

Borders, independence and post-colonial ties : the role of the state in Caribbean migration

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Summary

Public debates on migration periodically incite calls for increased border controls, be it through fences or heightened border patrols, or through selective migration policies to exclude the entry of 'undesirable' immigrants. Yet, research has produced mixed findings on the effects of migration policies: while they may lead to their intended objectives and decrease immigration levels, they also generate important unexpected effects, such as diversion of migration to ever riskier migration routes and irregular flows. This study contributes to this debate by examining the migratory effects of the establishment of border regimes in a specific historical and geographical context: the closure of the border by former colonial states as part of Caribbean former colonies' movement to independence. Specifically, this study investigates the short- and long-term migration effects of independence and the establishment of border regimes as well as the role of historical connections, often referred to as post-colonial ties, in shaping migration patterns. Covering the period between the 1950s to the 2010s, this study complements existing migration literature by contributing new concepts and empirical evidence on the role of the origin and destination states in shaping Caribbean migration patterns, specifically migration volumes, timing, composition (class, gender, ethnic group, age) and destination.

This study was inspired by evidence of high emigration rates in the Caribbean region, particularly from independent Caribbean countries with closed border regimes. Paradoxically countries with open borders with their former colonial states, such as French Guiana, did often not experience equally large-scale emigration. Furthermore, although post-colonial ties are generally expected to encourage migration from former colonies to former colonial state, actual migration patterns in the Caribbean question this assumption. In fact, while migration from some countries is heavily concentrated on the former colonial state, such as from Suriname to the Netherlands, others have experienced a strong diversion to alternative destinations, such as from Guyana to North America, rather than to Britain, the former colonial state. These distinctive migration outcomes invited the analysis of the migration drivers and the dynamics at play.

Conceptually, this study primarily explored whether the closure of the border generated the four unanticipated *migration substitution effects* of migration policies hypothesised by Hein de Haas (cf. 2011). However, by focusing on the decolonisation period, this study also examined the effects of migration policies *in their interaction* with the migratory effects of independence and state formation processes. By also considering the political changes and socio-economic developments associated with decolonisation, this study analyses the more general role of the state in shaping migration patterns beyond migration policies *per se*,

including economic, education, social welfare and agricultural conditions. Redressing the receiving country bias, this study also purposefully focused on analysing the role of state policies in migration processes from an origin country perspective.

The Caribbean region provides an ideal case to examine theoretical ideas and contesting hypotheses on the effects of open and closed borders, political status changes and post-colonial ties. The Caribbean case also provides a valuable analytical angle to conduct critical analyses on the role of the state in shaping migration patterns. First, the 25 former colonies considered in this study underwent rapid change in political status between the 1960s and the 1980s; but while 13 gained independence and experienced border closure by their former colonial state, 12 former colonies moved to an autonomous non-sovereign status and various combinations of border regulations. Second, four hundred years of colonial past make this region highly suitable for investigating how (colonial and) post-colonial ties shape migration between former colonies and their former colonial states before and after independence. Within the region, three case studies, Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana, often referred to as the three Guianas, allowed in-depth analysis of how these factors shaped the timing, volume, composition and direction of migration over the past few decades.

This study relies on a conceptual framework which expands the view of the state in migration through a classification of migration and non-migration policies, providing examples of intended and unintended policy effects. Chapter 2 of this study elaborates theoretical scenarios to illustrate the complex effects of independence and the establishment of border controls on the timing, volume, composition and destination of migration. Chapter 3 discusses overall trends and patterns of Caribbean migration and explores how the various combinations of political status transitions and border regimes established by former colonial states as well as Caribbean countries have affected migration. A detailed analysis of border regimes and travel visa requirements shows that Caribbean countries which have open border regimes with their former colonial state also have lower travel visa requirements to other major destinations in Europe, North America and within the Caribbean. Conversely, independent countries which had the borders with their former colonial state closed, are also subjected to high levels of travel visa requirements by other major destinations in Europe, North America and within the Caribbean. This suggests a certain migration policy convergence, whereby main destination countries generally impose similar migration restrictions on the same origin country. The chapter then presents descriptive statistical analyses of long-term emigration patterns identifying associations between border regimes and post-colonial ties on overall, extra-regional and intra-

regional emigrations in the period between 1960 and 2010. The findings are discussed below.

Chapters 4 to 6 build upon the insights from the conceptual framework, the theoretical scenarios and the descriptive analyses of the Caribbean to present complementary in-depth analyses of migrations in Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana. Chapters 4 and 5 examine the evolution of Guyanese and Surinamese emigration, respectively, from the 1950s until the 2010s and analyse how the establishment of border regimes and independence have shaped the timing, volume, composition and direction of emigration. These case studies show that it is crucial to understand the state's position with regards to independence and the establishment of border regimes given its role in shaping the population's perceptions of these important changes and, subsequently, their migration decisions. Chapter 6 examines the effects of French Guiana's incorporation into the French State on Guianese emigration patterns from the early 1950s to the 2010s. This case shows the importance of the French state in stabilising the standards of living in French Guiana and how this, in combination with free migration, reduces migration aspirations. Finally, chapter 7 presents a comparative analysis of the Caribbean region and the three case studies and summarises the main findings on the role of border regimes, political status, post-colonial ties and the wider role of the state in migration.

Five main insights can be drawn. First, countries that have experienced the closure of a border regime, mainly independent countries but also British dependencies, have paradoxically witnessed stark *increases* in emigration intensity over time, often against the expectations and intentions of policy makers. In contrast, Dutch, French and US non-sovereign countries, generally show slower growth in emigration and increasing immigration, paradoxically as a consequence of their open border regimes and non-sovereign status vis-à-vis their metropolitan states. Thus, *while closed borders do not reduce emigration in the long term, open borders do not necessarily lead to very large migration, but more often to higher (circular) mobility, including short-term visits and return flows*. Second, both *the establishment of border regimes and independence help to explain the occurrence of unintended strong, albeit temporary, emigration hikes*, while such peaks do not appear in the absence of migration restrictions as in the case of French Guiana. Third, the contrasting cases of Guyana and Suriname suggest that *differences in the timing and sequencing of independence and border regime establishment significantly affects the spatial orientation of post-colonial migration patterns*. When immigration restrictions are introduced before independence, emigration destinations may diversify away from the former coloniser, such as in the case of (former British) Guyana. On the other hand, border closure at and after independence may reinforce the colonial orientation of such migrations, such as in

the case of Suriname. Fourth, *strong relations between former colonies and former colonial states after independence seem to strengthen post-colonial ties and encourage migration to the former colonial state*. Conversely, *the growth of relations with other states, such as through trade, education and media exposure, encourages people to expanded worldviews (mental maps) of potential migration destinations in which the former colonial state and other countries in the same colonial sphere are no longer exclusively considered*. Lastly, while border regimes and migration policies greatly influence emigration, *in the long-term political and socio-economic conditions as well as stability, which are effected by a wide range of non-migration policies, offer important explanations for variations in colonial and post-colonial migration patterns across countries and over time*.

The study makes three important methodological contributions. First, it adds to an understudied research field: comparative research of Caribbean migrations across former colonial spheres. Second, it puts the three Guianas on the mental map of migration researchers; these countries provide not only rich migration histories that include the earliest state-led labour migrations, but they also provide valuable examples of very dynamic contemporary migration patterns. Third, this study showed that there is great value in using in-depth case studies in a historical comparative perspective to explore themes, such as independence and post-colonial ties, which to date have been weakly conceptualised in migration research.

To conclude, this study expands our understanding of migration in four ways. First, it contributes conceptual insights and empirical evidence on the unanticipated effects of border regimes on migration volumes, timing, composition and destination as well as our understanding of migration dynamics in the absence of border regimes. Second, it provides a conceptual framework to understand the role of independence and non-sovereignty on migration patterns as well as a systematic approach to examine the potential *migration substitution effects* of political status changes and the establishment of border regimes by former colonial states and destination countries. Third, this study advances an improved and expanded conceptualisation of post-colonial ties which moves beyond the conventional bilateral relations between former colonies and their respective former colonial states. Instead, it proposes that colonial ties have evolved in response to post-colonial experiences, reacting to new geopolitical relations, which have shaped specific worldviews and new choices of migration destination. Fourth, it provides evidence of how states, particularly in origin countries, influence migration in indirect but important ways through various non-migration policies affecting general political, ideological, economic, technological and social conditions in origin countries.