

BOOK REVIEWS

THE EXPERIENCE OF RETURN MIGRATION: CARIBBEAN PERSPECTIVES. By Robert B. Potter, Dennis Conway and Joan Phillips. Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2005.

Return (or counter) migration has been acknowledged as integral part of every migration wave over a century ago (Ravenstein, 1889) and has since received considerable attention within the interdisciplinary field of migration studies. In contrast with early theories that focused on the temporal and spatial linearity of migration, recent writers have been emphasizing the circular (back and forth), temporary, and networked nature of migratory moves. Structural approaches, which viewed migrants - and returnees - merely as passive respondents to macro, primarily economic changes in countries of origin and destination, have lost much of their explanatory power and were gradually replaced by a transnational approach. The latter pays closer attention to the role played by social networks, career opportunities, and issues of identity and belonging in examining individual and family migration (and return) motivations, choices, and everyday practices. Methodologically, the shift has been characterized by an increased use of so-called 'softer' methods, including life stories, personal narratives, and focus groups with migrants (see Lawson, 2000)

This edited volume inserts itself into the changing theoretical and methodological landscape of migration studies. Instead of the traditional focus on Caribbean-born migrants returning to their home-islands after retiring in Western Europe and North America, the book calls attention to the new experience of return of mostly young, highly-skilled, 1.5 and second-generation migrants. As stated early on, the book's main concern is *not* the return process itself, but rather the experience of return migrants as active human agents, their socio-spatial adjustment to life on the island, and the different ways by which they influence - and are influenced by - island communities. How do returnees cope with new cultural challenges they face, to what extent do they fit it (socially, professionally, linguistically), what kind of transnational social strategies they rely upon in their settlement process, and how do island communities accept them are some of the key questions this book addresses.

To investigate migrants as human agents, as active, independent subjects embedded within a web of social relations (work, family, and friends), the authors use a set of qualitative research methods, including personal narratives and migration stories. These, they argue, allow them to uncover the social intricacy behind the return experience and "to better understand the world return migrants find themselves in,

and...their daily, weekly and monthly experiences, their everyday material life" (p. 9). It further enables them to focus on the local scale - that of the body, the family, the community, and social networks of *the new returnees*.

A short chapter of introduction, which sets the aforementioned theoretical, methodological and substantive agendas, is followed by thirteen articles written by a mixed group of academics and practitioners. The articles open up a window to the social and cultural geography of young, educated returnees in both the English (Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Grenada, St. Lucia, and Barbados), French (French West Indies), and Spanish-speaking (Puerto Rico) Caribbean Islands. Returnees' narratives reveal their in-between, 'hybrid', and often liminal social positions and offer a particularly interesting outlook on the spatiality of home, exile, and return in a highly mobile world. Elegantly evading simplistic binary conceptualizations of social categories (black/white, underdeveloped/developed, home and away), the authors portray instead return migration as a *transnational* process of ambivalent, frustrating negotiation over identities (national, racial, professional, gender), resources (social networks, employment opportunities), and symbolic values. Essays nicely demonstrate how returning migrants rely on acquired social and cultural capital (Western education or British accent) while deploying a broad range of transnational strategies (e.g., retaining properties and keeping in touch with family and friends left behind) in order to ease their way into the island communities. Rather than severing their ties with people and places left behind - as their parents often did - the young returnees remain strongly linked to their former places of residence even as they strive to fully adjust to life on the island. Despite the inevitable differences found between the adjustments of returnees of different backgrounds, the authors conclude that *the suffering of return* is shared by all. A successful return, however, is experienced by those "who have developed niches from which they can build contacts, make new circles of friends, and generally participate in the social and economic fields...in the islands of their parents, now their homes and nations" (p. 285).

The book makes a valuable contribution to the mushrooming literature on transnational migration and, in particular, what has often been termed *the new migrant experience*. The essays are generally informative and well-written, though long excerpts and overly detailed narratives in several chapters (especially 3, 6, and 7) make them unnecessarily dense and lengthy. Substantively, despite a decidedly transnational approach, the book focuses almost exclusively on migrants in their post-return phase and - with the exception of chapter 12 - discloses very little of their whereabouts prior to it. A few more pre-migration case studies could have been useful for the sake of tying together returnees' multiple worlds and shedding some light on the expectations, anxieties, and concerns that precede return migration. Finally, despite a respectful list of authors the book could have benefited from a broader diversity, especially in light of the authors' involvement in seven of the fourteen the chapters (1-5 and 13-14). These shortcomings notwithstanding, the book - which can be

read separately or as a collection - is strongly recommended for migration scholars and others interested in the changing faces of Caribbean (return)-migration.

References

- Ravenstein, E. (1889). The Laws of Migration. *Journal of the Statistical Society*, 52, 214-301.
- Lawson, V.A. (2000) Arguments within geographies of movement: The theoretical potential of migrants' stories. *Progress in Human Geography*, 24(2): 173-189.

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DAVID HARVEY: A CRITICAL READER edited by Noel Castree and Gregory Derek. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006.

This very important book is about David Harvey's monumental creation, spanning over the last thirty years. Along with a deep examination of Harvey's work, this Reader suggests a unique opportunity to learn about his views from a first source. "Space as a Keyword" - the last essay dedicated by Harvey to the reader, will probably be appreciated in the future as one of the classical texts of geographical thought.

The book is divided into five main parts: (1) Short notes on the contributors, (2) Essays (starting with an introduction by Derek Gregory and ending with a special chapter written by Harvey himself concerning his own concept of space), (3) Harvey's publication list, (4) Bibliography and (5) Index.

The Reader is far from being eulogy to Harvey. Indeed, it (un)covers almost every aspect of Harvey's work. But at the same time, the authors do not refrain uttering their very sharp criticism of Harvey's theoretical structure and its inconsistency, as well as his over-commitment to Marxism, and his circumscribed geographical reference etc.

In spite of everything, above (or at the bottom of) Harvey's ideas grows dark the problem of space. Space is the hard rock on which theories such as Harvey's are shattered. Eric Sheppard and Bob Jessop stress this point from the capitalism-theories perspective, while Nigel Thrift does so by going far back to Leibniz' Monadology - the foundation on which Harvey establishes his theory about the nature and the role of space in social geography.

Moreover, one can show some serious defects in Harvey's philosophy of space. Although it is not the proper place to discuss them in detail, I would still like to make two very short notes about the problematic way he uses philosophical terms and concepts. First, it seems that Harvey makes too strong the distinction between the terms 'relative' and 'relational' - at least in the way Leibniz meant they should