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Latino Migration within New York State: *Motivations and Settlement Experiences*

Katherine W. Platt
and Lina P. Rincón

Encouraged by recent literature on internal migration and the increasing evidence of new waves of migrants settling in new destinations throughout the United States (Kritz and Nogle 1994, 2001; Suro & Singer 2002; Durand et al. 2005), this study focuses on understanding why and how Latinos decide to migrate within New York State. We examine the reasons that push Latinos to migrate internally hoping to find alternative explanations from those provided by neoclassical economics approaches which argue that migration decision-making processes are based on rational cost-benefit calculations (Massey et al. 1997). We hope these explanations contribute to grounded policy and program recommendations seeking to improve Latino life in the Albany area and in New York State.

We present evidence on the variety of reasons why Latinos choose Albany as their new destination, as well as testimonies on their settlement experiences in the past fifteen years (1994 - 2009). The reasons they give unveil the diversity of interests and backgrounds of Latinos that have migrated internally in New York State. This diversity is explained by motivations that are directly linked to life course expectations shaped by the migratory experiences of families, the social and cultural capital migrants bring with them, as well as their goals of upward mobility (Padilla 1998).

Our findings reveal that Latinos migrating to the Albany area are not only pulled by economic opportunities (i.e. available

jobs, greater possibilities of upward mobility, etc.) but are also driven by emotional factors. We argue that these motivations are dictated by values and beliefs shaped by life course expectations (e.g. raising a family, reconnecting with friends and family, etc.). Moreover, we find that Latino motives for internal migration and their posterior settlement experiences vary according to differences in socio-economic status and previous migration history. For example, non-professionals were more interested in finding a quieter place to raise their families or reuniting with friends, while professionals were more interested in professional development and upward mobility.

Along these lines, this report is a contribution to understanding the motives for internal migration from a cultural perspective, highlighting what Cornelius has called “culture of migration:” “a set of interrelated perceptions, attitudinal orientations, socialization processes and social structure, including transnational social networks, growing out of the international migratory experience, which constantly encourage, validate and facilitate participation in this movement” (1992: 95).

In this report we track the “culture of migration” for internal Latino migrants settling in Albany, New York in order to find qualitative indicators that explain the ways in which the integration of migrants to the mainstream society might occur. This case is important not only because of its proximity to New York City, which is one of the main traditional gateways for international



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migration, but also because race dynamics and community formation in New York State destinations differ from other destinations analyzed in the literature such as Kennett Square, Pennsylvania or the Shenandoah Valley in Harrisburg, Virginia where Latino communities formed rapidly and tightly (Lattanzi 2005; Zarrugh 2008).

In the following sections, we briefly discuss some of the new destinations and internal migration literature informing our research questions. We then proceed to discuss our methodology. Lastly, we describe and analyze the migration motivations and settlement experiences of our interviewees.

Internal Migration in New York State and Surrounding Areas

The literature on internal migration seeks to explain the degree to which migration occurs internally, the factors that motivate or discourage it, and whether the foreign-born are more likely to migrate than the native-born. These explanations have led to different theories that not only speak about demographic trends on outmigration, but also aim to explain social dynamics and patterns taking place in the receiving destination, namely racial tensions, discrimination, segregation, and nativist responses.

Frey (1995) argues that the native-born are more likely to migrate internally than the foreigner. This is known as “white flight,” i.e., an increasing tendency of native whites to migrate from locations that receive large numbers of migrants because they are seen as a threat to themselves or to their communities. Kritz and Gurak (2001) dispute Frey’s position by arguing that demographic evidence shows that natives are more likely to stay in states with high immigration inflows than those with low immigration. Conversely, McHugh (1989) argues that the foreign-born are more likely to stay put because recently arrived international migrants are not familiar with the receiving context and their language skills are not good. Therefore, they tend to “concentrate in ethnic enclaves for social and economic support” (438). This suggests that social networks play an important role in the consolidation of ethnic enclaves and thus in arresting internal migration.

Borjas, et al. (1992) claim that people who are more likely to migrate internally are those whose skills do not match the skills required in the location where they reside. This makes sense because in order to maximize labor gains, migrants must reside in a location that rewards their skills. Rogers

and Henning (1999) argue that internal migration of the native- and foreign-born varies by geographical region: foreigners are more likely to migrate from the Midwest, relocate to the West, or stay in the West; natives are more likely to migrate from the Northeast and relocate to the South. Furthermore, the foreign-born coming from Latin America and Asia are more likely to concentrate in ethnic enclaves in different geographical regions of the U.S. than those coming from Europe.

Findings for New York State suggest that residents living in the state are 32% more likely to migrate within the state compared to other states in the country (Kritz and Nogle 2001). Increased internal migration is said to be more prevalent among the foreign-born since they already have a migration history and experience, hence are more agreeable “to leave social capital behind and seek opportunity elsewhere” (Kritz and Nogle 1994: 511).

Some authors have stressed the emergence of new migrant destinations in New York State as a result of the high demand for jobs outside traditional destinations. Suro and Singer (2002) argue that for the 1990–2000 period labor demand transferred from central cities such as New York, Washington, D.C. and Atlanta to the suburbs and other places on the fringes of metropolitan areas. But Latino migration to suburban areas and the fringes of metropolitan areas can be explained not just by a rising supply of low-skilled jobs, but, as Padilla (1998) has shown, also by other factors such as more affordable lifestyles or the pull of family networks.

The pattern of internal migration from metropolitan to suburban areas is explained by some as the result of a growing demand in the construction, service, government, managerial, production and technology jobs in these new areas. Bose (2006) argues that in New York State, in cities such as Albany and Rochester, managerial and government jobs are currently attracting educated and highly skilled Latinos such as Cubans, Central, and South Americans. While low-skilled jobs do not appear to be in high supply in these cities, this appears to be the case in New England. Intrastate migration in Massachusetts dates from the 1970s and 1980s when Puerto Ricans and Dominicans started migrating internally with Lowell and Lawrence as main destinations. These cities offered them work in the textile and shoe industries (Borges-Méndez 1993).

Internal migration history to Lowell and Lawrence, as well as to other cities in Massachusetts, informs the debate on

the emergence and consolidation of ethnic enclaves or immigrant communities that, in the context of increased demand for labor, attract other Latinos to migrate within and between states. Glasser (2006) argues that consolidated networks have served as incentives for Dominicans to migrate to Waterbury, CT where they not only reunite with their families and make ethnic enclaves grow, but also consolidate ethnic businesses that help compensate for lower wages in other service or production jobs in the area.

In addition, Padilla (1998) notes that oftentimes when Latinos migrate to an ethnic enclave or immigrant community their chances of making better wages or moving up in the social ladder are low. This suggests that economic calculations in the decision to migrate may be either off the mark or absent. In a study on the consequences of internal migration in the Latino life course for different areas including Massachusetts and New York, she found that when internally migrating, Latinos in the receiving city did not improve their economic status significantly compared to those that did not migrate. Bose and Rincón (2009) reach similar conclusions in a study on Latinos migrating from New York City to Albany, New York finding that, socioeconomically, migration expectations often differ from actual outcomes in the receiving destinations.

Compared to research on international migration, the literature on internal migration is underdeveloped. Interestingly enough, most research done on internal and intrastate migration thus far, focuses on the Northeast of the United States and especially New York. However, there is more yet to be learned concerning the emergence of new Latino destinations in New York State.

New Migrant Destinations

There is an extensive literature on new migrant destinations that mostly focuses on push and pull factors, as well as migrant settlement experiences in these new destinations. Literature in this area has also looked at the responses of the receiving society to the settlement of Latinos in places where historically they have been relatively absent. A great deal of the literature on new migrant destinations explains the origins of current internal migration tracing it back to immigration reform and the long history of immigration to the United States. Examples are the 1942-1964 Bracero Program and the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (De la Garza 1993; Jones 1995; Lattanzi 2005; Glasser 2006).

On the other hand, recent studies have also focused on understanding the role of family networks as a factor that influences many young Latino families and heads of households to relocate in order to reunite with family members, oftentimes regardless of whether the move produces significant upward socioeconomic mobility or not (Padilla 1998; Lattanzi 2005; Zarrugh 2008).

Pull factors such as acquiring a more affordable lifestyle, better education opportunities, and quieter and safer places to live in the receiving locations also count when deciding to migrate internally. This is true about Latinos (Padilla 1998; Camayd-Freixas 2005). In the case of New York State, there is evidence that Latinos tend to settle in Albany not only seeking higher-paying jobs, but to reduce living costs (Bose 2006).

Data and Methods

Research Setting

Our research setting is Albany, the capital of New York State. Albany is the fourth oldest city (f. 1614) in the country, and the oldest in the Northeast. Albany is relevant as a new migrant destination given its proximity to New York City and its role as the political center of the state. Albany attracts highly educated individuals to work in state government. This in turn creates demand for other jobs in the service area in places such as restaurants and hotels. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the 2005 to 2007 estimated total population of Albany was 90,382. Latinos were 5,507 or 6.09% of the total. The relatively small population in Albany gives the city a small town feeling. Due to its small population and the lack of cultural and social activities (compared to New York City), residents refer to Albany as “Smallbany.”

Sampling & Data Collection

We conducted twenty-five semi-structured interviews with Latinos living in Albany and surrounding areas. We used quota sampling and a snowball recruitment technique to identify Latinos who migrated from any point in New York State to Albany within the past 15 years. Each participant was asked questions about their migratory experience, their decision to migrate, and their current experience in Albany. These questions aimed to collect demographic information, assess past migration experiences, and whether class status, nationality, or migrant generation were related to specific migratory decisions and settlement experiences.

All study participants were 18 years of age or older. We excluded college and graduate students since we were more interested in participants who migrated to Albany to look for jobs or to reunite with their families and because we assumed that students are not necessarily coming to Albany to stay. However, we included participants who initially relocated to Albany to pursue their education and later on chose to stay in the city.

We are aware that there may be a selection bias to our sample. We also view the statements of our interviewees with a dose of caution since their ostensible reasons to migrate may vary from their real reasons. In addition, their recollection could be imprecise given the time lapse since migration. Our findings regarding the migration decision making process are based on retrospective perceptions, stated in what Mills refers to as “vocabularies of motive” which establishes that there is not necessarily a cause-effect relationship between the motive and the action of migration (Mills 1940: 905).

Data Analysis

We used a grounded theory analysis to find different patterns and relationships in the statements of participants to classify their motivations and experiences. First, data was classified through simple words that evoke common mental images, scenes, experiences, emotions or sensations; then, these classifications led to creating categories that encompass repetitive phenomena; finally, by comparing and contrasting all categories together a set of concepts was developed. This final procedure led to an explanatory framework based on patterns in which people organize their lived experience in the migratory process. Our aim was to produce a theoretical frame “that perfectly fits a set of data” (Glaser and Strauss 1978: 115).

Demographics

Our sample consisted of twenty-five Latinos: 11 women and 14 men. More than half of our sample (n=13) was between the ages of 36 and 45; 24 percent (n=6) was between the ages of 26 and 35; 20 percent (n=5) was 46 years and older; and one informant was between the ages of 18 and 25. Eight percent (n=2) of our interviewees reported high school as their highest level of education, whereas 24 percent (n=6) mentioned having less than high school. Another 40 percent (n=10) had completed college or some college, and 28 percent (n=7) had graduate degrees. Of those reporting an individual income, 40 percent (n=10) said they earned between \$10,000 and \$30,000, 20 percent (n=5) earned between \$30,000 and

\$50,000 and 32 percent (n=8) earned \$50,000 or more per year. Two informants did not report any annual individual income.

Regarding employment, 48 percent (n= 12) mentioned having a professional job—project manager, financial job, professor—and the rest mentioned having non-professional jobs—cook, waiter, hair stylist. Thirty six (n=9) percent migrated to Albany within the past one to three years, whereas 28 percent (n=7) did so within the past four to six years and 36 percent (n=9) within the past seven to fifteen years.

The majority of participants came to Albany from New York City (80% - n= 20), whereas the rest came from places such as Buffalo, Kingston, New Paltz, and Westchester County. Puerto Ricans composed 44 percent (n=11) of our interviewees, 24 percent (n=6) were Dominican, 28 percent (n=7) were Central and South American and 4 percent (n=1) were Cuban.

Findings

We identified two types of intrastate Latino migrants coming to Albany: a professional class and a working- or non-professional class. The professional class migrated to Albany mainly seeking employment and professional development or a higher education degree and later, as is often likely, stayed for employment. The working-class migrated motivated by reasons connected to their life course expectations such as seeking a better place to raise their children, following relatives who moved into the area earlier, and looking for a more quiet and secure place to live. Some in this group were often motivated by perceived job and networking opportunities created by perceptions their families and friends already living in Albany had about the job market. Within this group we found some ex-convicts who had settled in Albany after prison and who participated in a renowned local rehabilitation program.

Professional Class

Those Latinos who fit into the professional class category mostly came from other locations in upstate New York. The criteria we used to classify participants in this group had to do with either the kind of job that they had or their level of education (Associate’s Degree and above). Participants in this category held jobs as project managers, professors, upper level secretaries, or as officers in the financial sector. Forty eight percent of our sample (n=12) were classified in this category.

These are some profile descriptions of participants within this category: Mabel (all names have been changed for confidentiality), a native Colombian, accepted a position as a Project Manager at the SUNY headquarters right after graduating from SUNY-New Paltz; Carlos, a second-generation Cuban, migrated from Kingston to Albany to continue his job as a union organizer; and, Francisco, a Peruvian, migrated from Buffalo to Albany after accepting a job promotion from his current employment at a bank. None of these individuals are native New Yorkers, but migrated into the state seeking higher education and employment. Later on, they relocated to Albany looking for increased salaries and better professional opportunities or to live with their spouses who had migrated seeking job opportunities.

Gilberto, a Puerto Rican born and raised in New York City, moved to Albany specifically to attend a Master's degree program at SUNY-Albany. Rita, a Peruvian-born who grew up in Westchester County, relocated to Albany to get her undergraduate and later on two Master's degrees at SUNY-Albany. Both Gilberto and Rita were raised in New York State and went to Albany to pursue higher education degrees. Both of them decided to stay in Albany after graduation because they found employment there.

Working-Class

Those Latinos who fit the working-class category migrated to Albany mainly motivated by emotional or life course expectations (i.e. social and ethnic networks, lifestyle change, perceived work opportunities, etc.). Some chose to come to Albany either following perceived or actual job opportunities: the issue of perceived vs. actual job opportunities is paramount, given that the former are related to a social network phenomenon in which participants are influenced by other internal migrants who have either created small networks of friends or employers in Albany. Fifty-two percent (n=13) of our sample fit the working-class or non-professional category.

Often, as reported by participants, they would move to Albany and spend the first months of their stay without being able to find a job or relying on their network of friends for financial support. Eventually, they would find low-paying employment and then take a second job in order to make ends meet.

These are some profile descriptions of participants within this category: Eileen, a second-generation Dominican, migrated to Albany from New York City after getting married.

Eileen's husband thought Albany would be a better place to raise a family. Estela, a native from Ecuador, relocated to Albany because she was tired of the rush in New York City. Ana, a Puerto Rican raised in New York City, migrated to Albany after the 9/11 terrorist attacks because she could not afford to live and did not feel safe in New York City.

These three profiles show the diversity of reasons why some Latinos decide to leave New York City, but they had a common denominator that influenced their decision: they had a relative living in the area. Eileen's brother in law lived in Albany with his wife and children. Eileen's husband saw in Albany a more tranquil and safe place to raise the family and therefore decided to relocate to the area. Estela first came to Albany in the early 1990s to visit a cousin, but did not like the city. Fifteen years later, she came back to visit the same cousin and noticed a change in Albany. While vacationing in the city, Estela decided to migrate to the area to start a business since she was tired of New York City's rush. In addition, Estela thought Albany would be a better place for her two daughters. After witnessing the 9/11 attacks, Ana relocated to Albany since her mother was living in the area. Ana stated that she migrated to Albany because she needed to be close to her mother.

Within this group, we include participants who migrated to Albany for rehabilitation purposes. These Latinos moved to Albany right after being released from prison to participate in a program known as T.H.E. Program or Father Young's program. The logo of this program is a three-legged stool. The legs are: treatment, housing, and employment. All participants receive drug addiction treatment, are provided housing, and placed in a job.

John, a second generation Puerto Rican from New York City, wanted to be a baseball player. His dreams were shattered by a hip dislocation. John told us that due to peer pressure he became addicted to drugs and engaged in criminal activities. After spending time in prison, he did not want to go back to New York City to avoid peer pressures. His friends have not changed; they continue to engage in the same criminal activities. Therefore, John decided to move to Albany to participate in Father Young's program and start a new life.

Deciding to Migrate

Informants migrated for three basic reasons: 1) to seek job opportunities and/or professional development; 2) to change their style of living; and 3) to "reconnect" with friends and

family. These reasons are about more than simple economics. They also reveal the diversity of orientations among Latinos in our sample and how these orientations correlate with class: for example, non-professional Latinos in our sample were more geared towards building a family while professional Latinos were more openly career-oriented.

Job Opportunities/Professional Development

Job opportunities were the primary reason to engage in internal migration for 48 percent of our respondents. The distribution of this proportion is even for our sample: 24 percent of professionals and 24 percent of non-professionals migrated for this reason.

Participants often reported that they would move to Albany and spend the first months without a job, relying on their network of friends. Eventually, they would find a low-paying job and they would have to find an additional one in order to make ends meet. Those holding Associate's or graduate degrees migrated to Albany after being offered a concrete job opportunity that, for all in the professional group, meant a promotion or a better salary.

I came to Albany fifteen years ago to work as an assistant professor. The reason to move to Albany was to take that job. More generally, it was a decision to pursue an economic opportunity, employment after the process of getting a Ph.D. in Political Science. George, 56, professional.

It is worth mentioning that some participants perceived Albany as an ideal city to start a business such as a restaurant or hair salon. Two of our informants from New York City were successful in starting businesses in the area. Both participants mentioned being helped by family as well as bank loans to carry out their enterprise. These businesses currently serve mostly the Latino and African American communities in Albany.

En mi país yo tuve negocios y al llegar aquí dije... tengo que probar aquí a ver qué tal. Empecé. Vine a trabajar primero y luego ví la facilidad que tenía de yo poner uno [un negocio], comencé y aquí estoy. Cándida, 38, non-professional, business owner.

[In my country I owned different businesses and when I got here I said: I have to give it a try to see what happens. I started. I first came to work up here and I saw that it was easy to start a business so I did and here I am.] (Translation by authors.)

In total, twelve interviewees reported job opportunities as their top reason to migrate to Albany. Seven of these twelve were women and five were men. Six were between the ages of 36 and 45, three between 26 and 35, one between 18 and 25 and two were 46 years old or more. Four interviewees in this group had less than a high school diploma, three completed some college and the rest held graduate degrees. Three participants reported their individual income to be between \$10,000 and \$30,000, three between \$30,000 and \$50,000 and five reported making more than \$50,000 per year. Moreover, five Latinos in this group reported their ethnicity to be Central or South American, four were Dominican and three Puerto Rican (See Appendix A).

Change in Lifestyle

Participants reporting a change in lifestyle as their reason to migrate explained that they sought a quieter place to live or a desire to live in a smaller place with better values than those found in the previous location. Based on participants' descriptions Albany promised to be an ideal place to start a new life.

Overwhelmingly, participants coming from New York City were looking for a place to raise a family or a place to settle and bring other members of their family. Albany was referred to as "a quieter place to live."

I like [Albany] a whole better (sic) than the city: it is a lot quieter, there is not a lot of violence that there is in the Bronx. I just want a better place to raise my children. Christian, Age 35, griller.

I didn't want to raise my kids in the Bronx because of all the violence, all the drugs and everything, I just wanted to get away from that and I have a sister who owns a few restaurants here so she asked if I could come and manage her restaurants so I thought that could be a good opportunity for me to leave the Bronx and come up here. Marcos, 42, non-professional.

For the group of participants coming from New York City, the fact that Albany is so close to where the rest of their families and friends are settled became an advantage when choosing where to move. An interesting perception is the notion that in Albany participants were going to find a community with better values than those found in New York City. When referring to values they meant safety, appropriate behavior, and positive peer pressures, as Carmen describes:

Y los maestros aquí como que te dedican más tiempo porque mi esposo tiene dos sobrinos y como son, no sé, son bien inteligentes. Comparado con los muchachos de allá, nada más quieren estar en... con las gangas, quieren estar como el otro dizque mejor. Aquí no, aquí no se ve eso. Ehh, y los muchachos de allá hoy en día que están en vicio. Que eso se puede ver, están bebiendo, nada más quieren estar en fiesta, las niñas nada más quieren estar pintadas. No se ve como esa educación que debería ser como estar teniendo. Aquí es diferente, me gusta más aquí. Y además que yo estudié allá, yo también la crianza que me dieron fue muy diferente a como está la cosa hoy en día. Mire que yo nunca pensé que iba decir que a mi me gusta Albany. Carmen, 34, non-professional.

[And the teachers here, like they devote more time to you. My husband has two nephews and it is like, I don't know, they are very intelligent. If you compare them with kids there, they just want to be in... with the gangs. Here I don't see that at all. Kids down there are into vice these days. You can see that, they are drinking, they only want to be partying, girls like to wear a lot of makeup. You don't see like that education that kids should have these days. It is different here, I like it better here. Plus, I studied down there, and how I was raised it was different than nowadays. See, I never thought I'd say I liked Albany] (Translation by authors.)

In total, six interviewees reported change of lifestyle as their top reason to migrate to Albany. One of these six was a woman and five were men. Three were between the ages of 36 and 45, one between 26 and 35 and two were 46 years old or more. Two interviewees in this group reported having less than high school, one to have completed high school, two some college and one held an Associate's Degree. Five participants reported their individual income to be between \$10,000 and \$30,000 and one participant reported making more than \$50,000 per year. Latinos in this group reported to be either Dominican (two) or Puerto Rican (four) (See Appendix A).

Reconnecting

Reconnecting with family and friends was reported as a primary reason for migrating for seven of our interviewees, three women and four men. Reconnecting was primarily an emotional reason that, in our sample, signified reuniting with daughters, spouses, and life-long friends.

All participants migrating from New York City mentioned having someone in Albany who preceded them. Most women in this group came to Albany to reunite with their families, especially mothers looking to reunite with daughters that came to Albany after getting married or seeking a lifestyle change. Men in this group came lured by New York City friends who had moved to Albany. Professionals in this group came solely to be able to live with their spouses.

My oldest daughter had a very bad domestic violence situation, so she was relocated up here, like secretly, so I didn't want to be away from her and my grandchildren, so I decided to follow her up here. Luz Delia, 43, non-professional.

The proportion of participants who reported their primary reason to migrate to be reconnecting was 28 percent (n=7) of the total. This exceeds the proportion of participants that reported migrating to Albany for a lifestyle change, but it is lower than the proportion of those who came to Albany seeking job opportunities. Of those who reported that their primary reason to migrate was reconnecting with family and friends, five were non-professionals and two were professionals.

Four of the seven in this group were between the ages of 36 and 45, two between 26 and 35 and one was 46 years old or older. One interviewee in this group completed high school, two had some college, two held Associate's Degrees and two reported holding doctoral degrees. Two participants reported their individual income to be between \$10,000 and \$30,000, two between \$30,000 and \$50,000 and two reported making more than \$50,000 per year. Two Latinos in this group reported their ethnicity to be Central or South American, one Cuban and four Puerto Rican (See Appendix A).

Settlement Experiences and Integration Challenges

After participants evoked their migration motivations, we asked them about their experience in Albany after living in this city for some months or years. We wanted to understand the character of their settlement and integration experience in the city. We believe this is especially important to better understand the process of migrant integration in the receiving society and to determine how the Albany experience correlates with findings in the current incorporation/integration literature.

Studies of migrant integration focus on indicators that measure whether migrants are being gradually acculturated or assimilated into American culture. These studies have mostly paid attention to economic and political indicators of assimilation such as homeownership and political participation as well as spatial assimilation e.g., immigrants moving to white or wealthy neighborhoods (Bean & Stevens 2003). Often, these studies fail to describe or analyze the lived processes and the chain of events that migration entails and whether migrants are emotionally and socially successful at fitting in within the receiving society. These lived processes are “[processes] that operate within the embodied person and within the networks of family and kinship relationships” (Wade 2005).

For all of our interviewees their settlement process included the perception of racism in the workplace and in the Albany community overall. Many of them attributed a difficulty for economic mobility to racism in the workplace. As a consequence, participants perceived either competition or difficulty when attempting to reach upper-level positions or a preference by companies to give these positions to the native-born or native speakers. For some, having more than one job appeared necessary to make ends meet or as some of them put it, to live a comfortable life in which you can have Internet and cable TV for the family.

Regarding racism, one of our informants said:

I believe that the whites are treated better, you know, both classes. Depending, you know, depending where you go. But it is like that. It's hard to explain because is something that I feel, you know. When I have to deal with that situation. It is not that everyone is like that, but there has (sic) been a lot of times where I've worked with people that, you know, that they feel a certain type of way, you know, because you are not from here or they think you are something else. Harold, Age 38, Waiter.

Participants reported feeling isolated and lonely: these feelings made them wish for a stronger sense of community. The group of participants coming from New York City reported missing the vibrancy of the Latino community back in the city: the restaurants, the people, the social gatherings, etc. Moreover, the group of Latinos coming from other places in the state mentioned a difficulty in relating to their co-workers and the community surrounding them. They had hoped for a more cultural

and cosmopolitan atmosphere as was experienced in their home countries or in the cities of former residence.

Additionally, all our interviewees reported the following themes as their main concerns when referring to their current experience in Albany: unorganized/inexistent Latino community, prejudice, small town atmosphere, and inefficient public transportation. We elaborate on these themes below.

Unorganized/Inexistent Latino Community

All the Latinos interviewed agreed that the Latino community does not seem to be well organized in Albany. Latinos expressed being concerned about the limited options the city has to offer in terms of activities to do in their spare time and about the dispersion of the community. In many cases their social life only includes co-workers and relatives (for those who have family in Albany).

Moreover, our interviewees expressed their hope that the community would become more closely-knit and politically organized and engaged. However, only one of our interviewees, Carlos, a union organizer, expressed that he is actively working toward organizing the Latino community towards better jobs and working conditions in the Capital Region.

On the cultural aspect, participants mentioned they wish to join a Latino community center that is well promoted and within reach of anyone, from children to the elderly. On the political aspect, participants mentioned they want Latino representatives at both the local and state level. A more culturally and politically organized Latino community would provide better access to information about many of the existent services as well as carry out needed initiatives.

Prejudice

Our participants reported feeling discriminated against in Albany. None of our respondents provided an example of concrete discrimination such as not getting a job or an apartment on account of race or ethnicity. Their testimony suggests more prejudice than discrimination. They claim that there have been times when whites looked and talked down to them. Stephanie, a dark-skinned Puerto Rican, stated that her co-workers believe that she is African American. Stephanie said: “they talk down to you, like we are not competent.” Once Stephanie explains that she is not African American, but Latina, there is immediately a change in attitude. Stephanie claims that she has to speak Spanish in order for people to believe that she is indeed Puerto Rican.

Stephanie stated that “whites are not accustomed to having us around. They don’t know how to communicate or absorb us.” Carlos, the union organizer, states that there is xenophobia in upstate New York. Since there is not enough diversity in Albany, whites grow up in homogeneous neighborhoods with little contact with minority groups. Once they enter the workforce they do not know how to behave when they encounter Latinos or other ethnic groups:

The course of xenophobia directed to immigrants was just like nothing I’ve ever seen before! I was just ashamed to live in this area. I found it was just horrible and you go to places like Queens...I had no idea how is (sic) like up here. Carlos, Age 43, Labor Union Organizer.

Rita, a Peruvian woman, states that whites never put her in the Latino category. Rita claims that the few whites who can identify her as Latina are those who are educated. Usually, whites think that she is Chinese, Vietnamese, or from another Southeastern Asian nation. Rita states that she feels discrimination when she talks in Spanish at work. Nobody has said anything to her, but she feels that whites stare at her like she has no right to speak in a foreign language.

Small Town Atmosphere

The small town atmosphere is both viewed as an advantage and a disadvantage. “Smallbany” is the nickname given by locals to the city of Albany because they perceive there is not much going on, especially when Albany is compared to New York City. Those Latinos who are raising children see the small town atmosphere as a benefit. Santiago, a Puerto Rican who was raised in New York City, states that economically he is better off living in New York City since he can earn more money there. However, for Santiago, money is not everything; family is more important. He did not want his children to grow up in an environment of violence. Santiago feels Albany is a better place to raise his children.

Similarly, Eileen, who is Dominican, states that Albany is a better place for her children. Although Eileen did not want to migrate to Albany, she now agrees with her husband that Albany is the right choice for their family. Eileen comments that every time she goes back to New York City, she sees young girls wearing makeup and kissing boys on the street. Eileen does not want her daughter to grow up in that kind of environment. Estela, from Ecuador, was tired of driving around one or two hours a day just to find a parking spot around her neighborhood in New York City. Estela also

complained about the smallness of her house in New York. In Albany, Estela is more relaxed since she has a bigger place to live and does not have to drive for hours just to find a parking spot. Both Eileen and Estela stated that the public school system in Albany is better than New York City since there are not that many students per classroom and therefore their kids get more individual attention from their teachers.

The small town atmosphere is viewed as an advantage for those with children, but those who do not have a family feel limited by the options Albany has. Ana, a Puerto Rican, describes Albany as “predictable” since every year all she has to look forward to are the same events: the Tulip Festival, LarkFest, and the Latin Fest. Ana says that, in contrast, there is always something new going on in New York City. Gilberto, also Puerto Rican, stated “I can guarantee you that you’ll never get bored in the city [New York].” Gilberto says it does not matter how much money you make in New York City, there is always something you can do. Gilberto, who is gay, says that New York City is a better place since there are activities geared toward the LGBT community like film festivals and support groups; in college, students can even major in gay and lesbian studies. According to Gilberto, Albany is more conservative for someone who is Latino and homosexual, but he prefers to live in Albany because he is satisfied with his employment.

Inefficient Public Transportation

All of our informants complained about the lack of a 24-hour public transportation system in Albany. Even those who owned a car stated that the city of Albany should provide a better transportation system to the community. Catalina, a Dominican woman who owns a hair salon, says that she has her own car and therefore does not have transportation problems.

However, several of Catalina’s customers rely on public transportation and it can be a challenge for them to get to her business. Ana has her own car as well, but in the past when she did not have a car, she had to rely on public transportation to go to college and work.

Those Latinos who migrated from New York City are used to the 24-hour subway system which takes them anywhere. It is a challenge for those Latinos who cannot afford to own a car to get from home to work and back using Albany’s limited bus system.

Conclusion

While economic opportunity (job opportunities/professional development) is still the leading reason that pulls Latinos from different places in New York State toward Albany, other reasons, such as changing the pace of their lives to start a family, seeking a more affordable environment, and reconnecting with friends and family, are also relevant. These additional reasons suggest that theories of migration need to expand their reach and pay attention to cultural and emotional factors as push and pull variables. Even though this should not be surprising, it is important to note that Latino migrants are not of the one-size-fits-all type; there are not only different types of migrants among Latinos but they also have different kinds of reasons to migrate.

More in-depth ethnographic research is needed to fully assess the quality of lived experience for Latinos in Albany. Suffice it to say that the feelings of isolation reported by participants in this study are not a good indicator of successful integration. Such feelings are an all too common feature of modern urban life. They nevertheless run contrary to widespread societal expectations. Should isolation be regarded as simply normal, is it a temporary condition, or is it a significant hurdle in the road to successful Latino community integration? Similarly, to what extent is racism a real obstacle for Latino success as opposed to a misguided perception? Is prejudice, real or perceived, a mere nuisance along the way to upward mobility, a structural feature, or a subjective condition that generates a self-imposed handicap for Latinos? Finally, is community cohesion a requirement of group success and upward mobility? It is not news that Latinos in Albany are geographically dispersed. But the fact that participants in this study made reference to residential dispersion as a negative quality of their life in Albany points to a normative mindset that may or may not have consequences for successful integration. The presence of an economically successful professional Latino element in Albany belies the notion that upward mobility is predicated on demographic concentration. On the other hand, there is no question that demographic dispersion makes political empowerment less likely. This is important because without political power it is more difficult to achieve socioeconomic progress.

In the final analysis, while growing, the Latino “community” of Albany is still very small—only 6.09 percent of the total Albany population from 2005 to 2007, up by less than one percent since the official 2000 census count. The point, however, is not how large a portion of the total population Latinos may be but that whatever challenges they face the city must confront as well. They are a part of the city as much as anybody else and for the sake of the common good their particular story, issues, needs, and aspirations must be known and understood.

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Appendix A: Reasons to Migrate by Selected Characteristics

CHARACTERISTIC	REASONS TO MIGRATE		
	JOB OPPORTUNITIES	LIFESTYLE CHANGE	RE-CONNECT
SEX (%)			
F	7 (28%)	1 (4%)	3 (12%)
M	5 (20%)	5 (20%)	4 (16%)
AGE			
18 – 25	1		
26 – 35	3	1	2
36 – 45	6	3	4
46 – 55	1	1	1
56 or more	1	1	
EDUCATION			
Less than High School	4	2	
High School		1	1
Some College	3	2	2
Associate's Degree		1	2
Master's Degree	4		
Doctorate	1		2
INCOME			
\$10,000 - \$20,000	2	3	1
\$20,000 - \$30,000	1	2	1
\$30,000 - \$40,000	2		2
\$40,000 - \$50,000	1		
\$50,000 or more	5	1	2
Not Reported	1		1
ETHNIC BACKGROUND/ NATIONALITY			
Central and South American	5		2
Cuban			1
Dominican	4	2	
Puerto Rican	3	4	4
TOTAL	12	6	7