

Changes in the Bay Area : Designing New Mobility Patterns, Shaping Tomorrow's Metropolitan Evolutions

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'It should - as my friend and colleague Saskia Sassen would put it - allow 'hacking' by its smart denizens, empowering them to augment their collective space through the exploding constellation of urban apps.'

Jane Wakefield, BBC News Technology,

23 September 2013

Tomorrow's cities : what's it like to live in a smart city ?

INTRODUCTION

Throughout a century of scientific literature on migration studies, the definition of the urban migrant referred to a series of ruptures and oppositions inherent to his destiny, and which have constantly been called for as crucial structuring principles for a whole theoretical reflection on mobile populations. *Moving / still, not there / neither here, absent / present, at the center / marginal.* These concepts can hardly stand in a world characterized by a generalized mobility and an unprecedented increase of communication. The rootless, as a paradigmatic figure in the migrant world, is less and less effective, and gives way to a new figure, still roughly defined, but which we know corresponds to that of a moving person who calls for solidarity networks and alliances.

Figure 1

A woman and her baby waiting to cross the frontier in Peñas Blancas, one of the rare border checkpoints between Nicaragua and Costa Rica. It works as a snapshot for a recurring theme in Central American migrations : the departure as a form of loss, be it temporary or permanent.



This article goes against the paradigmatic figure of the migrant as a rootless, and rather shows the massive impact of migrant circulations on metropolitan evolutions, through a shift between two case studies, from Costa Rica to the state of California. This is why I would like to see how ICTs increase the accessibility of distant places and actions, and how this triggers an unprecedented opportunity, deeply embedded in resilience, to develop individual strategies which have until then been undetectable, as they were inhibited by collective decision-making. This questioning introduces the principal protagonist of the story I would like to tell : the *connected migrant*, as he shapes tomorrow's urban form.

Therefore, I explain the links between my study of Nicaraguan migrations and my current Californian research (I). I also describe the challenge generated by the necessary renewing of French paradigms specific to the Bay area (II). I then develop further my analysis of connected migrant networks in the digital age (III).

GEOGRAPHICAL METAMORPHOSIS : FROM CENTRAL AMERICA TO THE BAY AREA

- Results of my first research project : Central American migrations, a pattern ?

Through the initial study of two communities (Panamanian and Nicaraguan) settled in the coffee production area of Los Santos, Costa Rica, I am able to compare two different migration systems, with their own structure, their own characteristics, their rootings in the same place of arrival. Therefore, through the paradigm of space, or rather space appropriation, I can put in perspective the different nationalities which live there side by side, and outline the shift from war refugees to constrained economic migrants which characterize the Nicaraguan community.

I begin my study with the use of the 'push and pull theory' (Lee, 1966), an approach which partially explains migration flows between Nicaragua, Panama and Costa Rica, but which does not subsume what is really at stake. In fact, regarding the spatial evolutions of the labor area I am studying, along with the

constraints driven by the coffee production cycle, and the changeability of migration trajectory types for each farmworker community, I knew I had to refine the scale of my study. For this reason, I try to go beyond the prism of analysis which reduces migration trajectories to the quality of hospitality offered by "exogenous" actors (government, facilitators, associations), in order to present the migrant as the *key actor* of these trajectory patterns.

I evaluate the strategies under constraint set by migrants themselves, and intend to highlight the part some of them play in recruiting networks, their ability to benefit from the coffee production cycle, and the potential some of them have to build alternative professional projects on a long-term basis.

- Prospects of my actual research project : a bridge between Central America and the United States :

Each one of the nine counties of the Bay Area (Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano and Sonoma) counts between 11 and 24% of Hispanics¹. My actual shift from Central America to California as a case study is partly embedded in the inclusion of migrants' part in the building of ties between places of origin and places of arrival. What we used to consider as simple steps in individual trajectories constitutes in fact one and only dense network of multiple community networks. Moreover, a comparison between different places of arrival allows to sharpen the definition of network types which are structured on the American continent, considered as a whole.

My approach is very much inspired by Lucile Médina's doctorate dissertation (Médina, 2007), which relies on an analysis of "divergent comparison" among the Nicaraguan migrant community : it consists in the study of one national or ethnic group having migrated towards two or more different destinations (Green, 2007). Yet, Médina chooses to focus on the educational and professional outcome differences between two migrant profiles (migration towards Central

¹ 2010 U.S. Census Data.

America and migration towards the United States)². I am rather interested in what makes scattered communities look alike.

I also imitate Mike Davis's distinction between two key localized macro-processes happening in Southern California : on the one hand, the over accumulation of real estate and bank capital originated by the East Asian trade surplus, on the other hand, the labor-intensive service industries following Central American immigration's local impact in the region. Those two completely different connections have the same impact locally : what happened yesterday in Asia and Central America will have an effect in Los Angeles today³.

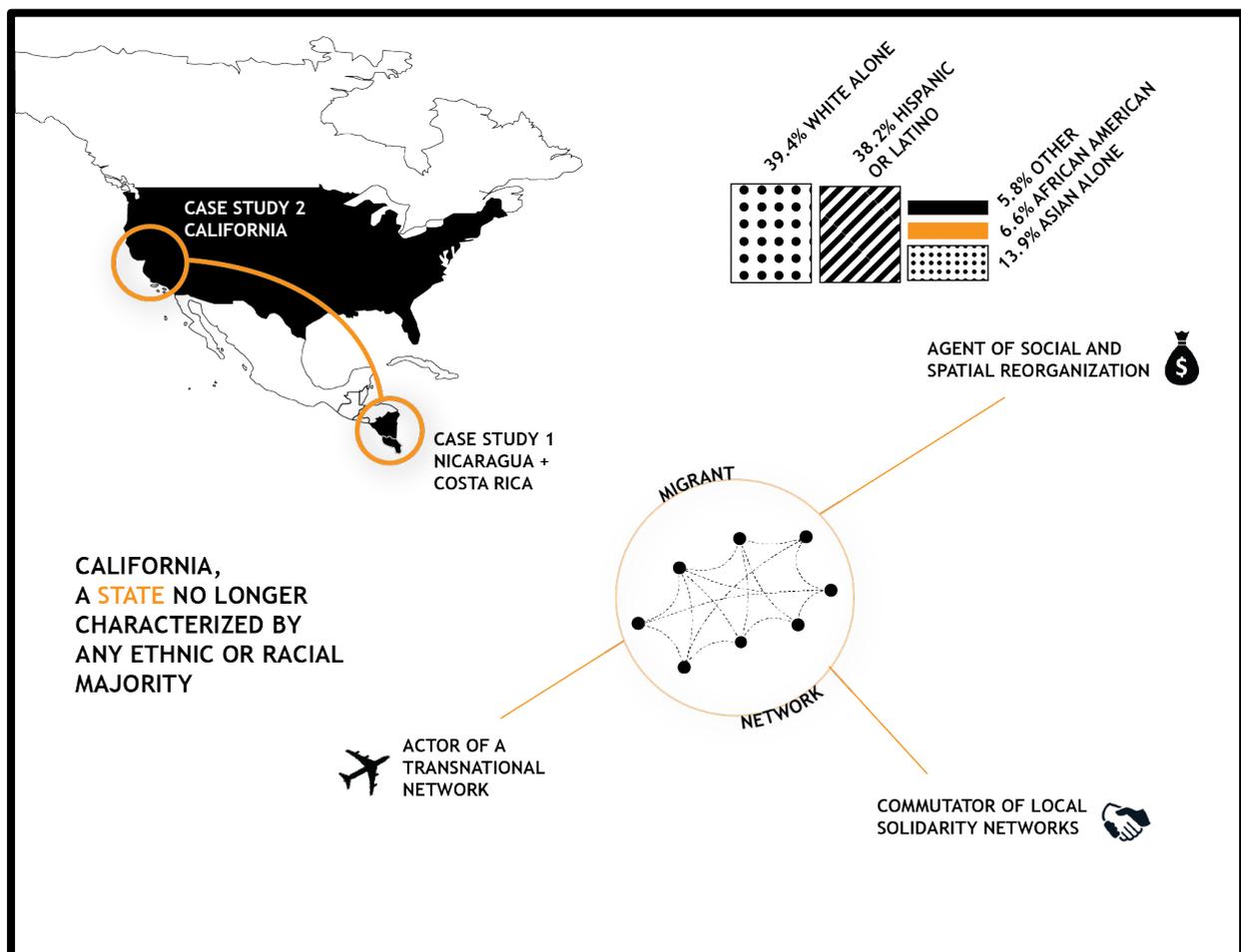


Figure 2
Migrant networks, from Central America to the State of California.

² "(You have) on the one hand, the somozista who exiled during the Sandinista Revolution with his capital and has found shelter in Miami ; on the other hand, the seasonal worker who cuts sugar cane and migrates, often illegally, towards neighboring Costa Rica ; there are very few common features, except their geographical origin" (Médina L., *Vers le Nord ou vers le Sud : Les chemins de l'émigration nicaraguayenne* In Baby-Collin V., Cortès G., Faret L., Guéat-Bernard H. *Migrants des Suds* (2009)

³ In Dear M., Flusty S., (1998) *Postmodern Urbanism*. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 88:50-72

ANALYTICAL METAMORPHOSIS : HOW TO STAND OUT ?

- *Bringing an innovative approach to the topic*

While being embedded in the aforementioned theoretical framework, my conducting hypothesis lies in the fact that migrants in the Bay Area develop mobility competences which are condensed in the suburban areas, a process that gives way to networks different from the classic pattern of ethnic enclave located in downtown neighborhoods. Through the prism of analysis which focuses on the logics of the information era, I intend to link this study to the research on metropolitan evolution in the Bay Area.

The studies of migration communities settled in the United States are numerous. What I intend to propose is the study of space taken as it appears. This space is both nodal point and crossroads for flows, sense of place, mobility and rootings. I intend to go back to the thesis of space-object and network-subject, to the detriment of the initial notions of ethnic enclave and ethnoburb (Wei Li, 1997) which researchers are increasingly correcting, preferring the plural notion of "kaleidoscope" (Mekdjian, 2009). We must now focus on crossroads, hybrid cultures, drawing a map where transcultural spaces are hypertrophied.

- *Renewing French paradigms on the Bay Area*

The study of connected migrations in the State of California would add a new pole of comparison to recent French-speaking studies already written on urban migration networks in the cities of Miami (Audebert, 2006 ; Médina, 2007 ; Jolivet, 2010), New York (Célestine, 2009), Chicago (Gervais-Linon, 1997) and Los Angeles (Mekdjian, 2009). In San Francisco, the recent gentrification at stake in the neighborhood of Mission District, the historical place of arrival for Central American migrants throughout the XXth century, has given place to the building of central paradigms in the cross-study of urbanity, residential segregation and

migrations (Lehman-Frisch, 2002, 2008), while Oakland has been treated through the prism of minority residential segregation (Douzet, 2013).

This intertwining of transnational networks is even more topical as the proportion of minorities in the Californian population grows, turning California into a state no longer characterized by any ethnic or racial majority⁴. Moreover, the gentrified Mission District neighborhood is not anymore the Mecca of the historical Central American migration : now, the suburbs of the San Francisco Bay Area, characterised by the consequences of the economic crisis of 2008, are taking over and gather the majority of the Hispanic community⁵.

POSTMODERN METAMORPHOSIS : MIGRATION NETWORKS TODAY

- *Networks : Central American migrants in the Bay, connected migrants ?*



Figure 3
Bismarck Cardoza, a Nicaraguan farm worker from Esperanza, on the phone with members of his family. He is getting ready to go back to Esperanza, at the end of the harvest season, with co-workers who had also settled in Costa Rica. This year, he had also invited his Costarican boss to come visit him in Nicaragua - Llano Bonito (Costa Rica), March 13, 2012.

⁴ Caucasians who are non-Hispanic now represent only 39.4% of the population and African-Americans have lowered to 6.6% while Asians represent 13.9 % and Hispanics 38.2%. 2010 U.S. Census Data.

⁵ "The line between predominantly black East Oakland and almost exclusively white San Leandro was well known in the country and helped to reinforce the common perception of 'white' suburbs and 'black' cities. But in the Bay Area, which has long been multiracial, with a complicated and spread out geography, this was never completely the case. Yet, it has been a fact of life for African Americans to be confined to a handful of cities at the core of the Bay - namely, Richmond, Oakland, San Francisco, and East Palo Alto. (...) Many were able to become first time homeowners by taking advantage of East County's relatively affordable housing stock. But rampant predatory lending practices that targeted buyers of color led to skyrocketing mortgage payments and declining home values that put East County at the epicenter of the national foreclosure crisis." in Schafran A., Schildt C., 'Social Justice in Suburbia : East Contra Costa Needs Regional Resources', Race, Poverty & The Environment, Vol.18 No.2, 2011. Alex Schafran refers to the urban system which characterises the San Francisco Bay Area using these terms : 'a collection of suburbs'

One of the major changes which happened since the 1980's in the evolution of diasporas is linked to the multiplication of dispersed communities in physical space, and the new forms of grouping, action and occupation in digital territories. This digital transformation goes beyond the initial observations made about social or spatial segregation⁶, and has now corrected the dichotomy between a potential "cybergeoisie" (Dear, 1997) and the rest of the urban community.

In the 1990's, the scientific world had witnessed the access of migrants to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). In the preparation of trips, in the maintenance of distant ties, in the integration through labor market, the use of ICTs had become inevitable, as it was now an integral part of mobility and communication networks. Throughout these decades, we were witnessing the first days of research projects on the new use of ICTs : this was the work of Arjun Appadurai (1996), Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller and Cristina Szanton Blanc (1994), Alejandro Portes (1996) or Helen Sampson (2003) who had set the following equation : *'transnational communities = diasporas + technologies'*. In France, at the same time, Alain Tarrus and Lamia Missaoui (1994) were publishing their findings on the "communication know-how" specific to migrants, whereas Dana Diminescu was publishing her first works on digital frontiers (1999) and the emerging figure of the connected migrant.

- Future perspectives :

*"The problem with much of the 'right to the city' discourse has been that it has remained impossibly abstract for far too long."*⁷

⁶ "The phone and modem have rendered street life irrelevant, and the new city threatens an "unimagined sameness" characterized by the loosening of ties to specific spaces ; rising levels of surveillance, manipulation, and segregation ; and the city as a theme park. This new electronically mediated suburb is not missing any particular building or place but the spaces between them, that is, the connections that make sense of urban form." (Dear M., Flusty S., 'The Iron Lotus : Los Angeles and Postmodern Urbanism', May 1997, Annals of the Association of American Academy of Political and Social Science, Vol. 551)

⁷ Davis D., Hatuka T., 'The Right to Vision : A New Planning Praxis for Conflict Cities' (2011). Journal of Planning Education and Research vol.31 no. 3 241-247

Studies have been numerous on the building of transnational networks, specific to classic themes developed in migration sociology, and dealing with the increasing digitalization of the environment and mobility of migrant communities (border crossings, flows, integration, family groupings, development and money transfers). It would be interesting to add a left out dimension, the one dealing with the impact of such a digital ecology on local space.

Carlo Ratti's MIT SENSEable City Laboratory is for instance focusing on scenarios of how digital economy is changing the way we describe, design and occupy cities. As a matter of fact, the figure of the connected migrant shows how technology can indeed function as an interface between people and the city.

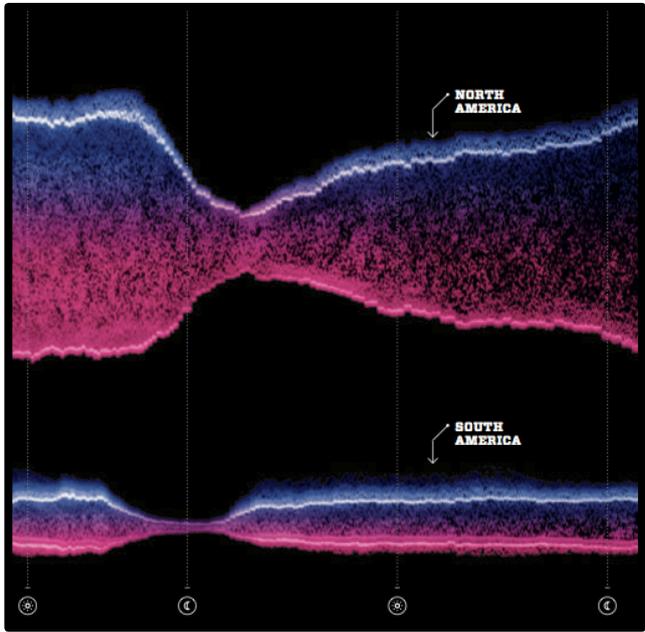


Figure 4
Carlo Ratti and his team used 33GB of anonymised data from Ericsson, harvested from 7,727,358 users around the world. They found that South America mostly browses the web, Asia watches videos and Europe is a social-networking continent. *In How the world uses its phones*, publication from MIT SENSEable City Laboratory (2013)

CONCLUSION

Moments full of emotion and constant implication give deepness to the experience and show how the project matters. Thousands of bus trips, thousands of wanderings to go to interviews. A long way, encounters which always move you, a process of identification that comes unexpected. One cannot only be the neutral research student, the simple individual asking questions ; one can only be

completely *immersed* in it. Yet, one cannot jump to quick conclusions : as Robert Beauregard puts it : "Only decades into the future will the city be fully changed and a new epoch in place (...). The assertion of a radical break in urbanization is not, and can never be an unadorned, empirical claim (...). More important is the work that the claim does in focusing attention, mobilizing ideas and research, and challenging the community of urban scholars to re-think the wisdom they have so patiently acquired. Viewed in this way, the 'radical break' is less a statement about cities than an insight into the current state of urban theory"⁸.

I want to study the United States of pluralization and identity complexity. I look forward to learning more on crossed stories, intertwined routes, diasporic identities and migrant lineage. What I seek is the call for the combination of Foucault's framework, where the subject is first built by the subjection to control institutions and dominant discourse, and Deleuze's paradigm, that of a subject demultiplied along nomadic base lines. I also seek the heritage of network prophets : first Deleuze and Guattari, whose botanical rhizome pattern, this underground and non hierarchical network made of lateral connections, is the graphic transcription of the networks I admire. I intend to highlight the interaction between the structure of opportunities, group histories, and network resources, also looking at how it permeates research traditions of metropolitan change, with metropolitan forms which embody the time-sensitive logic of the information age.

⁸ Beauregard R., 'The radical break in late twentieth-century urbanization, *Area* (2006) 38.2, 218-220

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