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Ties That Bind: Families, Social Capital and Caribbean Second-Generation Return Migration

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Abstract

This paper explores second-generation return migration to the Caribbean and how this is facilitated by social capital generated through transnational family relationships. My analysis is positioned and contextualised within broader theories of migration studies. The family narrative constructed around the 'myth of return' is integral to the young people's accounts of return migration. Of particular interest in the analysis is how these narratives act as important social resources in sustaining the second generation's emotional attachment to the family homeland and in influencing the decision to return alongside other pragmatic and practical constraints. Drawing on fieldwork data, the analysis also examines issues of adjustment and settlement, particularly ways the 'insider/outsider' status and existing gender and social class relations inform experiences of return migration among the second generation.

Introduction

Return migration by particular ethnic communities in the UK has received considerable academic attention (Gmelch 1980; King 1986; Byron 2000). Increasingly, research interest is turning towards second-generation return migration to highlight the significance of diaspora and social networks informing the return migration process. This paper explores second-generation return migration to the Caribbean¹ and how this is facilitated by social networks and resources generated through family relationships. In simplistic terms, second-generation migration refers to migrants' children who 'return' to their family place of origin or ancestral homeland.² To date, much of the growing body of research in Britain on second-generation Caribbean return migration has focused on problems concerned with cultural differences and social adjustment as these individuals settle into their

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currently emerging on the return of other migrant groups to highlight points of similarity and departure in the analysis. The third section uses fieldwork data to examine the experiences of second-generation return migration to the Caribbean. The main themes and focus of debate include an investigation of the networks and resources that are utilised, generated by, and are a product of, the second generation's existing connections to the family's homeland. The fluid and contextual nature attached to notions of identity, belonging and 'home' are issues that emerge in the young people's accounts. A further emergent theme is the impact of gender and social class relations on the second-generation returnees' experience of return migration. A review of the main arguments is given in the concluding section of the paper.

Research background

The study was informed by a qualitative ethnographic research approach, seeking to elicit people's own interpretations of the social realities faced and their understanding of their own private experiences of return migration. In-depth qualitative data was collected from second-generation returnees to the Caribbean. Data was generated through unstructured and semi-structured interviews, together with observational methods. The aim of these research approaches was to examine the participants in their natural settings whilst at the same time allowing their voices to come to the fore in narrating their own stories. Social and cultural anthropologists have a longer tradition of sustained interaction with the research participants in their natural settings in order to investigate the social worlds of the individuals under study. In sociology, feminist epistemological approaches have long argued for the centrality of people's

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neighbourhoods further strengthened these

to. Yet, in other instances I would stress my 'outsider status' and the fact that not being a member of the group or community (i.e. returning resident) meant that I could better safeguard the confidentiality and anonymity of others who agreed to participate in the research. Another primary advantage of my 'insider' knowledge is that I could recognise and understand many of the unexplained and undefined customs and practices that gatekeepers performed to control my access to second-generation returnees. For instance, I anticipated that the gatekeepers would ask many questions about my personal life, family background and understanding of the political climate of the region. I always went to these meetings fully prepared to be questioned extensively about my professional and personal interest in the study. To this end, my 'insider'/'outsider' status enabled me to utilise both social and cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986) to establish further contacts that would assist me with cultivating a non-purposive research sample.

The 2004 interviews took place with second-generation migrants who were dispersed throughout the region in Jamaica, Guyana, and St. Kitts and Nevis. In contrast, all of the fieldwork and interviews in 2007 were conducted in Jamaica. The majority of these formal and informal interviews took place with second-generation migrants living in three neighbouring north-east-Jamaican coastal parishes of St. Ann, St. Mary and Portland, although a small number of interviews were in the capital city of Kingston including follow-up interviews with two participants I first interviewed in 2004.

Most of the prior research into return migration to Jamaica has focused on the area of Mandeville in southern parish of Manchester, where there is an established resident and thriving returning resident community (Goulbourne 2002; Horst 2005). I purposely chose not to use Mandeville as a research site for a number of reasons. Firstly, this area is experiencing 'research fatigue' in terms of the number of studies emerging from the UK, Caribbean, Canada

and North America that have explored return migration (Goulbourne 2002). In contrast, the northern coastal towns have returning resident communities that are

consumer demand is strengthened, production is weakened.

In order to channel remittances so that they benefit the economy, the Jamaican government is talking publicly about finding ways to harness investment from migration by utilising remittances provided by Jamaicans abroad to develop productive investment and nation-building instead of consumption or savings. However, policy plans to do this have so far met with strong resistance borne out of the fact that economic remittance in Jamaica, as throughout the Caribbean, is still largely viewed as a private and domestic arrangement. Family members overseas who send money 'back home' and returning residents who bring income and capital back with them want to maintain their independence in deciding how their money should be used. My own analysis of the interview data points to a general feeling by respondents that it is the responsibility of government to develop the country's infrastructure and generate productive investment opportunities. Individuals or hometown associations overseas, as well as migrants who have returned, should not be relied upon to harness investment towards collective economic development.

This is in contrast to other migrant communities, for example Mexican migrants, where there is evidence that hometown and collective associations have been active in using remittances to develop the local infrastructure (Díaz-Briquets and Weintraub 1991). This issue of an absence of collective associationism within the Caribbean context reflects the social and cultural factors which structure relations in the Caribbean and its diaspora. Individualism is a dominant aspect of Caribbean society. For example, there exists greater autonomy for individuals to choose their lifestyles, family forms and living

ways in which transnational activities among the second generation influence their articulations of identity, home and belonging (Wessendorf 2007). Transnationalism involves processes of 'linking immigrant groups in the advanced countries with their respective sending nations and hometowns' (Portes *et al.* 1999: 217). Numerous studies examining Caribbean migration and diaspora suggest that transnational identities are created and sustained through diasporic and transnational ties to family and community (see, for example, Thomas-Hope 1992; Barrow 1996; Chamberlain 1998; Goulbourne and Chamberlain 2001; Duval 2002; Fog Olwig 2002; Potter *et al.* 2005; Plaza 2006; Reynolds 2006a). For the second generation, these Caribbean transnational ties are further strengthened by the relative ease and affordability of air travel, increasing the frequency of family visits and holidays to the region; greater choice and immediacy of contacting family members through improved telecommunication systems and other electronic forms of communication; and, increasingly, the phenomenon of return migration among the first generation to the region (Reynolds 2004).

Wessendorf (2007) refers to the many studies that have explored the impact of transnationalism on the integration process. In her work on second-generation Italians in Switzerland, she reflects that, growing up as children and adolescents, the second generation lead 'highly transnational lives' and have engaged in many 'transnational activities' (2007: 1084). Not only did this provide them with a 'third space' in which to articulate their identity, but such transnational links provided the means through which return migration among the second generation could occur. Her findings parallel many of the themes and issues raised in my own work. In my own study, the second generation in the UK offered many examples of the transnational activities that they actively participated in. These included

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the place of homeland are essential to the family narrative. The capital and resources that are generated by, and are a product of, the family narrative of 'return' directly inform family experiences and practices in the UK and create contested notions of home, belonging and identity among the second generation. In Caribbean context,

security. Yet, for migrants and their offspring, this relationship between home and homeland is far more complex. Sometimes home and homeland are interchangeably and simultaneously used, thereby emphasising the 'contextual slipperiness and multiplicity' of these concepts. Whilst at other times they represent different things for these migrants. Rapport and Dawson's (1999) edited volume explores this complexity in defining home and the various ways in which migrating people understand 'home' in a world of movement and globalisation. For those second-generation migrants who

relationships and transnational identification of 'home', which is sustained through their cultural, emotional and spiritual connections to the region. Yet, this latter issue raises further questions and challenges for this particular migration process. If these migrants achieved collective success and a sense of cultural belonging in Britain, would they put so much effort into maintaining these ties? To what extent is second-generation return migration contingent upon the failure of British integration policies to address issues of racial disadvantage and improve the collective structural positioning of Caribbean migrant groups in this society?

Second-generation return: who returns and what facilitates this?

The desire to return home to their parents' and grandparents' homeland was expressed by many of the second-generation respondents. This was a direct consequence of their participation in internal familial transnational activities, nostalgic reminiscences of 'past lives' in the Caribbean passed down across successive generations (Chamberlain 1997); alongside external constraints of exclusive practices and policies in the UK, which continue to create harsh structural conditions for the everyday lived experiences of the second generation. However, some of the respondents who expressed an interest in return migration were able to translate this dream into reality. The decision and choice to return among the second generation relied upon specific circumstances such as these young people's continued family ties to the region (and the cross-generational networks and resources that emerge from this); particular stages in the life-course for the second generation (single professionals or parents of young children); levels of educational qualification and past work experiences. Most of the respondents had professional/vocational or degree-level qualifications and this factor was important

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visits to the region and this enabled the young people to view the country with a fresh perspective, beyond that of conventional tourist, before they made their final decision to return.

Social and economic benefits of return

There was a perception among young returnees that they would have a better quality of life in their parents' homeland compared to their lives in the UK. This was borne out of increasing disillusionment with life in the UK, particularly perceived

mind because I'm not constantly
worrying about their safety (Monica,
Guyana, July 2004.)

Culturally I wanted them to experience

utilise their English accent to apply for work without formal or appropriate levels of qualification. This was particularly the case in the hotel and catering industry, where the returnees acknowledged that having an English accent alone could secure a receptionist/front-of-house post, because of the perception among native and other foreign businesspeople that an English accent established a professional atmosphere and would attract other English and foreign customers to the place of business. Potter and Phillips' study (2006a) of second-generation return migration to Barbados explores the power of the English accent and its symbolic associations to whiteness in postcolonial discourses. Their respondents, too, reported similar experiences of social and economic privilege on account of their English accent and the way in which they accrued a 'pseudo-white identity' in the workplace and other professional settings that translated into power and racialised privilege over native-born black residents. Potter and Phillips (2006a) point to the 'hybrid' or 'in-between' status of their second-generation Bajan-British returnees on account of their symbolic whiteness. The returnees in my own study recognise that their English

accepted by the homeland residents and integrated back into their communities. They subsequently encounter feelings of loss, trauma and rejection when this does not happen (Goulbourne 2002). Freed from this burden of looking for social acceptance, the second generation were more able to adapt to the cultural and social changes required to settle. They developed survival strategies to compensate for their position 'outside' society, including seeking out friendship and support networks with other second-generation returnees and, more importantly, maintaining frequent contact or visits back in Britain to sustain the social ties and links:

into the middle classes. Second, on a related point, there was wide-scale migration of lighter-skinned people to North

internalise the disadvantages of being black as opposed to white or fair-skinned in Caribbean society, and the family acts as the main agent in transmitting these values of skin colour and racial values (Barrow 1996). Various customs, beliefs, attitudes and behaviour continue to explicitly and implicitly valorise white identity whilst at the same time pathologising black identity in a number of different ways. For example, skin bleaching is still very popular amongst dark-skinned women in order to achieve a lighter skin tone. Skin bleaching is a highly successful commercial business, as evidenced by the large number of skin bleaching products readily available in

here, they [men] know how they behave when they're out, so they think that it must follow that another man is trying to do that [chat-up] with their woman (Denise, Jamaica, August 2007).

All of the female participants spoke of the culturally defined sexual dynamics as something which presented a challenge to them. They live in a society where broad patterns of gender segregation operated. Outside of family or romantic interests, men and women do not really interact with each other and it was difficult to establish cross-gender friendships. It was difficult for the women to have platonic male friends without people assuming a sexual relationship. Married women in platonic friendships with other men were especially criticised within their community and family networks because it was expected that these women should only socialise with husbands or male family members.

One of the female returnees, Denise, spoke of the pressure and difficulty she experienced in relation to conforming to prescribed notions of female behaviour and friendship patterns because she had a close friend (society) 2.7 (e) 2.3 (r) 1.4 (ally) -5.3 (cns) 5.8 (es) 7.4 (to) 5.3 (e) 5.4 (c) -6.2 (ly soci only res(e

my old shorts and jeans on but I know if I'm seen out like that people will talk about me and what I wearing, when I say people I mean the women because they are very judgemental and always in each other business. [...] I miss about my old life in London you are anonymous and there's not this pressure to look good all the time [...]. Being English you're definitely more at an advantage though because you don't have to be the prettiest or [wearing] expensive designer clothes because your accent alone can carry you through. The men love the accent and that you stand out and are different to same old women they are used too. The women can't stand it because they may be really pretty but they can never get the accent and they hate it! (Georgia, interviews Jamaica 2004 and 2007).

Similar to Wessendorf's (2007) study of second-generation female returnees, the women in this study were also actively engaged in new ways to negotiate and adjust to different expectations of gender roles, whilst at the same time keeping elements of their identity and gender roles that they migrated with. Frustrations around the lack of friendship and social bonds

Caribbean region to industrialised societies such as Britain.

The analysis confirms that the Caribbean second generation are embedded into transnational networks. Their everyday lives in Britain show many examples of the transnational activities, connections and practices that the young people actively engaged in prior to migrating back to their familial homeland. Importantly, the young migrants' family and kinship relationships acted as a primary vehicle sustaining their emotional, cultural and spiritual ties to the region. These family and kinship networks also later acted as an important social capital resource in facilitating their return 'home'. Nostalgia for the 'place' of homeland is essential to the Caribbean family narrative in the UK because it creates contextualised meanings around home, belonging and identity among the second generation. So essential is the 'myth of return' to the family narrative that the first-generation parents utilise social resources in their parenting practices, household rituals and family life to keep this dream alive in their own and their children's imagination. The family narrative of return also represents a form of capital in itself, through which the first generation's narratives of home and return become a part of the second generation's own narratives in terms of understanding their personal identity and sense of self. Consequently, many of the second generation living in Britain choose to ethnically identify themselves as Caribbean,

Their 'insider/outsider' status in both place of birth (i.e. England) and parents' homeland mean that their continual reflections and negotiation around home and belonging are not new or specific to their experience of return but something they have been used to doing as part of their everyday lives. The second-generation returnees also utilised their 'insider/outsider' status in relation to social and cultural adjustment and to position themselves within the race, social class and gender dynamics which underpin the cultural environment and social structure of Caribbean societies. Despite some issues and tensions encountered by second-generation returnees concerning cultural and social adjustment, it must be pointed out that the overwhelming majority of

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