigrants of color are erased from the analysis. The assumption is one of a unilinear process of integration into the host society. Moreover, the cultural pluralist school recognizes the ethnicity of all the White groups, but subsumes Blacks, Hispanic and Asians under the “they all look alike” racial reductionism (Omi & Winant, 1986). The diverse ethnic groups among the Black, Latino, and Asian populations are not recognized within this paradigm. They keep using racialized categories to lump together a diversity of ethnic groups. In this article a variety of ethnic groups that are erased with the use of racialized categories such as Hispanic or Black will be distinguished. This will allow us to make important analytical distinctions among different ethnic groups depending on class origin, educational backgrounds, the political-economy of the city, and the broad context of incorporation to the new society.

Recent approaches to migration emphasized the context of reception to the host society and the modes of incorporation to the labor market (Portes & Böröcz, 1989; Portes & Rumbaud, 1990). The context of reception refers to the state policies toward a specific migrant group, the reaction/perceptions of the public opinion, and the presence or absence of an ethnic community. This context provides the sociological framework that determines the diverse labor market incorporation. This approach represents an improvement over the timeless and unilinear deterministic conceptualization of the old paradigms. However, this approach conceptualizes the context of reception and modes of incorporation in terms of the national setting of a nation-state, over-looking the global historical- structural processes that overdetermine the context of reception. If the state policies toward a migrant group are positive, negative, or neutral, this is something that in the Caribbean region is frequently related to the United States’ foreign policy,

geopolitical strategies as well as the racial composition of the migrants. Two points need to be emphasized.

First, it is crucial to locate each migrant group within the broader context of the global relationships between its state of origin and the United States (Petras, 1981). For example, whether the core-periphery relationship is colonial, neocolonial with an active military intervention of the United States, or neocolonial without geopolitical importance for the core state, this makes a difference in terms of: 1) the migrants' class origin and educational backgrounds, 2) the United States' policies regarding their incorporation, and 3) the public perception of the migrants, which, in turn, affects the modes of incorporation to the labor market. The geographical proximity of a peripheral state to the core state allows lower-class migrants to bypass the institutional barriers to migration by crossing the borders legally or illegally (e.g., Mexico). Caribbean migration, given the region's geographic formation as an archipelago of multiple islands, is more vulnerable to state and institutional policies. It is difficult to overcome the institutional barriers to migration when there is an ocean separating the sending and receiving countries. A somewhat different case are countries that have broken the neocolonial linkage with the United States and are treated by American foreign policy as enemies (e.g., Cuba, Nicaragua during the Sandinista regime, Vietnam). In these cases. The migrants were frequently treated as refugees with a more positive context of reception than many other immigrants

Secondly, an important overlooked aspect which is central to the context of reception is the racial/ethnic composition of the migrants. The difference between White Europeans and non-White "Others" is a crucial axis that articulates social relations in the

United States. There are groups of migrants that are socially constructed as White such as European migrants, others that are constructed as Black such as certain migrations from the English speaking Caribbean, and there are groups that although they have a mixed racial composition are nevertheless racialized as a group such as Puerto Ricans and Mexican-Americans. All of these variations in racialization and colonial experiences are crucial to understanding the different reception of various immigrants groups in a racialized society such as the United States.

Thus, it is important to look at the totality of the migration process of each migrant group in its historical-structural complexity, that is, to analyse the time and space dimensions as well as the racial and ethnic dynamics, in order to understand why some groups are more successfully incorporated to the labor market than others: Where are they coming from and why? When did they arrive? What is the dominant class origin of the migration flow? What is the racial/ethnic composition? Where did they settle? What are the geopolitical, economic, and social dimensions of the migration processes for each immigrant group? What are the relations between the host society and the country of origin? What is the history and political-economy of the region they settled at the time they migrated? What is the context of reception for each different migrant group in the City they settled? How do the narratives of the nation in the host society affect the migrants' identity and/ or racialization processes? After accounting for all these factors, we can start making sense of the diverse labor market incorporations among different ethnic groups and the diverse social networks built by their communities. Not accounting for the broad historical-structural context experienced by each particular migrant group in the process of incorporation to the host society, opens the doors to stereotyping. By

erasing the broad historical and political-economic context that precedes the incorporation to the labor market, and placing the emphasis only on the latter, it is easy to conclude that the failure or success of an ethnic group depends on how hard they work, how disciplined and motivated they are, or whether the community's social capital is positive or negative. This kind of reductionism leads to praising the privileged and blaming the victims.

In order to avoid an economistic interpretation, the notion of mode of incorporation, which in the outlined literature refers mainly to the labor market, will be conceptualized here in broader sense such as the global and national political, cultural, and social dynamics of the processes of incorporation to the new society which I will call the *socio-political mode of incorporation*.

HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF CARIBBEAN MIGRATION TO THE U.S.

By the late nineteenth century, the United States had special economic and political interests in the region. The Caribbean was perceived by U.S. political elites as an important region for both commercial routes to South America and as a strategic military location for the defense of the U.S. mainland against a European invasion (Estades-Font, 1988). These two considerations mobilized the political elites to establish an aggressive strategy of direct military interventions for political-economic control of the region. Four of the five islands in the Greater Antilles were invaded between 1898 and 1916. Puerto Rico and Cuba were invaded in 1898, Haiti in 1915, and the Dominican Republic in 1916. These interventions re-peripheralized the four islands from

a dominant European control over their political and economic process to one of U.S. domination (Grosfoguel, 1997a). U. S. capital investments increased dramatically in the region directly controlling the sugar plantations and the sugar trade.

Official labor recruitment was established in the territories under U.S. military control: Puerto Ricans after 1900 were recruited by U.S. sugar corporations to work in Hawaii, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba; Haitians were recruited to work at sugar estates in the Dominican Republic and Cuba after 1915; also under British rule as of the 1900's, Jamaicans were recruited by the thousands to work at U.S. sugar estates in Cuba; and thousands of Barbadians were recruited to build the Panama canal under the U.S. flag (Castor, 1971: 84; Perez de la Riva, 1979: 34-39; Foner, 1983: 9; Baez-Evertz, 1986: 188-96).

Of greater importance to our topic, the 1900-20 period saw both the initiation of mass labor migration from the Caribbean to the U.S. mainland and the foundation of the first Caribbean communities in the United States. This shift was part of a global transformation of migration processes. Rather than being a colonizing migration from the expanding commercial center of the world-system to the subordinated regions, instead it became a population movement from the periphery in response to the needs of the new industrial centers (Portes & Walton, 1981).

During the First World War the flow of immigrants coming from Europe was affected, thus increasing the recruitment of Caribbean labor. Thousands of Jamaicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans were recruited for agrarian and menial jobs as part of the on-going war efforts. By 1920, there were about 35,000 Afro-Caribbean West Indians in New York City alone (Light, 1972).

For the next 25 years (1920-45) the absolute numbers of Caribbean migrants declined compared to the large numbers of the first two decades of the century (Bryce-Laporte, 1983). The labor unions' demand to restrict immigrants, the Great Depression, and the Second World War affected the entrance of new Caribbean migrants. Thus, the internal minorities, especially Southern Blacks but also Puerto Ricans (after 1917 they were U.S. citizens), became the main source of cheap labor for the Northeast industrial complex. New York City became one of the main destinations of these racialized/colonial migrants.

The 1924 Immigration Act that restricted European migration to the United States further accelerated the massive migration of these internal colonial subjects to New York. As the Euro-American workers became upwardly mobile with their increased skills and job opportunities in higher-wage industries, the low-wage manufacturing jobs in the garment and apparel industries became an undesirable economic sector identified with racialized minorities. During the 1920's and 1930's African-Americans became the main source of cheap labor in New York City's manufacturing sector and low-wage services. Puerto Ricans were the second largest group with approximately 30,000 new comers in the 1920's. The racialization of these colonial subjects was reflected in the low wages they received in the garment industry sweatshops relative to Whites of different ethnicities. As early as 1929, Puerto Ricans and African-Americans earned \$8-\$13 per week while Jews and Italians earned \$26-\$44 per week (Laurentz, 1980: 90, 104).

During the Second World War the United States relied on Mexican immigrants (through the Bracero program) for cheap labor in South-west agriculture and on women in Northern industries. Puerto Ricans were recruited through a war effort Federal

Program to work in agriculture and industries in the Northeast during the Second World War (Maldonado, 1979). It was after 1945, when the war was over and women left the labor force, that Caribbean migration increased to the pre-1920's levels. (This was a period of increased segmentation in the labor market (Portes & Bach, 1985). This refers to the emergence of a dual-labor market divided between an oligopolistic sector and a competitive sector. The former is characterized by stable labor relations in capital intensive industries through internal promotion and increases in wages as productivity increased. The latter were low-wage, menial jobs in labor-intensive industries. Caribbean migrants were massively recruited in the competitive sector. The great majority of the 1940's and 1950's Caribbean immigrants were Puerto Ricans recruited for low-wage jobs in the postwar expansion of the competitive capitalist manufacturing and service industries in New York City.

The Cuban revolution during the 1960's and the approval of the liberal 1965 Immigration Act brought about a major transformation in the ethnic composition of Caribbean immigrants in the United States. Cuban political refugees became first in total numbers of Caribbean immigrants both for the 1960's and the 1970's. But the most interesting development in this period was the substitution of African-Americans and Puerto Ricans for the "new immigrants" as the major source of cheap labor in the secondary labor market of "global cities" like New York, especially after the 1973 crisis (Sassen, 1988). Labor migration from the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, and other Caribbean islands (not including Puerto Rico and Cuba) increased to proportions never seen before. From comprising merely 7% of the total legal Caribbean immigrants, in the 1950's, they geometrically increased to 46% in the 1960's, 60% in the 1970's, and 63%

in the 1980's. This increase of "new immigrants" was also reflected in the significant decrease of Puerto-Rican migrants from the peak of 450,413 (79% of the total Caribbean legal migrants) in the 1950's, to only 57,217 (7%) in the 1970's. This is significant because it reflects a major change in the source of cheap labor in the U.S. economy, namely, from domestic minorities to the "new immigrants." This leads us to our next question: Who migrates? From what sectors of the sending societies are these migrants?

THE CLASS COMPOSITION OF THE POST-1960'S CARIBBEAN MIGRANTS

Since these islands do not share a border with the receiving society, Caribbean countries, in the majority of these cases, send those who can afford to get a visa and/or to pay for the journey. Contrary to popular beliefs, there is a consensus in the literature that those who migrate are the most urban, educated, skilled workers, and with household incomes that are higher than the sectors at the bottom of the sending society (Bray, 1984; Grasmuck & Pessar, 1991; Stepick & Portes, 1986; DeWind & Kinley III, 1988; Foner, 1979, 1983; Portes & Bach, 1985; Pedraza-Bailey, 1985).

There are three exceptions to these patterns: the Puerto Rican migration, the Haitian "boat people," and the Cuban *marielitos*. First, Puerto Ricans represent an anomaly because they are U.S. citizens and live in a territory under the United States' jurisdiction. Although the Puerto Rican pre-1950's migration was composed of urban skilled and educated workers because they were the only ones who could afford paying for the transportation expenses (Vazquez, 1979), after 1950 air fares were significantly reduced between the island and the mainland (Bach, 1985). The unrestricted border along

with the reduced air fare has the result that the bulk of the 587,535 Puerto Rican migrants during the 1950-80 period came from the unskilled and low-income sectors, many of them from rural areas (Grosfoguel, 1992; Levine, 1987; Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, 1979). During the 1980's more than 200,000 Puerto Ricans migrated to the United States. This migration was more representative of all social classes in the island and the majority settled in new communities outside of New York City.

The second exception is the recent wave of new Haitian immigrants that has landed illegally on the shores of South Florida after crossing 700 miles of open sea aboard small boats. Estimates are that between fifty and seventy thousand Haitians arrived between 1977 and 1981. Managing to avoid border restrictions, the Haitian boat people are definitely from a lower status and more rural than the Haitian legal immigrant cohort to the United States between 1962 and 1980 (Stepick & Portes, 1986). The former settled in South Florida while the latter settled in New York City. Haitian boat people come from low educational and occupational backgrounds. The results of a recent survey still reveals a population with above-average levels of education and income by Haitian standards (Stepick & Portes, 1986). Even though the illegal sea journey migration is accessible to more Haitians than the legal air travel with a visa, only those with above average income can afford to pay the illegal fare.

Thirdly, the migration of 125,000 Cubans in 1980, through the port of Mariel to south Florida, is another exception to the Caribbean upper and middle level labor immigration pattern. Most of these immigrants were unskilled laborers from the lower strata of the Cuban society (Pedraza-Bailey, 1985; Portes & Bach, 1985).

In sum, Caribbean migrants can be characterized as a labor migration composed mainly of the most urban, employed middle sector workers in the sending countries. Only colonial migrants such as Puerto Ricans and boat people such as Haitians/Cubans in South Florida are an exception to this general trend. This leads to our next question: What are the modes of incorporation of Caribbean immigrants in the United States?

MODES OF INCORPORATION TO THE HOST SOCIETY

Contrary to the Human Capital approach, which emphasizes individual attributes, structuralist explanations emphasize the macro structures of the capitalist labor process. However, both approaches share an overemphasis upon societies' economic processes, overlooking the social and political relationships mediating the relations between an ethnic group and the labor market. This is where a non-reductive social relational approach emphasizing the socio-political mode of incorporation can offer new insights that enrich the structuralist perspective. A basic assumption of this approach is that market relationships are embedded in social relations (Grannovetter, 1985; Block, 1990), that is, the market is not insulated from political relations, state policies, and social relations. Rather than a rational subject consciously calculating the most profitable choices, there are individuals or groups embedded in social relations with other individuals or groups which condition their alternatives and choices within peculiar social contexts.

The implications of the socio-political mode of incorporation approach for our topic is the reconceptualization of the economic conception of the immigrants' modes

of incorporation in that they are conceptualized as embedded in social, political, and cultural relations. In other words, a particular immigrant group's labor market incorporation is the outcome of the interaction between the class origin of the immigrant group and the multiple social determinations composed by the socio-political mode of incorporation within the host society. Whether the host government's policy is of active support or opposition to the immigrant group, the public opinion is of acceptance or discrimination, the country of origin is perceived by the core state as a friend or an enemy, or the immigrant group has access to an ethnic community that provides capital and social networks of solidarity to the newly arrived or not, makes a significant difference in terms of the particular mode of incorporation into the labor market. The notion of socio-political modes of incorporation is close to Portes and Rumbaud's (1990) notion of context of reception. The main difference is that while the former emphasizes the global political-economic relationship between the host and sending society, the latter emphasizes the national setting of the host society. Contrary to Portes and Rumbaud (1990), it is the U.S. government's geopolitical policies toward the Caribbean which overdetermines the public opinion and the ethnic community resources. The U. S. government's policy toward Caribbean migrants has been dependent on political strategic considerations in the region (Grosfoguel, 1997b). Global symbolic strategies to gain a capital of prestige vis-à-vis the former Soviet Union during the Cold War are crucial to understand the U. S. policies toward the Cuban and Puerto Rican migration. For example, the Cubans in Miami were a geopolitical showcase vis-à-vis the Cuban regime. To make them successful was an important ideological weapon during the Cold War years to influence ideologically those who stayed in the island (Grosfoguel, 1994;

1997b). Thus, they received a billionaire's amount of government aid to open businesses and improve their educational levels (Cronin, 1981; Pedraza-Bailey, 1985; Dominguez, 1992; Grosfoguel, 1994). On the other hand, Puerto Ricans in the island were a geopolitical showcase of capitalism vis-à-vis the Soviet model represented by Cuba. Puerto Rico's model of development better known as "industrialization by invitation" was showcased around the world by the United States as a way of gaining a capital of prestige and honor, or symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1977), to the U.S. model of development vis-à-vis the Soviet model (Grosfoguel, 1997b). Thus, the migration of the lower strata was stimulated and encouraged as a way of cleaning up the island from the unemployed and the shantytowns (Grosfoguel, 1997b). This policy paved the way for the first mass airway migration in world history. Approximately six hundred thousand Puerto Ricans, mostly rural unskilled workers, migrated to the mainland in the 20-year period between 1950 and 1970. Since the Puerto Rican showcase was the island rather than the migrants, the United States channeled its resources to the island. Those who migrated ended up in the urban ghettos of the metropole with one of the highest poverty rates in the United States.

Similarly, U.S. policies toward Haitian refugees have been discriminatory for racial as well as geopolitical reasons. In this case one consideration was the support to the Duvalier dictatorship as a containment strategy against Communism in the region (Grosfoguel, 1997b). To support the refugees was an indirect critique to a friendly anti-Communist dictatorship. Thus, in contrast to the Cuban refugees which until very recently were received with open arms, Haitians were detained in jails or simply deported

to Haiti. This is crucial to account for the success or failure in the incorporation to the labor market of different Caribbean groups in the United States.

Caribbeans offer an excellent example of the immigrants' multiple forms of incorporations into the receiving society's labor market depending on their class origins and diverse socio-political modes of incorporation. There is a diversity of modes of incorporations within the same ethnic groups. However, each ethnic group has a dominant trend. On one extreme, we have Cubans who migrated during the 1959-79 period and, on the other extreme we have the Haitian boat people during the 1980's, both of whom arrived in South Florida. The mode of incorporation for the Cuban refugees during the Cold War years was characterized by:

- 1) an active government support with the creation of the Cuban Refugee Program to help them resettle successfully into the host society (Pedraza-Bailey, 1985); 2) a positive public opinion; and 3) an entrepreneurial community which offered jobs and opportunities to the newly arrived, insulating them from discrimination in the open market (Portes & Bach, 1985). In contrast to this migration, the Haitian boat people in South Florida encountered opposition to entry from the host government, discriminatory public opinion, and no ethnic community to serve as a buffer against discrimination.

Between these two extremes there are a variety of other modes of incorporation. First, the 1980's Mariel Cubans who experienced discriminatory public opinion, had no active government support, but had an entrepreneurial ethnic community which incorporated them at least more successfully than the Haitians in South Florida

(Portes & Stepick, 1985). The next two cases are the skilled/white collar immigrants from Jamaica and Haiti in New York City who arrived between 1965 and 1980. New York's large Black community and a multicultural environment served as a curtain for both ethnic groups to pass unnoticed. Thus, both have experienced passive acceptance from the government and a relatively positive public opinion concerning their particular ethnicity. In a post-civil rights era, the dominant Euro-American groups used the West Indian presence in the city to showcase them vis-à-vis African-Americans. West Indians were portrayed as "hard working" people vis-a-vis the "lazy" domestic minorities such as African-Americans. In the Haitian case, there was no public hysteria against their settlement in New York before 1980 as there was in South Florida during the 1980's. Since both Haitian and Jamaican are primarily of Afro-Caribbean descent and settled near African-Americans, they avoided the racism directed against the African-American community in New York City by emphasizing ethnic over racial identity. However, one major difference between the African-Americans and the immigrants from Haiti and Jamaica is the higher educational levels of the latter (Grasmuck & Grosfoguel, 1997). Meanwhile, the main differences between Haitians and Jamaicans in the United States are: 1) the host society's stronger prejudices against Haitian culture; 2) the existence of a large white-collar community in the Jamaican case versus a more diverse working class community in the Haitian case; and 3) the Jamaican's first language is English, while for the Haitians it is Creole. Thus, despite that both groups share high educational levels, the Jamaicans are economically more successful than the Haitians.

The Puerto Ricans have one of the worst socio-economic conditions in the United States. The first large wave of Puerto Rican migrants were skilled/urban laborers

between 1900 and 1945. During this period, Puerto Ricans were actively recruited during and after the First World War as cheap labor for the manufacturing industries in New York City. The second large wave of Puerto Rican migrants were mostly unskilled/rural laborers during the 1950's and 1960's. Most of them found support networks in the Puerto Rican working class communities in New York City. They encountered a passive acceptance by the U.S. government, a negative reception in public City. The second large wave of Puerto Rican migrants were mostly unskilled/rural laborers during the 1950'2 and 1960'2. Most of them found support networks in the Puerto Rican working class communities in New York City. They encountered a passive acceptance by the U.S. government, a negative reception in public opinion, and an inefficient/bureaucratized Migration Division Office, an office of Puerto Rico's Department of Labor organized to encourage mass labor migration. The Migration Division established offices in New York and Chicago to assist the migrants to find jobs and follow-up any complaint concerning their civil rights (Lapp, 1990). However, the Migration Division had little power and will to intervene on behalf of the workers. Despite this minimum of institutional support, the Puerto Rican migrants faced discriminatory public opinion. For reasons that will be discussed below, public opinion became extremely negative against the Puerto Rican migrants and the social conditions of the communities deteriorated. The new migrants suffered from overcrowded and dilapidated housing, lack of institutional support for education, and poor medical services. In New York's racial/ethnic division of labor, Puerto Ricans occupied the economic niche of low-wage manufacturing jobs. By 1960, more than 50% of Puerto Ricans in New York were incorporated as low wage labor in this sector. During the 1960's, Puerto Ricans were actively organized in labor unions and

through the civil right struggles started claiming equal rights. Many labor rights that were violated in the past by the employers through repressive mechanisms and misinformation were now claimed by Puerto Ricans as part of their citizenship rights. Puerto Ricans' successful struggles for labor rights made them "too expensive" for the increasingly informalized manufacturing sector (Grasmuck & Grosfoguel, 1997). Simultaneously, the deindustrialization of the Northeast, the region where most of the Puerto Ricans settled, led to the loss of thousands of manufacturing jobs. Most of the manufacturing industries moved to peripheral regions around the world while those that stayed in locations like New York, Philadelphia, or Hartford informalized their activities. The manufacturing industry, in constant need of cheap labor, relied heavily on new Latino immigrants, legal or illegal, who had even fewer rights than internal colonial subjects such as Puerto Ricans. The expulsion of Puerto Ricans from manufacturing jobs and the racist educational system that excluded Puerto Ricans from the best public schools produced a redundant labor force that could not reenter the formal labor market (Grasmuck & Grosfoguel, 1997). This led to the formation of what some have called the Puerto Rican underclass, which I prefer to call a racialized displaced population. Unable to find jobs, many Puerto Ricans developed popular strategies, legal or illegal, to survive the crisis. Currently, only 14% of Puerto Ricans are in manufacturing jobs and more than 50% are either unemployed or out of the labor force (Grasmuck & Grosfoguel, 1997). Today around 40% of the Puerto Rican labor force is concentrated as cheap labor in retail trade and in services such as health, administrative support, and educational occupations (U.S. department of Commerce, 1993: Table 4).

In sum, the Puerto Ricans migrants' unskilled working class backgrounds combined with a negative socio-political mode of incorporation produced a massive incorporation to the secondary labor market and later, with deindustrialization, a massive marginalization from the labor market. Today they have one of the worst socio-economic profiles of all ethnic groups in the United States. Puerto Ricans have one of the highest unemployment rates, lowest labor force participation rates, and highest poverty rates among Caribbean groups in the United States.

PUERTO RICAN IDENTIFICATION STRATEGIES

What strategies have racialized subjects pursued in the struggle against racism in the United States? An important strategy has been the construction of identities that subvert exclusion from the dominant imaginary community called the nation. Different ethnic groups in the United States have used hyphenated identities in order to deconstruct the attempt by the dominant groups to exclude them from citizenship rights on the bases of race and/or ethnicity. Today we see the Black community using the term Africa-American as a strategy of incorporation to the mainstream of American society. A similar strategy has been pursued by other groups such as Mexican-Americans, Cuban-Americans, Haitian-Americans, Korean-Americans, and even Dominican-Americans. The only racialized group that has resisted this hyphenated identity are the Puerto Ricans. It is very rare to find a Puerto Rican using this hyphenated form of identity. Even those born and raised in the United States keep using the non-hyphenated Puerto Rican identity. This is partly related to resistance against being fully assimilated to a society that marginalizes and racializes Puerto Ricans. Discrimination reinforces a feeling of belonging to, and an

idealization of, the imagined place of origin. Moreover, this feeling is more pronounced with the constant circulation of Puerto Ricans given the open border between the island and the mainland. Many second, third, and even fourth generation Puerto Ricans in the United States keep a feeling of belonging to the Puerto Rican imagined community even if they have never visited the island. This sense of belonging is fed through family and social networks between the island and the metropolitan communities. The Puerto Rican identity persists despite the rejection and discrimination suffered when second and third generation Puerto Ricans visit the island. Similar to the term “negropolitan” in the Martinican experience, second generation Puerto Ricans who return are frequently stereotyped with names such as “nuyoricán”. The cultural hybridity of Puerto Ricans in the United States is not tolerated not only by nationalist intellectuals in the island but also by Puerto Ricans middle classes. The “nuyoricans” question some of the racist and elitist representations of Puerto Ricans identity in the island. The cultural hybridity of the Puerto Ricans in the United States represents a form of identity which includes elements of African-American culture that threatens island elites’ efforts to conceal their African heritage privileging the Spanish culture. Moreover, it shows how there are heterogeneous ways of being Puerto Ricans not reducible to a question of a common language or common anything. Puerto Ricans as a form of identity means different thing for Puerto Ricans born and raised either in the island or in the United States. Many middle class Spanish-speaking Puerto Ricans in the island are more assimilated to American “White” middle-class cultural practices with their suburban houses, cable T.V, racist representations of Puerto Rican identity, and mass consumption in fancy shopping centers than many non-Spanish-speaking Puerto Ricans in the United States living segregated in

urban ghettos. Thus, there is an important difference in the content and claims of Puerto Ricans identity in the island and the mainland. To identify as Puerto Ricans with no hyphenation implies a challenge to the racism of the U.S. urban racial/ethnic hierarchies. However, there is a cost attached to this challenge in the United States that does not exist in the island where Puerto Rican identity (*puertorriqueñidad*) has become the colonial administration's dominant discourse vindicated by all political forces (Grosfoguel et al., 1997).

Some people have used the metaphor of “commuter nation” to refer to the Puerto Rican *guagua aérea* (airbus) between the island and the mainland (Rodriguez-Vecchini, 1994). Although the non-hyphenated Puerto Rican identity in the United States might seem close to a notion of a deterritorialized nation, it would be essentialist to think of Puerto Rican identity in the United States as a simple extension of the Puerto Rican national identity produced in the island. The implication of this would be a static, non relational notion of identity, as if the migration experience did not transform the identity of the migrants into a new hybrid, syncretic form of identity both in the metropole as well as in the island. Puerto Rican migrants emerging forms of identities do not reproduce exactly neither the national identity of the country of origin nor the identities of the metropolitan society. They mix, redefine, resignify, and reappropriate a multiplicity of practices from different cultures, redeploying cultural practices of the country of origin in new and transformed ways.

The identification processes of Puerto Ricans transcends the concepts of nation and ethnicity. Puerto Ricans articulate their identity in the transnational space between the metropole and the island through ethnic and national claims simultaneously. When

social and civil rights are at stake, Puerto Ricans make claims as an ethnic group within the metropolitan state, that is, as a minority that belongs to a broader unit. When cultural and political rights are at stake due to certain inconvenient metropolitan policies, Puerto Ricans mobilize a national discourse claiming autonomy. In this sense, notions of nation or ethnicity used separately come short when attempting to understand the identity process of Puerto Ricans. Puerto Ricanness has diverse meanings in different contexts. Thus, the notions of transnation (Appadurai, 1996), transnationalism (Basch et al., 1994), or ethno-nation (Grosfoguel et al., 1997) are better notions if we mean by that an emerging form of hybrid identity that transcends the categories of ethnicity and nation by assuming and surpassing both forms simultaneously. The transnational identities of Puerto Ricans are new forms of hybrid, postnational identities that capture and mobilize, according to the socio-political context, diverse forms of identities such as ethnic, national, or minority simultaneously. “Ethno-nation” refers more to a process rather than to a concept or a fixed reality with emphasis on both sides of the hyphen depending on context (Grosfoguel et al., 1997). Each individual, even those with extreme nationalism positions, reproduces the ambiguities of transnationalism which emerges from the ambiguous status of colonial people like Puerto Ricans. Sharing citizenship and a nonindependent status with the metropolises produces an ambiguous situation to the extent that on some issues people mobilize discourses on national identity while on others they articulate themselves as an ethnic group within the metropole. Puerto Ricans use their metropolitan citizenship to claim access to U.S. government programs, or to deploy discourses on national identity to defend cultural rights or to avoid unwanted metropolitan laws both in the island and the metropole. Identities need to be understood

as constructions that emerge out of political strategies within specific power relationships. It is in a postnational sense that Puerto Rican identity formation is transnational.

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