The Impact of Social Networks and Human Capital on Puerto Rican and Dominican Migrants' United States Destination Selections

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Introduction

Destination choice provides critical insight about migration patterns and migrant experiences. Migrants carefully select their destination choice to ease their transition and to provide them with the best advantages in the host society. Not only is the actual destination choice a telling piece of information, but it is also essential on a macro scale to know how and why migrants make similar (or different) location selections. Knowing the typical destination choices, when there is a change, flags other important demographic shifts.

Geographic concentration is the main indicator of social networks and is often an inevitable result of immigration (Alba and Denton 2004). However, the growing trend in migrants' – and particularly Latinos' -- destination choices is a move away from the typical Northeastern and Midwestern migrant destinations to "new gateways" in the South and Southwest, along with an increased number of migrants who choose nonmetropolitan areas (Alba and Denton 2004; Singer 2004). Puerto Ricans and Dominicans have long been established in New York City, yet concentrations of both groups have been growing in other areas. Moreover, recent decades have witnessed a large-scale out-migration of Puerto Ricans from New York to other parts of the country (Foulkes and Newbold 2000; Rivera-Batiz 2002). This paper explores

where Puerto Ricans and Dominicans fit into larger trends and patterns of Latino dispersal from traditional gateways as well as the factors influencing those decisions.

Background

While this analysis focuses on a range on individual-level determinants of migrants' destination selection, including documentation status and stocks of human capital, I place particular emphasis on evaluating the role of social networks in predicting where in the United States Puerto Rican and Dominican immigrants locate.

Having access to social networks, along with the size and composition of those networks, are key factors influencing the decision to migrate and destination selection. Friends and family who have been to the United States can provide critical information about how to get there (especially if one lacks proper documentation), can provide a place to stay and information about job opportunities, and can help ease the newcomer's transition to life in the host society (Massey and Espinosa 1997; Massey et al. 1987; Massey 1990a; Massey 1990b; Choldin 1973; Boswell 1984; Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Ebaugh and Curry 2000). The importance of social networks and the information (and social capital) they can transmit to the home community is made clear by the Cumulative Process of Migration theory, which argues that as a the number of linkages to the destination rise, migration becomes a self-perpetuating process (Massey et al. 1987; Massey and Espinosa 1997; Massey 1990a; Massey 1990b).

Espinosa and Massey (1999) argue that it is not just the *number* of ties that a migrant has, but it is also the *closeness* of those ties that help to predict migration decisions, a notion that emerges out of Granovetter's (1973) work on the "strength of weak ties." In other words, the size and composition of one's social network may influence different kinds of decisions; "strong" ties, i.e., those with close family members, may have more information or social capital that is

already known to (or available to) the potential migrant, while weaker ties may provide access to a broader range of opportunities. As a result, social network effects should hold for connections with both family and friends. While some friendship ties may be on the order of "fictive kin" (e.g., *compadrazgo*, *padrinos*, *madrinas*, etc.; Ebaugh and Curry 2000), others may be more distant, and thus "weaker," thereby providing information otherwise inaccessible to the potential migrant. Weaker ties may also entail fewer negative aspects of social capital, including excess claims on group members, restrictions on individual freedoms, and downward leveling norms (Portes 1998:15). Conceptualizing friendship ties in this way – i.e., separating family from friendship ties -- expands traditional views of social networks to allow for a more dynamic and possibly more accurate source of influence on destination selection.

Documentation

Lacking legal documentation increases migrants' dependency on social networks and on their human capital skills for their eventual success in the host country (Espinosa 1997; Espinosa and Massey 1999; Massey and Espinosa 1997; Fairchild and Simpson 2004). Having an undocumented status limits migrants' options, making them more likely to select a destination with an already-established co-ethnic network. For example, undocumented Dominicans are more likely to work in an ethnic niche than their legal counterparts, an issue that Puerto Rican migrants (as United States citizens) have the liberty to contend with in different ways (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991).

Human Capital

English language proficiency is one of the standard measures of acculturation and potential for success among migrants to the United States (Alba and Denton 2004; Blank and Torrecilha 1998; Massey et al. 1987; Singer 2004; Stevens 1994; Foulkes and Newbold 2000). It

is also one of the more prominent aspects of human capital. First-time migrants by definition have no migration-specific human capital to draw from, so their facility (or lack thereof) with the English language is possibly central to their destination selection. Greater English language proficiency allows migrants more flexibility in their occupation and destination choices since they are not as dependent upon the ethnic enclave or other co-ethnics to establish themselves.

Education is another relevant aspect of human capital that relates to destination selection. Education leads to increased mobility and access to opportunities that are not necessarily dependent upon the ethnic enclave or co-ethnics. Migrants with increased human capital in the form of education are more likely to have had better opportunities in their home country, are better connected to find a more lucrative and/or prestigious job, and are not as tightly tied to having the ethnic enclave determine their destination selection. As evidence of this, immigrants with increased years of education have an increased likelihood of living outside of the top 25 SMSAs (Bartel 1989; Foulkes and Newbold 2000; Neuman and Tienda 1994). Education also has further-reaching consequences since the odds of return migration to the country of origin decrease as education increases (Massey and Espinosa 1997). Also, increased levels of education increase the odds of internal migration once migrants have settled in the United States, further demonstrating the flexibility that education affords migrants (Neuman and Tienda 1994).

Occupational status in the country of origin is another predictor of destination choice in the host country as immigrants are likely to continue to be employed in the same work capacity in the host country (Fairchild and Simpson 2004). Portes' (1995) Embeddedness of Economics theory demonstrates how occupational background relates to economic and social opportunities, which in turn connects to migration destination decisions. Following Sjaasstad's (1962) model, settlement patterns are a function of costs and benefits, as perceived by

immigrants (Dunlevy 1991:55; Gurak and Kritz 2000). If the costs of selecting one destination are overshadowed by the benefits (perhaps a job offering a higher salary) of a different location, migrants will presumably choose the latter.

Expected Findings/Hypotheses

Based on the preceding discussion, I expect social networks, documentation status, and human capital to have significant effects on the destination selection of migrants. More specifically, migrants with higher numbers of social ties (familial or non-kin connections) in the United States are more likely to choose a non-New York destination. As migrants increase their social ties, those networks expand, leading to greater variety in the locations of those ties (Massey 1986). With few exceptions, as an immigrant group's length of time in the United States increases, that group is more likely to be spread out geographically, thereby leading to a more diverse range of destination choices (Lieberson and Waters 1987). Migrants with any form of legal documentation are more likely to select a non-New York destination. Documentation creates opportunities for alternative destination selections by expanding migrants' opportunities to those outside of co-ethnic social networks (Espinosa 1997; Espinosa and Massey 1999; Massey and Espinosa 1997; Fairchild and Simpson 2004). The greater proficiency a migrant has with the English language, the more likely s/he will select a non-New York destination. Again, the migrant will not be dependent upon choosing a location with a strong co-ethnic network to provide opportunities for success. Similarly, the wider range of opportunities that follow from having more years of education and having a pre-migration skilled occupation will also increase the likelihood of choosing a non-New York destination.

Data/Methods

The analysis focuses on data from the Latin American Migration Project (LAMP), an ethnosurvey modeled on the Mexican Migration Project. This data set interviews respondents almost exclusively in their country of origin and asks a variety of questions about migration experiences including basic demographic information, questions regarding the household members, and migration experiences, among others.

I examine migration history data by appending migration history information reported by householders with U.S. migration experience from the Dominican and Puerto Rican PERS files onto these respondents' records in the MIG files (combined N = 440). Since the odds of taking a first trip to the United States are significantly higher for people who have at least one relative with experience in the United States, and social capital is most important in predicting the odds of taking a first undocumented trip, yet less important for subsequent trips, I focus on migrants' first trips (Espinosa 1997; Espinosa and Massey 1999).

Among the independent variables used to predict destination choice include the respondents' occupation in their home country, the number of years of education, their documentation status, along with their English language proficiency, all measured at the time of the first trip. I measure social networks following Espinosa and Massey's (1999) operationalization of the concept of social ties by taking into account not only the number of ties, but also the closeness of those ties. Additional controls will include gender and marital status, the latter measured again at the time of the first trip (cf. White et al. 2005).

Due to the dichotomous nature of the dependent variable (New York versus non-New York destination selection), the analysis relies on basic logistic regression techniques.

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