



“We always remember the Island”: Puerto Rican climate migrants’ emotional meanings of home

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ABSTRACT

To contribute to the development of a sociology of home, in this article, we integrate migration, emotion, and place and space theories to study how the notion of home interacts with the experience of displacement. Through 54 in-depth semi-structured interviews with Puerto Rican climate migrants who fled Puerto Rico for the continental US after Hurricane Maria struck the archipelago in 2017, we asked this group about their experiences of the disaster and relocation. These interviews collected stories filled with place-making practices, definitions of identity, and descriptions of emotion work. The narrative analysis of these stories allowed us to gain knowledge about our participants’ meaning-making processes and emotions around simultaneously losing their sense of home and striving to (re)constitute it in a new space. The stories also showed the impact of the conditions of displacement on a population that is not commonly associated with forced migration but that is increasingly threatened by the impact of climate change. Our findings showed that the intangible emotional losses of displacement are as important for the adaptation process of climate migrants as material losses can be.

1. Introduction

When Hurricane Maria struck Puerto Rico in 2017, tens of thousands of homes suffered significant material damage; over 350,000 homes were affected, which represented just under a quarter of Puerto Rico’s total housing stock (Hinojosa and Meléndez 2018:15). In the aftermath of the hurricane, however, the damages to housing in the archipelago were only part of the problem behind the social crisis. The environmental devastation also included the destruction of the electrical infrastructure and significant damage to roads and to the potable water supply system, leaving people without shelter, water, food, health care, and medicines for months on end, and the government’s response was critically deficient (Rodríguez-Díaz 2018). After the storm it was estimated that approximately 2975 individuals lost their lives (Santos-Burgoa et al. 2018).

Our review of the social science research on the hurricane and the devastation that followed in its aftermath revealed that the interplay of human emotion and space, in the context of this crisis, was largely absent from the literature. Part of the scholarship is focused on ways in which preexisting structural conditions, such as the large number of informal constructions—that is, houses that were self-built without following building codes and often lacking proof of land

ownership—affected the recovery process (Algoed and Hernandez Torales 2019). Scholars have also investigated post-hurricane daily practices of adaptation for those who stayed on the archipelago (Sou and Webber 2019), addressing the community resilience and self-organized recovery practices (Andrade et al. 2021). People’s meaning-making of the situation has been addressed through the study of the emotional management of loss (Nina et al. 2019), and the federal government’s substandard mobilization of aid has been a recurring theme in the literature, which has addressed the trust or lack thereof in governmental institutions (Carvalhoes et al. 2021). Some analyses have connected the difficulties of implementing effective emergency preparedness plans to the ongoing financial crisis in Puerto Rico but also to the colonial relationship between Puerto Rico and the US (Rodríguez-Díaz 2018). Part of the dynamic of this relationship has been conceptualized as racialized neglect embedded in the form of governance (Bonilla 2020), which some scholars have viewed as having a negative and historical effect on the national psyche of Puerto Ricans (Llorens 2018).

However, despite the significant volume of work on the aftermath of the hurricane—some of which includes work on how the abstract category of home was affected by the experience of the hurricane (Sou and Webber 2019)—little is known about the spatial practices and emotions (Lefebvre 1991; Walker 2010) of those for whom the losses and acute

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crises led to relocation to the continental US. With very limited exceptions (Vargas Ramos and Venator-Santiago 2019), most of what we know about these post-disaster, or climate migrants is their numeric representation in migration flows (Mora et al. 2021).

In this article, we explore how, in the context of the immense losses that resulted from the disaster, Puerto Rican migrants construct new homes after migration, and how, in some cases, the partiality of the losses represents an ambiguity that prevents emotional closure (Boss 2007). All of the 54 Puerto Rican migrants whom we interviewed had experienced damage to their dwellings in the archipelago and were affected by the lack of critical resources after the hurricane. For them, community resiliency was combined with waiting for more substantial aid, and common daily practices of home-making were suspended in limbo, leaving them in a “permanence of temporariness” (Brun and Fábos 2015), which over time led to the forced migration of many.

Our analysis discusses the meaning-making processes around simultaneously losing one’s sense of home and striving to (re)constitute it in a new space, and it largely draws from the work of migration theorists focused on the study of home and place-making (Hammond 2018; Korac 2009; Boccagni 2016; Brun and Fábos 2015) that allowed us to contribute to the development of a sociology of home (Boccagni and Kusenbach 2020) while responding to academic calls for an integration of the study of emotions into migration research (Aranda 2007). Our research thus seeks to begin to close the gap in the study of post-hurricane Puerto Rican migration by addressing the intersection of displacement, mobility, and emotional meanings of place, in an effort that also contributes to the development of a sociology of home.

2. Puerto Rican migration and resettlement in Florida

Research about Puerto Rican migration to Florida has largely been done prior to the hurricane. These works have explored the adaptation of groups of Puerto Ricans from different social class backgrounds (Silver and Vélez 2017), their experiences with racialization (Aranda and Rivera, 2016) and with other race/ethnic groups, and internal divisions in the diaspora associated with socioeconomic bifurcations within the population (Deleme 2020), as well as transnational connections and bifocal lives (Duany 2011). With Hurricane Maria, scholars began to conceptualize post-hurricane Puerto Rican migrants as climate refugees (Duany 2021), and there is a notable research gap in the literature regarding how this latest cohort compares to those who were in the US previously. Though we will use the term “climate migrants” and not “climate refugees,” given that the latter is not commonly used for internal migration within a nation, we do recognize the population’s vulnerabilities and colonial conditions (Roosvall et al. 2020). Puerto Ricans in the continental US face the contradictions of embodying the social membership of citizenship, while also sharing with other immigrant minorities the experience of systematic institutional discrimination (Vidal-Ortiz 2004). While the colonial relationship between Puerto Rico and the US is a much broader subject that is beyond the scope of this article, our analysis is informed by the work of scholars who argue that, as colonial subjects (Grosfoguel 2003), Puerto Ricans have a marginalized citizenship (Ramos-Zayas 2003).

3. The intersection of migration, emotions, and place-making

In this analysis, we conceptualize disaster as a “place-based phenomenon” that affects the physical structure and social conditions of people’s lives, challenging their understanding and connection to place (Greer et al. 2020:306). We propose that expanding our understanding of the experience of displaced post-disaster migrants, whether they are categorized as refugees or not, requires an exploration of the views and feelings toward place that trauma can cause (Walker 2010). We also propose that the concept of home as a research tool to understand place-making processes can help researchers transcend the traditional scholarly focus on the receiving societies and the disempowerment of

the displaced newcomers, thus preventing the promotion of collective emotions of pity and fear (Korac 2009).

Though sociologists have long recognized the intrinsic relationship between thought and emotions and their interplay with one’s social context and the social structure (Hochschild 1979; Elias 1969; Bourdieu 1984), sociologists and scholars from across the social sciences have largely suppressed the exploration of how “the human world is constructed and lived through emotions” (Anderson and Smith 2001:8). The interdisciplinary field of migration studies has also been affected by this disregard of emotions in research (Boccagni and Baldassar 2015), despite early empirical observations of the prevalence of emotions in resettlement processes and transnational families (Thomas and Znaniecki 1919).

Today, scholars broadly recognize that migration “dissociates individuals from their family and friendship networks as well as from other socially significant referents that have strong emotional connections” (Skrbiš 2008:236), and scholars are increasingly integrating emotions into their analyses of people’s relationship with place, particularly for the study of transnational families within migration studies (Baldassar 2008) and disaster recovery (Convery et al. 2008).

Vargas Ramos and Venator-Santiago (2019) studied the adaptation of post-disaster migrants to Holyoke, Massachusetts, and showed that, in this context of reception, the majority of the migrants relied on kinship networks from largely working-class communities. Both community solidarity and the work of nonprofit organizations provided resources for migrants to reconstruct their lives and also provided access to affordable housing, which was the key to stabilizing the lives of the displaced. However, in contexts of forced migration, as is the case of our participants, frequent patterns of additional emotional challenges include pre-migration trauma (Aranda et al. 2021) and coming to terms with unwanted experiences such as discrimination (Walker and Zuberi 2020) and under-employment. As such, people find themselves having to change their ways to fit in, thus experiencing acculturation stress (Wilson-Forsberg 2015). Moreover, the work of emotional geographers (Morrice 2013) has documented how post-disaster migration can be a deeply traumatic experience and that in returning home after a disaster, people seek the familiarity and security of notions of home despite the disruptions trauma may have caused in their connection to places (Adams-Hutcheson 2017).

We build on sociological research that, drawing from interdisciplinary work on place and space and migration, proposes a sociology of home (Boccagni and Kusenbach 2020). This body of work argues that the definitional, relational, and ideological aspects of the notion of home can help researchers to simultaneously explore cultural, interactional, and material dimensions of the migration experience (Boccagni 2016). In this analysis, we define home as a lifetime process and practice of affiliation (Korac 2009) and an integral part of one’s personhood and identity (Cuba and Hummon 1993) and adopt home as an analytical tool to understand emotional challenges in displacement and extended mobility. It is important to note that by “home,” we are not referring to the limited category of dwelling; “home” conveys a social experience or practice (Boccagni and Brighenti 2017) with spatial, social, and symbolic features (Watt and Smets 2014).

Margarethe Kusenbach and Krista Paulson (2019) have specifically argued for the integration of emotions into sociological research on home, and Aranda (2007) has developed a theoretical concept for the study of emotional adaptation in processes of migration, termed “emotional embeddedness.” Emotional embeddedness refers to the aspect of emotional adaptation that pertains to the individual’s sense of belonging and acceptance and their sense of emotional connection with the multi-scalar place of reception and its people (e.g., home, neighborhood, community, or nation). Connections in the new place may depend on the interplay of relational, cultural, structural, and social factors, and thus emotions can be observed in many aspects of migrants’ lives, such as the family level (Aranda 2007), group relations (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Pastor 2021), and interactions with newly inhabited

spaces and host societies, and in the construction of places (Aranda et al. 2014).

The adaptation of a migrant to a new society entails not only the linguistic adjustment and access to practical and material resources such as education, health care, and employment but also a type of effort that can be considered what sociologists have called “emotion work” (Hochschild 1983), which constitutes the emotional and affective dimensions of adaptation. Moreover, for displaced populations, adaptation can also be marred by challenges to mental health, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (Morrice 2013). By treating home as a fluid category whose definition varies depending on the views of the individual defining it, we are able to explore associations that our participants make between their own identity—which is to say their perceived personal characteristics and their roles and value in social life—and the situations, settings, and dwellings that they arrived to or had to abandon and that they call or called home. We sought to learn, from the emotional meanings attributed to the notion of home, about our participants’ embodied needs and aspirations for “safety, rootedness, harmony, joy, privacy, togetherness, recognition, order, control, possession, nourishment, initiative, power, [or] freedom” (Rapoport 2005:345), which are often associated with this notion.

As an analytical category, the notion of home can deepen research on how people negotiate between continuity and change in their daily experience (Korac 2009; Boccagni 2016; Boccagni and Kusenbach 2020); how they seek stability and belonging (Shutika 2011) or change (Thin 2016); and how they regulate social life and interaction based on cultural ideologies (Kitchin 1999). Moreover, the category of home can allow us to see how people attribute emotional meanings to place in the context of life changes and perceptions of self but also how routines and feelings of loss affect people’s sense of belonging (Cristoforetti et al. 2011).

In this article, we specifically explore three factors that are broadly recognized in the literature on home as integral factors of this category: familiarity, safety, and control (Boccagni 2016). To further develop the abstract notion of emotional embeddedness, we explore how home-making, as an ongoing process in people’s lives (Korac 2009), can serve as a process that we call the *emplacement of emotions*. We define the emplacement of emotions as the intentional ways in which people attribute meaning to space through emotional definitions, as geographers focused on emotions have noted (Adams-Hutcheson 2017; Morrice 2013). In mobility, this meaning-making process attributes specific emotions, such as loss, nostalgia, or belonging, to places (Duyvendak 2011; Morrice 2013), effectively shaping the situated experience of emotional embeddedness. Lastly, our paper also engages with the task of studying the lives of inhabitants of islands, an often-neglected area of study within the top-down structure of research focused on continental development (Stratford 2008).

4. Method and data

In this analysis, we embrace the underlying understanding that humans are storytelling animals (MacIntyre 1977) who create dramatic narratives to interpret and define their lived experience (Fisher 1984). We draw our data from semi-structured in-depth interviews, which are a common data type in empirical research on migration and emotions (Boccagni and Baldassar 2015). We analyze biographical and experiential narratives from 54 in-depth interviews with Puerto Rican climate migrants in the Tampa Bay area in Florida, USA. We partnered with the faith-based nonprofit organization *Mujeres Restauradas por Dios* (MRD) for the recruitment of study participants. This organization provided disaster relief services to Puerto Ricans who came to the Tampa Bay area after the hurricane. With financial assistance from the Tampa Bay Disaster Relief and Recovery Fund through the Community Foundation of Tampa Bay, MRD was able to create a one-stop hub to help migrants gain access to local services (e.g., job placement, housing, school enrollment, health care, food assistance). MRD provided us with its list

of clients affected by Hurricane Maria (over 1,000), and our 54 interviewees are a subgroup of 146 MRD clients whom we surveyed. Almost all of our participants migrated with other family members, most had children, few had less education than a high school diploma or more than a bachelor’s degree, all were middle to lower class, and more than half were women.

We asked our participants questions about their lived experiences of the hurricane and its aftermath in Puerto Rico and about their mobility to and settlement in the continental US. We categorized their responses by themes, using the qualitative coding software MAXQDA. A recurrence of narratives related to place-making emerged, which we termed “belonging,” “family,” “home,” “comparing US to Puerto Rico,” and “perceptions of Tampa.”

Through a narrative analysis of the stories, we teased out emotions and meanings related to the notion of home and the social dimension of home-making practices. We gained knowledge about cultural ways of feeling (emotion codes) and thinking (symbolic codes) in our participants’ sensemaking (Loseke 2009). We discuss our findings in the following subsections, citing samples from our participants’ stories to illustrate the two predominant narratives we identified.

4.1. Home is where your roots are

The cultural narrative of connecting to a place by “growing roots” was recurrently present in the stories of our participants, who often spoke of the material ownership of their dwelling—owning a home—as a symbol of rootedness and place attachment.

Alicia (72 years old) described a need for stability and belonging (Shutika 2011). Retired and married with three children, Alicia described her future plans through her husband’s active rejection of the idea of home ownership. When asked if they were thinking of buying a house in Florida, she responded, “My husband says no. He wants to die over there in Puerto Rico.” Subsequently, when asked how long they planned on staying in Florida, she mentioned that they wanted to stay two years but had been in Florida for three already, waiting for funds to fix their house in Puerto Rico:

Everything was damaged: the washer, the dryer, everything was damaged. ... And the rooms were damaged. The roof was falling. The ceiling gave in a little bit in the kitchen. We spent ... \$10,000 to seal the roof. Trees fell on the roof. I don’t know if FEMA was blind.

Alicia, showing signs of trauma, cried while sharing this story and shared that it is in Puerto Rico that her husband wants to die and be laid to rest. Florida is a temporary refuge, and the damaged house in Puerto Rico is an ambiguous loss (Boss 2007) that “freezes the grief process ... and prevents cognition, thus blocking coping and decision-making processes. Closure is impossible” (Boss 2007:105).

Unlike Alicia, Anuar (61 years old) aimed to establish roots as a means of transformation. Anuar sought growth and change (Thin 2016) but also wanted to embed himself permanently in the social fabric of his new environment. Anuar is a person with a disability who moved to the continental US after the hurricane and a subsequent divorce. He has no children. He and his sister were born in New York, but they both grew up in Puerto Rico. He works as a part-time mechanic and is learning English. In the following quote, he describes migrating as a process by which he left “his place” but also as a process that has given him a chance for learning new things and “becoming” again. In this regard, he shows what some scholars have called “post-disaster growth” (Thin 2016). His emotions, such as nostalgia, still tie him to Puerto Rico, as he said that he has thought about going back to Puerto Rico. But when he evaluates his options, he wants to stay in Florida:

I have thought about going back, maybe because of the nostalgia, but I put it all in a balance and I prefer the quality of life here. ... I was in my place, as they say. I knew it from head to toes. And then you come to a place where you don’t know anyone or the language, so you shy

away about lots of things. But here we are, overcoming it, I have come to learn, and when you have opportunities, you have to take them.

After leaving Puerto Rico, Anuar felt dissociated from his emotional connections (Skrbis 2008), yet he described a progressive process of affiliating himself (Korac 2009) and overcoming challenges. He mentioned, for example, the possibility of owning a business in Florida when describing a previous job he had: “that air-conditioning job, you know, was giving me the possibility of opening my own business.” Although he did not open the business, he wishes to attain home ownership. Anuar’s story shows both material and symbolic features of place (Watt and Smets 2014). He wants to buy a house where he can control his choices and has identified the area where he wants to buy, which he describes through emotions:

There is an area that I love. If I get lucky, I will buy—a place where I can plant things. ... I don’t want a condominium to tell me what to do in my house. ... I tell my sister, “How can it be that you can’t plant anything?!” ... No, no, no, in Puerto Rico things are different. There, if you follow the community’s parameters in the front of your house, you are fine. Whatever you do at the back is a different story.

By asserting that he will do home as they do in Puerto Rico, Anuar associates his personhood with the situated culture he has identified as Puerto Rican (Cuba and Hummon 1993), but he is open to and hopeful for new affiliations and connections to people and places in Florida, where he wishes to stay.

Home and rootedness did not necessarily translate into belonging and acceptance for our participants. For some of them, home was conceptualized as the place where family is (Blackwell et al. 2021) or where generations of family came from, further emphasizing the importance of roots. Perhaps the long history of being a “nation on the move” (Duany 2008) has deterritorialized this group so that kinship units define where home is (Aranda 2007), reinforcing Boccagni and Kusenbach’s (2020) assertion that home is relational. For example, when we asked Guillermo (31 years old), a social worker with no children who returned to Puerto Rico, which is the place he considered home, he explained that home was anyplace where he could be near family. His narrative illustrates a need for continuity but also how the complex interplay among personhood, culture, and social interaction is embedded in the notion of home and how return represents a search for familiarity and security experienced before the disaster:

I think that anyplace where my family—my blood—is will be my home, and now that is both Puerto Rico and Florida. We have always been together to support each other. In Florida, I lived a long time with [my family], but I am used to living in Puerto Rico.

However, he added,

I have always lived in Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico will always be my *canto de tierra* [homeland], as we say here in the Caribbean. So even if I go to Florida, I would not lose my connection to Puerto Rico. That will never happen. I may go, but in Christmas, I’ll come home and enjoy my culture.

Guillermo defines home both geographically and by kinship ties and cultural practices, such as being with family during the Christmas holiday. Rootedness, thus, rather than being a territorially bounded identity, was developed by some of our participants in more than one place across geopolitical borders and grounded in relational terms, such as contact with family or the social embodiment of cultural traditions. However, our participants did not associate home to all aspects of belonging. Some narratives deromanticized conceptions of home as haven and heaven (Duyvendak 2011). For instance, we also asked Guillermo where he felt more accepted, and he said that he felt more accepted in Florida, again describing social interactions to define place:

Puerto Rico is a very religious country, so if you are gay, you will experience more discrimination there; you see it more. Some things have evolved, but not much, though. You may be able to find more open-minded friends. ... There in Florida, I felt accepted in terms of my identity. I did not have to hide there. If I have a partner, I can flow in a normal way.

Alicia said that she was one of seven children and was the only one outside of Puerto Rico: “Sometimes I get melancholic and want to go to be with them.” Loneliness was a frequent concern, often rooted in a lack of familiarity overall, but was described as accompanied by an ambiguous sense of relief and even empowerment. For instance, Anuar said, “I had never been alone for so long, and it is sad. But it is good to learn how not to depend on others so much.” Yet Aurora (40 years old), a stay-at-home mom who depends on charity to pay her rent, said,

You are alone here. You don’t have that sense of company. It’s not just about being visited but also being invited. I like cooking: you make a meal, and then people come, and they bring something too, and you all share. I don’t have that dynamic here.

Some mentioned racism, as did Axel (34 years old), a construction worker living with his partner and three children, who spoke about the emotional impact of racism:

The migration experience here has affected me a lot—racism, you know. But it’s not only the discrimination but the general mentality. Racism is so accepted that it is normalized. It’s like this is part of the way identity is seen.

Axel could not develop a sense of emotional embeddedness, as he talked about this kind of racism existing in the work culture of his job, something unfamiliar to his embodied history and sense of self.

In the stories we collected, home was often defined by rootedness, or by a sense of grounding oneself through belonging. Yet rootedness was not necessarily attached to the traditional concept of “homeland” or the place where one is born or where one grows up. In some cases, being attached and deeply connected to a place did not guarantee the feeling of being accepted in that place. For those of our participants who expressed being pulled between two places, translocal constructions of home prevailed, and these constructions at times affected identities and emotional adaptation. Importantly, for Puerto Ricans—colonial migrants with US citizenship—the option to return is always open (Aranda 2007). Consistently, the meanings of home in our data were as much about possibilities of accomplishing goals as about feelings of acceptance. Thus, for some, as we showed through Guillermo’s responses, rootedness may only exist translocally.

4.2. Home is where you can make it

The cultural narrative of the continental US as a “place of opportunity” recurrently appeared in the stories of our participants. Three dimensions of the notion of home that recurrently appear in the literature on home are control, safety, and familiarity, and theories on the meanings of home (Boccagni 2016:10) posit that home is defined by cognitive and emotional evaluations of these three dimensions. The theoretical proposition is that people make these evaluations by negotiating perceptions of control, safety, and familiarity to determine the degree to which the notion of home is absent, partial, or ideal. In these cognitive and emotional evaluations, home can act as a vessel where the past, present, and future can meet.

For instance, for some of our participants, having the ability to acquire desired goods or to advance professionally led to a sense of transformation of the self through the control of new possibilities. In such cases, a partial idea of home often came closer to its ideal through material things. For example, Isadora (31 years old), unemployed and mother of one child, shared,

Here [Florida] I have progressed a lot. In the short time that I've been here, I have achieved many things that I don't think I would have been able to attain there [Puerto Rico]. There, it was very difficult for me to have my things.

In the context of loss created by the hurricane, it became important for our participants to recognize the meaning of personal possessions. Coveted possessions, opportunities for advancement, or social conditions would also act, in some cases, as the means to exercise greater control and also served as testimonies of lived experiences, granting a sense of familiarity and perhaps also of safety and continuity, as seen below.

Jorge (43 years old), an unemployed teacher who is married with two children, discussed a trip he made back to Puerto Rico seven months after his family was settled in Florida. He explained that he traveled to recover possessions from their damaged house:

[The hurricane] made us have to start from zero. When we moved, we arrived at my cousin's house. She allowed us to stay in a little room at her place. But out of the things we had there, we were able to save very little. You know, our furniture, fridge, everything got damaged. The girls' toys stayed behind, the clothing, our memories. When I went, I tried to bring what I could from our photos, ... our wedding album. Later I went back and sent seven boxes. A lifetime together, fifteen years of marriage did not fit in seven boxes. Many things were left behind, many collections of things.

Jorge lamented the memories lost in the destruction, illustrating the temporal and familiar dimensions of home (Boccagni 2016) that "things" can encapsulate. Yet by fetching mementos representing key experiences, such as photos of the social ceremony of a wedding, Jorge brought meaning, familiarity, and continuity to the notion of home being rebuilt in Florida. The temporal absence of the objects had disrupted the time-vessel quality of his present home, where Jorge felt disconnected from his past, and connecting the past to the home in Florida potentially projected it into the future through familiarity.

The symbolic value of things also appeared to be enhanced in the stories by domestic practices. Cooking, for example, was described as part of the set of practices by which people set out to "do home" (Kusenbach and Paulsen 2013). Thus, access to native foods from the place of origin, often a luxury for migrants, seemed to be significant in helping our participants re-create a sense of familiarity. Jorge, for example, shared how he can cook in Florida like at home:

Here [Tampa] I find all the food I like and can cook like I'm at home. You can cook here like you can cook there. You find everything. In Christmas, I even found almond nougat. So I don't really feel that much longing.

When interviewing another participant, Nando (34 years old)—a manufacturing worker who is married with two children—we witnessed his face light up when he spoke about Puerto Rican coffee and food. He associated coffee and food to conversation and used them to describe the continuity of his daily practices and the value of memories:

We always remember the Island. That never fails. Almost everything we do revolves around what we do on the Island: the food, the coffee, the conversation, the routine. Of course, we adapt to the system here, but almost everything revolves around what we used to do there.

These narratives show how multi-scalar notions of home and also emotional embeddedness in culture can be embodied through a re-created sense of familiarity and continuity by practices and relationships but also by the availability or absence of resources. Jorge was excited about being able to consume the food he knew back in Puerto Rico, and this contributed to the meaning of home for him and facilitated emotional adaptation, as indicated when he said, "I don't really feel that much longing."

Rootedness or transformation, as we saw above, was not the only

association made with home ownership. Some participants conceptualized home ownership as a means to attaining a sense of safety in material possessions. When we asked Carla (51 years old), a woman with a disability and a single mother of two children, what she defined as home, she invoked a common symbolic code of Puerto Rico as a place highly affected by crime (Duany 2017). She called Puerto Rico home but shared her wish to be calm, implying that was not possible in Puerto Rico:

My home is Puerto Rico, my Puerto Rico, but I'd be happy anywhere after I own a roof over my head. It does not matter if it's here in this town or another one in Florida or back in Puerto Rico. I'll be home once I have a roof and my peace, once I have my things. I long to have my little roof, even if it's an efficiency apartment or one of those apartments for old people.

The idea of feeling safe and calm in Florida, where material possessions are possible and where the protectiveness of a self-owned home can be attained, recurrently appeared in our participants' narratives and was justified in a number of ways. These understandings of Florida often incorporated narratives about a better quality of life in the continental US (Duany 2011). In the stories we collected, juxtapositions of quality of life in Puerto Rico and in the continental US often suggested a sense of significant difficulties in the archipelago. For example, Jorge said,

When you go out to places here [Florida], you think, "My God, if they only did the same in Puerto Rico!" Puerto Rico is even more beautiful than here. There you see the mountains, and it's so beautiful. But they don't use its potential, there in their own home! I feel powerless!

This type of narrative, frequently tied to a political critique, most often appeared hand in hand with a discussion of crime in the archipelago.

Possessions were not necessarily described in terms of economic ambition; they were also perceived as holders of memories, as shown in Jorge's example, and signs of empowerment, as in Isadora's example. In these narratives, home allowed for the past to be remembered, the present appreciated, and the future expected with joy, but it could also signify sacrifice and the need to cognitively and emotionally negotiate adaptation. For instance, Rebeca (48 years old), a single mother of two children, discussed her cognitive and emotional negotiation of gains and losses to explain how, in the future, she might return to Puerto Rico:

I don't have plans to go back to Puerto Rico now. Maybe in the future. My mom doesn't feel well. She knows she doesn't have much time left and has all her documents in order. She has come to visit and has seen us but doesn't want us going back, because she sees that my daughters are well here. She doesn't want us to go back. She is happy that we are here.

Cognizant of a desire to return because her mother is in her final days, Rebeca still argued, and felt that her mother would agree, that Florida was best for her daughters. Rebeca defined home as partial, negotiating her emotional adaptation. Florida's opportunities came for her with significant sacrifice. In Rebeca's case, as in previously discussed cases, such as those of Guillermo, Alicia, and Carla, leaving the possibility of returning open may be the means to an emotional adaptation.

5. Discussion

Our analysis contributes to the expansion of the study of emotions in the field of migration by demonstrating how emotions are a key component of adaptation in the context of mobility (Aranda 2007). We found in our data a cognitive and emotional flexibility toward the definition of home that supports and expands the interrelated notions of security, familiarity, and control commonly discussed in the literature on home (Boccagni 2016). Our participants defined home as continuity but also as transformation. Some held ambiguous emotions and views on the relationship between home and the sense of belonging and

acceptance, and most described the notion of home as something that had traditionally been open to geographical changes, displaying a culture of mobility (Kandel and Massey 2002). Climate migration, however, was brought about by the destruction of homes, the inability to rebuild them, and a generalized chaos that was very different from the mobility that most had envisioned. The historical uncertainty of coming from a “nation on the move” (Duany 2008) may have facilitated the relational conception of home (Boccagni and Kusenbach 2020). However, while loneliness was a frequent concern for our participants, one rooted in a lack of familiarity overall, sometimes they implied an ambiguous sense of relief and even empowerment brought by being alone.

Scholars have argued that for people whose identities are multi-scalar and not bound to one territory, place-identity can be tied to an imagined place that can encompass multiple geographic locations (Proshansky et al. 2014) and that can be maintained through relational connections nurtured transnationally (Aranda et al. 2014). Translocal homes cannot be taken for granted because the sense of rootedness within them is not simply defined by cultural identity. Instead, trans-local homes must be forged through the place-making practices and social citizenship building of migrants who engage with their old and new contexts (Aranda et al. 2014). Some scholars argue that for forced migrants, the sense of home as a protective refuge where one belongs and where normal life can take place is thus only possible in the trans-local experience (Brun and Fábos 2015).

Among the Puerto Rican climate migrants whom we interviewed, the association of social advancement with living in the continental US was prevalent. This finding is consistent with research on Puerto Rican migrants that shows a prevalence in this population of emotional meanings and cultural narratives of the US as a site of tranquility that provides a better quality of life (Duany 2011). Many of our participants, as is the case of Anuar, see their future in Florida but do not necessarily define social acceptance or emotional embeddedness as possible. Many of their narratives, however, do show emotional meanings and negotiations (Hochschild 2019) that draw from broadly shared cultural understandings of home (Boccagni 2016) while also demonstrating how ambiguous, unclear, subjective, and emotive people’s relationship with the category of home can be, especially in contexts of displacement and trauma (Rapoport 2005; Morrice 2013).

Puerto Ricans who fled the archipelago after Hurricane Maria faced a type of involuntary mobility that is not commonly associated with Puerto Rico but that may increase given climate change. Interpretive analyses such as this one can help expand the existing knowledge of the intangible emotional losses of populations at risk of these forms of climate displacement. Some of these losses are common to all displaced populations, such as the “loss of family, kinship, friendship and wider ties with community and society” (Korac 2009:41), yet they are at times obscured topics in disaster studies.

As colonial migrants with US citizenship, Puerto Ricans have the legal option to go back and forth, but this flexibility should not be assumed to have structural and social support, especially under conditions of displacement, as our analysis has shown. Our findings expand the existing knowledge of the effects of the hurricane on the Puerto Rican people, a current focal concern in Puerto Rican studies (Rodríguez-Díaz 2018; Llorens 2018; Bonilla and LeBrón 2019; Bonilla 2020). Unlike traditional migration studies of the structural conditions in the receiving society, our exploration of perceptions of incorporation problematizes stigmatizing cultural views of forced migrants as disempowered victims (Korac 2009) without agency, an essential existential element for people’s sense of regaining control over their lives beyond the acquisition of material resources (Wallman and Buchanan 1982). The concept of home as an analytical category also allowed us to pair the use of narrative as both topic and method (Kusenbach and Loseke 2013) for the empirical study of people’s emotional relationship to place, representing a methodological contribution to the literature on migration but also on narrative methods. Future research should consider how the notions of home, migration, and emotions come

together among other populations that cross legal boundaries of nation-states in their mobilities to examine the contours of emotional adaptation when the option to return may not be present.

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