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## Caribbean journeys: an ethnography of migration and home in three family networks [book review]

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*Caribbean Journeys: An Ethnography of Migration and Home in Three Family Networks.* By Karen Fog Olwig. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007. Pp. ix+319. \$84.95 (cloth); \$23.95 (paper).

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More than 60 years ago, representatives of three different families left their homes in the Caribbean. The Muir family came from a middle-class, racially mixed neighborhood in Jamaica; the Gaston family had roots in a French Creole community and was affiliated with the middle layers of education in Dominica; and the Smith family originated in small African Caribbean villages of farmers and fishermen on Nevis. Today, these three families have members distributed in England, Canada, the United States, India, South Africa, Scotland, Barbados, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. These immigrants are part of the more than 2 million people who have migrated out of the Caribbean in the last 50 years and are testaments to the fact that immigration has become an integral part of Caribbean life.

These three families are the protagonists of Karen Fog Olwig's latest book, *Caribbean Journeys: An Ethnography of Migration and Home in Three Family Networks*. Olwig's approach departs significantly from the migration studies that represent preoccupation with integration into destination countries and transnational activities in mostly economic terms. Olwig's research is not concerned with how these immigrants have been integrated or acculturated in their new environments, nor is she interested in aspects of the receiving context and how they may pull immigrants. Instead, Olwig offers us another focus of immigration studies, one that centers on the immigrants themselves as members of family networks that give them their notions of belonging, relatedness, and identification and how they talk about this as part of family narratives obtained through life-course interviews.

*Caribbean Journeys* takes a different route than the majority of studies on immigration in that it focuses on how immigrant families make sense of their immigration. The author does this through the use of life-course interviews that were fruitful in allowing the development of stories that are encompassed in each family's dominant immigrant narrative. On one hand, she prompted the solidification of such a narrative, since her questions became sources of conversation among each family network. And the interviews that followed provided information closer to what the researcher wanted—namely, the family's narrative of immigration. In this way she influenced the process by provoking the family members to share information that became consistent in a grand family narrative of immigration. According to Olwig, these narratives started in previous generations in the islands when families moved in search of social mobility within their land of origin; it was only natural that such migration would continue, although now continentally. The family narratives gain addi-

tional substance and endurance from the fact that they start before the families' migration out of their native nation.

The other significant finding was how family members avoided disrupting the flow of the narrative with particular events on the ground that at times pushed them to move again. In one instance, Olwig writes about a family's not mentioning the discrimination felt by their children, which resulted in their migrating again. This was not consistent with the self-determining role the family played in its narrative, so the family chose to omit it in order to maintain the overall flow of the narrative. This implies that members of the family valued being part of an intercontinental family dynamic, which in turn made their immigrant experience rosier than it would have been without that narrative. It is important to point out that most researchers on immigration do not get to such grand family narratives of immigration because their research is generally focused on outcomes and less on process. Olwig's work demonstrates the power in the utilization of life-course interviews to elicit family narratives of immigration that can offer insights into the success or failure of immigrant families.

Olwig interviewed about 150 members of these three family networks and had conversations with first-, second-, and third-generation immigrants that give insight into each of them and their education, occupation, and social mobility. Olwig shows that identity and belongingness are not necessarily rooted in a locality, such as these individuals' countries of origin, but are instead rooted in the maintenance of the family networks. This maintenance is not easy, given the distances produced by each successive move a family makes; however, it is what nurtures their belongingness and provides meaning for their migration, and it is therefore a necessity.

*Caribbean Journeys* also sets itself apart by not focusing on the context of reception or departure. Instead, Olwig focuses on family networks as the locality of her ethnography, which spans over four years and several different countries. This mobile and fluid site for ethnographic research is another tool that Olwig demonstrates to be worthy of further consideration theoretically and methodologically. An additional strength of the book is the manifestation of heterogeneity in Caribbean families. Olwig warns us not to treat Caribbean immigrants as coming from a homogeneous life and historical experience. As Olwig shows, the Smiths, Gastons, and Muirs came from different contexts in terms of history, ethnic influences, and economic background, and it would be a mistake to lump them together as Afro-Caribbeans.

Vilna Francine Bashi's *Survival of the Knitted: Immigrant Social Networks in a Stratified World* (Stanford University Press, 2007) is also an ethnography of Afro-Caribbean immigrants and their social networks, yet it differs greatly from Olwig's book in term of focus. In her book, Bashi presents an intervention that allows the success of those who are chosen to immigrate. As such, Bashi's book is in line with the focus of immigration

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studies on the sources of push and pull and on the integration of immigrants. *Caribbean Journeys* is a refreshing look at immigration from an unusual point of view, and it is worth reading and using in courses not only on immigration but also on social networks, family studies, and cultural identity development.

*Citizenship across Borders: The Political Transnationalism of El Migrante.* By Michael Peter Smith and Matt Bakker. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2008. Pp. v+249. \$19.95 (paper).

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In *Citizenship across Borders*, Michael Peter Smith and Matt Bakker provide us with a theoretically and empirically well informed analysis of transnational migrants parlaying their resources to achieve political influence and mobility in a context of voice, exit, and loyalty amid shifting policy environments. During five years of careful ethnographic research the authors uncovered a fascinating story of political change and development shaped by the unique circumstances of Mexican-U.S. migration. This book will be unusual fare for most readers because discussions of the political effects of Mexican migration in the United States usually center on the impacts of migration in the United States. Although attention to the political consequences of emigration back in Mexico has increased among migration scholars recently, the importance of the involvement of Mexicans who emigrate and return (continuing the historically long-established circularity of migration) in their home towns and communities has not been lost on Mexican officialdom. Thus, the hometown associations (HTAs) in the United States that originally formed as grassroots migrant organizations beginning back in the 1950s to help address many of the basic needs of the sending communities were increasingly courted by Mexico's Institutional Revolution Party and, much more recently, by the National Action Party as they grew in membership and resources. But, owing to the endemic problems of corruption and the hegemony of a long-established patron-client political culture within Mexico, the HTAs commonly viewed such overtures with ambivalence.

Nevertheless, HTAs and their leaders, who remained committed to the improvement of their respective communities in Mexico, began to see new democratic openings as a result: ways to gain governmental concessions to help advance their interests back home (such as the three-for-one matching program for remittances directed to local public and infrastructure development). The ensuing power contestation, as realized through the experiences of the Mexican transnational politicians documented in this book (such as Andrés Bermúdez, "El Rey del Tomate"), illustrates the heuristic utility of the concept of transnationalism in the political sphere