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A TRANSNATIONAL COLONIAL MIGRATION: PUERTO RICO'S FARM LABOR PROGRAM

On July 25, 1898, U.S. troops invaded Puerto Rico during the Spanish-Cuban-American War and have retained a strong presence there ever since.¹ In 1901, the U.S. Supreme Court paradoxically defined the Island as “foreign to the United States in a domestic sense,” neither a state of the American union nor an independent country (Burnett & Marshall 2001). The Court later ruled that Puerto Rico was an “unincorporated territory” “belonging to but not a part of” the United States, meaning that the U.S. Congress would determine which parts of the U.S. Constitution applied to the Island. In 1904, the Court declared that Puerto Ricans were not “aliens” for immigration purposes and could not be denied entry into the U.S. mainland (Erman 2008). In 1917, Congress granted U.S. citizenship to all persons born on the Island, but did not extend them all constitutional rights and obligations, such as having Congressional representation or paying federal income taxes.

In 1952, Puerto Rico became a U.S. Commonwealth (or *Estado Libre Asociado*, in Spanish) with limited autonomy over local matters, such as taxation, education, health, housing, culture, and language. Still, the federal government retained jurisdiction in most state affairs, including citizenship, immigration, customs, defense, currency, transportation, communications, foreign trade, and diplomacy. By most accounts, Puerto Rico remains a colony because it lacks sovereignty and effective representation in the federal government.

1. Portions of this article will appear in “The Puerto Rican Diaspora: A Postcolonial Migration?” in *Postcolonial Immigration and Identity Formation in Europe since 1945: Towards a Comparative Perspective*, edited by Ulbe Bosma, Jan Lucassen, and Gert Oostindie (forthcoming). I gratefully acknowledge the support of the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños at Hunter College, which offered me a research grant through the CUNY-Caribbean Exchange Program during the summer of 2008. Centro archivist Pedro Juan Hernández and former reference librarian Jorge Matos provided substantial assistance. Edwin Meléndez, Centro’s Director, invited me to present a summary of this article as part of Centro’s Lecture Series during the spring of 2009. Ulbe Bosma, Jan Lucassen, Gert Oostindie, Eileen Findlay, and Edgardo Meléndez commented on the manuscript.

Today, Puerto Rico is still an “unincorporated territory” that “belongs to but is not a part of” the United States. From the standpoint of international law, the Island’s inhabitants are subject to U.S. sovereignty; within the United States, they are often treated as “legal aliens.” Because all Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens by birth, they have the right of abode in the continental United States, Hawaii, and other overseas possessions of the United States. When they move to one of the fifty states of the American union, Puerto Ricans are fully protected by the U.S. Constitution. This territorially grounded distinction in citizenship rights remains a defining characteristic of U.S. colonialism on the Island.

As a result, Puerto Ricans in the United States have been dubbed “colonial immigrants.” Colonial immigrants move abroad primarily for economic reasons, tend to live in segregated quarters, work in low-status jobs, and attend inferior schools in their metropolitan countries.² As Ramón Grosfoguel (2004) has argued, Puerto Rico has much in common with other Caribbean dependencies that have sent large numbers of people to their European “mother countries.” For instance, colonial immigrants need not apply for a visa or change their legal status to vote in metropolitan elections. Although colonial immigrants hold metropolitan passports and are entitled to metropolitan subsidies, they often experience discrimination because of their physical and cultural characteristics. In particular, both Puerto Ricans in the United States and Antilleans in France and the Netherlands occupy subordinate positions within metropolitan societies, largely as a consequence of colonial racism, despite conditions of legal equality.³

For some analysts, Puerto Rico resembles a “postcolonial colony,” combining elements of classical colonial rule with political autonomy, a relatively high standard of living, and a strong national culture (Duany 2002, Flores 2000, 2008). The Island’s political status is largely based on majority will rather than sheer external imposition. Puerto Rican voters (some 95 percent) are now split between supporting Commonwealth and the Island’s annexation as the fifty-first state of the American union, with less than 5 percent favoring independence. Most value their U.S. citizenship, the freedom of movement that it entails, and “permanent union” with the United States. Even the president of the Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP), Rubén Berríos, has advocated the unrestricted entry of Puerto Ricans to the United States, should the Island become a sovereign republic (Rodríguez 1997). At the same time, Puerto Ricans of all political ideologies, not just independence supporters, define and assert their cultural identities in intensely nationalistic terms. At any rate, Puerto Rico occupies a marginal space within the U.S. academy and particularly within postcolonial and transnational studies, partly because

2. Magdalys Rodríguez, “Pedido de libre tránsito,” *El Nuevo Día*, March 14, 1997, p. 19.

3. See Cervantes-Rodríguez *et al.* 2009, Clegg & Pantojas-García 2009, Giraud 2002, Milia-Marie-Luce 2002, 2007, Oostindie & Klinkers 2003.

it is recognized neither as a colony nor as a nation in its own right. Yet, as I argue, the Island's government was one of the first modern states, colonial or postcolonial, to organize migration transnationally.

In this article, I approach the Puerto Rican diaspora as a transnational colonial migration. In so doing, I define Puerto Rico as a nation, an imagined community with its own territory, history, language, and culture. Nevertheless, the Island lacks a sovereign state, an independent government that represents the population of that territory (see Duany 2002). This unsovereign state has long sponsored population displacements from Puerto Rico to the United States. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, colonial officials embraced migration as a safety valve for the Island's overpopulation. During the 1950s and 1960s, the Commonwealth government spurred the "Great Migration" to the U.S. mainland. In particular, the Farm Labor Program, overseen by the Migration Division of Puerto Rico's Department of Labor, illustrates the complicated negotiations required by a transnational colonial state. In many ways, Puerto Rico's postwar migration policies anticipated those of contemporary transnational nation-states, such as the Dominican Republic.

FOLLOWING MIGRANT CITIZENS TO "ETHNOLOGICALLY ALIEN ENVIRONMENTS"

Soon after the U.S. occupation of Puerto Rico, the colonial government encouraged migration to the United States (Lapp 1990). This public policy was based on the widespread perception that Puerto Rico was a small, poor, and overcrowded country with few natural resources. According to the first civilian U.S. governor, Charles Allen, "Porto Rico has plenty of laborers and poor people generally. What the island needs is men with capital, energy, and enterprise."⁴ In 1912, Governor Arthur Yager held that "the only really effective remedy [to the problem of overpopulation] is the transfer of large numbers of Porto Ricans to another region."⁵ In 1917, General Frank

4. Charles H. Allen, *First Annual Report of Charles H. Allen, Governor of Porto Rico, Covering the Period from May 1, 1900, to May 1, 1901* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1902), p. 75. Although the Island's name was the object of public controversy after the Spanish-Cuban-American War of 1898, most U.S. government and journalistic reports on the Island retained the American spelling of "Porto Rico" until 1932, when the U.S. Congress passed a resolution accepting the official name of Puerto Rico. As one of the reviewers of this manuscript noted, the common use of the terms "Porto Rico" and "Porto Ricans" reflects the colonial habit of removing foreign-sounding diphthongs from place names in order to Americanize them.

5. Arthur Yager, "Fundamental Social and Political Problems of Porto Rico," in *Report of the Thirtieth Annual Lake Mohonk Conference of Friends of the Indians and Other Dependent Peoples* (Lake Mohonk NY: Lake Mohonk Conference of Friends of the Indians and Other Dependent Peoples, 1912), p. 147.

McIntyre, Chief of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, favored “the colonizing of several hundred thousand of the Porto Rican people in Santo Domingo.”⁶ A 1919 report for the U.S. Department of Labor pondered migration to the Dominican Republic and Cuba, but concluded that “it falls short of its purpose when submitted to careful analysis.”⁷ Instead, the report recommended establishing an office of the U.S. Employment Service in Puerto Rico to facilitate the relocation of Puerto Ricans to the United States. Three decades later, the Committee on Insular Affairs of the U.S. House of Representatives endorsed “a wise and prudent program of emigration” to alleviate the Island’s “lack of natural resources” and “congestion of population.”⁸

The earliest recruitment of labor on the Island under U.S. rule (especially between 1900 and 1930) was geared toward the sugar plantations of Hawaii, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, particularly St. Croix. Smaller groups of Puerto Ricans built railroads in Ecuador, cut cane in Mexico, grew coffee in Colombia, and worked in a clothing factory in Venezuela. A few thousand picked cotton in Arizona during the 1920s.⁹ However, the Puerto Rican exodus gained impetus during the 1940s, when it was largely reoriented toward the U.S. mainland. After World War II, thousands found jobs in seasonal agriculture, manufacturing, domestic service, and other service industries in the United States.

Notwithstanding its lack of sovereignty, Puerto Rico’s government acted as a “transnational” intermediary for its migrant citizens for most of the twentieth century.¹⁰ Thus, the Island’s government set up several agencies in the United States under different guises: the Bureau of Employment and Identification (1930-48), the Office of Information for Puerto Rico (1945-49), the Employment and Migration Bureau (1947-51), the Migration Division of the Department of Labor (1951-89), and the Department of Puerto Rican Community Affairs in the United States (1989-93). Among other initiatives, these agencies issued identification cards for Puerto Ricans as U.S. citizens;

6. Frank McIntyre, “Memorandum for the Secretary of War, April 17, 1917,” in History Task Force, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños (ed.), *Sources for the Study of Puerto Rican Migration, 1879-1930* (New York: Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, 1982), p. 104.

7. Joseph Marcus, *Labor Conditions in Puerto Rico* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1919), p. 49.

8. Committee on Insular Affairs, U.S. House of Representatives, *Report of the Committee on Insular Affairs, House of Representatives, 79th Congress, First Session* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1945), p. 25.

9. History Task Force 1979, Maldonado 1979, Mustelier Ayala 2006, Rosario Natal 1983, Senior 1947, Whalen & Vázquez-Hernández 2005.

10. Edgardo Meléndez, “La política transnacional puertorriqueña: Asuntos pendientes y problemas de investigación.” Paper presented at the workshop on “The Caribbean Diaspora: Current Trends and Future Prospects,” University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras.

promoted employment opportunities for Puerto Ricans abroad; oversaw the recruitment of workers; negotiated cheap airfares between the Island and the U.S. mainland; registered thousands of Puerto Rican voters in the United States; helped organize overseas Puerto Rican communities; and fostered Puerto Rican culture in the mainland.¹¹ To my knowledge, no modern state, colonial or otherwise, has engaged in more extensive and longstanding activities concerning its expatriates than the Puerto Rican government.¹²

U.S. sociologist Clarence Senior, who later directed the Migration Division (1951-60), first elaborated the project of organizing and supervising Puerto Rican migration. In an influential monograph, Senior (1947) proposed an emigration office attached to the governor's executive staff and working closely with the Island's Department of Labor. The main function of this office would be to facilitate the recruitment of workers to the United States and Latin America, especially Venezuela. The agency would provide migrants with information about job openings, training, transportation, settlement, and insurance, as well as promote further emigration from the Island. Although the plan to relocate Puerto Ricans in Latin America proved too expensive, the idea of finding jobs for them in the United States later crystallized in the Migration Division. As Senior (1947:119) surmised, "migration to the continental United States seems to offer the best immediate opportunities."

Luis Muñoz Marín, then president of the Senate (1941-48) and later the first elected governor (1949-64) of Puerto Rico, accepted Senior's blueprint for planned emigration. Muñoz Marín agreed that it was "necessary to resort to emigration as a measure for the immediate relief to the problem posed by our surplus population, while we seek permanent solutions in the long run."¹³ The chief economist of the Office of Puerto Rico in Washington DC, Donald

11. Duany 2002, García-Colón 2008, Lapp 1990, Stinson-Fernández 1996.

12. The best case for historical comparison with the Migration Division is the Bureau for the Development of Migrations Concerning the Overseas Departments, or BUMIDOM (Bureau pour le Développement des Migrations Intéressant les Départements d'Outre-Mer), operated by the French metropolitan government between 1963 and 1982. According to Monique Miliá-Marie-Lucie (2002, 2007), Puerto Rico's Migration Division served as a model for the BUMIDOM, especially its efforts to encourage mass migration, recruit workers, and facilitate their adjustment to the metropolitan country. Similar labor recruitment schemes were established in the British colonies of the Caribbean, particularly in Barbados, Jamaica, and Trinidad, and in the Netherlands Antilles and Suriname, after World War II (Cervantes-Rodríguez *et al.* 2009:5)

13. Memorandum from Luis Muñoz Marín to Max Egloff, "Foro público sobre el problema poblacional de Puerto Rico. Resumen de las soluciones ofrecidas por los ponentes en la sesión de julio 19, 1946," September 28, 1946; section IV: President of the Senate, 1941-1948; series 2: Insular Government; sub-series I: Fortaleza; box 1B: Office of Information; folder 16; Fundación Luis Muñoz Marín (hereafter FLMM), Trujillo Alto, PR. All translations from Spanish to English are mine.

J. O'Connor, also urged the resettlement of Puerto Ricans in the United States and other countries such as Venezuela and the Dominican Republic. According to O'Connor, "migration can accomplish what economic programs on the island cannot do quickly"¹⁴ – that is, create jobs and sources of income, while reducing population growth. In particular, O'Connor advocated the relocation of young unmarried women as domestic workers in the United States, especially in Chicago. High-ranking members of the ruling Popular Democratic Party (PDP), such as Antonio Fernós-Isern, Teodoro Moscoso, Rafael Picó, and Salvador Tió, concurred with O'Connor's optimistic assessment. Thus began a state-supported project of emigration as a safety valve for Puerto Rico's socioeconomic problems.

On December 5, 1947, the Island's legislature passed Law 25, establishing Puerto Rico's migration policy and creating the Employment and Migration Bureau. According to this law, "the Government of Puerto Rico neither encourages nor discourages the migration of Puerto Rican workmen [*sic*] to the United States or any foreign country; but it considers its duty to provide the proper guidance with respect to opportunities for employment and the problems of adjustment usually encountered in environments which are ethnologically alien."¹⁵ From its inception, the Bureau (and its heirs, the Migration Division and the Department of Puerto Rican Community Affairs in the United States) sought "to follow its migrant citizens to facilitate their adjustment and adaptation in the communities in which they chose to live."¹⁶ The policy of "following migrant citizens," while officially "neither encouraging nor discouraging" their departure, paid off in the short run. The growth of the Island's labor force slowed down, as living standards rose substantially between the 1940s and 1960s. Population control was a key tenet of the PDP's development strategy throughout this period (Pantojas-García 1990).

The PDP, which controlled the Island's government between 1941 and 1968, crafted the Migration Division as an informal "consulate" in the United States. For decades, the agency's basic mission was "*giving voice* [empha-

14. Memorandum from Donald J. O'Connor to Jesús T. Piñero and others, "Mainland Labor Force Needs in 1948-1949 and Puerto Rico's Opportunities to Exploit Them," August 10, 1948; section IV: President of the Senate, 1941-1948; series 2: Insular Government; sub-series 1: Fortaleza; 1C: Office of Puerto Rico in Washington; folder 18; FLMM.

15. Asamblea Legislativa de Puerto Rico, "Para fijar la política pública del gobierno de Puerto Rico sobre migración a Estados Unidos y otros países," in *Leyes de la Cuarta y Quinta Legislaturas Extraordinarias* (San Juan: Administración General de Suministros, 1947), p. 386.

16. Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico (hereafter ELA), Departamento del Trabajo, División de Migración, "Informe anual," 1972-73, p. 2; microfilm reel 53: Annual Reports; box 2737, folder 3; Records of the Offices of the Government of Puerto Rico in the United States (hereafter OGPRUS), Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY, New York.

sis in the original] to the thousands of Puerto Ricans who come to reside in the cities and towns of the United States.”¹⁷ Throughout the 1950s, the Division attempted to articulate the interests of Puerto Rican migrants to the American public and government officials. As Law 25 stated, “the efforts of the Government of Puerto Rico in this connection should constitute a liaison at all times and under all circumstances between the Puerto Ricans who are going to reside in the city of New York and other cities of the United States, and the governments of such cities, states, and the United States.”¹⁸ In turn, U.S. public authorities often relied on the agency as the official mouthpiece of the overseas Puerto Rican population. Michael Lapp (1990) has criticized the Division’s attempt to co-opt the diaspora to further the interests of the Commonwealth government. Representatives of mainland Puerto Rican communities did not participate in formulating the agency’s policies, which depended exclusively on the PDP during the period under consideration.

In 1960, Muñoz Marín thus summarized his party’s migration policy:

The government of Puerto Rico is the first that establishes offices here [in the United States], outside its own territory, to help its compatriots. The offices of our Department of Labor in New York, and in ten other cities, are devoted to this purpose of helping our fellow citizens adapt themselves to life in the new places of residence they have chosen, as quickly as possible. We constantly strive to combat the lack of information, the prejudices that, unfortunately, always tend to accompany the reception of the newly arrived, from all countries, regardless of what country they come from.¹⁹

Representatives of the prolonged PDP administration explicitly connected economic development and sponsored migration. As a Division report stated bluntly, “it is obvious that migration, although voluntary, is an integral part of the program of economic and social development that is being carried on by the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. It is so because migration helps to maintain the population index at a more or less stable level with the corresponding effects on employment and unemployment, education, housing, health, and all the other factors that affect the development of Puerto Rico’s government programs.”²⁰ According to Joseph Monserrat, who headed the Migration Division between 1960 and 1968,

17. ELA, Departamento del Trabajo, División de Migración, “Informe anual,” 1961-62, p. 182; microfilm reel 53: Annual Reports; boxes 2734-2736; OGPRUS.

18. Asamblea Legislativa de Puerto Rico, “Para fijar la política pública del gobierno de Puerto Rico sobre migración a Estados Unidos y otros países,” p. 388.

19. Luis Muñoz Marín, “Discurso a los puertorriqueños en Nueva York pronunciado por el Gobernador Muñoz Marín el 10 de abril de 1960,” manuscript, p. 9; section V: Governor of Puerto Rico, 1949-1964; series 9: Speeches; box 16: Status; folder 7; FLMM.

20. ELA, Departamento del Trabajo, División de Migración, “Informe anual,” 1966-67, pp. 8-9, microfilm reel 53: Annual Reports; box 2736, folder 1, OGPRUS.

Operation Bootstrap and Fomento's programs [promoting the Island's industrialization] have always had a senior silent partner—the Puerto Rican migration to the United States. This migration, of which migrant agricultural workers formed an important segment, is and has been an intrinsic part and a basic factor in the economic growth and development of the island."²¹

Another report asserted: “the Office of Services to Migrant Agricultural Workers has contributed greatly to the mobility of Puerto Rico’s population, thus providing a powerful escape valve to our great problem of overpopulation and high chronic unemployment.”²² The metaphor of migration as an “escape valve” is a recurring theme in the official discourse of the period. When the pro-statehood New Progressive Party (NPP) gained power in 1969 and again in 1977 and 1985, it restructured the Migration Division to advance the Island’s annexation into the United States. Apparently, the NPP did not advocate the same migration policies as the PDP, particularly the Farm Labor Program. In 1969, the agency’s staff was downsized, together with its orientation and educational programs for seasonal farm workers.²³ In 1979, NPP Governor Carlos Romero Barceló eliminated the Division’s Cultural Affairs Program, only to have it reinstated by PDP Governor Rafael Hernández Colón in 1985. Finally, in 1993, NPP Governor Pedro Rosselló and other pro-statehood leaders, then a majority in the Island’s legislature, abolished the Department of Puerto Rican Community Affairs in the United States because they believed that the agency represented an unwarranted instance of applying public policy in another jurisdiction. Still, the Commonwealth government retains a formal presence in the mainland through the Puerto Rico Federal Affairs Administration (PRFAA). Nowadays, this agency has greatly reduced its budget and influence over the diaspora.

“SURPLUS HANDS”: THE RISE AND FALL OF THE FARM LABOR PROGRAM

Postwar Puerto Rican migration has ebbed and flowed according to various stages of Operation Bootstrap (*Manos a la Obra*, in Spanish), the Island’s pro-

21. Joseph Monserrat, “The Development, Growth and Decline of the Puerto Rican Migrant Farmworkers Contract Program,” manuscript, 1991, p. 27; series: Subject Files; box 17, folder 2; The Joseph Monserrat Papers, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY, New York.

22. ELA, Departamento del Trabajo, División de Migración, Programa de Trabajadores Agrícolas Migrantes, “Informe anual,” 1974-75, p. 1; microfilm reel 43: Reports; box 881, folder 4-box 882, folder 11, OGPRUS.

23. ELA, Departamento del Trabajo, División de Migración, Programa de Trabajadores Agrícolas Migrantes, “Informe anual,” 1972-73; microfilm reel 43: Reports; box 881, folder 4-box 882, folder 11, OGPRUS.

gram of “industrialization by invitation” (largely of U.S. manufacturing capital), as well as to the changing demands of the U.S. economy, particularly in the large urban centers of the northeast (Rivera-Batiz & Santiago 1996, Rodríguez 1989, Whalen 2001). Although Operation Bootstrap created thousands of factory jobs, it could not absorb many more thousands of unskilled workers displaced by a swift agricultural decline. In 1940, agriculture employed 44.9 percent of the Island’s labor force; by 1970, that sector only employed 9.9 percent.²⁴ During this period, Puerto Rico’s development strategy expelled a large share of its rural population, both on and off the Island. As Frank Bonilla (1994) once quipped, *Manos a la Obra* (literally meaning “putting hands to work”) could be renamed *Manos que Sobran* (“surplus hands”).

The Farm Labor Program provides a fascinating case study of how Commonwealth officials navigated the “colonial” and “transnational” intricacies of Puerto Rico’s political status. Between 1948 and 1990, the program recruited 421,238 Puerto Ricans to work in the U.S. mainland (see Figure 1). This was the second-largest organized movement of temporary laborers in the United States, after the Mexican *bracero* program (1942-64) in the southwest. Indeed, Senior (1947:52) regarded the negotiations between the Mexican and U.S. governments as a model for the Migration Division. These agreements included recruitment, transportation, housing, wages, food, working conditions, hours, savings funds, and repatriation of agricultural laborers.

Although Puerto Rican farm workers traveled to many states, they concentrated in the northeast, especially in New Jersey, Connecticut, New York, Delaware, Massachusetts, and Pennsylvania (see Figure 2). The vast majority were young men with little schooling and proficiency in the English language. Most had been landless rural laborers in the sugar, coffee, and tobacco industries on the Island.²⁵ They were popularly known as *los tomateros* (“the tomato pickers”), because that was one of the main crops they harvested. Puerto Ricans also planted and cut shade tobacco in the Connecticut River Valley; picked corn, blueberries, asparagus, broccoli, and onions in the Delaware River Valley; strawberries, cabbages, and carrots in New York; apples in New England and Washington; potatoes in Maine; peaches in South Carolina; avocados and lettuce in South Florida; and other crops like cranberries, oranges, and mushrooms in various places.

On May 9, 1947, the Puerto Rican government created the Farm Labor Program through Law 89. The main purpose of this law was to regulate the recruitment of workers in Puerto Rico and to make the Island’s

24. Junta de Planificación de Puerto Rico, *Estadísticas socioeconómicas* (San Juan: Junta de Planificación de Puerto Rico, 1983).

25. Bonilla-Santiago 1988, Cruz 1998, García-Colón 2008, History Task Force 1979, Whalen 2001.

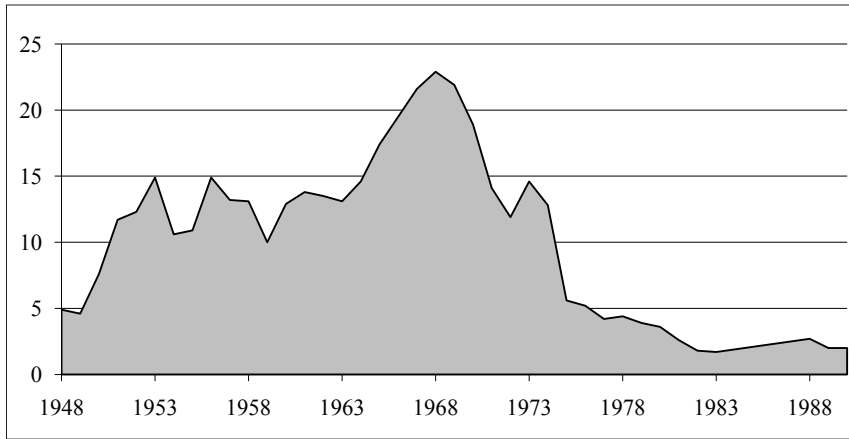


Figure 1. Number of Puerto Ricans Referred by the Farm Labor Program in the United States, 1948-90 (Thousands)

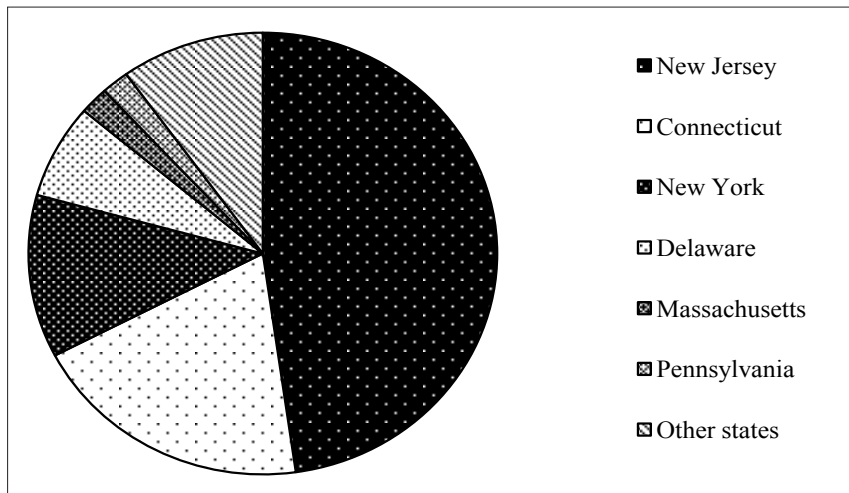


Figure 2. Destination of Puerto Rican Farm Workers in the United States, 1963-87

Commissioner of Labor responsible for this process.²⁶ In 1948, nearly 5,000 Puerto Ricans traveled to the U.S. mainland under the Farm Labor Program. In 1951, the Wagner-Peyser Act, which established the Bureau of Employment Security within the U.S. Department of Labor, was extended to Puerto Rico. Thereafter, the federal government recognized the Island as part of the domestic labor supply in the United States.²⁷ In effect, U.S. officials treated Puerto Rico as a state of the American union concerning seasonal agricultural workers. Henceforth, the Island's Farm Labor Program processed thousands of interstate clearance orders from mainland employers requesting farm workers through the U.S. Department of Labor.

The arrangement between the Commonwealth and federal governments worked reasonably well between the 1950s and 1970s. It produced the peculiar situation of a "colonial" state "giving voice" to its "migrant citizens" within a complex metropolitan legal structure and labor market. According to a lawsuit against the Migration Division, "the operation of the Department of Labor of Puerto Rico relating to migrant farm workers is completely integrated in, and interdependent with, a comprehensive federal scheme established by the Wagner-Peyser Act."²⁸ Thus, Commonwealth representatives insisted that Puerto Ricans were legally "domestic" in the United States. However, according to Petroamérica Pagán de Colón, who directed the Bureau of Employment and Migration, "within official circles in Washington and in all states, the Puerto Rican worker was considered a foreigner who was going to displace other workers from their jobs."²⁹ Because most of the workers could not speak English, U.S. employers and journalists often referred to them as "aliens" and "semi-foreigners."³⁰ In addition, Commonwealth officials admitted that "cultural differences ... represented some of the problems faced by Puerto Ricans in the United States, which

26. Asamblea Legislativa de Puerto Rico, "Para regular contratación de obreros o empleados cuyos servicios fueren a utilizarse en cualquier estado de la unión americana, sus territorios o estados extranjeros," in *Leyes de la Tercera Legislatura Ordinaria de Puerto Rico* (San Juan: Administración General de Suministros, 1947).

27. Monserrat, "The Development, Growth and Decline of the Puerto Rican Migrant Farmworkers Contract Program," p. 10.

28. Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund (hereafter PRLDEF), "Memorandum in Opposition to Defendants' Motion for Judgment on the Pleadings," February 18, 1975, p. 28; Legal Division, Litigation Files: Vazquez v. Ferre; box 7, folder 14; PRLDEF Papers, Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños, Hunter College, CUNY, New York.

29. Petroamérica Pagán de Colón, *Programa de trabajadores migratorios de Puerto Rico a los Estados Unidos* (San Juan: Departamento del Trabajo, Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico, 1956), p. 13.

30. "What Makes Martinez Run and Smile," *Courier-Post*, September 11, 1965; microfilm reel 7: Growers Association Files; box 516, folder 4-box 517, folder 19, OGRUS.

make their adjustment to the new environment difficult.”³¹ In a strange twist of the legal doctrine, Puerto Ricans were “foreign in a domestic sense.”

The Migration Division developed into a formidable bureaucratic structure. By 1958, it had a staff of 130 persons and a budget of one million U.S. dollars.³² At its peak in 1968, the agency had thirteen offices throughout the U.S. mainland. Many of its resources were geared toward seasonal agricultural workers. The Director of the Farm Labor Program supervised field operations near farm areas where the workers clustered, including Camden and Keyport, New Jersey; Newburgh and Rochester, New York; Middletown, Delaware; Hamburg, Pennsylvania; Hartford, Connecticut; Boston, Massachusetts; and Cleveland, Ohio. The Division signed contracts with numerous agricultural employers, especially the Glassboro Service Association in New Jersey, the Curtis Burns Corporation and the Apple Growers Association in New York, and the Shade Tobacco Growers Association in Connecticut.

The Farm Labor Program sought to meet the cyclical demand for workers in such tasks as weeding, planting, fertilizing, picking, packing, loading, and unloading fruits and vegetables. Employers usually covered the cost of air transportation between Puerto Rico and the United States, to be repaid by the workers in weekly installments. Housing was provided at no cost to the workers. Working hours were typically from seven in the morning to six in the evening. Wages ranged from eighty cents to one dollar per hour in 1960 and from US\$ 2.61 to three dollars in the late 1970s. The period of employment lasted from several weeks to three months, often coinciding with the dead season of the Island’s sugar harvest (from May through August). The program extended Puerto Rico’s labor market to the U.S. mainland, just as the Island was transformed from an agricultural to an industrial economy.³³

The field representatives of Puerto Rico’s Farm Labor Program had multiple duties. First, they oversaw the workers’ transportation from the Island and often welcomed them at U.S. airports. Second, they oriented the migrants about their rights as U.S. citizens. Third, they inspected housing and eating arrangements at labor camps to ensure their compliance with the Commonwealth’s contract with employers. Fourth, they investigated health, accident, salary, and unemployment claims by disgruntled workers (and they were many). Fifth, they mediated disputes between workers and employers, usually organized through growers’ associations. Finally, they coordinated the services offered by state, federal, and private agencies, including

31. ELA, Departamento del Trabajo, División de Migración, Programa de Trabajadores Agrícolas Migrantes, “Informe anual,” 1964-65, p. 2; microfilm reel 53: Annual Reports; box 2735, folder 2, OGPRUS.

32. Continuations Committee, *First Report of Continuations Committee* (Third Migration Conference, San Juan, January 19-26, 1958-New York, June 12, 1959), p. 27.

33. Monserrat, “The Development, Growth and Decline of the Puerto Rican Migrant Farmworkers Contract Program,” p. 27.

insurance, health care, English language classes, and recreational activities. A fictional character in a promotional film commissioned by Puerto Rico's Department of Labor, *Los beneficiarios* ("The Beneficiaries"), quips that the field representative of the Migration Division played the roles of "father confessor, nurse, psychologist, chauffeur, translator, teacher, defense lawyer—and everything for the worker." Another character adds, "he's a friend of the worker. Someone who fixes everything [*arreglalotodo*]." ³⁴

Puerto Rico's Farm Labor Program waned during the 1970s, until it practically faded away during the 1990s (see Figure 1). To begin, the demand for seasonal agricultural workers in the U.S. northeast decreased because of crop mechanization and increasing availability of local labor. In addition, the growing number of unauthorized immigrants from Mexico and Central America diminished the need for Puerto Rican agricultural labor. Furthermore, as U.S. citizens, Puerto Ricans usually earned higher wages and had better working and living conditions than temporary foreign laborers, such as Jamaicans or Mexicans. Puerto Rican farm workers also organized labor unions to defend their collective rights, a role formerly played by the Migration Division (Bonilla-Santiago 1988). In 1968, the election of an NPP government on the Island weakened the thrust for recruiting migrant workers. By this time, Puerto Rico itself had become largely urbanized and fewer Puerto Ricans sought agricultural work. Most migrants drifted toward cities, where wages tended to be higher than in rural areas. Lastly, two legal controversies undermined the Division's capacity to recruit farm labor.

During the 1970s, Puerto Rico's secretary of labor complained that U.S. apple growers preferred to hire West Indians over Puerto Ricans. In 1979, a class action suit, *Rios v. Marshall*, contended that temporary foreign laborers, especially Jamaicans, were recruited for the New York apple harvest, without first guaranteeing jobs for Puerto Ricans and other "domestic" workers. The U.S. secretary of labor at the time had certified that "no domestic workers were available" because Law 89 eliminated Puerto Ricans from the labor supply. As the under-secretary of labor, Robert Aders, wrote to the chairman of the Subcommittee on Agricultural Labor of the U.S. House of Representatives, "it is our hope that the regulations under Puerto Rican Public Law 89 can be adjusted to make these workers more effectively available for employment on the mainland." ³⁵ In 1978, Law 89 was amended to allow exceptions to the Commonwealth's contract, which many mainland growers disliked, particularly the jurisdiction of Puerto Rican courts over

34. Vigiú Films, *Los beneficiarios*, undated film produced for the Migration Division of the Department of Labor, Government of Puerto Rico, "Migration Division Short Films," OGPRUS.

35. Letter from Robert O. Aders to William D. Ford, Chairman, Subcommittee on Agricultural Labor, January 26, 1976; microfilm reel 145: Apple Harvest; box 2487, folders 1-19, OGPRUS.

labor disputes. This amendment hampered the Island's bargaining position vis-à-vis U.S. agricultural employers.

Perhaps more damaging to the Farm Labor Program was the protracted litigation surrounding *Vázquez v. Ferre* (1973). This lawsuit accused former NPP Governor Luis Ferré, Secretary of Labor Julia Rivera de Vincenty, National Director of the Migration Division Nick Lugo, and other public authorities of allowing unsafe, unsanitary, and unhealthy conditions in the agricultural labor camps. The main plaintiff, David Vázquez, was a twenty-five-year-old Puerto Rican farm worker from Arecibo, employed by the Glassboro Service Association in New Jersey in 1972. Among other grievances, Vázquez alleged that the camp where he toiled had inadequate living quarters, unhygienic cooking facilities, no heating, insufficient sleeping space, and unclean bathing and toilet facilities. Attorneys employed by the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund (PRLDEF), which filed the suit on behalf of Vázquez and other migrant workers, charged that the farm's housing conditions violated the Wagner-Peyser Act, Commonwealth laws and regulations, and the contract with the Glassboro Service Association. After years of negotiations, the Commonwealth government settled the case in 1977, agreeing to inspect farms before assigning them workers.³⁶ By then, U.S. farms had recruited less than 4,200 Island workers (Figure 1).

DOCUMENTING TRANSNATIONALISM FROM BELOW

Most of the extant documents on Puerto Rico's Farm Labor Program, deposited at the Centro de Estudios Puertorriqueños at Hunter College in New York, voice the perspectives of Commonwealth officials. Nonetheless, the archives sometimes provide glimpses into the mundane concerns, practices, and social relations of the workers and their families. These primary sources, including unpublished correspondence, annual and monthly reports, memoranda, and newspaper clippings, help reconstruct the everyday experiences of transnationalism from below (Smith & Guarnizo 1998), from the standpoint of the migrants themselves.³⁷ (When translating the Spanish texts, I retain their original punctuation and syntax.)

To begin, Puerto Rican farm workers faced difficult working conditions. By far their most common grievance involved breaches of contracts by employers. Many workers claimed that employers treated them unfairly, including withholding their wages until the end of their contracts and not giving them enough work. A letter signed by "Federico Gaspar. Alcadio Serafin" was addressed to the migration specialist in Hamburg, Pennsylvania:

36. PRLDEF, "Vázquez v. Ferre," various dates, PRLDEF Papers.

37. For an earlier study of the farm workers' correspondence at the General Archive of Puerto Rico, see Stinson-Fernández 1996.

Dear Mr. Mendosa [*sic*].

The present [purpose] of these short line [*sic*] is to let you know that you could come here because at this time this farmer during the week he gives us two or three days of work during the week and we turn to you also five weeks have passed and they haven't changed the bed linen and we'd like you to come see where we take baths which is a ranch where there are bulls ducks hens etsetera [*sic*] these is [un]hygienic for our health. And we've carried out our work also look we haven't been able to send much [money] to P.R. [Puerto Rico]. Because these people are really bad. Look I'd still like you to see where we live, in a shack [*chiho?*] where things barely fit. Look I'd also like you to see the kitchenware. Look here there were some emigrant people and they fled, I think it was because of the bad service they give here and they don't agree with what the law requires.³⁸

Ten years later, Puerto Ricans employed by Comstock-Greenwood Foods in New York denounced similar working conditions:

My very esteemed Jorge Colón: The Present [purpose] of this [letter] is to [offer] new information we'd like not to bother you again But it's our duty to let you know that at Curtis Burns they still [treat] us with cruelty us Puerto Ricans and I'll tell you that we expected that when the corn [season] came we'd do something and time is growing shorter and we suffer the same scarcity of work this company adds blacks [*moyetos*] and Americans to work and many of us are still looking at each other's faces and we complain to you Because you're the man called to solve our Problem We Pay for our meals and those from here don't pay anything and besides you told us that if anything happened we should let you know so we're sincere We hope you'll visit us if it's agreeable to you and you can and we can be corresponded, by duty these people should share with everyone and if they want us to come later to work for them. We hope you'll answer and visit us.

Yours truly,

Workers at Curtis Burns³⁹

The above letter suggests that many migrants indeed perceived the field representative as a fixit-all.

In addition to work-related issues, migrants complained about daily disturbances at the camps:

38. Letter to Roberto Mendoza, October 9, 1959; microfilm reel 48: Reports; boxes 889-890, OGPRUS.

39. Letter to Jorge Colón, September 19, 1969; microfilm reel 3: Growers Association Files; box 509, folder 14-box 511, folder 14, OGPRUS.

So we want to inform you that most of these laborers [in Windsor, Connecticut] are young men who go to these camps to smoke marijuana and sniff coke and other drugs, and then when they're under the drug's effects they start to laugh, tell jokes, and turn on the radio, and [listen to] Radio Picat all night, and if you tell them you want to sleep because you have to work the next day to fulfill your contract duties.

They respond that you were in Puerto Rico before if you don't like it move back, and if you took [the job], you have to put up with it now, and there are also individuals who take loose women [*mujeres de la vida alegre*] to these camps to sell them to the workers and then many of them get sick putting at risk the others' health, and also these same women together with those who bring them coax many of the workers, hitting and assaulting them.⁴⁰

Health problems were commonplace. In Chester County, Pennsylvania, Puerto Ricans were susceptible to a respiratory disease caused by a substance used in growing mushrooms.⁴¹ In Massachusetts, the Division tried to inform Bernardo Avilés Ramos's closest relatives that he had been hospitalized at Northampton State Hospital for ten days because of "mental disturbances."⁴² In Hartford, a few months later, Jesús Aponte Figueroa wrote:

Mr. Rafael Muñoz

Amidst the disturbance in which I find myself I take the pen to notify you of my state of health. And my working conditions, I Jesús Aponte Figueroa write this letter to request your help and that of other collaborators of the labor office because here where I'm at what you find is an injustice toward agricultural workers mainly Puerto Rican I should manifest now, this is mycase [*sic*]. Which may seem of no importance if it's declared by Mr. [Gilberto] Camacho [the field representative], I Jesús am a worker at the Imperial Nurseries, where many of us risk our necks that weed makes fun of us because we don't speak English. It's been two weeks since I was working when unfortunately some dirt fell on my right eye which I got when I went to put down a tree in a brook ...

I wish you can help me get a ticket back to PR since I don't think I'll work any more because I feel bad from the heart and from an eye I've

40. Letter to Gilberto Camacho, July 5, 1974; microfilm reel 14: Growers Association Files; box 652, folder 5-box 654, folder 12, OGPRUS.

41. Louis S. Bringhurst and Jacob Gershon-Cohen, "Respiratory Disease of Mushroom Workers: Farmer's Lung," 1959; microfilm reel 34: Regional and Field Office Farm Labor Files; box 863, folder 8-box 865, folder 4, OGPRUS.

42. Letter from Gilberto Camacho to José J. Maysonet, June 11, 1971; microfilm reel 44: Reports; boxes 882-883, OGPRUS.

almost lost which I know that not even my island has a cure and my sickness appears to be internal.⁴³

Upon visiting the camps, field representatives frequently found substandard housing conditions. Their inspection report included an assessment of sleeping quarters, sanitary conditions, kitchen and laundry facilities, and recreational grounds. A Commonwealth official in Hartford wrote about “a family of 9 living in a cottage without hot water, toilet, showers, and without proper ventilation. Another group of 5 men living in a dirty small barrack not big enough for 1 person.” The owner of the apple orchard declared that “the Puerto Ricans do not deserve any better.”⁴⁴ Puerto Rican workers often described the camps as filthy (in one case, calling them *un corral de puercos*, a pigs’ pen). Some compared them to “concentration camps” because “the worker cannot go out unless he has a special permission from the guards ... and where the guards carry clubs and use them fearlessly.”⁴⁵

Aside from the camps’ overcrowded, unkempt, and Spartan conditions, many Puerto Ricans were dissatisfied with the food they ate there. Although the Commonwealth contract stipulated that employers should provide three hot meals per day, this requirement was rarely met. A field representative in Camden was told that “we Puerto Ricans do not eat soup that way [in thermos flasks brought to the labor camps] and much less beans for lunch.”⁴⁶ At a Windsor camp, “the men showed a desire for more variety [in their lunches] ... [T]hey feel that the fish and chicken cooked for the evening meals are not highly seasoned enough.”⁴⁷ Similarly, workers criticized the menu at the Green Giant Company in Middletown, Delaware: “breakfast a loaf of bread and (two small slices) of bread and coffee and milk that tasted like a rusty nail. For lunch they gave us a sticky rice, *marota* (?), always beans and chickpeas that looked like stones. For seven days rice and beans and chickpeas. In the afternoons they gave us the same food.”⁴⁸

43. Letter from Jesús Aponte Figueroa to Rafael Muñoz, September 23, 1971; microfilm reel 44: Reports; boxes 882-883, OGPRUS.

44. “Activity Report” from Gilberto Camacho to Francisca Bou, July 15, 1965; microfilm reel 145: Apple Harvest File; box 2487, folders 1-19, OGPRUS.

45. Letter from Anthony Vega to Eulalio Torres, January 27, 1960; microfilm reel 32: Regional and Field Office Farm Labor Files; box 859, folder 1-box 860, folder 11, OGPRUS.

46. Letter to Jorge Colón, September 19, 1969; microfilm reel 3: Growers Association Files; box 509, folder 14-box 511, folder 14, OGPRUS.

47. “Minutes of the Consumer Participation Meeting of the Camp Windsor Council,” June 22, 1972; microfilm reel 35: Regional and Field Office Farm Labor Files; box 865, folder 5-box 868, folder 4, OGPRUS.

48. “Declaración de los trabajadores bajo contrato [sic] con Green Giant Co.,” undated; microfilm reel 11: Growers Association Files; box 647, folder 1-box 648, folder 15, OGPRUS.

Another report from Hartford dwelt on the cultural differences between Puerto Ricans and Americans regarding food:

The problem lies in that what “*solid food*” [emphasis in the original] [means] for the Shade [Tobacco Growers Association] are soups for the worker. Soups for Americans are broth; soups for Puerto Ricans are boiled rice with chicken, much softer than solid. They allege that’s not solid food. Because of the enormous quantity prepared at Shade, it can’t be tasty.

Most of them don’t eat chili con carne, which comes in a one-gallon container.

They don’t like the various types of spaghetti and macaroni, also heated from gallon containers.

All of the food for lunch, except for sandwiches, is semi-solid or semi-liquid. The workers expected a solid lunch with rice and beans.⁴⁹

The Migration Division’s representatives constantly pleaded with the employers to offer meals that better reflected the workers’ cultural tastes.

In at least one documented case, an enterprising Puerto Rican named Carlos Arroyo established a clandestine food retailing business at the Curtis Burns camp. According to a field representative, Arroyo had smuggled numerous groceries into his barracks, including ten boxes of pig’s tripe (*mondongo criollo*); ten boxes of Corona Malt beverage; twenty-two boxes of guava, orange, soursop (*guanábana*), pear, peach, and apricot juice; two boxes of sausages; two boxes of rice and chicken soup (*asopado*); and fourteen boxes of *Rico* cookies.⁵⁰

TRAVELLING TO “*LAS AMÉRICAS*”: THE DILEMMAS OF EMOTIONAL TRANSNATIONALISM

In this section, I focus on the subjective impacts of uprooting farm workers from their home communities. I build on Elizabeth Aranda’s (2007) work on emotional transnationalism, highlighting how migrants sustain affective attachments to their places of origin. In particular, Aranda calls attention to the personal challenges posed by physical separation, “the empty spaces of migration,” and cultural alienation. In its own way, the Migration Division recognized the emotional dimensions of migration, using the nationalistic rhetoric typical of the 1970s:

49. Letter from Gilberto Camacho to Aurelio Segundo, March 27, 1973; microfilm reel 14: Growers Association Files; box 652, folder 5-box 654, folder 12, OGPRUS.

50. Letter to Harry Vazquez Gallardo, December 12, 1967; microfilm reel 3: Growers Association Files; box 509, folder 14-box 511, folder 14, OGPRUS.

the Puerto Rican people are composed of two parts: almost halves, divided between those who reside in the island-motherland and those who live in the continental United States ... both communities maintain affective and material ties, which are constant: they worry about each other; they share joys and tragedies; they feel affected by the political and social currents on both sides of the sea. In sum, they feel like a single people, a single identity, Puerto Ricans all.⁵¹

Several letters written by farm workers and their families in Puerto Rico articulate the emotional strains on separated couples and households. Inquiries about estranged relatives in the United States were common. Lidia Esther Berríos, a resident of Villa Palmeras in Santurce, was concerned about Rafael López Berríos, a worker for the Glassboro Growers Association in New Jersey: “the writer of this letter is his mother, who wants to find out why they treat him so badly over there ... [H]is employer has something against him, he treats him like a slave they treat him like a thief and like a nobody.”⁵²

One letter reflects family tensions concerning the decision to migrate. Daniel Medina Cruz was a sixteen-year-old migrant worker in New Jersey: “I came to work on my own with a contract with the Labor Department of Puerto Rico. My dad and mom called to ask me to go back to P.R. I won’t go back to P.R. because I want to work and fulfill my contract and make money this is my decision and nobody has forced me to do it.”⁵³

Some migrants lost touch with their loved ones. As part of its many duties, the Migration Division served as a transnational liaison between farm workers and their families in Puerto Rico. During the 1970s, the agency even advertised in New York’s newspaper *El Diario/La Prensa*, to relay messages to migrants from their relatives. Several letters attempted to reestablish rapport with departed workers, such as one penned by Edna Luz Arriaga, from Cataño, which began: “Baby: The present [purpose] of this little letter is to know about you and how it’s going over there I as for me and your son I’ll tell you that we’re both down with a cold.”⁵⁴

Other correspondents reported serious illnesses and deaths in the family:

51. ELA, Departamento del Trabajo, División de Migración, “Informe anual,” 1975-76, pp. 2-3; microfilm reel 54: Annual Reports; box 2737, folder 6, OGPRUS.

52. Letter from Lidia Esther Berríos, July 7, 1969; microfilm reel 17: Growers Association Files; box 658, folder 1-box 658, folder 22, OGPRUS.

53. Letter from Daniel Medina Cruz, September 30, 1971; microfilm reel 32: Regional and Field Office Farm Labor Files; box 859, folder 1-box 860, folder 11, OGPRUS.

54. Letter from Edna Luz Arriaga to Horacio Rodríguez, October 11, 1973; microfilm reel 4: Growers Association Files; box 511, folder 15-box 513, folder 5, OGPRUS.

Mr. Daniel Torres

Brother this letter has the goal of greeting you and at the same time give you some bad news from our mother on the 15th of this month she died which was yesterday. Agustín Paco Chee and Rafi are already in Puerto Rico today Toña Pedro arrives. So if you want to see Picto well I think when you receive this letter and it's too late you won't be able to see her. With no other news your sister Yuly who loves you and take it easy don't do anything silly.

Your sister Yuly

Oh and Pito is also gravely ill he's in the hospital he was throwing up blood through his nose and mouth.⁵⁵

The most heartbreaking messages involved abandoned wives and children. Lydia Acosta Estrada, from Gurabo, was searching for her husband, Iluminado Acosta Jiménez:

My painted lips

My dearest husband:

I wrote this [letter] without receiving any [response]. where I'll tell you that your children they're fine in health. Thank God and I wish the same to you together with your fellow workers. As to myself I'll tell you that I've been nervous and [in]tranquil because I haven't heard from you. Look daddy you know I suffer a lot because of you because I don't know [about your life?] I'm your wife I want to know about you since I don't know your whereabouts tell me what's happened to you since I received a single letter from you and I haven't received anything else from you ... When you come back you'll find me losing weight and thinking about your trip I hope you won't make me suffer anymore my sweetheart you know that I'm crazy about you and I please you in every way My beautiful sweetheart I think I'm the only woman who has understood you ... Look I went to the State Fund and they had the address of the owners of the farms and I got this one from over there so that's why I wrote to this director of the farm who's trying to look for this gentleman who works in the state of Indiana, named Iluminado Acosta Jimenez ... I look for you everywhere. That's so you know that I love you, kisses and hugs, from your children my kisses and hugs from your wife Lydia who loves you forever. Who won't ever forget you Answer soon by all means I await your response.⁵⁶

55. Letter to Daniel Torres, April 16, 1974; microfilm reel 12: Growers Association Files; box 649, folder 1-box 650, folder 16, OGPRUS.

56. Letter from Lydia Acosta Estrada to Iluminado Acosta Jiménez, September 12, 1975; microfilm reel 4: Growers Association Files; box 511, folder 15-box 513, folder 5, OGPRUS.

The Commonwealth office located the husband at the Curtis Burns camp in Rochester, New York.

The Migration Division even acted as a bilingual social service agency. In one instance, a migration specialist served as translator for four Puerto Rican workers accused of molesting three girls in Moorestown, New Jersey. The judge dismissed the charges after hearing the girls' testimony. The Commonwealth official commented: "not every person who speaks Spanish and English can act as interpreter in court in the best interest of our workers. It takes a person with a thorough knowledge of both languages plus a full understanding of how our workers thinks [*sic*], act and react."⁵⁷

Another case involved a dysfunctional family, referred to the Division by Catholic Charities in Reading, Pennsylvania. According to the migration specialist in Hamburg, Eugenia Galán threatened to "sleep in the street with my six children rather than keep on living with this old man [the husband]. Last night he was about to strangle himself with a string of rope tied to the bed, with a tight knot around the neck, and I think that someone who dares to do that, is capable of killing anyone. When the son cut the string, he said he was going to buy a revolver to kill me. I want to leave here right away." The woman insisted on going back to Puerto Rico, because "I don't like *las Américas*." The Commonwealth official took her to the Salvation Army Women's Lodge.⁵⁸ Galán later changed her mind about returning to the Island.

One of the most poignant examples of the human toll of transnational migration is the case of Carlos Torres, who worked in a tomato farm in Greshville, Pennsylvania. On August 20, 1959, Luis Rivera Hernández, another Puerto Rican worker, shot and killed Torres, after arguing over a prostitute in their barracks. The migration specialist in Hamburg served as interpreter for the accused. Rivera Hernández pleaded guilty to voluntary manslaughter and was sentenced to six to twelve years of imprisonment. The deceased man's sister, Georgina Hernández, claimed the body and his meager personal belongings:

A jacket
 A shirt
 A black suit
 A pair of brown shoes
 A red hat
 A belt
 A can of hair ointment

57. Godofredo Janer, "Progress Report on Projects," September 15, 1969; microfilm reel 9: Growers Association Files; box 519, folder 9-box 521, folder 8, OGPRUS.

58. Letter from Roberto Mendoza to E. Torres, March 2, 1959; microfilm reel 48: Reports; boxes 889-890, OGPRUS.

A box of cigarettes
An old wallet
A can of shoe polish
A tie⁵⁹

COMPARING TRANSNATIONAL COLONIAL STATES
AND TRANSNATIONAL NATION-STATES

The postwar Puerto Rican experience of government-sponsored migration prefigured what are now known as “transnational nation-states.” Georges Fouron and Nina Glick Schiller (2001:19-20) define a transnational nation-state as “the reconstitution of the concept of the state so that both the nation and the authority of the government it represents extend beyond the state’s territorial boundaries and incorporate dispersed populations.” Transnational nation-states claim “that [their] emigrants and their descendants remain an integral and intimate part of their ancestral homeland, even if they are legal citizens of another state” (Fouron & Glick Schiller 2001:19).

As Luis Guarnizo (1998) has shown, many contemporary migrant-sending states, including the Dominican Republic and Mexico, have redefined the meaning of citizenship and nationality to integrate diasporas into their countries of origin (see also Itzigsohn & Villacrés 2008). Among other measures, transnational nation-states have restructured their ministerial and consular bureaucracies, recognized dual citizenship, extended the right to vote abroad, permitted candidates to run for public office from overseas, provided state services to nationals living abroad, and reinforced expatriates’ sense of membership in the sending countries. Peggy Levitt and Rafael de la Dehesa (2003) argue that transnational-nation states follow such policies because of the growing significance of remittances as well as changing norms of governance across state boundaries. In addition, migrants often organize themselves to participate in homeland politics and press for the sending state’s recognition of their citizenship rights.

After World War II, the Puerto Rican government adopted several transnational migration policies, though it did not grant voting rights to Puerto Ricans in the United States. (As noted before, Puerto Ricans on and off the Island share U.S. citizenship, albeit with different rights and obligations.) Since 1947, the Island’s bureaucracy “followed its migrant citizens” to the U.S. mainland and promoted their adjustment to an “ethnologically alien” setting. In particular, the Farm Labor Program walked a tightrope between defining Puerto Ricans as “domestic labor” and preserving their “foreign” culture and language in the United States.

59. Testimony of Georgina Hernández, August 25, 1959; microfilm reel 48: Reports; boxes 889-890, OGRUS.

After 1952, the Commonwealth government expanded its “transnational” reach, from promoting job opportunities and enforcing labor contracts, to providing legal defense and health insurance, as well as translation and education services. As Ismael García-Colón (2008:285) observes, the Migration Division “acted contradictorily as a labor organization and, at the same time, as a hindrance to independent labor organizing efforts.” Moreover, the agency had a vested interest in maintaining a regular labor flow to the mainland because of its economic benefits for the Island. At a time when remittances were not as carefully monitored as they are today, farm workers sent nearly US\$ 292 million to the Island between 1947 and 1959.⁶⁰ Finally, the Migration Division operated as a liaison between the Puerto Rican government and city, state, and federal agencies in the United States.

Compared to transnational nation-states such as the Dominican Republic, the Puerto Rican government has not fully incorporated its émigrés into homeland politics. Perhaps the most controversial issue is how the diaspora can contribute to solving Puerto Rico’s “colonial” status. Until now, all local elections, referenda, and plebiscites have been restricted to U.S. citizens who reside on the Island. Nonetheless, Puerto Ricans in the United States have reiterated their wish to participate in defining the Island’s political future (Falcón 1993, 2007).⁶¹ On April 29, 2010, the U.S. House of Representatives approved a bill to celebrate a new plebiscite on Puerto Rico’s status. The Puerto Rico Democracy Act of 2009 (H.R. 2499), sponsored by Resident Commissioner Pedro Pierluisi, would grant the right to vote in the plebiscite to all U.S. citizens born in Puerto Rico, regardless of their current residence. If approved by the Senate, this proposal would allow stateside Puerto Ricans to take part for the first time in the status debate. As of October 2010, however, the Senate’s Committee on Energy and Natural Resources had virtually paralyzed the bill.

“FOREIGN IN A DOMESTIC SENSE”:
THE RISE OF A TRANSNATIONAL COLONIAL STATE

In this article, I have elaborated the concept of a “transnational colonial state.” This category includes dependent territories with large migrant populations in metropolitan countries and which continue to regard them as part

60. Monserrat, “Suggestions for a New Approach to Migration. Confidential Memorandum to Luis Muñoz Marín,” February 9, 1961, p. 35; section V: Governor of Puerto Rico, 1949-64; series 1: General Correspondence; box 137: Departments; folder 9: Labor – Migration Division; FLMM.

61. See also José Delgado, Voto puertorriqueño podría ser decisivo, *El Nuevo Día*, October 13, 2008, pp. 46-47.

of the colonial nation. Although residents of the dependent territory and its metropole share the same citizenship, the former are often treated as foreigners in the “mother country.” In this scenario, the legal boundaries between sending and receiving countries are blurred, while their cultural borders remain intractable to those who move back and forth. Puerto Ricans in the United States and Antilleans in the Netherlands are cases in point.

Although a transnational colonial state lacks sovereignty, it extends its reach to the metropolitan state. At the same time, it must follow metropolitan laws and regulations about immigration, citizenship rights, social benefits, and other public policies. This insider/outsider logic differentiates transnational colonial states such as Puerto Rico from independent ones such as the Dominican Republic. It also underlines the basic analogies among the overseas territories of the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, and the United States. For example, all citizens of the dependent Caribbean share the right of abode, as well as access to welfare and social rights, in their metropolitan countries. Not surprisingly, migration rates from nonsovereign territories are much higher than from independent states (see Cervantes-Rodríguez *et al.* 2009, Clegg & Pantojas-García 2009, De Jong & Kruijt 2005).

Clearly, the *Estado Libre Asociado* did not end Puerto Rico’s colonial dependence on the United States, although it did provide greater local autonomy. On the one hand, Commonwealth status allowed – perhaps even required – the Island’s public authorities to intervene on behalf of migrants to the mainland. On the other hand, the Island’s government must comply with all applicable federal laws and regulations. The Farm Labor Program best exemplifies the Island’s “transnational” migration policies, which facilitated the transfer of “surplus hands” to the mainland after World War II. The large-scale displacement of agricultural workers established the earliest settlement patterns of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. Northeast as well as the circulation of labor that persists today. To promote the recruitment of Puerto Rican farm workers, Commonwealth officials argued that they should be given preference over foreigners in the United States. Still, many U.S. employers considered Puerto Ricans “alien workers,” especially because they spoke little English and practiced a “foreign” culture, including their eating habits. According to a Commonwealth official in Hamburg, “the language barrier” was “the number one problem” for Puerto Rico’s migrant workers.⁶²

In sum, Puerto Ricans illustrate one of the main dilemmas of colonial subjects in their metropolitan countries: although legally domestic, they are often viewed as culturally foreign. Thus, the Puerto Rican diaspora is both transnational, because it involves crossing the cultural borders between the Island and the U.S. mainland, and colonial, because it does not entail traveling across

62. Speech by Roberto Mendoza, October 13, 1959; microfilm reel 48: Reports; boxes 889-890, OGPUS.

the legal boundaries between independent states. This ambiguity is the long-term consequence of the oxymoronic legal doctrine that Puerto Rico “belongs to but is not a part of” the United States. Such a doctrine, established at the beginning of the twentieth century, laid the ground for a massive transnational colonial migration during the second half of the century.

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