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Colombian Migration to South Florida: A Most Unwelcome Reception

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“Here [Colombia], I am a professional. There [South Florida], I was nobody.”
Colombian Migrant (quoted in Robles, 2003)

Introduction

The Economist (2002) characterizes the late 1990s and early 2000s wave of migration from Latin America as a “hemorrhage.” Unlike previous periods of Latin American migration consisting mainly of working-class persons in search of economic opportunities, this latest wave of migration by middle and upper-middle class is draining the region of many of its most educated and talented citizens. Colombia presents a classic case of economic, political, and social turmoil in Latin America where a middle and upper-middle class “brain drain” took place in the period 1996-2002. Colombia’s internal civil war, combined with historically high crime rates, spawn some of the highest levels of violence in the world. In the late 1990s, the Colombian middle and upper-middle classes came under increasing threats of kidnapping and extortion by a complex mix of guerillas, paramilitaries, and narcotraffickers. As former Colombian President Andres Pastrana (1998-2002) sought a negotiated peace settlement with the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), Colombia’s largest guerilla group, the insurgents instead used the 1999-2001 peace talks as a ruse for strengthening their forces and subsequently moved their attacks from rural areas into Colombia’s major cities. The boldness of the Colombian guerillas is evident in the April 2000 “war tax” imposed by the FARC on Colombian citizens with more than U.S. \$1 million in assets—with kidnapping or death the punishment for not paying.

In addition to its political violence problems, in the late 1990s, the Colombian economy spiraled into deep recession, bottoming out in 1999 when the Colombian GDP contracted by 5.0% while the country's unemployment rate reached 20%. The combination of increasing personal threats and economic downturn coincides with many professional Colombians "voting with their feet" through migration to safer and more economically stable countries, such as Costa Rica, the United States, and Spain. This mass exodus of Colombian professionals no doubt left the Colombian government wondering if this migration trend would reverse itself and allow these talented citizens to eventually return and help develop their home country.

Thousands of Colombian migrants began arriving in South Florida beginning in the mid 1990s. No one knows how many Colombians have made the trip to South Florida. The 2000 U.S. census identified 100,216 Colombians in South Florida—a figure not adjusted for the 40% to 50% of those estimated to be living in the region but out of status (lacking legal visas) (interview with Miami Colombian Consul, 2000). Unlike the more numerous Cuban migrants, Colombians in South Florida are nearly invisible—economically, politically, and socially.

In Fall 2000, the Florida International University (FIU) Latin American and Caribbean Center (LACC) began a research project to study this relatively unknown group of recent migrants to South Florida. A group of graduate students in LACC's Master's of Arts in Latin American and Caribbean Studies degree program initiated the study—several of them being recent Colombian migrants. These students sought a deeper understanding of the wave of middle and upper-middle class Colombians flowing into South Florida. After a year of pilot research, the project expanded into three Master's thesis projects (Casey, 2002; Franco, 2002; and Robertson, 2002). This article is a summary of the findings of this project's pilot and thesis research with a focus on two specific research questions: Why are Colombians migrating to

South Florida? Why, after only a short time in South Florida, are these migrants returning to Colombia? Using a rival theories approach, the theoretical contribution of this article is its demonstration of the complexity of the recent Colombian migration wave. Methodologically, this article reveals that a number of competing hypotheses are needed to substantially explain such complex behavior as the recent Colombian migration wave.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The FIU research team quickly found that with the exception of numerous journalistic articles and books describing the role of Colombian's in South Florida's drug trade, there were no scholarly studies of Colombians migrating to the region. Studies did exist on Colombian migrants living in the greater New York and Los Angeles regions (Guarnizo et al., 1999) and on the transnational linkages of Colombian working-class migrants (Guarnizo and Diaz, 1999), but the literature lacked studies of Colombians migrating to South Florida. This lack of research attention to Colombian migrants to the region explains why a descriptive summary of the team's pilot research on the South Florida Colombian Diaspora (Collier and Gamarra, 2001) received wide coverage in the local South Florida, U.S. national, and Latin American medias.

A review of the scholarly migration literature found several rival theories that could explain the recent migration of Colombia's middle and upper-middle classes. These rival theories all follow a general rational choice approach. The theories include the Classic Push-Pull (Microeconomic Equilibrium); Exit, Voice Loyalty; Social Dislocation; Network/Social Capital, and Expanded Push-Pull theories. These theories assume that an agent (e.g., individual migrant or head of household) is a rational actor whose behavior is motivated by a conscious calculation of advantages. Rational choice theory assumes that agents have goals or objectives and a number of options for action that will attain these goals or objectives. As rational decision-

makers, agents rank order their preferred options or actions based on their ability to achieve their goals or objectives. Rational choice theory takes into account that agents may not have complete information to support their decision process and may differ in their aversions to risk (Morrow, 1994, ch 2; Allison and Zelikow, 1999, ch 1).

The major differences in these rival migration theories are in their use of economic, political or social factors that identify the most important in influencing an agent's decision to migrate. Except for the interdisciplinary Expanded Push-Pull Theory, the other rational choice-based theories are mainly single-discipline theories that offer only one or two primary factors for agents deciding to migrate. A thorough review of these rational choice-based theories is impossible in this short article, so the following discussion focuses only on the propositions each theory offers for answering our two research questions on why the Colombian middle and upper-middle classes are migrating to South Florida, and why they are returning to Colombia after only a year or two away from their home country.

Ravenstein (1889) was one of the earliest migration theorists whose work led to the development of Classic Push-Pull or Microeconomic Equilibrium Theory. He offered that people migrate because of an inherent desire in most men to better themselves materially. The theory offers that people tend to leave areas characterized by surplus population, unemployment, and poverty and are attracted to areas with growing employment and better wages. While this theory worked well to explain the 1800s and 1900s migrations from Europe and Asia to the United States, and the pre-1995 general migration of Latin Americans to the United States, it is too simplistic for today's Colombian case as the explanatory factors are mainly economic.

Hirschman (1970) offers a more sophisticated model for migration studies during periods of societal crisis or decline. His Exit, Voice, Loyalty (EVL) model designates that when a

person sees no other viable solution to a crisis or decline, and possessing the requisite resources or means to relocate, they will desert or escape—i.e., *Exit*—the situation. *Voice* takes place when the person sees viable solutions to the societal crisis or decline and is willing to remain and articulate opposition to societal conditions or work toward solutions. *Loyalty* comes into play when the person continues to award societal institutions and leaders their loyalty, despite the societal crisis or decline. While the societal crisis or decline may involve economic, political, or social conditions—the EVL Model finds primary use in explaining behavior in the face of declining political institutions and loss of trust in governments.

Social Dislocation Theory attempts to explain the migration of people who experience altered societal roles (Isbister, 1996, 99). This theory maintains that people will not migrate if they have a secure niche in their family or community, especially if they are in a position where they are expected and able to fill a role that their parents or grandparents before them filled. However, when a person's family or community role changes or becomes tenuous, or their larger social environment becomes uncertain, they are likely to migrate in search of social certainty. This theory normally attributes the migrant's dislocation to a change in their economic status as the result of disruptions in the world capitalist system. Sassen (1988, 1991) asserts that persons who migrate due to dislocation will follow similar paths to those of international capital flows, including to global cities that become the hubs for international financial matters. Sassen offers that Miami serves as the international financial center for Latin America and the Caribbean and thus would be expected to be primary destination for migrants from the region. Portes and Rumbaut (1996, 84) add to Social Dislocation Theory by arguing that a major factor in the success of migrants re-locating concerns the context in the receiving state—i.e., relocation is facilitated in states where work visas and refugee status are easily obtained.

Massey et al. (1993) offer that Network Theory explains migration flows along the lines of existing social networks. This theory holds that family or friends who have already migrated encourage persons to migrate to the same location where the family or friends now reside. Guarnizo et al. (1999, 370) recognize social capital as a major factor in the adaptation of new migrants. Social capital entails the nature and strength of social networks, levels of social trust, and norms for personal interactions in the family, neighborhood, community, and workplace (Putnam, 2000). Network/Social Capital Theory proposes that if social capital is high on both ends of the migration stream, then the migrants are more likely to establish strong networks at the receiving location and integrate quickly into the new society. If social capital is low on one or both ends of the migration stream, then it will be more difficult for the migrants to adapt on the receiving end.

Finally, in recognition that the decision to migrate is complex, scholars have attempted to broaden the Classic Push-Pull (Microeconomic Equilibrium) Theory into a more robust Expanded Push-Pull Theory (Boyle et al., 1998). This theory offers a number of economic, political, and social factors tend to both *push* migrants from their home locations and *pull* migrants to their intermediate or final destinations. Similar to Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of human needs, the reasons a person might be *pushed* to migrate or *pulled* to a specific migration destination could run the gamut of human needs including the search for physiological needs (food, shelter, etc.), safety and security, love or acceptance, esteem or recognition, and self-actualization. Thus, of all the rational choice-based theories, Expanded Push-Pull can include the most diverse causal conditions and accommodate the most complex causal models.

The above discussion reveals that a number of rival theories are available for explaining the latest wave of migration from Colombia. Table 1 provides a summary of the competing

hypotheses associated with each rival theory discussed above and indicates the results of this research project's hypothesis tests. Under each research question in Table 1 are listed the primary causal conditions (explanatory factors) that are included in each competing hypothesis. Table 1 also displays secondary causal conditions included in the causal models for each theory. These secondary conditions often perform an antecedent role that triggers changes to the primary causal conditions. The Findings section of this article provides additional details of the evidence used to assess each hypothesis tested in Table 1.

<Place Table 1 near here>

Research Design

This research project mounted a multi-method data collection effort. The project began its pilot research in Fall 2000 with interviews of officials in South Florida's Colombian service organizations (Lions clubs, Kiwanis clubs, Colombian American Service Association (CASA), Colombian Coalition, etc.), the Miami Colombian Consulate, and other entities that were in regular contact with Colombian migrants (Radio Caracol, U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, etc.). These interviews provided the initial evaluation of conditions in the Colombian Diaspora from those organizations and agencies assisting Colombian migrants in settling in South Florida. In Spring 2001, the researchers conducted a series of three focus groups with 30 Colombians who had migrated to South Florida over the past five years. See Table 2 for a summary of the focus group participants. The data collected from the focus groups closely matched the results from the initial interviews.

<Place Table 2 near here>

Three graduate students in the research team expanded on the pilot research with their Master's thesis projects. Franco (2002) concentrated on the process of recent Colombian migration, investigating their pre-migration information gathering processes, expectations generated before migrating, and disillusionments of migrants after arriving in South Florida. Her research included a series of repeated interviews and observations of eight migrants and their families in South Florida and six soon to be migrants and their families in Medellín, Colombia. Her ethnography of these migrants and their families informed Classic and Expanded Push-Pull, Social Dislocation, and Network/Social Capital theories. Robertson (2002) employed the Exit, Voice, and Loyalty Theory in the investigation of how Colombians were dealing with the decline of their political institutions. Using the pilot research for her primary Exit data, she then conducted 98 interviews in Medellín and Bogotá, Colombia of persons displaying Voice and Loyalty behavior. Casey (2002) utilized Network/Social Capital Theory in her investigation of the adaptation of Colombian migrants in South Florida. Besides the pilot research, she collected data from repeated interviews and observation of 12 migrants and their families in South Florida. Summaries of the pilot and thesis research are included in the following Findings section.

The three theses and this article follow a pattern-matching analysis procedure. This procedure calls for the researcher to match the data collected with the predicted relationships in each study's causal model. Table 1 summarizes the multiple competing hypotheses tested for this article. The pilot and theses research employed nominal measurements for all qualitative causal conditions with the data collection focused on finding convincing evidence of whether the condition existed or not. A purposive sampling method was employed, whereby interview and focus group subjects were selected based on their being cognizant of the information desired. A snowball sampling procedure was utilized to identify interview and focus group subjects in

South Florida—meaning initial subjects were identified from CASA and the Colombian Coalition telephone lists and these subjects were then asked to identify additional subjects. In Colombia, thesis researchers used networks of family and friends, combined with snowballing procedures, to identify subjects.

Because a representative sample was not used in this project, the generalizability of the project results is limited to the subjects of the focus groups and the thesis interviews and observations—approximately 50 subjects in South Florida and 100 in Colombia. The lack of a representative sample and the qualitative nominal measurement of all causal conditions are the two major biases contained in this study. This bias is somewhat lessened by the strong correlation of the data collected in the pilot research and theses with both journalistic investigations of the Diaspora and the research team’s continuing interactions with Colombian service organizations who were in contact with hundreds of Colombian migrants. Thus, the magnitude and direction of the biases should not affect the hypothesis tests in Table 1 as these results are generalized to the specific subjects of the focus groups and thesis interviews and observations. Because of the small sample employed, this research is limited to only advancing and not testing the theories summarized in this article.

Findings

Table 1 summarizes the hypothesis tests in this article. All hypotheses were supported with varying degrees of strength. The Table 1 findings, arranged by rival theory, are discussed further below.

Classic Push-Pull Migration Theory

Throughout history, the push and pull of economic factors has been one of the strongest motivations for migrants to relocate to the United States. In the case of the 1996-2002 migration

of Colombian middle and upper-classes to South Florida, economic opportunities were identified as an important factor—but not the strongest factor. Table 3 provides the results of a pre-focus group survey that asked recent Colombian migrants the factors most important in their decision to migrate.

<Place Table 3 near here>

Table 3 reveals that economic factors rated low on the list (seventh and ninth) of the most influential factors in Colombian focus group participants' decisions to migrate to South Florida. Focus group participants widely discussed the late 1990s decline in employment opportunities and their frustrations with finding jobs in Colombia, where family networks were more important than the education or professional experience of the applicants. Other project subjects reported this same Colombian employment situation based on “who you know” instead of “what you know.” One of Franco's (2002) subjects summarized her employment problems in Colombia as: “I was looking for a job for one and one-half years and I did not find one. Everything here [in Colombia] is managed with connections. I had interviews, but generally they chose the boss's nephew” (quoted in Franco, 2002, 41).

Migrants looking for work in South Florida faced a number of frustrations—a very unfriendly welcoming context—which it appears eventually caused many to return to Colombia. With personal connections as the primary factor in obtaining Colombian employment, writing resumes and the etiquette of job interviews were skills few migrants initially possessed when they arrived in South Florida. Colombian service organizations provide new arrivals instruction on these critical job search skills. However, even beyond resume writing and interview skills, the main reasons that pilot project subjects reported as difficulties in finding employment in South Florida were the lack of a permanent or work visa and lack of English language skills.

These employment problems were particularly serious for Colombian professionals who could not take the U.S. licensing examinations in their field. As a result, many Colombian migrants worked illegally in South Florida and took what they considered menial jobs. As one Colombian migrant reported on why he returned to Colombia after three and one-half years in South Florida:

The majority of us go there [South Florida] with money thinking that in one month you'll have everything you had at home. Ninety-nine percent ended up waiters and at valet parking. I had education and status [in Colombia]—to become a car-parker? I did it all. I mopped floors. I delivered flowers. I cleaned bathrooms. I cried. (quoted in Robles, 2003)

Florida State Representative Juan Zapata, (Republican-Miami), and former Director of CASA, offers “Those who left Colombia for economic reasons went back the quickest. The situation here (in South Florida) is not easy. Since the situation in Colombia has improved somewhat, they’re going back” (quoted in Robles, 2003). Zapata reported how when CASA hosted a late 2003 professional fair to help migrants with professional licensing and visa problems, most of CASA’s telephone list had returned to Colombia (Robles, 2003).

Exit, Voice, Loyalty Theory

Focus group participants, who had all decided to *Exit* Colombia, reported feeling there were no solutions to Colombia’s problems as the third most important factor in their decision to migrate (see Table 3). Fifty four percent of participants reported this as a factor in their decision to leave Colombia. The Exit, Voice, Loyalty theory connects this feeling of hopelessness with several of the political and economic factors in Table 1 which led migrants to relocate to South Florida. It is interesting to note that in Robertson’s (2002) interviews with Voice and Loyalty subjects in Colombia with the resources to migrate, almost all reported still having hope for solutions to Colombia’s problems—the major reason they had not exited Colombia.

Robertson (2002) concludes her study of Exit subjects by offering that “it was this group’s lack of confidence in the state institutions’ abilities to recover from ineffectiveness, exacerbated by declines in freedoms that were the most salient factors for exit” (Robertson 2002, 71). While the research shows upper class members leaving Colombia for security reasons and middle class members exiting for economic purposes, “the research also depicts the wealthy fleeing to protect their economic [status]....” (Robertson, 2002, 70). For these subjects, “the Colombian government, along with the institutional structure within which it operates, [had] lost both credibility and control” (Robertson, 2002, 70).

Evidence is sketchy on those who return to Colombia after initially losing hope of solutions to Colombia’s problems. Robles (2003) reports how many believe that the return migration to Colombia demonstrates a new feeling of optimism about Colombia. Journalistic and political pundits offer that after decades of conflict in Colombia, the new hard-line policy with guerilla and rightist paramilitary fighters implemented by President Alvaro Uribe, who took office in mid-2002, has given Colombians a new sense of hope. While the journalistic reporting on the return migration to Colombia due to new hope is compelling, further interview and survey work is required to confirm the magnitude and causes of this reverse migration.

Social Dislocation Theory

As Table 3 depicts, the increase in violence and decrease in economic opportunities in Colombia have most certainly manifested changes to many Colombian’s social status and environment. Franco (2002) highlights that “(m)any Colombians feel they have an uncertain future in their country, that their social roles are limited, that the chaos generated by violence is unbearable, and that it is too difficult to pursue a “promising future” with the current circumstances”(Franco, 2002, 8). Therefore, as reported by almost all of the South Florida

subjects in this project, Colombians began to migrate to the United States in search of the “American Dream.”

The American Dream was not what most middle and upper-middle class Colombians found in South Florida. Instead, the uncertainty of their living conditions remained, if not increased, after relocating to South Florida. Colombians did not find a welcoming context in the United States. Despite the ongoing civil war in their home state, Colombians never received the blanket Temporary Protected Status (TPS) offered to other Latin American migrant groups from war-torn countries. The failure to receive TPS can be traced to two factors: (1) President Pastrana initially characterized the late 1990’s “brain drain” as being for economic reasons, and (2) a strong lobbying effort of the U.S. government for Colombian TPA was never mounted. Instead of obtaining TPS or easily qualifying for refugee status, the inability to obtain permanent or work visas (the number one problem reported by focus group participants), the threat of deportation for those who overstayed tourist visas or entered the U.S. without a visa, the inability to find professional positions while being relegated to menial labor, and the lack of resources to quickly establish a lifestyle similar to what they lived in Colombia, all contributed to the uncertainty of living in South Florida. These factors led many Colombians to feel they had dropped significantly in social class.

Colombia is an extremely class conscious country—so much so that an informal class or economic strata rating scale of one to six, with six being highest, is used by Colombians. Focus group participants reported an average drop of almost two social strata on the Colombian informal scale after their arrival in South Florida (see Table 2)—a situation leading to extreme social tension in Colombian households.

Statements like the opening quote in this article indicate the frustration Colombians experienced over their loss of social position on migrating to South Florida. Franco (2002) concluded from her ethnographic work with Colombian migrants:

...migration to the United States ends up being shocking to many people. The middle and upper-middle classes have attained a social status in Colombia over the course of several generations. Even if they are not swimming in dollars, the majority has social recognition and access to certain luxuries.....Unless immigrants are wealthy, have an attractive job offer, or embark on a successful business venture, it is very probable that their social and economic status will decrease in South Florida.... (Franco, 2002, 93)

Of all the variables in Table 1 supporting why Colombians are returning to their home country, their inability to reestablish a stable environment, combined with a loss of social class, was found to be among the strongest factors in explaining the return migration.

Network/Social Capital Theory

Both the pilot and thesis research found strong evidence of the role that family and friends played in influencing Colombians to migrate to South Florida—likely the strongest factor explaining why Colombians chose to migrate to South Florida over other locations. Franco (2002) describes how the migrants use these networks of family and friends as the informal source of information on the migration process, which creates unrealistic expectations in the migrants concerning the ease of finding the “American Dream” in South Florida. Rather than consult official U.S. embassy, consulate, or Immigration and Naturalization Service information sources, family and friends would offer potential migrants a rosy picture of the ease in getting permanent U.S. visas, finding employment, and reestablishing their Colombian lifestyles in South Florida—all which turned out not to be true. Instead, Colombian migrants to South Florida, after living with family and friends already established in South Florida, became disillusioned and experienced increasing social tension as family and friends often did little to

help the migrants find employment and began asking for payment of room and board to help support host families.

In the case of Colombian migrants moving to South Florida, there are low levels of social capital on both ends of the migration stream. Sudarsky (2001) uncovered a low level of social capital in Colombia when measured in a country-wide survey. Colombia's particular type of social capital is best described by what Putnam (2000) defines as "bonding" social capital where the strength of social networks is primarily with persons closest to the individual, i.e., family and close friends. Colombian's lack strong "bridging" social capital, which is the ability to network and establish social relations with persons outside the immediate family and close friends. This strength of "bonding" over "bridging" social capital is evident in the priorities Colombians use to describe their personal identity, which in ascending order includes: (1) family, (2) close friends, (3) socioeconomic class, and (4) region of Colombia (paisas, costeños, caleños, etc.) (Collier and Gamarra, 2001). This project found identification with Colombian political parties and the sense of a larger Colombian nation as substantially missing in those who migrated from Colombia. In fact, when Colombians both in South Florida and Colombia were asked what made them the most proud of being a Colombian—the answers were almost always "the people" or "the territory," but never the Colombian state or its institutions (Collier and Gamarra, 2001, 14; Robertson, 2002, 111).

Colombian "bonding" social capital, results in small closed social networks (Casey, 2002, 85) and helps explain both why Colombian migrants tend to not live in enclaves as do other migrant groups in South Florida, but instead live scattered among South Florida communities that reflect their social class in Colombia. Low "bonding" social capital also explains why Colombians have difficulty finding employment assistance outside their immediate family or

social circle in South Florida. Casey (2002) documented several cases where “bonding” social capital began to weaken as both new Colombian migrants and their host family and friends became frustrated over the inability of the migrants to find employment and establish their own homes in the region.

South Florida has its own problems with low social capital, which contributes to the problems Colombians have in settling in the region. Instead of a U.S. “melting pot,” South Florida tends to be a “patchwork quilt” of communities characterized by strong enclaves of ethnic and social class-based groups—groups that have limited inter-group interaction. Portes and Stepick (1993) detail how the Cuban enclave that developed in Miami in the 1960s and 1970s, a case where Cuban migrants assisted others in building businesses and finding employment, explains the rapid rise in economic and political power that Cubans now hold over Miami. Both the pilot research interviews and focus group participants revealed the extreme difficulty that Colombians migrants have encountered in penetrating the still strong Cuban enclave in search of employment or other assistance.

Putnam (2000) estimates that social capital in Florida is low, only slightly higher than U.S. states in the deep South (Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and Tennessee) with the lowest U.S. social capital due in part to social tensions over slavery and racial discrimination that have still not been adequately resolved. A 2003 statewide survey of social capital in Florida found that South Florida displayed significantly lower social capital than other state regions (Collier, 2004). Thus, South Florida has the lowest social capital in a state with some of the lowest social capital in the nation—not an ideal migration destination according to Guarnizo et al. (1999). This also helps explain the difficulty that Colombian migrants have in finding

employment or other assistance in South Florida—a region little disposed to social networking outside of established ethnic or social groups.

The story of Christina (pseudonym) who migrated to South Florida in 1999 reveals the effects of the lack of social support on migrants' decision to return to Colombia. Initially living with her sister, three months later Christina moved into a one-bedroom apartment with her husband and daughter. A business administration specialist in Colombia, Christina could only find work as a maid, cleaning lady, and babysitter in South Florida. With her husband sick, Christina's employment and a U.S. \$1000 monthly check from her father in Colombia, which barely covered her monthly rent, was her family's only income. Even with her sister's family living nearby, her husband and daughter with her in the United States, and residing in a modern, secure South Florida community, Christina reported:

I missed the warmth of my family, walking out on the streets [in Colombia] and saying hello to people, even if I did not know them....I returned [to Colombia] because I was tired of work, of living by myself, of being alone without anybody to talk to. In the United States nobody has time to be with you in tough moments—that is what made me [return] (quoted in Franco, 2002, 76).

It is unknown how many Colombians migrants have returned to their homes due to the lack of social network support in South Florida, but there are likely a number of migrants with experiences like Christina's.

Expanded Push-Pull Theory

Table 1 depicts how all the primary variables associated with the previous discussed theories play key roles in an Expanded Push-Pull Theory explanation of the latest wave of Colombian migration. This project thus supports a number of hypotheses related to Expanded Push-Pull Theory. In addition to these primary factors for explaining the migration, the pilot research found that the *pull* to South Florida over other destinations was strengthened by several

additional factors: (1) Spanish language—the primary language of business and social interaction in the community, (2) lifestyle—Colombian food, restaurants, music, dance, radio, and television are readily available in South Florida, (3) proximity to Colombia—only two to three hours by air to most major Colombia cities, (4) good weather, and (5) unfamiliarity with other regions of the United States (Collier and Gamarra, 2001).

In consonance with the assumptions of comparative research (Ragin, 1994, ch 5), this article's rival theories analysis reveals that a number of differing causal configurations can lead to the same human behavior or outcome condition—i.e., in this study the decisions of Colombians to migrate to South Florida and then later to decide to return to Colombia. Classic Push-Pull, EVL, Social Dislocation, and Network/Social Capital theories are good for explaining different sections of the wave of Colombian migration—i.e., almost all migrants are affected by one or more of the economic, political, and social factors related to these theories. However, in the search for models that explain the most variance in our dependent variables, i.e., the decisions to migrate in either direction, the interdisciplinary Expanded Push-Pull Theory emerges as the most robust. These findings highlight that not all migrants are motivated by the exact same factors, and that interdisciplinary theories are often better for explaining these complex differences.

Conclusion

As this research summary report reveals, the 1996-2002 migration of middle and upper-middle class Colombians to South Florida is an extremely complex social phenomenon affected by a number of economic, political, and social factors. This article develops that employment of interdisciplinary theories similar to Expanded Push-Pull Theory are best for capturing the complexity of such human behaviors. The pilot and thesis research conducted for this study

found that social dislocation caused by personal threats from violence and economic downturns in Colombia were the most important reasons middle and upper-middle class Colombians in our sample migrated. Existing networks of family and friends provided the strongest explanation for why Colombians migrated to South Florida. The unfriendly welcome of Colombians to South Florida; i.e., the migrants' inability to obtain work visas, obtain professional employment, and reestablish lifestyles similar to what they left in Colombia; primarily explains why Colombians returned to their home country after only short periods living in South Florida. However, this last finding requires additional research as only anecdotal evidence was available.

Substantial research remains for us to fully understand the Colombian migration to South Florida and the return migration to Colombia. While this study was able to advance several rival theories that explain the causes of the migration and why South Florida was the migrant's destination, we were not able to actually test the theories due to the study's lack of a representative sample of sufficient size. Additionally, interviews and surveys of larger representative samples using more precise measurement scales are required of Colombians who are about to migrate from Colombia, of those newly migrating to or living in South Florida, and of those recently returned to Colombia after attempting to settle in South Florida. Sampling such "hidden" populations is extremely difficult, but not impossible and is the investment required to fully understand this recent social phenomenon that has drained Colombia of many of its most educated and experienced professionals.

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Table 1 Competing Hypotheses from Rival Migration Theories Explaining Middle and Upper-Middle Class Colombian Migration to South Florida (1996-2002)

Competing Hypotheses: Primary & Secondary Causal Conditions (Explanatory Factors) Shown	Classic Push-Pull	Exit, Voice, Loyalty	Social Dislocation	Network/Social Capital	Expanded Push-Pull
Why are Colombians migrating to South Florida?					
1. See better economic opportunities.	P	S	S	S	P
2. See no solution to Colombia's problems.		P			P
3. Change of social status/environment in CO.			P		P
4. Encouragement of social networks in SF.				P	P
5. Personal security concerns in Colombia.		S	S	S	P
Why are migrants returning from SF to Colombia?					
1. Renewed economic opportunities in CO.	P	S	S	S	P
2. Have new hope for solving Colombia's problems.		P			P
3. Did not establish social status or environ. In SF.			P		P
4. Failure to expand social networks in SF.			S	P	P
5. See improved personal security in Colombia.		S	S	S	P

(P) primary condition with evidence found. (S) secondary condition with evidence found.

Abbreviations: Colombia (CO), South Florida (SF), environment (environ.).

Table 2 Demographic Information on Focus Group Participants (March 2001)

Number in Focus Group	26	Colombian Origin (percent)	
		Large Interior Cities*	77
Age (years)		Small Interior Cities	19
Range	22-64	Coastal City	4
Average	38.4		
		Time in U.S. (months)	
Gender (number)		Range	1-131
Female	8	Average	23.8
Male	18		
		Professional Jobs (percent)	
Married (percent)	61.5	In Colombia	85
		In U.S.	23
Average Number Children (married persons only)	1.9	Social Class (scale 1-6)	
		In Colombian Average	4.6
		In U.S. Average	2.8

* Medellín (10), Bogotá (6), Cali (4).

Table 3 Most Influential Factors in Colombian Decisions to Migrate to South Florida

Factor	Percentage Reporting
1. Afraid of general violence in Colombia.	83%
2. Feel could live more securely in U.S.	81%
3. Feel no solutions for Colombia's problems.	54%
4. Violence in Colombia touched you or family.	50%
5. Discontent with Colombia's elected officials.	46%
6. See better economic opportunities in U.S.	44%
7. Discontent with Colombian political system.	38%
8. See better educational opportunities in U.S.	30%
9. Lack of employment opportunities in Colombia.	23%

Source: Focus groups conducted March 2001. N = 26