

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document:                   CREATING SPACES OF HOME: HAITIAN  
  WOMEN’S JOURNEY OF MIGRATION,  
  “LAKAY!”

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The literature on Haitian women immigrants has not offered a comprehensive portrayal of their experiences in America, but has treated their plight as a neutral entity, void of differences. Even more distressing, there is a lack of focus on the Haitian women’s experiences in the U.S. based literature. However, the true experience of many Haitian women migrants is that they have been either the first to migrate and or the focal point of the migration process in terms of recruitment. This study addresses the specificity of Haitian women’s experiences in the Washington, D.C. area, not one of the long established immigration centers in the U.S. An intersectional approach that maps the simultaneity of gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, class and legal status on the lives of these immigrants allowed theories of space, identity and notions of home to be developed. How did this group of women attempt to create “Lakay” in the metro Washington, D.C. area? Taking an ethnographical approach, this project centralizes an American immigrant population that has occupied a marginal if not invisible space by theorizing Haitian women’s

experience and giving them a voice in the broader framework of migration studies. Furthermore, the project will illustrate Haitian women's migration stories through examining their roles within their family, the community and transnationally through an analysis of the cultural understanding of Haitian women as central pillars of society.

In particular, this ethnographic study explores the everyday lives of Haitian women as immigrants and also provides an in-depth analysis of their social worlds. We find that Haitians in the Washington, D.C. area were not visible due in large part to the small population size, the dispersal of the community, both factors that contributed to the lack of prominent social institutions that have historically drawn immigrants to an area. Despite this, the participants have created a space of home in Washington D.C. in which their investment in the community lies mainly in the churches and organizations to which they belong. From a transnational perspective, home for the participants is also simultaneously located in the U.S. and in Haiti, where they long to return.

CREATING SPACES OF HOME: HAITIAN WOMEN'S  
JOURNEY OF MIGRATION, "LAKAY!"

By

Manouchka Poinson

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the  
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## Preface

On January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2010 at approximately 4:45 p.m., the Earth shook. In Haiti, the country of my birth, the ground revolted in protest. That protest came at a high price, with a single powerful force, the force of nature. Embedded deep in the Earth was a secret battle plan, drawn out, simple and executed. The Earth that gave birth to a free Black republic revolted in protest to take the lives of the masses.

Earlier that day the children had been sent to school and families departed, each member going their separate ways... Rushing off without saying what would be their last good-byes.

That day, the world watched as history was written for the country of Haiti. It would mark an important date in the timeline of Haiti's history --- January 1<sup>st</sup>; Independence Day, January 12<sup>th</sup>, The Earthquake of 2010, May 18, Haitian Flag Day.... Nothing in the history of the country could compare to the magnitude of human losses that was suffered on that day. Up from slavery to rebellion and revolt, the people to whom the land inflicted such a hard blowing attack had survived a history that some say was written in blood. For years, the people survived and died to a massacre. Governments changed and people continued to survive and die to corruption and injustices. People survived and died to the rise of a new force, the force of poverty and hunger. Poverty is said to be like Clorox bleach, a drink to kill. The imbalance of power and wealth and valuable resources were for a moment replaced with an equalizing fact of life or death. For once differences did not matter. Like a house being remodeled, a room redesigned, or a bed being made, it was like a bed sheet caught in the air, shaken vigorously to remove any dust and to remove any

wrinkles. The bed that was made is for everyone to lie on. Some are familiar with this new bed and fell asleep; while others could not find the comfort they once knew and suffer sleepless nights. They all beat back the darkness, the nightmares. While the Earth spared their own lives, the Earth also took the lives of the ones they loved.

Haiti has now returned to the public eye. The world is watching with a new eye, a humanizing eye of concern and empathy. On the day of the 12<sup>th</sup> as well as during the whole month of January, I received phone calls from people whom I had not stayed in touch with frequently. To the question, “how is your family?” I answered with a pause. Whether we suffered any direct losses did not lessened the feeling of despair for the entire country—the country of people who I am related to by the very invocation of the land. Our family prayed for the best, as we had not heard from our immediate relatives until days after the Earthquake due to a loss of communication. We posted pictures on CNN and other venues and we searched for answers. These answers we would have to prepare ourselves to hear and to live with...

Consequently, this dissertation was written to draw attention to the importance of my Haitian cultural heritage, a dominant part of my identity that has created an interest in building knowledge and awareness beyond my family stories and memories of an imagined past. The women who make up this project also share their stories of a past that included Haiti as a point of departure.

## Dedication

To my father, the late Rev. Thompson Poinson, who did not get to share in the many joys of life but offered the leadership example that has kept our family rooted.

To my mother, Durozia Poinson, who instilled in me an invaluable drive for excellence, the strength of faith and the certainty of success. To their courage to leave what was familiar. To my siblings Ann-Marie, Pierre, Louis-Handrick, Rose-Merry, Becki, and John Thompson, Jr., who always believed in my potential. To my precious husband, Bertholino, whose endless love and understanding helped to sustain me during this trying process. To our sons, Nathanael and Julian, the joys of our lives and the source of our motivation. And finally, to the memories of the over 230,000 Haitian people who lost their lives to the January 2010 earthquake.

## Acknowledgements

This dissertation project is possible through the support of many different communities of people. I am honored here to acknowledge the people who supported me through the process. I thank the American Studies Department at the University of Maryland, College Park for the years of intellectual support that helped to shape this project. It is through my department that I learned the importance of doing interdisciplinary work. American Studies has also helped me to bring topics that were once relegated to the margins to the very center of the conversation. I thank my advisor, Dr. Nancy Struna for her years of patience and dedication to my intellectual process. I also thank the Women Studies Department and Dr. A. Lynn Bolles in particular for her endless support, continued interest and commitment in my project. Women Studies has been instrumental in shaping many of my intellectual positions.

To my dissertation committee, I thank you for your commitment to my project and sacrifice of time that you so graciously gave me through this process. Special thanks to my dissertation chair, Dr. Lynn Bolles for offering her expertise and for believing in this project and supporting me from very early on in my academic journey. Thank you for the many meetings that brought clarity and a new found vision for this project. Thank you to the following committee members, in particular, to Dr. Nancy Struna, who has served as my advisor since the beginning of my academic journey through the Ph.D. To Dr. Psyche Williams-Forsson, who always challenged me to see creative ways to interact with my topic. To Dr. Georges Fouron whose own work on Haitian migration has shaped some of the important foundations

of this project. To Dr. Ana Patricia Rodriguez for her support and willingness to contribute her unique perspective to this project.

Much is owed to my project participants who are the center of this project, without which this project would not be possible. Your time and graciousness to welcome me into your homes, families and lives are invaluable. I also thank Dr. Bonnie Thornton Dill, Dr. Ruth Zambrana, and Dr. Amy McLaughlin of the Consortium for Race, Gender and Ethnicity (CRGE) who helped to shape my academic positions as an early scholar through my mentorship as a CrISP Scholar. To the Southern Regional Educational Board (SREB), who supported me through a Dissertation Fellowship. Thank you for simply existing and for supporting so many scholars of color. Thank you to AGEP and PROMISE for the numerous programming that were organized at the University of Maryland that helped give me direction and sharpened my skills. To, Dr. Wendy Carter, who brought to me a special set of skills. Thank you for your time, your talent and your heart to see me through till the end, for bringing me out of the final hour of this dissertation project. To my teaching community, Academic Achievement Programs, the Center for Teaching Excellence's UTLP for providing me with quality lessons on teaching and learning. During my tenure at the University, I learned to balance both my research and teaching roles. Thank you for making that experience enjoyable.

To my sons, Nathanael and Julian, who makes everything so much more meaningful. Thank you to my mom, Durozia, who has been my childcare provider, allowing me to be free to complete this work. Thank you for the many writing weekends that gave me that extra push. To my friend, Gaelle, who has only been a

phone call or email away to help me to stay on track. To my husband, Bertholino, who has been right next to me to cheer me on during the entire process, and pushing me forward ever so gently.

Special thanks must be given to God for bringing me here to the end of this road. By your grace, I have made it to this end, which I know is only the beginning. I give many thanks to my family for their love and motivation. The doctoral process has been a learning experience for us all, thank you for your patience and understanding. You have been there for me from the beginning of this journey and have never lost sight of the positives and always served as a reminder of strength, lifting my spirits, believing in me through it all. To my friends and church family, who have prayed for me and given me strength to endure this process.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Works of different genres by women have started to insert Haitian women's experiences and history into the wider scope of feminist literatures. Works such as *Framing Silence*<sup>1</sup>, *Walking on Fire: Haitian Women's Stories of Survival and Resistance*<sup>2</sup>, *Like the Dew That Waters The Grass: Words from Haitian Women*<sup>3</sup>, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*<sup>4</sup> and *The Butterfly's Way: Voices From The Haitian Diaspora In The United States*<sup>5</sup> have presented the strength and resilience of Haitian women. This strength is rooted in the survival strategies of everyday life. Within this strength there is also a contradictory silence. Author Myriam Chancy captures the plight of women in Haitian society very vividly when she explains that "even as they speak-whether through words or physical acts-they are silent."<sup>6</sup> This quote describes the limiting and contradictory roles typically available to Haitian women.

Women made up 54 percent of the estimated 6.5 million of the Haitian population in 1990. By 1990 women became 41 percent of the work force and 46 percent were heads of households.<sup>7</sup> Up until 1979, Haitian women were legally

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<sup>1</sup> Myriam Chancy, *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels By Haitian Women* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997)

<sup>2</sup> Beverly Bell, *Walking on Fire: Haitian Women's Stories of Survival and Resistance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001)

<sup>3</sup> Marie Racine, *Like the Dew That Waters The Grass: Words from Haitian Women* (Washington, D.C.: EPICA, 1999)

<sup>4</sup> Edwidge Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994)

<sup>5</sup> Edwidge Danticat, *The Butterfly's Way: Voices From The Haitian Diaspora In The United States* (New York: Soho Press, 2001)

<sup>6</sup> Chancy, 29.

<sup>7</sup> Marie-Jose N'Zengou-Tayo, "Fanm Se Poto Mitan: Haitian Women, the Pillar of Society," *Feminist Review* 59 (1998).

considered minors and the responsibility of their men<sup>8</sup> as husbands or brothers. Civil society is also extreme in regards to the topic of women's sexuality. In the Haitian civil society, women were either wives or prostitutes.<sup>9</sup> In spite of the traditional gender role placed on Haitian women in their society, they were always referred to as 'poto mitan,' central pillar.<sup>10</sup> How can Haitian women be called the central pillar, be considered minors, dominate the workforce and household all at one time? With such rigid binaries Haitian women must find alternative ways of defining themselves.

Edwidge Danticat contributed to this process of identification through her work of fiction, particularly *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, which has given us a view of how migration stories change when women are placed at the center. Readers are exposed to the inner conflict of identification, the gendered experience of women's migration and the process of reconciliation with locating the place of home.

Consequently, it is at the intersection of Haitian women's sense of identity through the lenses of feminist consciousness that I come to the study of Haitian women as migratory subjects. Migration is the place where I can meet, where I can reflect, where I can honestly theorize through my personal experiences and the experiences of the women I met. By using the trope of migration I hope to contribute to the histories of Haitian women that have yet to be written. The story that this dissertation project conveys is not of Haitian women being politically active in their communities specifically, as was the original direction of the project. Rather, this

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<sup>8</sup> Carolle Charles, "Gender and Politics in Contemporary Haiti: The Duvalierist State, Transnationalism, and the Emergence of a New Feminism (1980-1990)," *Feminist Studies* 21.1 (1995): 138.

<sup>9</sup> Charles, 142.

<sup>10</sup> N'Zengou-Tayo, 118-142.

dissertation shows the lived experiences of these women and tries to capture the moments, acts of agency that are exercised on the everyday personal level.

The project of portraying the Washington D.C. Haitian immigrant was one that I came to with much hesitancy because the population did not resemble what I have come to expect from a Haitian community. I expected to find neighborhoods where Haitian immigrants settled, Haitian restaurants, Haitian businesses, and Haitian religious institutions, all signals of enclave ethnic community.<sup>11</sup> Instead, I found that Haitians in the Greater Washington, D.C. area were not visible due in large part to the small population size and dispersal of the community. In addition, I also did not want to engage in this project because I assumed that I would be writing the story of the Haitian elite. The elite and those in power have always had representation, and they have always had the means to provide for themselves. I did not want to return power and privilege into the hands of this Haitian elite (diplomat, international agency) that I assumed made up the metro Washington, D.C. community, due to its proximity to the nation's capital. However, after surveying the social science literature of migration to the D.C. area I realized that certain stories were left out, whether classed or gendered. One such missing story in the literature is the story of Haitian immigrants in the Greater Washington D.C. metro area.<sup>12</sup> To date, there has been no scholarly work that focuses on Haitian immigrants in this area. Another gap is women centered research that deals with the experiences of Haitian women immigrants. Most studies on

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<sup>11</sup> Alejandro Portes and Alex Stepick, *City On The Edge: The Transformation of Miami*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> Cary's, *Washington Odyssey*, presents a multicultural history of the nation's capital, which includes the stories of Native Americans, African Americans, the Irish, Greeks, Jewish, German, Italian, Latino, Koreans, Cambodians, and Africans. Repak's, *Waiting on Washington*, presents the story of Central American workers in the nation's capital. Ana Patricia Rodriguez's *Dividing the Isthmus* also addresses the Central American transformation of Washington, D.C.

Haitian immigration have treated the immigrant as a neutral entity, having no specific differences. Using a gendered perspective, this project seeks to address the specificity of Haitian women's experiences. Migration simultaneously reinforces and challenges patriarchy in its multiple forms. By bringing gender in, an intersectional approach maps the simultaneity of gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, class and legal status on the lives of Haitian immigrants and Haitian native-born women. This project began with the two main goals of filling the gap in research on the Washington, D.C. area and Haitian women as immigrants.

The central themes of home, journey, and agency mark the parameters for this current study. These themes provided the direction for the project. The following four research questions have guided my thinking of this project:

The first question—*Where does the Greater Washington, D.C. fit into the story of Haitian Immigrants' journey to the U.S.?* —Reveal both the themes of home and journey in the lives of Haitian women. Whether D.C. is the first and last stop along the circuit of migration or one stop among many, this project seeks to trace when the Washington, D.C. Metropolitan area as a destination began to attract and maintain a Haitian population. What is particular about this population? What are some differences between other destinations? What attracts Haitian immigrants to this area? What does D.C. have to offer to this immigrant community? How has Haitian immigrants made D.C. their home? How have Haitian immigrants maintained transnational ties to their home country, Haiti? How do Haitians in D.C. reflect a story or success, struggle, and negotiation?

Question two—*How do Haitian women negotiate their everyday lives and identities?* —Reveals the theme of agency. As women, how do Haitian immigrants live their everyday lives? In what ways are their everyday experiences gendered? How do they maintain their Haitian identities? What are the cultural traditions that form their identities and culture? What are the differences if any between the first and second generations? What does the everyday life look like? This project interrogates women's roles within the family and in their communities. It looks at ways that women exercise agency within different aspects of their lives and the sense of power that these women feel.

Question three—*What happens when Haitian women are put at the center of migration research?* —This query also explores the theme of agency. When Haitian women are put at the center of migration research, the research becomes located within a specific cultural framework. This framework is raced, gendered and classed. These women are affected simultaneously by these constructions as subjects. Placing women at the center shows how men continue to be part of the conversation, as well as the family and society as a whole. Placing women at the center, thus allows for a holistic view of gender.

Question four—*How are generational differences reflected in the lives of Haitian women immigrants?* — An important question that addresses all three of the central themes of home, journey, and agency. By questioning and making the distinction between the first and second generations notions of home become layered and multidimensional. Other questions that are brought to the forefront are, where is home located for the two generations and most importantly how did they get there?

What sorts of choices were negotiated to establish this place of home? Generational differences allow for a discussion on agency in that the degrees of agency, to self identify become important. Overall this question creates another layer for analyzing this population of Haitian women immigrants.

### Methodology

Ethnography serves as the primary source with which data was gathered for this dissertation project. As a combination of different methods, ethnography served as a tool to combine certain features in specific ways. Ethnography encompasses both qualitative and quantitative research methods, namely, conducting fieldwork, engaging in participant observation, developing relationships and focusing on cultural forms. Ethnography is conducted locally and most importantly is guided by and generates theory.<sup>13</sup>

As the inscription of participatory experience, ethnography has allowed the use of “field notes that detail the social and interactional processes that make up people’s everyday lives and activities.”<sup>14</sup> Ethnography is important to migration studies, anthropologists in particular because as ethnographers argue, “migration is not merely a process best understood in economic and/or political terms but that it is also a sociocultural process that is mediated by gendered and kinship ideologies, institutions, and practices.”<sup>15</sup> Ethnography is therefore, the interpretive account of a

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<sup>13</sup> Margaret LeCompte and Jean Schensul, *Designing & Conducting Ethnographic Research: Ethnographer’s Toolkit #1*, (Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press, 1999) 1.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Emerson et al, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 11.

<sup>15</sup> Sarah Mahler and Patricia Pessar, “Gender Matters: Ethnographers Bring Gender from the Periphery toward the Core of Migration Studies,” *International Migration Review* 40.1 (2006): PAGE.

group's everyday lives.<sup>16</sup> In "The Ethnography of Everyday Life", John Caughey offers a critique of the role of the researcher in the field:

Fieldwork is itself a distinctly social process. In the standard situation, a scholar-researcher approaches a social situations, a community, or an institution, that is, a set of individuals—often strangers—whose everyday lives are the object of study. Effective research depends on establishing close personal relationships with these people, and its outcome is largely determined by the roles the scholar plays in their midst...Through experience of these relationships—though casual conversations, watching what goes on, participation, and formal interviewing—and through the concepts and methods brought to the field, the researcher "collects data."

The nature of this "data" is not neat or easy to control, but rather messy and unpredictable. It is therefore important as Caughey explains to pass beyond the role of stranger and establish close relationships with participants. Developing these close relationships brings with it, what Feminist Ethnographer Beverly Skeggs calls ethical dilemmas. One such dilemma is how we understand the experience of the research and the researched. "Feminist ethnographers enter into a culture of indebtedness always grateful that people will actually speak and spend time with you. Ethnography is very different from other forms of research because of the intensity of the experience."<sup>17</sup> Like Skeggs, I wanted to "reciprocate, not exploit, not abuse power, to care, to empower and to be honest". It is important to this dissertation project that feminist theories be applied to ethnography because of the participants who are women, who must negotiate power relationships in their daily lives.

Feminist anthropologists have also offered the background of knowledge that this project is founded. "Creating Spaces of Home" seeks to use the concept of gender

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<sup>16</sup> John Caughey. "The Ethnography of Everyday Life: Theories and Methods for American Culture Studies," *American Quarterly* 34 (1982): 224.

<sup>17</sup> Beverly Skeggs, ed. "Theorising, Ethics, and Representation in Feminist Ethnography." *Feminist Cultural Theory, Process and Production*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) 197.

identity in general as a lens through which to view the social worlds of Haitian Immigrant women in the Greater Washington D.C. area. One such way is presented by feminist anthropologists who concur that:

1. Power differences shape the lived experiences of people and the meanings that people attribute to those experiences.
2. In state societies, gender is one of several intersecting variables that together produce differences in power among sets of people.
3. Gender is a major organizing principle that shapes the reproduction of culture and, consequently, the transformation of cultural practices.<sup>18</sup>

As a social construction, gender varies between cultures, time, and socioeconomic levels. The particular gender categories that this project reveals are applicable to the specific group of participants in the study. What is most empowering as a researcher is the range of choices to shape the project based on my personal social commitments and engagements. By focusing on Haitian Immigrant women specifically, I hope to:

Correct the biases that are inherent in selecting only male informants, assuming that whatever men did was more important than what women did, analytically demeaning the contributions of women, discounting research topics that would be associated with women in the researcher's own culture, and assuming that women did the same things as men.<sup>19</sup>

This project looks at the difference of women through gendered, raced and classed lenses. Haitian women must simultaneously occupy all of these spaces. Focusing on not only the identities of my participants, but also my identity as a researcher who is also a Black, 1.5 generation Haitian woman, I rely on theories of autoethnography.

Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural

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<sup>18</sup> Bernard Russell, *Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology*, (Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press, 1998), 205.

<sup>19</sup> Russell, 205.

experience... [While acknowledging and accommodating] subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don't exist."<sup>20</sup>

More specifically, Black feminist anthropologists employ auto-ethnography as a "viable form through which Black feminist anthropologists may theorize and textualize our situated positions and elevate our subjugated discourses to levels recognized by both margins and center of the discipline."<sup>21</sup> The fact that I identify with my participants on many levels of identity offers me a unique perspective that cannot be replicated, but instead creates a process and product that is the result of our shared identities and experiences; it is an honest connection. For black feminist anthropologists, auto-ethnography "directly confronts the way in which our identities (always informed by race, class, and gender) are implicated in the research process and in the very way in which we relate to the discipline of anthropology."<sup>22</sup> And as such a methodological strategy, auto-ethnography brings "together identity, scholarship, and knowledge production."<sup>23</sup>

Along with the qualitative information that was gathered from the participants, I sought quantitative data from the U.S. Census and Immigration and Naturalization Services records. This quantitative information helped me to trace the population growth of the community at large and to trace specific locations within these spatially different communities.

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<sup>20</sup> Carolyn Ellis et al. "Autoethnography: An Overview," *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*. 12.1, 2011.

<sup>21</sup> Irma McClaurin. "Theorizing A Black Feminist Self In Anthropology: Toward an Autoethnographic Approach," *Black Feminist Anthropology: Theory, Politics, Praxis, and Poetics*. Ed, Irma McClaurin. (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2001) 56.

<sup>22</sup> McClaurin 57.

<sup>23</sup> McClaurin 61.

### Interview Methods<sup>24</sup>

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with twenty participants during a nine-month period. The semi-structured interview worked best for the participants because I would not get more than one opportunity to interview most of them. Most participants were interviewed once, while a select few were interviewed twice. The primary reason for interviewing participants only once was due to the time restraints that were caused by their work and family life. I started the interview process with the realization that I might not get another chance to interview the participants at a later time. As a result, I sought clarification on the initial interviews through a follow-up conversation either by phone or email communications.

On average an interview lasted from 40 minutes to an hour. An interview guide (see Appendix A) was used for each of the interviews in which a written list of questions and topics that needed to be covered in a particular order were used. All participants were asked the same questions so as to gather enough comparative information for later analysis. Interviews were located mostly in the homes of participants or in their place of work. The interviews were person centered, as I had to accommodate interruptions of family life in which some participants did not have childcare and had to conduct their interview while watching their children who were nearby. Other participants were interviewed at their places of work during their breaks. Participants were committed to the interview process and never cut an interview short but rather they liberally made themselves available. We covered all of the topics that were listed in the interview guide.

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<sup>24</sup> Copies of the interview questions, consent form (in English, Kreyol and French), questionnaire, and Institutional Review Board forms are included in the appendices.

Once I arrived at the interview location I re-introduced myself with a brief informal chat that led into the interview. Greetings usually consisted of a traditional hug or kiss on the cheek for mostly women who were first generation immigrants, while the second generation and the more professional first generation greeted me with a warm handshake. To accommodate women from a variety of social, economic and age backgrounds, participants were offered the choice of conducting the interview in either English or Kreyol.<sup>25</sup> Their decisions were primarily based on their level of comfort and proficiency with those two languages. I then explained the consent form and gathered the necessary signatures. The participants retained a copy of the first page of the Institutional Review Board consent form for their reference that contained information about the study and their role within as participants. To maximize on time with the participants I chose to administer a demographic questionnaire that was either self-administered or filled out by me before starting the official interview.

The questionnaire consisted of the following 16 demographic questions: age (within the ranges of 18-23, 23-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, and 60+), years lived in the United States (from less than 5 yrs, 5-10 yrs, 10-15 yrs, 15-20, 20-30 yrs, and 30+ yrs), years lived in the Greater Washington, D.C. area (from less than 5 yrs, 5-10 yrs, 10-15 yrs, 15-20, 20-30 yrs, and 30+ yrs), level of education (from some primary

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<sup>25</sup> Haitian Kreyol and French are the two official languages of Haiti. Kreyol's vocabulary is derived from French and its syntax is based on West African languages brought by slaves, particularly, Ewe, which is spoken in Ghana, Togo, and Benin. (Flore Zéphir, *The Haitian Americans*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004) 2.

education to above Master's degree) and financial status<sup>26</sup> (I am very comfortable, I can pay all of my bills, I struggle to get by, and other).

To get a sense of where my participants lived and possibly to trace any niches for the Haitian community, I asked participants for their zip codes in order to design a zip code map of the neighborhoods in which they lived. Questions about race and ethnicity were important in the questionnaire format because they allowed my participants to self identify. Their responses varied and will be discussed in later chapters. The questions included: What is your zip code? What is your documentation status?<sup>27</sup> (working papers, visa, permanent, citizen, other) Did you go to school in the U.S.? If so, for how long and what kind of education did you receive? (high school, trade school, business institute, vocational, college/university), Are you presently employed? If so, what do you do? Are you married? What is your spouse's race/nationality? Where were you born? (town/country), What is your race? What is your ethnicity? What is your religion? What language(s) do you speak? And what language do you feel more comfortable in?

Once all of the paperwork was cleared I began our interview by reiterating the objectives of the project and why each participant was chosen to be a part of the project. All interviews<sup>28</sup> were conducted face-to-face and were recorded using a digital recorder. Recording the interviews helped me to build rapport with the

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<sup>26</sup> Participants were hesitant to answer this question even though it did not ask for income. I explained that the question was purposely designed to get qualitative generalizations about class conditions and not quantitative data.

<sup>27</sup> As this question is very personal and confidential, I ensured participants that I wanted to know the percentages from the responses and that the information would not be used for any other purposes. I also ensured participants that the questionnaire was anonymous. It consequently did not ask participants' names.

<sup>28</sup> One participant was interviewed over the phone on two separate occasions because she recently moved out of the Washington metro area but had lived all of her life in the area and still embraced it as a location of home.

participants because I was able to start the recorder and placed it nearby, avoiding being intrusive or intimidating. Using the recorder also helped to focus my attention on my participants and engaging in conversation without having to stop the interview to take notes.<sup>29</sup>

Most of the women I spoke with and interviewed were excited about being a part of the project. They often wanted to know what I was going to do with the information that I gathered. I told them that the project is my dissertation work and that it was something that I hope to publish one day. In spite of meeting many of these women for the first time, they were very forthcoming with information. In the instances where participants did not want to answer a question I explained the purpose of that question before moving on to the next one, being careful not to probe if they were not comfortable.

Another method that was useful was participant observation. These women represented different social worlds and so visiting their churches, attending meetings and simply having informal conversations with them helped me to better understand their worlds.

### *Participant Selection*

The participants of this research study were selected based on the criterion of being a Haitian woman who had either migrated from Haiti to the U.S. or were born in the U.S and now live and/or work in the Greater D.C. area. Their participation was enlisted using a combination of snow balling and random sampling techniques. The project started with a convenience sample of seven Haitian women whom I

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<sup>29</sup> I took few notes during the interview. I relied mostly on the transcripts and notes that were written after the interview.

encountered through personal social networks. I also relied on the snowball method of recruiting participants, asking these women to identify others in their social networks to be interviewed in the same way based on the research criterion.

In addition to the participants who were selected I also interviewed and had informal conversations with local gatekeepers. Some of these gatekeepers included church leaders, business owners, and community educators/organizers, all of whom at some level control access to the Haitian community. As a site of cultural reproduction, the church was a location that I particularly targeted to recruit participants. I had to receive official<sup>30</sup> permission from church Pastors because they were in control of the access to information and other individuals and settings.<sup>31</sup> From a cultural perspective, getting this permission was critical to the legitimacy of the project to the leaders and to the community that would then be aware of the project through the approval of leadership. It was an act of respect that gave me a stamp of approval to begin my work within their cultural space. I also used my personal identity as a second generation Haitian American immigrant to gain acceptance and approval from both my participants and local gatekeepers.

In the original design of the project I wanted to conduct focus groups with women from different communities such as churches, schools, or local organizations. My attempts to organize focus groups did not yield great results. I targeted one church in which I wanted to conduct focus groups with both first and second-generation women. I sought the participation of the church leader, the pastor, who

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<sup>30</sup> “Official permission” did not involve the signing of documents, but rather personally meeting with the Pastor and getting his verbal approval for the church’s involvement in the project.

<sup>31</sup> Stephen Schensul et al, *Essential Ethnographic Methods: Ethnographer’s Toolkit #2*, (Walnut Creek: Alta Mira Press, 1999), 76.

offered to compose a list of possible participants for the focus group. After reconsidering the implications of such a decision on the project, I declined this top down method of imposing the project on women through the male leadership that the pastor represented. I wanted each woman who participated to do so of her own free will and to be fully aware of her decision to participate as one that is rooted in her understanding and commitments to the project as a whole. Though the focus groups would have added more dimensions to the project, my decision to interact with the women through my own efforts was a political decision that was informed by feminist theories that encourage agency and choice.<sup>32</sup>

### *Participant Portraits*

This project would not be possible without the participation of the women who opened their lives and homes to me. The women all lived within the Greater Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, mostly in Maryland suburbs.<sup>33</sup> I observed these women at work, in their homes, in their churches and at meetings that they attended. All of the interviews with the second generation were conducted in English. We did at moments start speaking Kreyol or Kreyol terminology was used throughout the interview. Interviews with first generations varied. They were conducted in both English and Kreyol. At particular times during the interview, participants would switch from speaking English to Kreyol. I developed different relationships with the women. I tended to develop deeper relationships with women who knew more about me than women who met me for the first time. Even women who met me for the first

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<sup>32</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, (New York: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>33</sup> One participant lived in Washington, D.C.

time were at ease when I began to share about my experiences and commitments to the project. They identified with the project and wanted to contribute.

First generation women (12) were all born in Haiti and migrated to the U.S. as adults. They all have children who were for the most part born in the U.S.<sup>34</sup>

**Ritha:** Ritha is 51 years old, married, and was born in Acaye, Haiti. She has lived in the U.S. for about 19 years. The metro Washington, D.C. area is the only place that she has lived in since immigrating to the U.S. Her mother filled the necessary documents for her entry and she migrated with her brother and sister. She was 32 years old when she migrated to the U.S. I met Ritha at a women's meeting at her church. We interviewed in the same room at her church. Ritha received her GED in the U.S. and is now a nurse. Ritha lives with her mother, cousins, her husband and children. She speaks Kreyol, French, and English but is most comfortable speaking in Kreyol. Ritha has a son who is 10 years old. When we interviewed, she was off from work and about to go to the grocery store to buy ingredients for dinner and then would return to the church for a meeting.

**Leonne:** Leonne is Ritha's mother and is 70 years old. Leonne was born in Acaye, Haiti and has three children. She has lived in the U.S. for 22 years, living 18 years in the Washington, D.C. metro area. Leonne is retired, single and lives with her daughter, her family and other family members in a single family home. She speaks both Kreyol and French but is most comfortable speaking Kreyol. Leonne watches her grandchildren during the day.

**Paulene:** Paulene was born in Haiti but did most of her schooling in the U.S. and is now an artist. Paulene is a friend of the family, whom I've known for many

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<sup>34</sup> Leonne's children were born in Haiti. At 70 years old, she was the oldest participant.

years. I have attended dinners at her house for the holidays and also supported her artistic efforts. Paulene is very committed to her charity work that benefits Haiti. Paulene migrated with her siblings after her mother had sent for them. Paulene's mother came only after an older sister was in the U.S. Paulene came to the U.S. in 1972 and D.C. in 2004. She has lived mostly in New York.

***Fernande:*** Fernande is between 50-59 years old and has lived in the U.S for 15-20 years. Fernande was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. She has received all of her education outside of the U.S. and has lived in France. She came to the U.S. at about 33 years old. She has one child. She is presently self-employed. I met Fernande online where I emailed her asking if she wanted to participate in the project. Fernande is a community leader who founded an online organization, with the purpose of preserving the cultural heritage of Haiti.

***Silvia:*** Silvia is between 50-59 years old and has lived in the U.S. for 29 years. She has lived in the D.C. area for 12 years and Florida for 17 years. Silvia is a family friend who is married with one child. We first met in 2004. She currently works as cleaning staff, where her husband also worked until he recently retired due to health issues. She migrated with her son after her husband sent for her in 1980. She has always lived in the Washington, D.C. area.

***Jocelyne:*** Jocelyne is 55 years old and has lived in the U.S. for 9 years, 6 years in the D.C. area. She currently works in housekeeping. Jocelyne was born in Ti Goave, Haiti. Kreyol is the only language that she speaks. I met Jocelyne while she was working at a local library. I was headed for the elevators and was drawn to her perfume, a smell that was familiar to me. I waited next to her and when I got her

attention, I introduced myself and she was open to the project immediately. I attended a church service at the church she attends. Jocelyne migrated alone. Her children sent for her. She is married and her husband came to the U.S. in the 1980s.

***Darline:*** Darline is in the 40-49 years old age range and has lived in the D.C. area for the entire 20-30 odd years since coming to U.S. Darline was 20 years old when she came to the U.S. Darline was born in Province, Haiti and speaks Kreyol, English and French. She is most comfortable speaking in English, though our interview was conducted in Kreyol. She works in housekeeping.

***Edeline:*** Edeline is between the ages of 40-49 years and has lived in the U.S. for 30 plus years. She has lived in the D.C. area for around 15 to 20 years. She lived in New York and Canada before DC. She is currently a nurse. Edeline is divorced and has one child. She speaks Kreyol, French, and English, but is most comfortable speaking English. I met Edeline in church. We attend the same non-denominational church.

***Denise:*** Denise is between 50-59 years and was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. She has lived in the U.S. for 25 years and lived in the D.C. area for 22. She is presently not employed but has received her GED training and some college in the U.S. She speaks Kreyol, French and English but is most comfortable speaking English and Kreyol. I met Denise in 2005 in a grocery store, lost contact with her and we reconnected for this project.

***Therese:*** Therese has lived in the D.C. area for about 13 years. Therese is the co-owner of a money transfer agency in Maryland. I met Therese through a family friend who referred me to her office when I needed to send money to my family in

Haiti. Our relationship started as a client/owner relationship, where I would come into her office every other month and developed through this project.

**Georgette:** Georgette is over 60 years and has lived in the U.S. for over 30 years. D.C. is the only place that she has lived in the U.S. She was born in Petite Riviere de Nippe, Haiti. She identifies as being Haitian and speaks both Kreyol and some English. She is most comfortable speaking Kreyol. I met Georgette through her daughter, Roseline. She is retired and watches and cares for her grandchildren during the day.

**Madeleine:** Madeleine is between 50-59 years and has lived in the U.S. for 20-30 years and in the D.C. area for 5-10 years. Madeleine was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. She has two daughters, Murielle and Alice. She migrated first and brought her husband to the U.S. She speaks French, Kreyol and English but is most comfortable speaking Kreyol. Our interview was conducted in Kreyol.

Second generation women (8) are the daughters of immigrant parents. They were all born in the United States, with the exception of Deena, who was born in Haiti and migrated to the U.S. at a young age, thus making her a 1.5 generation immigrant.

**Roseline:** Roseline is in her thirties and was born in Washington, D.C. She has lived in the area all of her life and works as a Clinical Social Worker. Married with three children, she speaks both Kreyol and English but is most comfortable speaking English. I have known Roseline for about five years. We attended the same church until she moved to Georgia with her parents. We conducted phone interviews because she had already moved to Georgia before the completion of this project.

***Mika:*** Mika is 18-23 years old and was born in Washington, D.C. She has lived in the D.C. area all of her life. She is currently a college student and works at a law firm. She identifies herself as Haitian American. She speaks both English and Kreyol, but is most comfortable speaking English.

***Murielle:*** Murielle is 32 years old and was born in Washington, D.C. She has lived in this area all of her life. Murielle works in a community detention center. She speaks both English and Kreyol and is comfortable in speaking both languages. I met Murielle at church. We both attend services at a local non-denominational church. Murielle has one child who is four years old.

***Alice:*** Alice is about 33 years old and was born in Washington, D.C. She has lived in this area all her life and works as a Health Educator. She speaks Spanish, French and English, but is most comfortable speaking English. I met Alice through her sister Murielle who set up a meeting in her home, where I interviewed four members of her family respectively.

***Deena:*** Deena is between 30-39 years old and was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. She has lived in the U.S. for 15-20 years and has lived in the D.C. area for 5-10 years. She works as a Program Administrator. I met Deena through the Internet. I joined a Haitian Facebook group and Deena responded to my request online. Deena speaks French, Kreyol, English and Spanish, but is most comfortable speaking Kreyol.

***Arianne:*** Arianne is between 23-29 years old. She was born in Miami, FL. She has lived in the U.S. all her life and has lived in Washington, D.C. for 15-20 years. She speaks both Kreyol and English but is most comfortable speaking English.

I met Arianne through a contact from Murielle. Murielle identified Arianne as one of her only Haitian friends in the area. Arianne is single, owns two homes and lives with a roommate. The first time we met, we interviewed in her new home that she was moving into.

***Serena:*** Serena is between 23-29 years old. She was born in Washington, D.C. and has lived in the Washington, D.C. area all of her life. Serena identifies herself as Haitian-American. She speaks French, Kreyol and English and is comfortable speaking all three languages. We first met at her job as a Food Retail Associate. I bought a *Naked: Green Machine* drink, a chocolate donut and my favorite snack, plantain chips. Serena rang my purchases at the cash register, looked at my plantain chips and asked me if I was Haitian. We would set up an interview soon after that and see each other again at her church.

***Janet:*** Janet is between 30-39 years old and was born in Brooklyn, N.Y. She has lived in the area for 20-30 years and works as a Medical Doctor. She speaks English, French and Kreyol and is comfortable speaking all three languages. Janet has one child who is three years old. I met Janet through her father, who is a pastor of a local Haitian church.

### *Researcher Role and Personal Location*

As a researcher, who is a Haitian-American woman, I identify in many ways with my research participants. From language, gender, class, family, religion, and education, all of these women can identify with me, the researcher on some level. As a researcher, I occupied a dual space as a cultural “insider” in some respects and an

“outsider” in other aspects. In *We Paid Our Dues*,<sup>35</sup> Lynn Bolles sorts out this issue by simultaneously occupying the space of friend, academic and fieldworker. While collecting life stories of women trade union leaders in the Caribbean, Bolles collaborated with the women as participant participators.

My ability to speak fluent Haitian Kreyol with my participants and being a Haitian immigrant woman myself helped to simplify the research process. I understood the references that the women made, often times they spoke using Haitian proverbs. I did not create a threat to them because I had access to the same cultural understandings that they used to make sense of their everyday lives. For example, though I conducted some interviews in Kreyol based on the participants’ preference, all of my interview guides were written and developed in English. This meant that I had to translate the interview guide during the interviews. Sometimes, this process opens the door for possible breaking points in the interview where clarity of the question was crucial to the outcome of the interview. Having access to the cultural traditions of my participants from personal lived experience helps to ground their stories within a framework of shared experiences. As a researcher, I formed my relationships with my participants with the dissertation project in mind. The women knew that I needed information from them and that our meeting was purposeful.

Coming into this project, I have thought of this identification as a rich connection to the participants. Locating myself as a researcher is an important method that would to ground my purpose and commitment to the research. Politically speaking, ethnography should be reflexive in order to break down the complex power

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<sup>35</sup> Lynn Bolles, *We Paid Our Dues: Women Trade Union Leaders of the Caribbean*, (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1996).

relations that operate between the researcher and the researched. The “politics of location” is a term that defines “the historical, geographical, cultural, psychic, and imaginative boundaries that provide the ground for political definition and self-definition for contemporary U.S. feminists.”<sup>36</sup> Thinking about this, I also see location as the outcomes of our experiences and the way we understand them...how our experiences define who we are and who we are not. My story is my intervention, it is the place where I meet my participants and can relate to them the most.

Consequently, I bring to this dissertation project a life time of experience with the process of migration, transnationalism and being a Haitian woman who has the privilege of negotiating multiple and sometimes contradictory cultural traditions. One such cultural tradition was language that I learned early on was very much tied to my identity as Haitian. I studied at Florida International University in Miami, FL where I learned how to write Haitian Kreyol. This experience was truly a highlight in my academic career because recognizing Haitian Kreyol as its own language has always been a highly debated issue. In Haiti itself, the language was recently accepted as one of the official languages in addition to French due to the campaigning of then President Aristide. My experience with Haitian Kreyol has been strictly oral up until that point when I decided to study Accelerated Haitian Kreyol in Miami.

My role as the researcher is one that I am obligated by the honesty of the participants to also share and to situate myself in this project. I am both insider and outsider. This project will show the different ways that I was able to blend in and stand out while in the field with the participants. As a researcher, I am not a neutral

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<sup>36</sup> Chandra Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 106.

subject but rather, my participants interpret me and this is where we are able to start our journey together.

### Chapter Overviews

Chapter 2, “*Positioning Haitian Women in the Context of Transnational Migration*,” provides a historical context for Haitian migration. It examines the different waves of Haitian migration to the U.S., specifically addressing what were the causes that linked such patterns of migration. It looks at when Haitians began to migrate in large numbers and to where. This chapter also shows that Haitian women have specific patterns of migration. Historically, this chapter shows how Washington, D.C. joins other major migration ports such as New York, Florida and Massachusetts.

In chapter 3, “*Gendering Transnational Migration Scholarship*,” I outline the major theoretical frameworks that guide my thinking about this project. I explore the literatures on transnational migration, paying particular attention to major developments in the field and the centrality of gendering transnational migration. This chapter provides a theoretical discussion of feminist theories that underscore the gendered forces of power that control the lives of women.

The focus of chapter 4, “*Journeys of Migration: From Haiti, Florida, New York, to D.C. and Back*” is to explore the trope of journeys and how the participants moved to the DC area. I look at the other places that they have lived, comparing them with their current homes. I present a portrait of each of these women and their experiences of migration to America or being born in America for the second generation.

In chapter 5, *“The Social Construction of Haitian Women’s Identities,”* I examine the Haitian proverb, “Women are the central pillars of society” and the implications of it to the women who were interviewed. I explore its origins, usages, and meanings within Haitian culture. This chapter highlights the responses that the women had to this question when they were interviewed.

The cultural institutions and community fixtures that are available to the Haitian community makeup the central theme of chapter 6, *“Community Building of Haitians in the Greater Washington, D.C.,”* I examine both the lack of particular institutions such as restaurants, which create a stronger sense of community. The markers of the Haitian community in the Washington, D.C. metro area are Radio Station WPFW “Konbit Lakay” radio show, a community help center in Silver Spring, money transfer agencies in D.C. and Silver Spring, and most importantly the churches of various denominations. This chapter also addresses the importance of cultural spaces that are housed within buildings and not separate from other organizations, such as churches that met in school buildings.

In chapter 7, *“Lakay Se Lakay”: The Uses of Home in Washington, D.C.”* I look at the multiple locations of home. Home, as this chapter will explore, is not necessarily rooted to the homeland of Haiti. Topics that are developed in this chapter are: understanding the meaning of home and the usage of this word to these women and how they utilize the concepts of identity, culture and memory to relate to the spaces of home. Home becomes a place where these women construct their lives.

This project concludes with chapter 8, which is a discussion that provides my reflections on the project, its goals, limitations and significance. I review each chapter

and discuss the major findings. This chapter ends with a discussion on how the meaning of home will change and continue to change as a result of the recent Earthquake in Haiti. With the physical loss of space, the structures that these women grew up in and have fond memories of no longer exist. How will they re-conceptualize this home that has been devastated?

## Chapter 2: Positioning Haitian Women in the Context of Transnational Migration

To better contextualize the project as a study on migration, I provide an overview of Caribbean migration, Haitian migration, Washington, D.C. as a location for migration and lastly women as subjects of migration. Place and location matters, and as such, the Caribbean is a place where a better understanding of things Haitian can be understood. Haiti is located in the western third of the island of Hispaniola, bordering the Dominican Republic (see figure 2.1). The Caribbean is defined as including the stretch of more than 50 islands from Antigua, Aruba, The Bahamas, Barbados, Cayman Islands, St. Croix, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Guyana, Grenada, Guadeloupe, Haiti, Jamaica, St. Kitts, St. Lucia, Puerto Rico, St. Thomas, St. John, St. Vincent, to Trinidad & Tobago, to name a few (see figure 2.2). The Caribbean is seeped with a history of colonization, slavery, globalization and forced migration. The Caribbean represents the African, the Spanish, the Dutch, the French, the Portuguese, the English, the Asian and the Indian simultaneously. Caribbean people themselves occupy more than one racial category since the Caribbean is made up of various cultures, or races that have been intermingled by the force of rape and historical domination since imperial colonization.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth Thomas-Hope, *Freedom and Constraint in Caribbean Migration and Diaspora*, (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2009), 19.



**Figure 2.1:** Map of Haiti

Source: Nations Online Project. [www.nationsonline.org](http://www.nationsonline.org)

The popular image of the Caribbean is one as a vacation destination, of sandy beaches, tropical weather, and cruise ships. It is seen as an exotic place where different Creole cultures can be experienced. With such an alluring reputation, it is important that the migration of Caribbean people from their idealized homelands to international destinations be examined further. Economics plays a crucial role in the everyday lives of Caribbean people.<sup>38</sup> It is the factor that originated and continues to motivate their long-standing pattern of worldwide migration.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> I use the term “Caribbean” here and throughout this project rather than “West Indian” because the latter is a term that was widely used during the colonial era to refer to the Caribbean islands.

<sup>39</sup> Milton Vickerman, *Crosscurrents: West Indian Immigrants and Race*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 81.



**Figure 2.2:** Map of the Caribbean  
 Source: Nations Online Project [www.nationsonline.org](http://www.nationsonline.org)

Caribbean migration occurred in three distinct waves. The first wave occurred around the turn of the century to the 1920s and was fueled by the banana and tourism industries. “By 1889, steamships originated in New York City and Boston were regularly transporting tourists to, and bananas from, such islands as Jamaica, Haiti, and Cuba back to the United States, helping to early establish those two American cities—especially New York City—as centers of West Indian immigration.”<sup>40</sup> The second wave occurred between the 1940s to 1965 that was aided by the depression and the change of the immigration act of 1965. The third wave occurred from the late 1960s to the present, which was affected by the Hart Cellar Act, which abolished the

<sup>40</sup> Vickerman, 61.

national origins quota system and replaced it with a system of preference for skilled immigrants and those who have family relationships with citizens and residents of the United States.<sup>41</sup> From these three waves a tradition of migrating for labor is established in the Caribbean. Caribbean women, for example have established themselves in the field of healthcare.<sup>42</sup>

Caribbean immigration to the United States has been a migration of laborers, primarily; a migration of induced and recruited labor in which women—whether spouses, mothers, daughters, relatives, friends or neighborhoods—came as workers...Caribbean immigration to this country is old, continual and always included working women—as slaves; as house servants; seam-stresses and factory workers; and as secretaries, saleswomen, nurses, and other professionals.<sup>43</sup>

Migration from the Caribbean accounts for three quarters of the Western Hemisphere's migration to the United States.<sup>44</sup> “Movements to and from the Caribbean region are not a new phenomenon. Caribbean people have always been, and still are, a massively uprooted people.”<sup>45</sup> The illustration below shows the population from Caribbean countries to metropolitan areas in 2000. According to Figure 2.3, New York, Florida, Massachusetts and New Jersey are among the top Caribbean immigrant receiving states. The Caribbean thus is distinguished from other regions in the Hemisphere where out migration is more recent. In *Freedom and Constraint in Caribbean Migration and Diaspora*, Elizabeth Thomas-Hope introduces the themes of freedom and constraint as cultural practices that capture the essence of Caribbean migration. Migration scholars talk of the “myth” or “ideology”

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<sup>41</sup> Vickerman, 62.

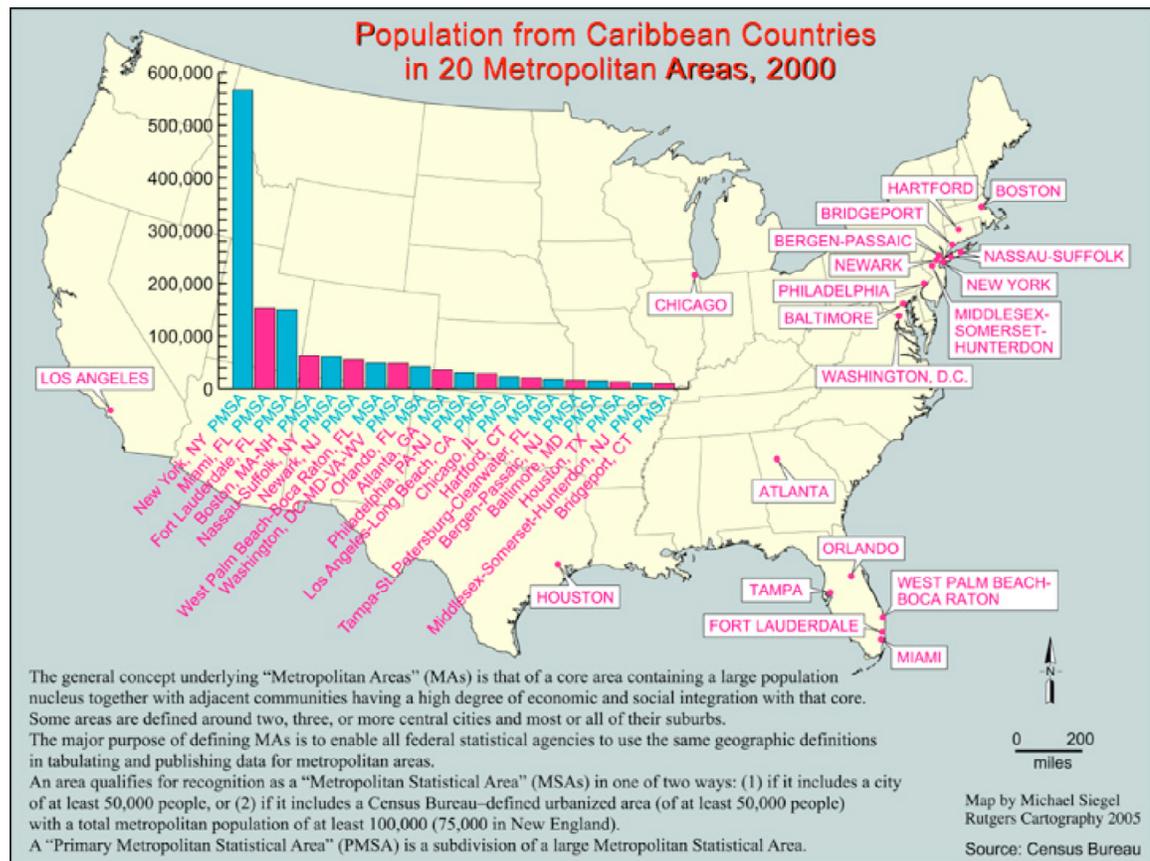
<sup>42</sup> Vickerman, 79.

<sup>43</sup> Delores Mortimer and Bryce-Laporte, eds. 1981, quoted in Stafford 1984, 172.

<sup>44</sup> More specifically, the four Caribbean countries that contribute to this migration are Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, and Mexico.

<sup>45</sup> Vickerman, 5.

of return as a strong feature of the Caribbean migrant experience.<sup>46</sup> Caribbean migrants thus engage in return migration or circulatory migration, where they do not leave their homelands definitively. This is an important point of comparison for Haitian migration specifically, which has been characterized as permanent movements of people. Though Haiti is located within the Caribbean both geographically and as an identity group, Haiti's history and poverty levels, relations with the United States and representations to the world set it apart from the region as a whole.



**Figure 2.3:** Population from Caribbean Countries in 20 Metropolitan Areas, 2000  
Source: In Motion: The African American Migration Experience. *The Schomburg Center For Research in Black Culture*. [www.inmotionaame.org](http://www.inmotionaame.org)

<sup>46</sup> Thomas-Hope, 4.

Haiti is a little smaller than the U.S. state of Maryland. Haiti was populated with the Tainos (TA-IN-OS), a branch of the Arawak people before European colonization began in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century. Haiti was colonized first by the Spanish and then the French. The Spanish divided the island of Hispaniola into two colonies, one being the French Saint Domingue and the other the Spanish Santo Domingo. Unlike many other Caribbean nations, English is not the official language of Haiti. The majority of Haitians speak Haitian Kreyol,<sup>47</sup> while the educated classes speak French. Haitian Kreyol was only recently accepted as a second national language, French being the first. The population of Haiti is approximately 9,035,536. The ethnic groups in Haiti are 95 percent black and 5 percent mulatto and white. The religious practices include 80 percent Roman Catholic, 16 percent Protestant (Baptist 10 percent, Pentecostal 4 percent, Adventist 1 percent, other 1 percent), none 1 percent, other 3 percent. It is noted that roughly half of the population practices Vodou,<sup>48</sup> an African syncretic religion. The literacy rate is 52.9 percent for the total population. Lastly, “Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere with 80 percent of the population living under the poverty line and 54 percent in abject poverty. Two-thirds of all Haitians depend on the agricultural sector, mainly small-scale subsistence farming, and remain vulnerable to damage from frequent natural disasters,

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<sup>47</sup> I use “Kreyol” here and throughout this project instead of “Creole” because the former is viewed within a Haitian specific framework due to its spelling. “Creole” on the other hand can have multiple meanings and interpretations from the reader. Also, the Parsley Massacre of 1937 that killed 20,000-30,000 Haitians in the Dominican Republic was a symbolic moment in Haitian history where the Haitian language meant life or death. Through the usage of “Kreyol”, I embrace the inassimilable aspects of Haitian culture.

<sup>48</sup> The World Fact Book: Haiti [www.cia.gov](http://www.cia.gov). Also note that throughout this project, I use “Vodou” instead of “Voodoo” because the later is a Euro/American-created term that in American popular culture has perpetuated images of Haitian backwardness. The word itself is used casually and in a derogatory manner to indicate anything magical or deceptive. Claudine Michel. “Women’s Moral and Spiritual Leadership in Haitian Vodou: The Voice of Mama Lola and Karen McCarthy Brown. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*. 17.2 (2001) 69.

exacerbated by the country's widespread deforestation."<sup>49</sup> In January 2010, Haiti was struck by a magnitude 7.0 Earthquake that was the worst in the region in the last 200 years. With an epicenter near the capital of Port-au-Prince, over 230,000 people were reported dead.<sup>50</sup>

In 1804, Haiti became the first black republic to gain its independence from its colonizer, France. Though independent, Haiti continued to be dependent as it developed in isolation. In 1825 President Jean Pierre Boyer agreed to pay 150 million francs<sup>51</sup> in compensation for the French colonist losses during the revolution. In return, France finally officially recognized Haitian independence. This monetary compensation represented ten times the country's entire national revenue and it was only paid through borrowing from European bankers. Consequently, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century about 80 percent of the national revenue was devoted to the repayment of debts. Similarly, the U.S. did not recognize Haitian independence until 1862 when the U.S. civil war created a demand for Haitian cotton in the union states. In 1915 a force of 2,000 U.S. Marines invaded the country after citing a breakdown in law and order following the overthrow and murder of Haiti's President Vilbrun Guillaume Sam. The U.S. occupation continued for 19 years and ended in 1934. A subsequent U.S. occupation occurred in 1994-1995 called "Operation Uphold Democracy."

The history of Haitians in the U.S. dates back to the second half of the eighteenth century, where "750 soldiers from Saint Domingue (Haiti's colonial name) joined forces with American troops and participated in the Battle of Savannah in

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<sup>49</sup> The World Fact Book.

<sup>50</sup> [www.huffingtonpost.com](http://www.huffingtonpost.com) "Haiti Earthquake Death Toll Raised to 230,000." February 9, 2010.

<sup>51</sup> This debt was later reduced to 90 million francs.

1779.”<sup>52</sup> As the struggle for freedom of the Haitian Revolution was in progress, in the late 1790s, French colonists and freed mulattoes left the turmoil, accompanied by their slaves. They established “colonies along the American seaboard in cities such as New Orleans, Louisiana, Charleston, South Carolina, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and New York.”<sup>53</sup> The history of Haiti and the United States offers many correlations to the migratory processes of the Haitian people.

Though political conditions and poverty in Haiti make it difficult for return migration, Haitians did return to Haiti but in small numbers compared to other Caribbean nations.<sup>54</sup> “Until the late 1950s, only about five hundred Haitians permanently immigrated to the U.S. each year, while another 3,000 came temporarily as tourists, students, or business people.”<sup>55</sup> The Immigration and Nationality Act Amendments of 1965 (“Hart-Celler Act”) ended all quotas based on national origin and replaced them with a system of preferences, some based on family relations to U.S. residents, some on labor qualifications. This Act permitted more people than before to enter the country. The last Census Bureau data (2008) indicates there are 546,000 Haitian immigrants in the United States; up from 408,000 in 2000 and 218,000 in 1990.<sup>56</sup>

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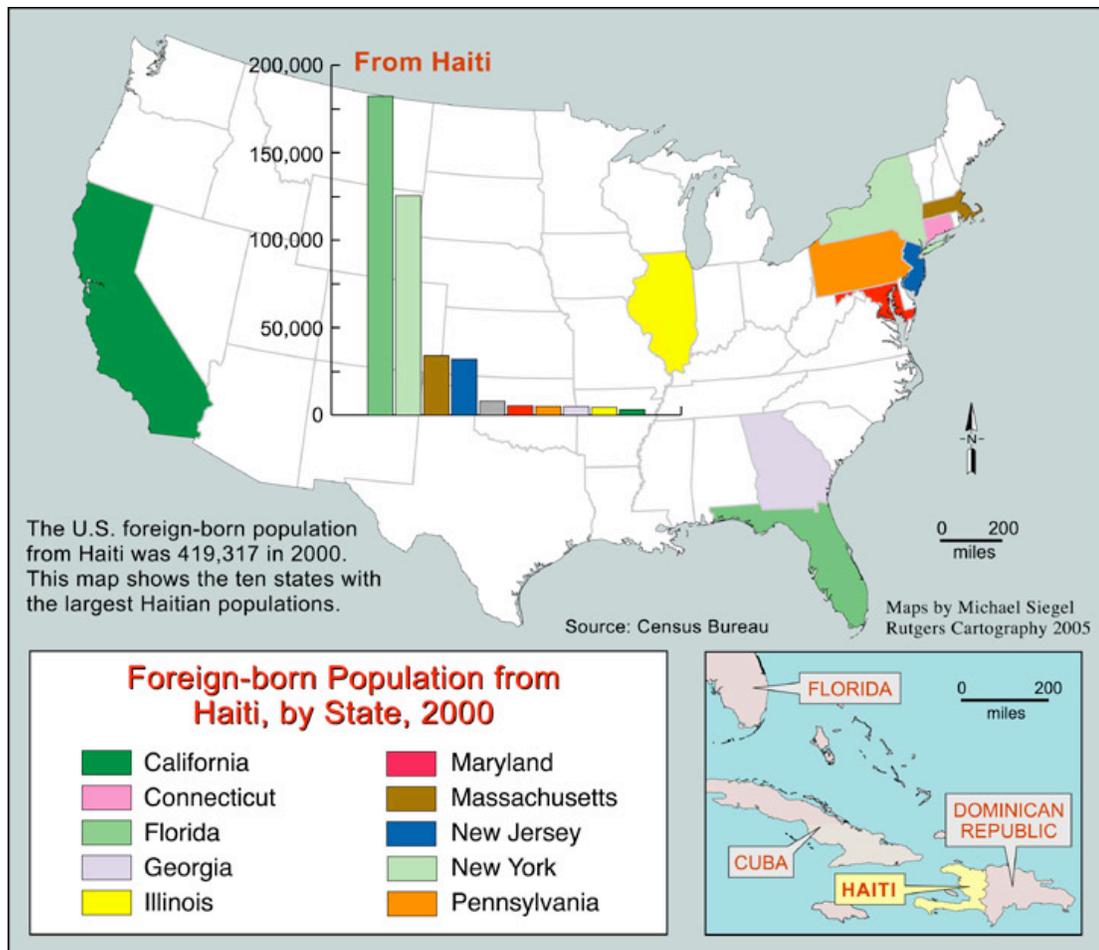
<sup>52</sup> Flore Zephir, *The Haitian Americans*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004), 17.

<sup>53</sup> Susan Buchanan Stafford, “Haitian Immigrant Women: A Cultural Perspective,” *Anthropologica* 26.2 (1984) 173.

<sup>54</sup> Stafford, 187.

<sup>55</sup> In Motion: The African American Migration Experience “Haitian Immigration 20<sup>th</sup> Century,” The Schomburg Center For Research In Black Culture, <http://www.inmotioname.org>.

<sup>56</sup> Center For Immigration Studies, <http://cis.org/HaitianImmigrants>.



**Figure 2.4:** Foreign-born Population from Haiti, by State, 2000  
 Source: In Motion: The African American Migration Experience. *The Schomburg Center For Research in Black Culture*. [www.inmotioname.org](http://www.inmotioname.org)

As shown in figure 2.4, the states with significant Haitian immigration settlements are Florida (251,963; 46 percent), New York (135,836; 25 percent) New Jersey (43,316; 8 percent), Massachusetts (36,779; 7 percent), Georgia (13,287; 2 percent), and Maryland (11,266; 2 percent).<sup>57</sup> For example, out of the entire Haitian population in the United States, Maryland accounts for 11,266 Haitian immigrants who settled there in 2008. Historically Haitian immigrants have migrated to New

<sup>57</sup> Based on Center for Immigration Studies analysis of public use file of the 2008 American Community Survey (ACS).

York, Miami, Boston, Chicago and Montreal.<sup>58</sup> This information is reflected in the literature on Haitian migration that focuses primarily on New York<sup>59</sup> and Miami.<sup>60</sup> Other studies focus on the Haitian population in the United States as a whole, without paying particular attention to specific states.<sup>61</sup>

The undocumented population also account for Haitian immigrants in the country, with 76,000 undocumented Haitian immigrants estimated by the INS in 2000.<sup>62</sup> Though the United States has played an important role in the history of Haitian migration, other countries such as the Dominican Republic, the Bahamas, Canada, and Guadeloupe also serve as destinations that have growing Haitian populations. This project however takes on a limited look at Haitian immigration to the United States only.

Haitian migration has been primarily a chain migration, where one or two individuals establish a household in the host society and begin to recruit relatives and friends to join them. Few Haitians enter the U.S. without an established network of family and friends. Women are more than “secondary” migrants who follow their partners but many Haitian women have been either the first arrivals or the focal point of the recruitment process.<sup>63</sup> For example, one cluster of Haitian immigrants in Brooklyn New York who were from Bassin Bleu in Haiti developed from the direct efforts of one young woman. In 1966, this woman accounted for the 36 Bassin-

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<sup>58</sup> Zephir 2004, Laguerre 2003, Foner 2001, Charles 1992.

<sup>59</sup> Foner 1987, Laguerre 1984, Zephir, 1996, Zephir 2001, Pierre-Louis 2006.

<sup>60</sup> Miller 1984.

<sup>61</sup> Zephir 2004, Dash 1997, Stepick 1998.

<sup>62</sup> Estimates of the Unauthorized Immigrant Population Residing in the United States: 1990 to 2000 on Table 2. [http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/Imm\\_Report\\_12...](http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/statistics/publications/Imm_Report_12...)

<sup>63</sup> Strafford, 176.

Bleuans in Brooklyn who are related by blood or fictive kin ties. Michael Laguerre<sup>64</sup> documents another such example in which a respondent in the study Josephine's, migration brought with it the migration of ten relatives.

Haitian women have always outnumbered men as migrants. For example, from 1953-1979, 50,002 Haitian women entered the U.S. while 44, 157 Haitian men migrated. Also, of the 40,000 "boat people" of 1978-1981, 30 percent were women. After World War II, Haitian women were attracted to New York, Washington, D.C., Chicago and Evanston, Illinois and Los Angeles, California based on opportunities to work as sleep-in domestics in American homes.<sup>65</sup> More importantly, "migration in Haiti is looked upon as an opportunity for advancement of both self and family."<sup>66</sup> The role of the individual in the family is further reflected in Haitian women who work outside their home, a role that is not only acceptable but also often required for women in Haiti. Haitian women's domestic role as mothers and wives is linked to the responsibility for the well-being of household members, particularly their children.<sup>67</sup> Haitian women and other Afro-Caribbean female immigrants to the U.S. share many of the same problems. Resettlement in the U.S. has generally improved Haitian women's opportunities to attain a higher standard of living for themselves and their families.<sup>68</sup> However, the Haitian women's case is further complicated by the fact that they do not enter with the advantage of speaking either English or Spanish, nor do

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<sup>64</sup> Michael Laguerre, *American Odyssey: Haitians in New York City*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 68-72.

<sup>65</sup> Woldenmikael 1980, quoted in Laugerre 1984:169

<sup>66</sup> Stafford, 172.

<sup>67</sup> Stafford, 178.

<sup>68</sup> Stafford, 172.

they find a large indigenous population with whom they share cultural or linguistic affinities.<sup>69</sup>

The story of Haitian migration to the United States is told within the framework of three waves. These waves were all marked by a change in the political structure of the home country of Haiti. The *first* wave of immigrants came in the early twentieth century. The violence of the American occupation of Haiti that occurred during 1915-1934 drove a group of about 500 Haitian migrants to come to the U.S. (New York City) in the 1920s, all of which were upper-class urban families.<sup>70</sup> These immigrants were mostly males engaged in industry, trade, or white-collar professions. Several were recruited through an education and cultural exchange program hosted by the Teachers College of Columbia University in New York.

After the American occupation of 1915, some American Marines who had Haitian mistresses, wives and Haitian-born children migrated to the U.S. However, it was during the 1950s that large-scale emigration from Haiti to the U.S. began. Similarly, those leaving during the 50's were the educated upper and middle classes, causing what is known as Haiti's "brain drain." During Francois Duvalier's presidency, political repression and lost of opportunity for these skilled professionals occurred. Political oppression continued when in 1964 Duvalier secured the position of president for life. During the 1960s, semi-skilled Haitians from the middle and lower urban classes began to migrate. Duvalier's move to assume absolute power is credited as the source of origin for Haitian migration to the United States because it

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<sup>69</sup> Stafford, 187

<sup>70</sup> Reid 1939, Laguerre 1984.

was also at this time that the United States became more involved in Haitian political affairs.<sup>71</sup>

The *second* wave of Haitian emigration is characterized with the rise of the “boat people” entering the U.S. beginning in 1972. At the time Jean-Claude Duvalier (“Baby Doc”) was in office for one year after succeeding his father Francois Duvalier (1957-1971). Haitians fled political repression as well as economic deprivation. Participants of this phase were mostly poor Haitians who could not obtain exit visas. This second wave of Haitian emigration significantly affected the reception and treatment of Haitians in the United States. The image of a boat full of Haitians arriving onto the shore of Florida in abject poverty became the stereotyped national portrayal of all Haitians in the United States. Moreover, Haitians were thought to be carriers of AIDS to the United States, a claim that was retracted from the Center for Disease Control in 1985.<sup>72</sup>

The *third* wave of Haitian emigration occurred during the 80’s and 90’s. The Haitian population in the early 1980s was estimated to be about 800,000. By late 1991, following the removal of Haiti’s President Jean Betrande Aristide’s during a violent military coup d’état, Haitians began to seek refuge in the U.S. Most of the people who fled during this time did so by boat. In the 1990’s, the Haitian population was concentrated primarily in New York and Florida, about 150,000 in each location.<sup>73</sup> The population continues to grow, with 531,397 total people who

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<sup>71</sup> In Motion: The African American Migration Experience “Haitian Immigration 20<sup>th</sup> Century,” The Schomburg Center For Research In Black Culture, <http://www.inmotioname.org>.

<sup>72</sup> Michael Dash, *Haiti and the United States*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), Paul Farmer, *AIDS and Accusation: Haiti and the Geography of Blame*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

<sup>73</sup> Alex Stepick, *Pride and Prejudice*, (Boston, Allyn and Bacon, 1998), 5.

identified as having Haitian ancestry in the 2000 U.S. census.<sup>74</sup> The documented Haitian population in the New York City metropolitan, area according to INS records is approximately 156,000, though if the undocumented population is taken into consideration the actual number is closer to 400,000.<sup>75</sup> Miami-Dade County records approximate the legal Haitian population at 100,000.<sup>76</sup> Boston's documented population is approximately 45,000.<sup>77</sup> The Chicago metropolitan area Haitian population ranges from 5,000-15,000 and from 15,000 -30,000 for the state of Illinois.<sup>78</sup>

With such numbers there is no denial that Haitians have a strong representation in the U.S. This project, "A Space Called Home" will focus on a location outside of the prominent centers, specifically D.C., Maryland and Virginia. The Haitian population in the Greater Washington, D.C. area is about 25,000.<sup>79</sup> The most populated areas for Haitian immigrants are Langley Park, Hyattsville and in the suburbs of Silver Spring, MD. On the fringe of the metropolitan area are farm laborers who worked in the Delmarva Peninsula on the Eastern Shore. These workers also developed small communities in Morgantown, West Virginia, Norfolk, Virginia, and along the MD/VA Eastern Shore. The most recent migrants came post 1991 and were activists who were drawn to the political power of Washington, D.C.<sup>80</sup> Whereas

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<sup>74</sup> <http://www.census.gov>

<sup>75</sup> Flore Zephir, *The Haitian Americans*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004), 90.

<sup>76</sup> Zephir, 97.

<sup>77</sup> Zephir, 102.

<sup>78</sup> Zephir, 106.

<sup>79</sup> The Trinity Haiti Program. [www.haiti-usa.org](http://www.haiti-usa.org)

<sup>80</sup> Trinity Haiti Program. The Washington Office on Haiti was a think tank that advocated for Haitian migrant workers.

Washington, D.C. has historically been a location that attracted the Haitian elite, now the population is predominately middle class.<sup>81</sup>

As the nation's capital, Washington, D.C. is a place that holds a particular image in the minds of people. D.C. is a politically planned city; consequently it is considered a place of government, power and influence. This legacy gives the city the reputation of being an "unreal" city. It is perceived as being "unreal" because it does not offer the attractions of other large American cities such as heavy industry, a major port of oceangoing ships and job availability outside of the government.<sup>82</sup> In the Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries, Washington, D.C. was not only viewed as "unreal" but it was considered a "backward country town lacking the size and dynamism of New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Baltimore."<sup>83</sup> The city was also viewed as an oasis for African Americans during the civil war era, where former and runaway slaves and soldiers fled the South and migrated to the city. It was not built upon a rich history of immigration. It is only after World War II that the character of the city changed and began to be a destination for newcomers to the United States. Washington, D.C. changed from being a purely national to an international capital.<sup>84</sup> Evolving as an international metropolis, Washington, D.C. became the place where most major businesses and international organizations maintained at least representational offices.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Trinity Haiti Program.

<sup>82</sup> Terry Repak, *Waiting on Washington: Central American Workers in the Nations Capital*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 49.

<sup>83</sup> Repak, 49.

<sup>84</sup> Audrey Singer, "The World In A Zip Code: Greater Washington, D.C. as a New Region of Immigration," (The Brookings Institute, April 2001).

<sup>85</sup> Repak, 50.

International immigration began to rise after World War II when Europeans initially predominated as legal immigrants as war brides, refugees and displaced persons. Now, Washington, D.C. thanks to new immigrants is recognized as one of the most diverse regions in the nation. Between 1990 and 1998, nearly 250,000 immigrants from 193 countries and territories chose to live in the metropolitan area. Having no dominant country or countries of origin among the newcomers, the single largest immigrant group from El Salvador makes up only 10.5 percent of the region's newcomers. In 1998, the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area was the 5<sup>th</sup> most common destination for documented immigrants to the U.S. By 2000, Washington, D.C. ranked 6<sup>th</sup> in areas of immigrant settlement, with over 800,000 foreign-born people. Indeed, Washington, D.C. is now referred to as an immigrant gateway city that has "emerged."<sup>86</sup>

Washington, D.C. climbed to the top of the list of immigrant gateways quickly, thus there are few long-standing immigrant neighborhoods or enclaves. As a result of this lack of historically immigrant communities, Washington, D.C.'s immigrants are not clustered into ethnically homogeneous residential enclaves, but are instead dispersed throughout the region. Of the top ten immigrant zip codes, four are located in Maryland; four in Virginia and two are in the District of Columbia.<sup>87</sup> In the 1990s, 87 percent of immigrants to the region chose to live in the suburbs, while less than 13 percent moved to the District. Subsequently, almost half (46 percent) of

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<sup>86</sup> Audrey Singer, "The World In A Zip Code: Greater Washington, D.C. as a New Region of Immigration," (The Brookings Institute, April 2001).

<sup>87</sup> Singer.

the immigrant populations are located in communities outside the Capital Beltway.<sup>88</sup> Immigrants of Asian descent are more likely to move to the outer suburbs, while Latin American and African immigrants tend to live within the Beltway.<sup>89</sup>

The Washington, D.C. metro area stands out as being different than the established immigrant cities once more when the characteristics of the labor market are taken into consideration. For example, the 1960s and 1970s experienced a rapid expansion of gender-specific jobs such as childcare and domestic service, held more attraction as job opportunities for immigrant women than for immigrant men.<sup>90</sup> “The massive entry of women into the wage-labor force generated escalating demand for yet more women who could tend the children and households of Washington, D.C.’s wage earning families.”<sup>91</sup> Repak’s *Waiting on Washington* is one of the few books on migration scholarship that focuses on the Washington, D.C. region as a destination for immigrants. Repak writes that what makes Washington, D.C. distinct is the proportion of women who participate in the wage labor force. Washington, D.C.’s 69 percent of women 16 years and older who participate in the work force is 22 percent higher than the national average. With such characteristics:

The Washington metropolitan area, as a new immigrant destination, offers a different model for immigrant settlement and integration. Washington receives a mix of highly educated and lower skilled immigrant labor. Regardless of economic status, newcomers to Washington do not rely upon established immigrant neighborhoods because there have been historically few. Instead residential choices appear to be made based on family ties, social networks, the housing market, access to public transportation, school choices, and other local services.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> The Capital Beltway is an interstate highway that surrounds the U.S. capital of Washington, D.C. and its inner suburbs in Maryland and Virginia.

<sup>89</sup> Singer.

<sup>90</sup> Singer.

<sup>91</sup> Repak, 56.

<sup>92</sup> Repak, 13.

Although diverse, the communities of the Greater Washington, D.C. area must still be places where immigrants and their families can incorporate themselves into the local labor, housing market, schools, community and social life in order to integrate and settle. Heterolocalism, which is a “nationwide trend of residential dispersion of immigrant groups that are linked by ethnic organizations and institutions rather than spatial proximity,”<sup>93</sup> is evident in metropolitan Washington, D.C.<sup>94</sup> A final distinction between Greater Washington, D.C. from other U.S. cities is that it draws relatively few immigrants to its central city.<sup>95</sup> Instead, “emigres favor suburbs in the neighboring states of Virginia and Maryland over the nation’s capital.”<sup>96</sup>

Benton-Short and Price’s *Migrant to the Metropolis*, however, is one of the few recent books that focuses on the movement of people to metropolitan areas, moving away from the analysis of borders and states to cities. In a chapter, “Washington, D.C.: From Biracial City to Multiethnic Gateway”<sup>97</sup> Elizabeth Chacko writes on the spatial manifestations of the Ethiopian and Korean populations in the PMSA.<sup>98</sup> Chacko also provides an account of these two group’s efforts and varying degrees of success in creating ethnic enclaves in urban and suburban Washington,

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<sup>93</sup> Zelinsky and Lee, “Heterolocalism: An Alternative Model of the Sociospatial Behavior of Immigrant Ethnic Communities,” *International Journal of Population Geography* 4.4 (December 1998).

<sup>94</sup> Price and Benton Short, *Migrants To The Metropolis: The Rise of Immigrant Gateway Cities*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 211.

<sup>95</sup> Benton-Short and Price’s, *Migrant to the Metropolis*, however is one of the few recent books that focuses on the movement of people to metropolitan areas, moving away from the analysis of borders and states to cities.

<sup>96</sup> Benton-Short and Price, 211.

<sup>97</sup> Elizabeth Chacko, “Washington, D.C.: From Biracial City to Multiethnic Gateway,” Benton-Short and Price, ed. *Migrant to the Metropolis*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008)

<sup>98</sup> Primary Metropolitan Statistical Area is a geographical region with a high population density.

D.C. A similar situation is examined later on in Chapter 4 for the degree of success of the Greater Washington, D.C.'s Haitian community. As an emerging location for migration, the Greater Washington, D.C. area is placed within the framework of the U.S.'s long history of migration, offering new insights for why people migrate to the area and how they have constructed sustainable lives.

## Chapter 3: Gendering Transnational Migration Scholarship

Haitian women's identities, lives and experiences must be examined through the lenses of the simultaneous nature of categories of difference such as race, gender, ethnicity and class. Therefore, this literature review grounds my project within gendered, transnational, and intersectional frameworks. It also addresses my central themes of home, journey and agency. In addition, this discussion traces the emergence of women and gender as relevant and important categories of analysis. It moves from broader portraits of migration to the United States from the traditional representation of early European immigrants to the new immigrants, specifically the case of Haitian women.

The review of migration literature is discussed in six parts. This literature begins with the history of the U.S. as a nation of migrants who were seen first within the frameworks of assimilation and secondly within theories of ethnicity. Second, it briefly highlights some key migration theories, namely assimilation and acculturation. Third, it introduces the current migration theory of transnationalism in order to understand the varying degrees in which Haitian women are seen as transnational immigrants. Fourth, it explores gender within migration theory to highlight the overall resistance of researchers towards conducting research about women and gender. Fifth, it addresses the major works within the study of Haitian migration to the U.S., looking specifically at characteristics of the respective communities. The primary focal point is on U.S. states such as New York, Florida, and Massachusetts in an effort to show how the metropolitan D.C. area resists the common

conceptualizations of immigrant destinations and communities. Finally, within each section, there is a discussion of how the body of knowledge relates to the concerns of Haitian women migrants.

Displacement has long been a part of U.S. history, whether through conquest, slavery or exploitation.<sup>99</sup> Framing displacement in such a manner allows for a distinction between forced migration and voluntary migration, drawing attention to the importance of the conditions surrounding the migration of different groups of people. Looking to large-scale voluntary migration before the U.S. Civil War, mainly from Britain and Germany, “America needed the immigrant at least as much as the immigrant needed America.”<sup>100</sup> I am interested here in voluntary migration as this most closely represents the type of migration experienced by Haitian women immigrants, the primary subjects of this study. The story of immigrants, as Oscar Handlin<sup>101</sup> writes, is American history. The early waves of immigrants arriving between 1880 and 1929 were European, namely, the English, Irish, Germans, Jews from Russia, Italians, and Poles and those who were raced such as the Chinese. These immigrants left their countries in search of America, “The Promised Land” and the American dream of success. The myth of American success was:

... The idea that ours is an open society, where, birth, family, and class do not significantly circumscribe individual possibilities, has a strong hold on the popular imagination. The belief that all men, in accordance with certain rules, but exclusively by their own efforts, can make of their lives what they will has been widely popularized for well over a century. The cluster of ideas surrounding this conviction makes up the American myth of success.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Stephen Steinberg, *The Ethnic Myth: Race, Ethnicity, and Class in America*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 5. Steinberg identifies these three factors to explain the origins of ethnic pluralism in America.

<sup>100</sup> Steinberg, 37.

<sup>101</sup> Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of The Great Migrations That Made The American People*, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1973).

<sup>102</sup> Richard Weiss quoted from “The American Myth of Success” in Steinberg’s *The Ethnic Myth*, 264.

This success was tied to the founding principles of the American nation, as described by Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence that included the ideology that a pursuit of happiness and the notion that “all men are created equal.” Despite these notions of egalitarian truths, race continued to be a factor not only for those living in American, but for those migrating to America as well. The immigrant experience must be understood not only from a historical perspective but also from a social-political perspective that involved an overall omission of nonwhite immigrants, who were considered “raced.” For example Jews were forced to exit Europe while Acts of Congress excluded Chinese, Japanese and Filipinos from migrating to the U.S.<sup>103</sup> By distinguishing the sociopolitical conditions of racial groups within the U.S., we can begin to understand how Handlin’s “uprooted”<sup>104</sup> metaphor reflected the particular migration experience of these early immigrants. Many scholars have argued about the validity or degree of “uprootedness” that these early immigrants experienced. Experiencing the dislocation from their homeland and the isolation<sup>105</sup> that they received as foreigners, these immigrants were residentially segregated, occupationally specialized, and generally poor. It was only after several generations<sup>106</sup> that the situation for European immigrants changed.<sup>107</sup> While culturally different, European immigrants eventually experienced success. This success is often referred to as “The Ethnic Miracle” in that the grandchildren and great grandchildren

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<sup>103</sup> Vincent N. Parrillo, *Diversity in America*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. (Los Angeles: Pine Forge Press, 2009) 107.

<sup>104</sup> This notion of being “uprooted” has been questioned by scholars who recognized that European immigrants did hold on to their cultures and ethnicities. (Basch et al, 2008, 265)

<sup>105</sup> In the late 1920s, limitations were set on European immigration to the U.S. through enforcing quotas.

<sup>106</sup> This generational change came post World War II, with the 1952 McCamen Act and war brides which opened up immigration.

<sup>107</sup> The first generations of European immigrants were initially received with hostility and widespread discrimination from Americans.

of the massive wave of immigrants from Europe attained success and social mobility. Moving out of the “inner city ethnic ghettos to White middle-class suburban homes,”<sup>108</sup> European immigrants became American. They became hyphenated-Americans, holding on to some of their ethnic identity as Irish-Americans, Greek-Americans, and Italian-Americans. What is important to note is that they became American nonetheless. Moreover, they succeeded at not only joining the American racial hierarchy, but also occupying the top of that hierarchy, which was based on the central notion that being white was tied to being American.<sup>109</sup> Michel Guillaume Jean de Crevecoeur, a U.S. immigrant from France writes *Letters From an American Farmer*<sup>110</sup> where he discusses what it means to be an American as well as promotes the widely used metaphoric connotation of America as a melting pot:

What is an American? He is either a European, or the descendent of a European; hence that strange mixture of blood which you will find in no other country. I could point out to you a man whose grandfather was an Englishman, whose wife was Dutch, whose son married a French woman, and whose present four sons have now four wives of different nations... Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labors and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world.<sup>111</sup>

This shared racial identity as white that Europeans now belonged to through assimilation thus entitled them to the same rights and privileges of Americans, the most important being citizenship and belonging. Mae Ngnai writes, “At one level, the new immigration law differentiated Europeans according to nationality and ranked

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<sup>108</sup> Mary Waters, *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) 31.

<sup>109</sup> The Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 was a system of quotas based on “national origins” that sought to align immigration with the composition of the American people. This conflation of “white” and “American” represented the racial thinking in Twentieth-Century America.

<sup>110</sup> Michael Guillaume Jean de Crevecoeur, “Letters From an American Farmer,” (1782; reprint, New York: Alert and Charles Boni, 1925) 54-5.

<sup>111</sup> Cited in Vincent Parrillo’s *Diversity in America*, 9.

them in a hierarchy of desirability. At another level, the law constructed a white American race, in which persons of European descent shared a common whiteness distinct from those deemed to be not white.”<sup>112</sup> Consequently, through this process of identify formation and nation building non-whites became a category of the ‘Other’. In essence, this process of Americanization is however seeped in the changing racial structure of American society, as Matthew Frye Jacobson writes in his book, *Whiteness of a Different Color*. By the time migration patterns started to shift, the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s was a time, he argues that white had come to be the broadly inclusive, “Caucasian” identity uniting all those of European origin.<sup>113</sup> Similarly, Karen Brodtkin writes of how the Jews became white folk, a tonic which today would puzzle many, given the inclusion of Jews outside of their religious identity. In her book, scientific racism of the 1920s sanctioned the notion that real Americans were white and that real whites came from Northeast Europe.<sup>114</sup> The specific way that European immigrants were able to assimilate was through their entry into the American “melting pot.”<sup>115</sup> Entry into this melting pot would signify the promise of complete transformation into Americans for all immigrants. The melting pot further signified a process of complete assimilation. Any variation to this assimilation process would also signify varying degrees of Americanness, where certain groups were viewed as being more American than others. Stephen Steinberg refers to “ethnic heroes” and “racial villains” to distinguish between groups who were

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<sup>112</sup> Mai M. Ngai. “The Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 and the Reconstruction or Race in Immigration Law.” in *American Studies: An Anthology*. Eds. Janice Radway et al. (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 71.

<sup>113</sup> Matthew Jacobson. *Whiteness of a Different Color*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998)

<sup>114</sup> Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks And What That Says About Race in America*, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1998) 30.

<sup>115</sup> A 1908 play written by Israel Zangwill, a Jewish immigrant from England.

successful or failed at assimilation.

This representation of America as a melting pot would prove to be a misnomer to explain the experiences of new nonwhite immigrants who could not simply “melt.” It did not take into consideration the difference that race and socio-historical location makes. The main difference between the early immigrants and more recent immigrants is that the process of Americanization for the new immigrants were also based on a process of racialization in which becoming American meant becoming a part of a racial structure that placed people of color at a disadvantage. The immigrant experience of people of color has been significantly different than that of the European immigrant. While the early European was able to experience economic success by blending and assimilating into the largely white majority, racially ethnic immigrant groups were not able to take advantage of the same opportunities that were available based on racial privilege.

Most researchers that examine the Americanization process describe an underlining assimilation process, derived from the experiences of European immigrants.<sup>116</sup> This process of integration set forth by University of Chicago Sociologist Robert Park involves four stages:<sup>117</sup>

1. Competition, where immigrants compete with one another and the native population for resources.
2. Conflict, where the competition for resources result in conflict (violent, enforcing segregation)
3. Accommodation, where immigrants and the native population come to terms and negotiate cooperation and coexistence after an extended period of conflict.

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<sup>116</sup> Omi and Winant, 18.

<sup>117</sup> Farley and Allen, 363.

4. Assimilation, where immigrants are eventually incorporated into the population and cannot be distinguished based on social or economic characteristics.

Park's process of integration offers a linear progression that assumes the homogeneity of immigrants' experiences and does not account for the potential disruptions and ruptures that might alter this order. The underlining assumption is that all immigrant groups follow the same process. Moreover, these same theories categorizes racially ethnic groups based on skin color, thereby lumping all racially based categories such as Asians Americans, Latin Americans, Native Americans and Blacks into four separate groups, regardless of immigrant status. Glazer and Moynihans' *Beyond the Melting Pot*, offers a critique of such a sterile model of integration, concluding that the melting pot concept of America is not entirely valid. They state that, "the assimilating power of American society and culture operated on immigrant groups in different ways, to make them, it is true, something they had not been, but still something distinct and identifiable."<sup>118</sup> While Glazer and Moynihan in 1970 were correct in their observation that difference must be taken into consideration, they fall short of an understanding of difference by also concluding that native-born blacks were relatively less successful than black immigrants due to failings in their character.<sup>119</sup> This observation is problematic on many levels, for one, there is no acknowledgement of the differing historical positioning of native blacks and black immigrants within the American social hierarchy and secondly, there is an underlying assumption that an analysis of two groups that share the same racial category are an equalizing basis for comparison. The focus on race is consequently

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<sup>118</sup> Glazer and Moynihan, 364

<sup>119</sup> Glazer and Moynihan, 364.

challenged by the use of ethnicity as a category of analysis.

Ethnicity first emerged as a key concept in social sciences in the U.S. during the late 1960s, before that the appropriate mode of analysis for the study of immigrant populations was “assimilation.”<sup>120</sup> In particular, Black immigrants were considered as one ethnic group despite their differences in national origin, religion, language, or culture.<sup>121</sup> This lack of distinction among racially defined immigrant groups is in sharp contrast with white immigrants who were allowed a wide range of ethnic options.<sup>122</sup> Because these racially defined immigrant groups could not maintain their ethnic identities when they immigrated to America, racialization was inevitable. The identities of nonwhite immigrants were racially constructed and identified. Steinberg states, “the majority of Americans cannot tell the difference between members of these various groups.”<sup>123</sup> As a result of the continued attention to race and importance of race as a factor in the identity formation in the lives of immigrants, research on immigration has also focused on this topic; consequently, there is a growing significance of race in the lives of these new nonwhite immigrants. Nonetheless, this research reinforces the common belief that people who share the same racial identity share a common immigrant experience despite their differences in national origin, religion, language, or culture. This research examines the identity formation of Haitian immigrants who share a common race with other Black immigrant groups but differ by speaking a different language.

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<sup>120</sup> Omi and Winant, 16.

<sup>121</sup> Roy Bryce Laporte, “Black Immigrants: The Experience of Invisibility and Inequality,” *Journal of Black Studies* 3.1 (September 1972)

<sup>122</sup> Scholars of Caribbean migration have also identified ethnic options for Caribbean immigrants, all of which are racially defined.

<sup>123</sup> Steinberg, 23.

Authors, Omi and Winant critique “Ethnicity” theory for comparing and evaluating the success of early ethnic groups, suggesting that “majority society is limited by an unwillingness to consider whether there might be any special circumstances which racially defined distinguish their experiences from those of earlier European immigrants, and make the injunction to ‘pull yourselves up by your own bootstraps,’ impossible to fulfill.”<sup>124</sup> Omi and Winant identify this process as racial formation, a sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed and destroyed.<sup>125</sup> Racial formations emphasizes the social nature of race, the absence of any essential racial characteristics, the historical flexibility of racial meanings and categories, the conflictual character of race at both the “micro” and “macro-social” levels, and the irreducible political aspect of racial dynamics.<sup>126</sup> Ignoring the distinction between racial minorities and the white majority would thus render the identities of racial immigrants invisible. Stephen Steinberg’s epilogue in *The Ethnic Myth* captures the critical nature of overlooking specificity, “As a nation we must give up our ethnic heroes and racial villains, and wage a frontal assault against the dangerous divisions of race and class that rend our society. At stake is not just racial and economic justice, but the very soul of the nation.”<sup>127</sup> The inclusionary practice of Blackness was thus different from groups whose places of origin include mulatto, mixed race, or colored categories.

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<sup>124</sup> Omi and Winant, *Racial Formations in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s*. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 22.

<sup>125</sup> Omi and Winant, 55.

<sup>126</sup> Omi and Winant, 4.

<sup>127</sup> Steinberg, 302.

The growing significance of race in the lives of these new immigrants became the direction of most literature on ethnic immigration. Black immigrants, for example, included immigrants from Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. The literature on Black immigrants covered such topics as identity formation in regards to racial and ethnic identity choices, the experience of encountering American race relations, the historical context of migration, and the U.S. presence in international politics. What resonates strongly from the literature is the resistance of Black immigrants to be identified as African or Black American. Black immigrants come to the U.S. with an understanding of the American racial hierarchy that would put them at a disadvantage and refuse to be compared to a racial category that has been disadvantaged.<sup>128</sup> Black immigrants want to move past this conflation and claim their own unique identities and form new identities and histories that are in contrast with African Americans. Black immigrants for the most part come from nations where the racial majority is Black. Even though access to the power, resources, and wealth are not equal to all classes of people, racial identity is not the only measure of disenfranchisement.<sup>129</sup> Instead of being visibly seen as just Black, these immigrants used their ethnicities as categories that set them apart from African Americans. This consciousness of the legacy of American slavery is filtered through their *own history* of slavery and domination. To Black immigrants who survived slavery in their own countries, coming to America and experiencing racial and class discrimination is rejected and actively resisted. The double minority status of being both Black and foreign would render their success a difficult task.

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<sup>128</sup> The perceptions of the group are promoted by the dominant white majority.

<sup>129</sup> In the case of the Anglophone Caribbean, power is held in the hands of colored, mixed race or whites. The mulatto classes similarly control Haiti's majority of power.

As we have already discussed, the earliest school to address migration is the Chicago School of Sociology, which focused on immigrants' adaptation and assimilation,<sup>130</sup> whereby immigrants adopt the customs of the majority group through a uni-directional process of contact, competition, accommodation and assimilation does not take into consideration the impact that immigrants and migration might have on the greater majority society. Furthering this model concerns issues of acculturation. Acculturation addresses this limitation by also accounting for the degree to which immigrants influence the customs of the majority group.

As subsequent generations become members of the American society, the process that they undergo to get to their status, the importance of how and why they came to the U.S. becomes factors to consider. The volume and dynamics of migration increased and changed, due to the process of globalization also evolved. Three generations of migration scholarship emerges.<sup>131</sup> The first generation emphasized the push-pull nature of migration in the context of social and economical developments. Push factors such as political unrest from the emigration region are relational to the pull factors such as labor recruitment from the immigration region. In this model of migration the flow from emigration to immigration are viewed as distinct processes.<sup>132</sup> The second generation argues that labor migration and refugee flows occur in structured relationships between emigration and immigration states. Emigration state(s) are periphery to the immigration state(s) centre. Emigration states are periphery because they are economically less developed while immigration states

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<sup>130</sup> Mahler and Pessar. 2006. "Gender Matters", 42.

<sup>131</sup> Thomas Faist, *The Volume and Dynamics of International Migration and Transnational Social Spaces*, (New York: Oxford University Press Inc, 2000)

<sup>132</sup> Faist, 11.

hold a high ranking in the world economy.<sup>133</sup> The migration flows of goods and information link the centre to the periphery. The third and present generation uses the concept of the transnational social space that recognizes the “practices of migrants and stayers connecting both worlds and the activities of institutions such as nation states.”<sup>134</sup> This third generation of scholarship invokes the centrality of transnational social spaces in the lives of immigrants and the circular flow of ideas, symbols, and material culture. Theories of migration have been traditionally framed within binaries, such as homeland/newland, citizen/non citizen, migrant/nonmigrant, and acculturation/cultural persistence.<sup>135</sup> One of the contemporary theories of migration operates with a focus on transnationalism and the fluidity of borders and homelands.

While nationalism connects an individual to a territorial entity or a set of culturally-held ideas, transnationalism involves the interconnections of identity, movement, and change over and across these narrow confines. To mix what is familiar with what is new is to confront and begin to understand this bridging. Transnationalism involves a loosening of boundaries, a deterritorialization of the nation-state, and higher degrees of interconnectedness among culture and people across the globe. This new nationalism does not rely solely upon the immigration.

This excerpt from *Transnational America*<sup>136</sup> captures one of the major defining markers of transnational migration, and that is a sense of interconnectedness. Immigrants are not isolated from their place of origin, nor are they isolated in their new location. The process that defines transnational experiences is multiple in nature and cause for specificity. This interconnectedness that Duncan and Juncker talk about is a source of strength rather than a weakness. Similarly, Schiller and Basch define

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<sup>133</sup> Faist, 12.

<sup>134</sup> Faist, 12.

<sup>135</sup> Levitt and Schiller, 289.

<sup>136</sup> Russell Duncan & Clara Juncker, eds. *Transnational America: Contours of Modern US Culture*, (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2004)

transnationalism as the “processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their society of origin and settlement.”<sup>137</sup>

The transnational embodies people and nations that are constantly changing. Through the negotiation of identity, culture, relationships, and political allegiances we can see that there is no essential transnational being but rather transnationals and transnationalisms. Transnationalism embodies the fluid experiences of individuals; their worlds are shaped by the interconnections.

While scholars of transnational migration do not imply that transnational migration is a new practice among immigrants, they do hold that it is a promising theoretical concept. As a theory, the pioneering work of *Nations Unbound* posit a framework of four premises for studying transnationalism:

1. Transnational migration must be analyzed within the context of global relations between capital and labor.
2. Transnationalism is a process by which migrants create social fields across national boundaries through daily life activities and social, economic and political relations.
3. It is limiting to conflate physical location, culture and identity.
4. Transmigrants are engaged in the nation building process of two or more nation-states.

How are these premises useful? What can be taken away from them? Do they apply to all transmigrants? How do they represent the variety of experiences that transmigrants engage in? These questions come to mind for me because transnational migration represents a process of complicating established norms of incorporation. From the first premise we see the importance of work and the economy. From a global perspective nations and people must sustain themselves as strengths of economies rise and fall. Without the restriction of space migrants as individuals and

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<sup>137</sup> Schiller and Basch 1994, 7.

as groups can take advantage of transnational networks that are forming and have potential to form. The second premise is important because it helps to explain what happens as a result of migrating from one nation to another. This is a great advancement from the times of historian Oscar Handlin's *The Uprooted*, where ties to the homeland are permanently severed and memories of the past are seemingly lost. Conflating physical location, culture and identity gives rise to monolithic histories and stereotyping. Lastly, what does the nation building process entail? This fourth premise raises the most issues for me in regards to its utility and applicability. It is dangerous to assume that all transmigrants are involved in this nation-building process. Those who are involved might have different levels of involvement and commitment in either location. How then do we characterize these experiences of difference?

As a theoretical concept, transnationalism has experienced change across three stages of development. In the first stage, cultural anthropologists, Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch and Christina Szanton articulate the earliest theories (1992, 1994, 1995, 1997). The second stage is refined by sociologist Alejandro Portes (1996, 1998, 1999). Finally in the third stage there is a systemic articulation by political scientist Thomas Faist (1998, 2000). The publication of *The Transnational Studies Reader: Intersections and Innovations* in 2008 was an important advancement in the field of transnational studies. Editors Peggy Levitt and Sanjeev Khagram and the contributors to this volume take on the task of “uncovering, analyzing, and conceptualizing similarities, differences, and interactions among trans-societal and trans-organizational realities, including the ways in which they shape bordered and

bounded phenomena and dynamics across time and space.”<sup>138</sup> They are careful to distinguish transnational scholarship,<sup>139</sup> paying particular attention to the areas of overlap and agreement, but also to scholars who disagree on its intellectual foundations. While transnationalism adds new dimensions to the assimilation process, scholars are careful not to position assimilation and transnational models as binary opposites. Works such as Waldinger and Fitzgerald’s “Transnationalism in Question”, Guaranizo, Portes and Haller’s “Assimilation and Transnationalism” and Levitt and Glick Schiller’s “Conceptualizing Simultaneity” all call for the negotiation of assimilation and transnationalism. “Assimilation and enduring transnational ties are neither incompatible nor binary opposites.”<sup>140</sup> This is clearly the case when the gender, race, and other identities of immigrants are considered.

The development of feminist and gender studies and immigration scholarship share a very similar timeline, starting in the late 1970s. Pierrette-Hondagneu Sotelo’s *Gender and U.S. Immigration* represents an important marker of growth of this field of inquiry, recognizing that “gender is one of the fundamental social relations anchoring and shaping immigration patterns, and immigration is one of most powerful forces disrupting and realigning everyday life.”<sup>141</sup> It is during this time that women studies scholarship recognized the unequal privileges that came at the cost of women’s marginalization were now being questioned and examined. Immigration scholarship similarly experienced a growth due to the increase of human transnational migration during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is estimated today that “as many as 150

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<sup>138</sup> Sanjeev Khagram and Peggy Levitt, 11.

<sup>139</sup> The five intellectual foundations of transnational scholarship are empirical, methodological, theoretical, philosophical, and public.

<sup>140</sup> Levitt and Schiller, 285

<sup>141</sup> Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2003, 3

million people live in nations other than those in which they were born.”<sup>142</sup> Moreover, women were prominent in this migratory trend.

Sotelo identifies three stages of development that characterizes the gender and migration scholarship. The focus of this work sought to counter the invisible location that women were rendered in migration research. Feminist scholarship thus inserted women and took into account women’s experiences. It was no longer tolerable or academically sound to make generalizations for both men and women immigrants based on studies that focused solely on men. While this was a step forward from what traditional longstanding studies of migration accomplished, this stage has been criticized for being simplistic, referring to it as “add and stir” or “women only.” Women were the “added” variable. Gender, instead must be understood as a “social system that shapes immigration processes for all immigrants, men and women.”<sup>143</sup> In fact, equating gender to women assumes that men are gender neutral, reinforcing the systems that describe men as the unmarked, universal category. Moreover, privileging and re-establishing the invisible, unquestioned relations of power that men benefit from.

Sotelo’s second stage, “gender and migration” emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This research focused on two aspects: the gendering of migration patterns and how migration reconfigures new systems of gender inequality for women and men. Stated clearly, migration is both a gendered and gendering process. This point of view recognizes the fluidity of gender relations that can only be understood through the knowledge that gender is a social construction. Gender is “seen as a

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<sup>142</sup> Hondagneu-Sotelo, 4

<sup>143</sup> Hondagneu-Sotelo, 4.

matrix of identities, behaviors, and power relationships that are constructed by the culture of a society in accordance with sex.”<sup>144</sup> Scholars who engaged in this type of study included the perspectives of sociologist Sherri Grasmuck and anthropologists Hondatge-Sotelo and Patricia Pessar. Pessar states that gender should be privileged because it still is undervalued, “gender is the meaning people give to the biological reality that there are two sexes. It organizes our behavior and thought, not as a set of static structures or roles but as an ongoing process.”<sup>145</sup> Households and the institution of the family was the main focus of Pessar’s research that revealed the gendered divisions and hierarchies in those social domains. This research on migrants from the Dominican Republic to New York revealed how men’s lives were constrained in the new setting but enabled women to change their individual and family’s socioeconomic status. The main critique of the gender and migration model is that gender relations were often generalized and confined to social institutions such as the family.

Gender formation, or gender as a constitutive element of immigration is the third and current stage. Here, the concept of intersectionality is crucial, “examining how multiple categories of difference such as gender, class and ethnicity mutually constitute themselves. One can never speak (only) to “a migrant woman” or a “migrant man,” s/he is always positioned in the matrix of class, ethnic and age relations that may shift in their relevance for her/his life depending on the particular

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<sup>144</sup> Monica Boyd, “Women and Migration: Incorporating Gender Into International Migration Theory,” *Migration Policy Institute* (May 2003) 3.

<sup>145</sup> Patricia Pessar, “Engendering Migration Studies: The Case of New Immigrants in the United States,” *The American Behavioral Scientist* 42.4 (1999) 577-600.

context.”<sup>146</sup> “Gender does not exist in a vacuum but emerges together with particular matrices of race relations, nation, occupational incorporation, and socio-economic class locations, and the analyses reflect nuances of intersectionality.”<sup>147</sup> Furthermore, “Different dimensions of immigrant social life are threaded by the dynamics of gender.”<sup>148</sup>

Patricia Pessar’s “Engendering Migration Studies: The Case of New Immigrants in the United States”<sup>149</sup> is a useful article that highlights contributions made by scholars who have treated gender as a central organizing principle in migration and suggests some promising directions for future inquiry. A gendered perspective calls for a scholarly reengagement with those institutions and ideologies immigrants create and encounter in order to determine how patriarchy organized family life, work, law, public policy. Also addressed is how migration simultaneously reinforces and challenges patriarchy in its multiple forms. An intersectional approach that maps the simultaneity of gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, class and legal status is a critical point of view to understand in the lives of immigrant and native-born men and women.

One of the major criticisms of transnationalism is that it is often viewed as detached from specific places and are rather imaginary and refer to ambiguous locations. Caribbean transnationalism is a useful category for analysis because it looks at a specific region. The literature on the Caribbean as a whole makes

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<sup>146</sup> Alice Szczepanikova, “Migration as Gendered and Gendering Process: A Brief Overview of the State of Art and a Suggestion for Future Directions in Migration Research,” *Migration Policy Institute* (March 2006) 5.

<sup>147</sup> Alice Szczepanikova 5

<sup>148</sup> Alice Szczepanikova 5

<sup>149</sup> Patricia R. Pessar, “Engendering Migration Studies: The Case of New Immigrants in the United States.” *The American Behavioral Scientist* 42.4 (1999) 577-600.

comparisons and observations that have some implications for Haiti. The themes and issues that are present within Caribbean transnationalism are a shared Caribbean identity that creates a sense of Diasporic community, the model minority myth and a variety of research limitations. The location of Haiti within the space of the Caribbean creates a sense of shared identity and experience. However there are some exceptions to their regional referent. Some may argue that its early 19<sup>th</sup> Century independence, a result of a slave revolt came at a high price, with Haiti now being the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere. The country is viewed through the binary of its exceptionalism. On one hand, is the country's history of being the first black nation, and second only to the United States to achieve independence in the Western Hemisphere, while on the other hand there is its systematic poverty. This exceptionalism is a source of pride for Haitians of the society at large, but also a source of criticism. These factors as well as many others shape the social identities of Haitian immigrants in the U.S.

Marie Chierici's "Caribbean Migration in the Age of Globalization: Transnationalism, Race, Ethnic Identity"<sup>150</sup> provides a review of three important contributions to the literature, they are, Nancy Foner's *Island in the City*, Michel Laguerre's *Diasporic Citizenship* and Peggy Levitt's *The Transnational Villagers*. In these texts, Caribbean migration to the US is not looked at as a new phenomenon, but rather as a process that has its beginnings as early as colonial times. These books all address the American perception and attitude towards race and how this affected the assimilation of Caribbean immigrants into mainstream society. The centrality of race

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<sup>150</sup> R.M. Chierici, "Caribbean Migration in the Age of Globalization: Transnationalism, Race, Ethnic Identity," *Reviews in Anthropology* 33 (2004): 43-59.

in American society and the fluidity of race in Caribbean cultures due to a salience of ethnicity and skin preference are presented as stark and important differences.

Specifically, Nancy Foner's edited work, *Islands In the City: West Indian Migration to New York*<sup>151</sup> highlights how Caribbean migrants are defined as the model minority group that strives to achieve economic success. In her introductory chapter she discussed how blacks are seen as a homogenous group in which differences of class, gender and ethnicity are often ignored in the research. Also of importance in Foner's work is how Caribbean immigrants form a distinct as a heterogeneous ethnic group and are ethnically distinct from native African Americans. This position unfortunately ignores the historical, social, political, economic and religious differences among people and cultures of the Caribbean. Research on immigration and Haiti is a case in point.

I have found that most works on the Caribbean only mention Haiti but do not actually engage the location of Haiti into the larger work.<sup>152</sup> This has been largely attributed to the language barrier that Haitians pose to research conducted in English. Unlike many other Caribbean nations, English is not the official language of Haiti. The majority of Haitians speak Haitian Kreyol, while the educated classes speak French. As mentioned earlier, Haitian Kreyol was only recently accepted as a second national language, French being the first in the country. Language is also a subject that affects the lives of Haitian women whether or not they are multilingual. The meaning of language in Haitian culture has much significance as it touches on the topics of colonialism, class formation and black pride.

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<sup>151</sup> Nancy Foner, *Islands In the City: West Indian Migration to New York*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001)

<sup>152</sup> Cary. *Washington Odyssey*, 251.

To date the majority of the literature on Haitian migration focuses on the long established New York City Haitian community.<sup>153</sup> The second prominent location for Haitian immigration, Florida also receives some attention in the literature, which centers on the status of Haitian refugees to Florida.<sup>154</sup> Other works examine Haitian immigration from the broader location of the United States.<sup>155</sup>

Another aspect of the Haitian community in the U.S. is the transnational linkage that Haitians have with Haiti. In 1991, on the day of his inauguration as President, Jean-Bertrand Aristide welcomed Haitians living abroad as the 10<sup>th</sup> department, “reclaiming all Haitian immigrants and all persons of Haitian descent living abroad, no matter what their legal citizenship or place of birth, as part and parcel of the Haitian nation-state.”<sup>156</sup> The Haitian nation-state is therefore a transnational social space in which identity is forged over.

Overall, both Haitians and Caribbean (Anglophone & Hispanic) immigrants have been labeled model minorities in the U.S. because of the high rates of economic stability and success that these groups experience. In regards to the achievements of groups, this is an area that is further developed in this dissertation project, particularly focusing on Haitian women. Transnationalism as a concept offers a culturally specific perspective to the study of transnational migration that is invaluable to the study of Haitian women in particular.

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<sup>153</sup> (Reid, 1939., Anderson, 1975., Buchanan, 1979., Laguerre, 1984., Foner, 1987., Schiller et al, 1987., Kasinitz, 1992., Zephir, 1996., Foner, 2001., Schiller and Fouron, 2001., Waters, 2001., Zephir, 2001., Pierre-Louis, 2006)

<sup>154</sup> (Boswell, 1982., Chierici, 1991., Grenier, 1992., Portes and Stepick, 1993., Stepick 1998) , Woldemikael, 1980 focuses on Evanston, Illinois.

<sup>155</sup> (Dash, 1997, Stepick 1998, Zephir, 2004)

<sup>156</sup> Nina Glick-Schiller and Georges Fouron, *Georges Woke Up Laughing*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001) 120.

Turning our attention to gender relations and the roles women play, I would like to align myself with migration scholars who support that women in particular experience a gendered immigration experience (Mahler and Pessar 2006, Schiller 2000, Buchanan 1979, Pessar 1996). Though gender includes both male and female and includes their expected behaviors, I purposely use gender to refer to women in order to centralize their experiences. Though Haitian women enjoy economic gain in the United States as workers, their social roles and cultural definitions of sexual roles complicate their experiences even further<sup>157</sup> because they have remained unchanged, privileging a patriarchal hierarchy. “The sexual dichotomy continues to be the major method for allocating work within the household.”<sup>158</sup> Haitian women migrants experience a disruption of kinship support systems and domestic help and they must also tend to the needs of relatives in Haiti. Obligative obstacles are set in the way of women’s careers and advancement. Very little work has been done on Haitian immigrant women and families in America.

The literature on Haitian transnationalism has some direct implications for research on the Haitian women featured in this dissertation. Looking at the gendered process of transnational migration in the lives of Haitian women will reveal the ways that gender and nation are mutually constituted within the transnational social fields that link homeland and new land. To understand gender relations in the lives of Haitian women, I turn to works by scholars Georges Fouron, Nina Glick Schiller<sup>159</sup> and Patricia Pessar.<sup>160</sup> In these works of feminist scholarship, the link between the

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<sup>157</sup> S.H. Buchanan, "Haitian Women in New York City," *Migration Today* 7.4 (1979) 19-25.

<sup>158</sup> Buchanan, 1979.

<sup>159</sup> Fouron and Schiller, “All in the Family: Gender, Transnational Migration, And the Nation-State.”

<sup>160</sup> Pessar. “Gendering Migration Studies.”

personal and the political are analyzed in order to productively join the study of gender as it is lived by transmigrants of nation-states. Some of the questions that Pessar poses are; does gender as it is lived across the borders of nation-states sustain gender divisions, hierarchies, and inequalities? Or, do these transnational experiences of gender help build more equitable relations between men and women than before in their country of origin? Schiller and Fouron address the way we remember the past. They are interested in the collective memory of the nation and the gendered construction of these memories. Gendered Haitian narratives of nation is traced back to the Haitian Revolution of 1804 and its heroes in which certain women are remembered as having participated as wives and daughters of men. To counter this construction, oral traditions that name women and their actions have entered popular culture and have presented tensions over the construction of femininity.<sup>161</sup>

Other issues that are important in Schiller and Fouron's article are Haitian women's history of linking feminism with nationalism; the affect of the Duvalier regime on women; suffrage; the role of U.S. in relieving Haitian women from the constraints of the Haitian gender hierarchy; class struggles; and confluences of nation and blood. Concluding this case study of Haiti, Schiller and Fouron found that nationalist ideologies and practices embody more than one construction of gender. Linking self, family and nation transnationally consequently creates an alternate vision of nation and gender.

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<sup>161</sup> *Femme Notre Histoire: Un panorama des femmes haïtiennes, héroïnes de notre indépendance et figures politiques contemporaines*. Le Ministère de la condition féminine et aux droits de la femme, de concert avec journée internationale de la femme, 1998. *Women Our History: A Panorama of Haitian Women, Heroines of Our Independence and Contemporary Political Figures*. The Ministry of Women's Conditions and Rights with the International Women's Day, 1998.

The gendered links between the national narrative and the domestic and public spaces are represented in the fact that a husband's social standing is secured only if the wife does not work outside of the home. To work outside of the home implies that these women are sexually accessible outside of their marriage. Schiller and Fouron show that gender is reproduced in transnational spaces by outlining the gendered ways that money can be used by women for the benefit of their families. Stated more clearly,

In a contradictory process that must be understood as part and parcel of the transnational construction of gender, women free themselves individually from the gendered constraints that the status system places on their personal activities by migration, but often they then deploy the wealth they obtain to fulfill obligations and obtain social status back home. These women contribute to the values that sustain the gender and class hierarchies in Haiti.<sup>162</sup>

Haitian transnationalism offers a culturally specific perspective to the study of transnational migration that is invaluable to the study of Haitian women in particular. To reiterate, very little of the literature of Haitian immigrants in the U.S. is devoted to women's experiences, which definitely reveals a gap in our body of knowledge. Most of the literature on Haitian migration looks at both groups of men and women immigrants without making any gender distinctions. Women are treated as a silent category of identity. Further to date, there is no published work concerning this group in the Washington, D.C. area.<sup>163</sup> This is the reason for this project that draws attention to the D.C. area as an important location for studying Haitian women and immigration.

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<sup>162</sup>Fouron and Schiller, 559.

<sup>163</sup> Repak's *Waiting on Washington* focuses on Salvadorian immigrants to Washington, D.C

Aligning my work with migration scholars who support that women in particular experience a gendered immigration experience is the main focus here and in the project as a whole.<sup>164</sup> Though gender includes both male and female, I purposely use gender to refer to women in order to centralize their experiences.

In 2004, literary critic Shelley Fisher Fishkin gave a presidential address to the American Studies Association, entitled, “Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn In American Studies.” Her address was dedicated to the memory of Gloria Anzaldua, a cultural theorist who debated the “arbitrariness of borders and the pain that they inflict, of the harsh realities of internal colonization.” This transformation in scholarship is most obviously highlighted in immigration and ethnic studies, as Mae Ngai states in her response to the Presidential address. Fishkin outlines the profound affects of the transnational turn in American Studies:

As the transnational becomes more central to American Studies, we’ll pay increasing attention to the historical roots of multidirectional flows of people, ideas, and goods and the social, political, linguistic, cultural, and economic crossroads generated in the process... we pay more attention to figures who have been marginalized precisely because they crossed so many borders that they are hard to categorize... we are likely to focus... on the endless process of comings and goings that create familial, cultural, linguistic, and economic ties across national borders.<sup>165</sup>

Fishkin’s article expresses the dynamic possibilities of using transnationalism within American Studies. The distinct areas of transnational scholarship are trans-cultural studies, diasporic studies, migration, and globalization,<sup>166</sup> of which I focus here on migration. Used as a framework for migration studies, transnationalism has undergone a series of reimagining’s, new understanding and approaches. This step of

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<sup>164</sup> Mahler and Pessar 2006, Schiller 2000, Buchanan 1979, and Pessar 1996.

<sup>165</sup> Fishkin, 14.

<sup>166</sup> Schiller, 2004.

developing the field is important for establishing the many uses of transnationality. Scholars have asked: “what’s new,” “revisited,” “reconsidered,” and “questioned” the field of transnational studies. In essence, they were seeking for specific parameters. What came out of this intellectual sorting and categorizing is an attempt to create a concise understanding of the field with Haitian women, Washington D.C. and a space called home.

## Chapter 4: Journeys of Migration: From Haiti, Florida, New York to D.C. & Back

The journey that characterizes the experiences of Haitian immigrants is just as telling as the choice of destination. This chapter focuses on the movement of Haitian immigrants from place to place. While the participants all lived in the metro D.C. area, it was important for this study to not only look at what is currently called home but to also examine how they got there, what Clifford would call routes. The question that Clifford challenges is that of dwelling, stating, “Dwelling was understood to be the local ground of collective life, travel a supplement; roots always precede routes.”<sup>167</sup> I was interested in the story, the process that caused immigrants to move. I do not present migration or home as a static location but instead, a process that invokes some of the main premises of transnationalism, a central theory that informs my understanding of the migration process. I look specifically at the movement of travel between spaces. This movement for some is a mechanism for survival and success, whereby moving from one place to another takes advantage of opportunities in all places traveled.

The theme of journey also described the process by which the research was conducted. Due to the fact that there is no Haitian ethnic enclave in the metropolitan D.C. area, I met my participants in different places, many of which led me to other women who were located elsewhere. With my GPS in tow, I traveled along US-29, Interstate-95 and the Baltimore-Washington Parkway-295, to meet my participants.

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<sup>167</sup> James Clifford. *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997. 3.

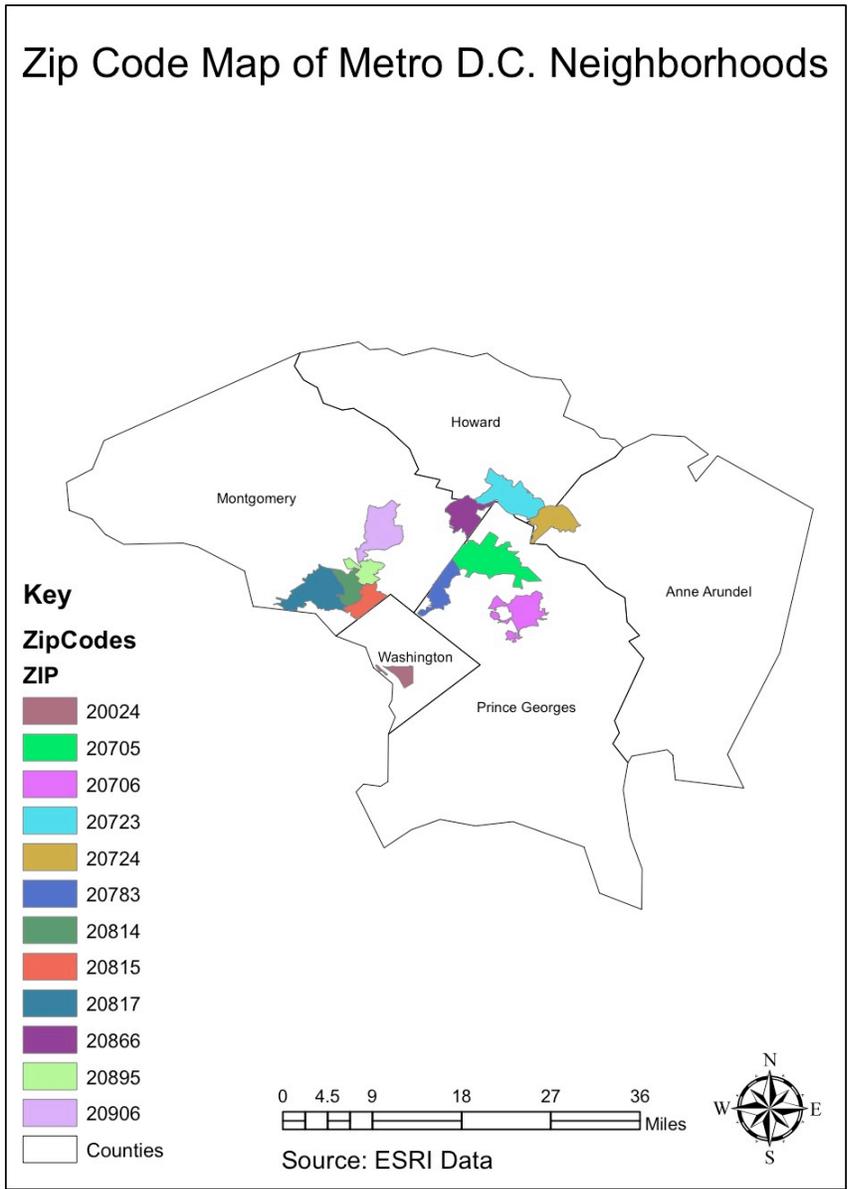
Figure 4.1, is a zip code map that reflects where my participants lived. Spanning across Washington, D.C., Montgomery, Howard, Anne Arundel and Prince Georges Counties, I contend that this map serves also as a visual representation of the vast dispersing of the larger Haitian population.

Journey sometimes come full circle, where after migrating to the U.S. immigrants establish themselves and eventually make plans to move back to their home countries. While most Haitian immigrants remain in the U.S, permanently, permanent migration is not the goal of all immigrants. Some immigrants come, having intentions of staying, while constantly having a goal of return that pushes them to work and live in the U.S. Journey is different when we take the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generations into consideration. The second-generation immigrants are those who were born in the U.S. to immigrant parents (first generation). The 1.5-generation immigrants are those who were born in their parent's homeland and migrated to the U.S. as children. Consequently, the second generation's story is not one of journey but rather of being at home in the place where they were born. First generation immigrants move, experience life in several different states and as such are positioned to talk and compare life in each place. This chapter highlights the experiences of ten 1<sup>st</sup> generation women and discusses and compares the locations in Maryland and the District where the participants lived. I discuss how I met each woman and where we met to conduct our interviews.

#### Darline, Leonne, And Ritha

I met Darline, Leonne and Ritha at their church, where they were

attending a women's meeting. The church was alive with activity. A choir was rehearsing. Two women's groups were meeting, one singing, "*wi pran tou seigneur*"/I surrender all, and "*conte le bienfet de dieu*"/Count God's many blessing. The young people were in the hallways; some going to the bathroom and others were attending a meeting. I walked around the church looking for the women's groups that were meeting that night. I spoke with a group of women that were not expecting me but welcomed me to their meeting. A group member introduced me to the other women. At first I did not want to barge in but they were very receptive, asked questions and then gave me their contacts. I spoke to the group and they were open to helping me with the research. As I left that meeting I heard English being sung in my left ear, "Grace has restored, Grace has redeemed." In the other ear was Kreyol, separating the generations by language.



**Figure 4.1:** Zip Code Map of Respondents Home Location

## Darline

I interviewed Darline in her home. It was early morning and she was making coffee. We conducted the interview at her dining room table. She sat with her back against the china cabinet. The table had a plastic liner on top and large porcelain fruit basket centerpiece in the center of the table. Darline has a young son, about four years old who came around the table from time to time but he mostly stayed with his grandfather in another room.

Darline's migration journey began when she came to the U.S. to work for a Haitian diplomat. She came alone, she says, "without a mother, without anyone". She started off getting paid \$125 a week, and \$30 per month on top of the \$125. Within a year her employers did not treat her well and wanted to send her back to Haiti. They tried to force her by threatening to take her passport, but as she said, she could not be forced. After she left that job she was able to find Haitian contacts and find help from the Baptist Church of Calvary. She joined the church within a year and has been a member for twenty-five years. She has always lived in the Silver Spring/Takoma Park area. Her work history includes working as a live-in, babysitting and cleaning. Though this work was part of her journey here, especially when she first arrived, she would never let her children who are born in the U.S. perform the same work. Darline left her family behind, particularly her sisters. Her dream once she migrated to the U.S. was to help her two sisters who she left behind when she migrated. Her sisters are now in Venezuela and Panama. Darline has visited New York, Pennsylvania, and Miami, Florida but likes the calm of Maryland. She compares her trip to New York to

being in Haiti, “they’d say, “child, help me sell this underwear, child help me sell this bra,” like when they are selling outside in Haiti, in the markets.”

Darline supports her family in Haiti every month. She sends money and food and even takes care of her nephew who is in school in Panama. She brought her father to the U.S. and is now applying for her brothers and sister to come to the U.S. Darline is the only member in the U.S. and so she supports everyone back home, “they are in Haiti, they are all in Haiti, it’s only me that’s here.” When her oldest sister died and left four children in Haiti, Darline “saved them, gave them life, helped them physically, spiritually.” Darline will always support her family until they can get on their feet she says, “as long as they leave the country (Haiti) they are working (in the U.S.), they will no need help.”

### Leonne

My meeting with Leonne was also in her home. “Liberty or Death,” and Haiti’s Declaration of Independence hung on the wall above all of the family photos. She seemed a little nervous and asked me if I agreed with or liked what she said. At 70 years old, Leonne was the oldest woman I interviewed. Her hair is gray but she moves with energy and strength. She mainly stays at home and watches her grandchildren and other family’s children.

Leonne had a community of her mother and sister in the United States that aided her process of migration. They applied for permanent residency<sup>168</sup> for her and when she came she in turn applied for her children. Leonne has also lived in New

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<sup>168</sup> The following lists highlight a few of the visa status that are available to immigrants and nonimmigrants. Visas for immigrants include immediate relative and family sponsored, employer sponsored, or diversity visas. Nonimmigrant visas include domestic employees, diplomats, students,

Jersey for four years. In Maryland, she lives in the Piney Branch area, just inside the Beltway. Leonne has family in New York, her mom in Georgia, others in Boston, Rhode Island, Florida and Canada. Her family shares the responsibility of members who did not migrate and sends packages back home, “it’s a family effort, we just put together and sent a box, we sent computers and things for my nephew in Haiti.” This support system also benefited Leonne before she migrated to the U.S. Leonne did not work in Haiti, she says she had the support of family who migrated before her who sent money back home to her. Once she migrated she worked as cleaning staff. She says that she likes Miami because it is like Haiti, “there are places where people can have gardens.”

#### Ritha

I interviewed Leonne’s daughter Ritha in the very place that we met at her church. She was running between work, having to go back home after buying some meat and returning to the church for another meeting. I knew that she was busy and appreciated her taking the time out to be interviewed. Ritha wanted to help and eagerly answered each question. Like her mom, she was very concerned with answering the questions correctly.

Ritha migrated to the U.S. with her brother and sister after her mother applied for her to travel. Ritha came to live in Maryland because she had an aunt who advised her that work could be easily found in this location. While her mother’s family have almost all migrated to the U.S., her father and his side of the family have remained in Haiti. For Ritha, the U.S. is a very fast paced country. From the professional to the

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religious workers or tourists. To live in the U.S. permanently, immigrants must apply for permanent residency, often referred to as a “green card.” [Http://Travel.state.gov](http://Travel.state.gov)

service worker, life and work are very fast paced. She compares working in the U.S. and in Haiti. Though there is significantly more earning potential in the U.S., the money is spent quicker states-side. Money in the U.S. is “spent like it is a butterfly in your hands, it flies away. In Haiti you might have some money left over because you don’t have to spend too much for food and clothes.”

### Edeline

I met Edeline at church. She was one of the only Haitian members of an English speaking non-denominational church in which we both attended. My family always sat near her in the center aisle very close to the front. She would sing and praise but I would always hear a hint of another language in her voice. One day I decided to ask her if she was Haitian. When she replied, “yes” I was relieved. When I explained my project and asked her to participate she accepted and we set up an interview in her home soon after. I felt at home by the way she welcomed me to her house. She offered me a drink and we sat in her living room and started our interview. We talked about going shopping in New York for specialty items such as dried mushrooms. She was surprised that I related to her in spite of our age difference. She continued to show me hospitality when on my way out she offered me some freshly baked pound cake.

Edeline’s journey of migration began when she left Haiti to go to school in Canada. For her, the U.S. was not the first destination. She says; “I thought I was going to stay there, make a life there and stay in Canada.” When she came to America, she never imagined staying. It wasn’t until she started to see Haiti change that she realized that she could not return--“I didn’t see myself going back and things

are not the same, the way it used to be.” She remembers a beautiful Port-au-Prince, with so many *camionets*/buses, now she envisions “so many people, all on top of each other, the streets are so dirty.” For Edeline, life in New York was like a big family, “it’s like every Saturday it’s a party, everything, every birthday it’s a party and then we’re all together it’s like a family and then we’re all together it’s like a family affair, so that’s what I like about New York and New York was like you don’t need a car to go anywhere.” It wasn’t until she visited her sister who moved to Maryland that she considered it a good place to raise a young boy. Looking back Edeline says, “That was the best move I made, leaving New York and coming here, life, it’s more peaceful it’s much better.” Edeline has visited New Jersey and Miami but prefers Maryland because these places are too busy. Edeline does however acknowledge Maryland’s disadvantages, saying “everybody is by themselves, nobody has time for anybody else.”

### Jocelyne

When I first met Jocelyne at her church, she greeted me at the door and placed a visitor’s bouquet on my jacket. She was serving as an usher at her church where I visited one Sunday. I was invited by the Pastor to talk to the congregation in order to solicit participation for my project. The church met in a school gymnasium. As I entered the church, my heels marked my entrance as it met with the hardwood floors. I was instructed to sit in the front row. Before I got a chance to sit down I felt a tap on my shoulder. A woman offered me a head covering. When I got up to speak to the congregation, I noticed all of the women were wearing some form of head covering, a hat, a scarf or an embroidered head cover. I did not get any participants from

speaking from the congregation but it did help me when I introduced myself to Jocelyne and Serena, two of my participants who work on campus. As I was walking towards the elevators of the library I couldn't help but notice a familiar smell. I smell women's perfume or it could have been lotion. What was interesting about the smell was that I recognized that smell as a distinctly Haitian scent, it smelled like Razak or 1804 (Haiti's year of independence), two very popular scented lotions that my family and I know others in the Haitian community liked to wear. There was an open door; a woman was in the supply closet. I said, "Excuse me, Hello." When Jocelyne stood up and turned around I knew that I had found a fellow Haitian woman. I immediately asked, "Are you Haitian?" She answered, "yes," her eyes wide open to match her wide smile. I explained the project, which she eagerly agreed to participate in and "help me" as she said. We had our conversation soon after and I continue to see her and greet her at the library when she is at work there.

Jocelyne's migration story is that of hesitation and longing to return home.

She recalls,

At the time when I came there were a lot of problems, they used to go from house to house killing people and me I never had it in my head to come here and stay here indefinitely because I always said that I would come, come to visit and then I would return but when I came everyone told me, no, I cannot return the way things are. I used to have a business in Haiti. The business that I used to have I used to have a boutique, I used to sell I said I would not leave my business I will come here, buy and return to my country but the way the country became people killing people when you go buy in the city in the stores they take your money and also hit you so I became afraid and so I came to the US. I stayed but I stayed not like I liked the country because not only does the cold not sit well with me, it makes me sick also and so I will always love my country and there is nothing that is going to make not love my country. My destination is to return to my country.

Jocelyne's life as a small business owner before migrating is much different than her cleaning job in the U.S. She used to travel from Fond des Negre, Ti Riviere (Petite Riviere), Saint. Michel, Anse-a-Veau, Fond des Blancs, and Ti Goave (Petite Goave) [insert map/miles between places]. When she brought a house in the capital, she opened her shop in her home, selling her merchandise as smaller retail items than in bulk. She describes her life in Haiti, "I was not a person who I would say had a lot of money in Haiti but I was comfortable, I knew how to make it, I knew how to survive." At 55, Jocelyne feels that she has always had the strength to work and in spite of having some knee and joint pain she likes to work.

Jocelyne has family in both Miami and New York but she does not see any advantages to living in those places. "There is no life for them but people who were already here who spent a good time in the country, it is an advantage." "If you leave Haiti now to come here to work, it will not be easy and you do not profit, you have nothing that you can accomplish." Jocelyne is referring to older immigrants who have a harder time adjusting to life in a new country, after they made the journey to the U.S.

### Madeleine

I met Madeleine through her daughter Murielle who is a fellow parishioner in my church. Murielle arranged interviews with many of the women in her family. Four women from her family participated in this project, her mom, sister, cousin and herself. I interviewed the family in their home. After explaining the project to the group, I interviewed them all on an individual bases. Madeleine was very open and eager to respond.

Madeleine migrated to the U.S. in 1971 through the application made by her older sister who had come to the U.S. initially on a tourist visa. Madeleine's older sister attended a French speaking church on 16<sup>th</sup> Street in D.C. where she met a French speaking family who were looking for a baby-sitter and recommended Madeleine. The family filled out the papers and sent for Madeleine to work as their baby-sitter. Within a year of working as a baby-sitter for the family Madeleine met another friend who was looking for a babysitter and Madeleine recommended her younger sister, who migrated to the U.S. soon afterwards to also work as a baby-sitter. Madeleine started to attend an English Language Program but left to return to work. Madeleine created a chain of migration and helped many others migrate to the U.S. Through work, she says, "I helped many of my friends that I knew in school from Haiti come to the U.S. There were some of them that came who their services were not needed but as a favor for me for the way that I was good to the people. There were some who came and went to Canada. They really spread."

Madeleine returned to Haiti in 1973 to marry her husband and he came to be with her in the U.S. She was able to facilitate his entrance through the support of the families that she worked for and with whom she become friends. She lived in D.C. for almost three years, where she gave birth to her two children before moving to Maryland. Madeleine's experience was not an easy one because she was twenty years old when she migrated; she left her family, her mother and her boyfriend behind. She explains, "I cried everyday, I spent almost six months crying everyday, calling my mom. They had me talk with my mom every Sunday and almost two, three times in a week because I did not want to stay. I remembered my country especially I had left

my boyfriend.” Madeleine has only lived in D.C. and Maryland. She spent one year in D.C. and then moved to Maryland, only to return to D.C. and come back to Maryland. In fact, Madeleine had the opportunity to live in New York where she also has family members but she preferred the quiet and calm of Maryland.

### Fernande

Fernande responded to my email in a voicemail. I located her online where she was the founder of an organization that is dedicated to the preservation of the culture and heritage of Haiti through the education and promotion of archeological, cultural and historical heritage. Fernande greeted me at the door with her French accent, so strong that I had to listen carefully to comprehend what was being said. She was surprised to see that I understood all that she was saying. The interview took place in her living room, where she displays a collection of Haitian paintings and artwork. One item, a large iron piece that was made entirely from an ironing board caught my attention immediately.

Fernande started off, “My migration experience has not been successful.” Fernande first came to the U.S. as a diplomat, stating that D.C. is a platform for international work. Fernande says that this “cosmopolitan area is easier,” comparing D.C. to New York. “New York is hard, it’s harsh to live close to Manhattan, it’s very expensive and you have to live in Long Island”— a suburb. Fernande came to the U.S. with her professional degrees from Europe but was unable to work as a lawyer due to her foreign credentials. She wanted to join the international field instead and to work for the World Bank, the United Nations or U.S. AID in Haiti. She does work in the international field and continued that she:

Didn't want to really be part of America. I mean, I'm forced to be here, I'm forced to be here because in Haiti, Haiti is very unstable, it's very unsecure, I'm definitely forced to be in America, and yes I didn't choose, I mean it's not as if I had chosen I would be more successful here and but if I adapted America here at the beginning I would be more successful here but in my mind it's just being here but staying as an international person dealing more with everything international and having nothing to do with American things.

Though she thinks this country is a great country, what Fernande has an issue with is that "there is a format, everyone is formatted." For Fernande this poses a problem for her as she was raised in Europe and Haiti and "cannot fit into the format that is established for everyone here." Moving to Washington, D.C. was a practical choice for Fernande, "if you are thinking international, Washington is the place. You aren't going to stay in Haiti." For Fernande who is constantly moving and traveling from place to place, being truly comfortable in one place is close to impossible. She says,

When I go back to Haiti after a while, I'm not in Haiti all the time, when I'm here, I'm not in my country, when I'm in Africa, I'm either in my country, when I'm in France I'm not in my county either." "I'm completely at my best, I don't know completely at my best when I am writing because I like to write. When I'm doing my work. I'm in front of the computer, that's okay between me and the computer and my head.

### Denise

I first met Denise at Shoppers Food Warehouse in Laurel, MD, a full service Supermarket that features everyday low prices without a store savings card. I was checking out ahead of her and like Jocelyne I had a hunch that she might be Haitian. We were engaged in small talk and I asked her "are you Haitian?" She got excited and answered, "yes." We exchanged contacts and I never saw her until five years later when I met her son as a student at the University of Maryland in my American Studies course as an instructor. He shared with me that he was of Haitian descent and

that he lived with his mother. At the time I was looking for additional research participants. I asked him if his mom would want to participate in the project and that I would call her to ask for her participation. When I called her, we recognized each other's voices. We realized that it had been five years since we last saw each other. She was thrilled to participate and reconnect. I conducted the interview soon after in my office at Maryland.

Denise used to visit the U.S. often until her mother died and her sister came to live in the U.S. on a permanent basis. Of her visits she said, "It's a good country for people who want to advance, it's a good place, but it's so different, it's so different." She soon followed her sister who lived in Maryland. She says, "I had somebody here, my sister was here, you go where you got people." However Denise made her first stop when she lived in Florida before coming to Maryland. Denise explains that work is central to survival in the U.S., "it's a country you have to work to make it, you've got to put your work first before everything." Denise and her sister both keep in contact with their aunt and cousin in Haiti.

### Silvia

Silvia is a family friend, whom I've known since moving to Maryland. I visited her home frequently when I lived close by to her. She would send me home with prepared food that went a long way when I was living alone. She also showed me where to shop to find the best ingredients for a Haitian home cooked meal. When my mother was in town, I would be sure to stop by Silvia's home so they can catch up. Silvia remains a family friend. We interviewed in her home one day after work.

Silvia migrated with her eighteen year-old son when her husband sent for her to travel to the U.S. When she first arrived she lived in Miami. It wasn't until her husband settled in Maryland that he sent for her to join him there. Silvia cleans offices for a living. She states that there are a lot of Haitians at her job. Though she did work in Miami, she found it easier to find a job in Maryland. "Miami and here are different, they are not the same." Silvia has visited New York and Canada. She makes telephone calls and sends money to her family in Haiti.

### Deena

Deena responded to one of my email messages that I sent out to Haitian organizations in the D.C. metro area. She was eager to participate and had a lot to say. I met Deena in downtown D.C. at the end of her workday. I picked her up in my car and we drove to a nearby café to talk. We began our conversation at the café but it was too loud there. Subsequently, we walked over to a nearby shop that served things like Greek food and smoothies, where we had the interview. Deena is a very tall, dark and confident woman. She wears her high heels, a brightly colored figure hugging dress, her toned legs walking besides me after parking the car. The men on the street were turning their heads. Some of the men tried to get our attention, screaming "hey baby, lookin good!" as we walked by. We are engaged in a conversation about skin color and beauty. Deena explained that she does not get the attention she desires from men because of her dark skin color. For the men she has encountered, beauty is synonymous with lighter skin color. Deena is an educated professional who is non-apologetic about her identity and culture. The men on the street and the men she encounters at work and in her social settings embrace different

conceptions of beauty, one desiring the shapely form of a curvaceous woman, the other placing the most value on lighter skin color. We talked as we drank our peach mango smoothies, the sound of a jazz saxophone coming from the speakers, and a mother and her small children blend in the background of our conversation. To capture Deena's voice over the background sounds, I handed her a noise-drowning microphone to place on her collar. The interview went by much too fast as we had very lively discussions that appear in the next chapter.

Deena grew up in Haiti separated from her parents, who were in the U.S. Growing up with extended family her parents relied on tapes and letters to maintain contact.

My father came first (to the U.S.) when I was one, the oldest boys were four, two and we had to stay for a long time (in Haiti) so I didn't get to meet him until I was six, and then my mom came five years before us my mom came in '85 and started working to help my father out a little bit. Then my father petitioned under family reunification for all four of us to come together so my brothers and I came together.

Reunification brought challenges and benefits for the family. Deena describes sitting together around the dinner table and talking with her dad as a way of getting to know him all over again. In 1990, when Deena migrated to the U.S, she describes her experience as being a tough one because "it wasn't cool to be Haitian." She grew up in Karfou, Haiti, where "most of the people look like me and we had similar social economic status." The U.S. proved to be a much different experience than what she was accustomed. Growing up in Haiti, a country where Black skin color was the majority, Deena did not stand out as different. However in the U.S., her dark skin when surrounded by different ethnic groups drew negative attention because she was now in the minority. Deena was called "Tar Baby and Shaka Zulu," she says, "I really

tried to understand who I was in this country and who I needed to be and it was something that could have either broken me or made me.”

Deena has lived in New York, went to college in West Virginia and would only consider living in a place that has a large Haitian population. “If its not like a place like Boston, maybe Atlanta, (that is) kind of growing in the Haitian population.” Deena describes her trips to New York— “go to Flatbush, buy my plantains, and go to my church where I can walk (instead of driving).” The differences between New York and Miami are starker than that, “you look at the grain<sup>169</sup> of Haitians who are in Miami and the grain of Haitians that are in New York and you can see a very big difference they tend to become more professional in New York because New York affords these kinds of opportunities...(Miami) more a resort a lot of them end up cleaning or maybe might be in the hospitality industry or food industry.”

As these narratives convey, the women who participated in the study had similar stories to my own. I close this chapter with my personal migration story in order to situate myself in the work and to relate to the women who told me of their own journey to the U.S. Reflecting on my personal journey helped me to detail the circumstances that might bring about social mobility and spatial movement. My experience also reflects my participants’ experiences with migration. Our journeys met, collide and took form in this chapter. The goal of “Journey” was to detail the path and story that brought each participant to the metro D.C. area. Most women lived in other states before moving to The District or Maryland. The ones who did live in Maryland first came here through a family contact. Moreover, this area is

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<sup>169</sup> What Deena is referring to are the differences of class that are found in the locations of Miami and New York. Historically, Miami’s Haitian population was labeled “boat people” and “refugees, while New York was seen as the location for advancement and thus desirable.

preferred by these women as a better place to live than the other states that they have lived, such as New York and Florida. One woman, Deena, is a 1.5-generation immigrant whose migration story is highlighted in this chapter. It also sought to introduce the women in more depth than what appeared in the introduction. Further, this portrait allowed the reader to become familiar with each woman as they come to know her through those experiences. Journey is a chapter that sought to show movement not just migration but the choices to move to other states after migration. Family, life style and personality all contributed to decisions to move.

All of the first generation women came to the United States as a result of support of other women such as their mothers, sisters. Once in the United States, three of the women brought others to the U.S. Seven of the women migrated to the U.S. first, before their spouses. Maryland was a choice destination for all of the women due to a contact from a family member or friend. And lastly, the women were familiar with life in a place like New York but they all preferred life in Maryland.

In the next chapter we will see how these women, both 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generations live and experience their everyday lives as Haitian women in the United States. It will discuss the cultural expression of the *poto mitan* woman and highlight the roles that they play in each of their individual communities in the U.S. and the transnational bridge to Haiti.

#### My Story

*At the age of five, I migrated to the United States. It was 1986, the year that President Jean-Claude Duvalier of Haiti (Baby Doc) was overthrown that my family migrated to the U.S. Though we came in search of better economic and educational opportunities, the political situation of Haiti pushed our family to take action, as the*

*country became more and more unstable than before. It is at this moment that my natal family began to suffer some changes due to our migration. The four of us traveled together, my mother, my brother John, sister Becki, and myself. My older brother Pierre, who is also the oldest child, migrated ahead of us, along with our cousin Harry. My father, who was a Baptist Pastor traveled frequently between the U.S. and Haiti to do missionary work. At first he lived with one foot in the U.S. and the other in Haiti. While in Haiti, he stayed with my sister Rose-Merry and brother Handrick who did not migrate. In the U.S., he added a sense of completion to our already disrupted family. My father did not join the family permanently until about a year after we migrated. Our family of eight, soon became six, minus my sister Rose-Merry and brother Handrick who were left behind. Our leaving had not been planned. We left behind our house, our church and our school, all of which distinguished our family as a distribution center for the neighborhood in which we lived. Of even greater value than that were our family photo albums, our status and comfort that we left in Haiti. For our safety, we exchanged our lives in Haiti for a less than average life in the U.S.*

*Migration was the greatest of sacrifices. Our family operated within a transnational space, staying in touch through letters and tapes and providing sustenance for Rose-Merry and Handrick through money transfers and sending food items regularly. We watched each other grow through the pictures and the clothes that were sent. Nothing could ever replace or substitute for the human relationship that is established among families. Because my siblings or I never traveled back to Haiti, we grew apart from Rose-Merry and Handrick for most of our adult lives. What*

*was in store for my family was a journey that was met with love, endurance, pain and renewal.*

*While New York was not the first place of settlement for my family, it was the most formative. Our family arrived first to Florida for a brief two months, where we stayed with our aunt before moving to Federalsburg, Maryland. We lived in Federalsburg for about three years. I remember Federalsburg as a small town with very few traffic signals, cornfields and flea markets. It did however have a large Haitian population. We grew up in a Haitian enclave. We went to a Haitian church, had plenty of Haitian friends and spoke Haitian Kreyol mostly everyday. My mother and most of the other adults worked in the chicken factories; Perdue, Mountainer, or Townsend. They would come home with their clothes smelling like raw chicken, unlike the savory fragrance of stewed chicken that we enjoyed for dinner on most nights. Their uniforms included many layers to protect them against the cold of literally working in a chicken freezer, packing and boxing the chicken to be shipped out to locations all across the U.S. Our lives in Maryland did not prepare us for our next journey, which was New York. We moved to New York and lived there for the next nine years.*

*I grew up in Brooklyn, New York as the youngest of six siblings. At that time Haitian identity was not a source of pride. Instead constant name-calling by the other school children that were American was the order of the day. During my years of elementary school, students who identified as Haitian were ridiculed. I experienced this ridicule because I was in the English as a Second Language program for Haitian students. At first I did not understand why I was placed in the ESL program, after*

*attending mainstream classes for three years in Federalsburg, MD. Looking back I realized that it was the experience of being in the ESL program that shaped my strong Haitian cultural identity. We were Haitian-American, and as such we celebrated both Haitian and American holidays. Haitian Flag Day and Haitian Independence Day were equally as important as Thanksgiving and Halloween.*

*The most vivid memories of our holiday celebrations were of wearing Haitian peasant costumes. I remember the girls lining up to powder our faces and put red lipstick on. I close my eyes and go back to when my picture was taken after the dance- I stood on stage dressed in a blue denim shirt and ruffled shirt outfit, a red scarf tied around my waist, my head was tied with a denim scarf, my face powdered, my lips red, a large straw bag leaned against the wall, with the word Haiti and red flowers embroidered on it. As we danced to the rhythmic drums, I never thought about why my ESL class was chosen to share our culture in this way. I pushed myself to be better than the entire school, to represent my ESL class who were at times targets of hate. I dreaded standing on the lunch line because it was there that we were most vulnerable. We sat and ate together-- the teasing affected us all as a group. They called us "boat people" and told us that we should get back on our "banana boats." Our experiences taught us to despise the "boat people," whoever they were. Little did we know that the "boat people" were a part of us. They represented the struggles that we as children faced in school and the realities of our parents who spoke little English but worked hard nonetheless. When I was alone and without my ESL classmates, I did not get teased. The power of public humiliation was diminished when no one was around to witness. The American students said that I did not look*

*Haitian, that I did not fit the stereotypical image of the uncoordinated, mis-matched clothes, high-water pants, body odor smelling and most hateful of all—the ugly Haitian. Though I was relieved whenever I was not teased I never denied my Haitian identity. At a very young age I had to assert my Haitian identity in solidarity with my classmates and community at large when we were targeted for harassment.*

*In the early 1990s, I attended a march that would shape my sense of ethnic and national pride forever. As I walked across the Brooklyn Bridge, holding on to my brother Pierre's back pant pocket, I knew that we were walking for something important. I remember thinking that the bridge was going to break with all of us on it. The march was in response to the controversy about Haitians being the cause of the widespread infection of the AIDS virus. At such a young age, what I remember is knowing that I didn't have AIDS and no one in my family had AIDS. The matter was simple to me, as was my understanding that what was being spread was a lie, an overgeneralization, an act of scapegoating. This generalization scared the Haitian community and pushed us into action. Through this experience the seeds of my consciousness were planted and I have learned that individual identity is much stronger than identification by others. Being identified as the bearers of this disease was a violation of my identity. The cultural meaning systems that I encountered are knowing the history of one's country and being prideful of the person who you are. This was not presented to me directly from my parents; I instead learned this value in school. My teachers in elementary school who were all of Haitian descent and worked in the ESL program that for example celebrated Haitian Flag Day and sung the Haitian national anthem. The story of the migrant is a story of movement, of*

*change and adaptation. My father's decisions along with my mothers dictated our lives as children. We had been in the U.S. for seven years when my father had passed away due to health complications. My mother who never knew what our birth certificates or social security cards looked like had to play both the role of father and mother. She worked for Cascade, a laundry company for hotel chains. She would come home with silver ware, tablecloth and the like. I'd imagine her and her coworkers talking together about the people who were served on the tables that were dressed with these tablecloths and how they imagined how wealthy people were. My dad worked for Rego Park nursing home in the nutrition department. I don't know exactly what he did. But maybe he served the meals to the patients.*

*When my father died my mother was terrified. She was so emotionally shaken that she could have taken her life right there, let alone raise six children on her own. My parents married for better and for worst and so for worst, my mother had to rebuild her family. She had to create a life for us the way that she knew best. She had to leave her job in New York because they were laying people off at the time. She needed to bring in some income. She moved. She moved back to the Eastern shore of Maryland to work in the chicken factories. That is what she knew. We had lived in Maryland for three years before moving to New York. Leaving us behind, she lived with my oldest adopted sister and worked to send us money and groceries from Maryland. We went to see her and spend summers with her and she came to Brooklyn on the weekends in between work with Applejacks, Captain Crunch, juices, and anything else we needed. I knew that she had made the ultimate decision of moving to sustain our lives.*

*We lived with my oldest brother Pierre and his wife for seven years from the time I started junior high school to finishing high school. I never saw anything wrong with this set-up-- it was our set up. We had already lost our father and we were trying to survive, trying to stay together. It was basic survival. We survived. We all grew up, moved away from New York, went to college, got married and all scattered across the Mid-Atlantic States. And still we maintained our family. However, our family always seemed to be incomplete. We did not migrate together with all of our siblings in tow. My older brother and sister were both left behind. It wouldn't be until eighteen and twenty-one years respectively that they would join us in the United States through the efforts of my mother who applied for their permanent residency. Life as a "complete" family unit would prove to be just as complicated as it was when we were separated. How do you get past the fact that you did not know your own siblings? We had the same parents but we were different, our understandings were different. How were we to get to know each other beyond the tapes, letters and pictures? We went from little children with the knowledge of having other siblings out there to grown adults who didn't know where to start the conversation. What would bring tears? What stories were too painful to talk about? Would they resent us for having grown up with our parents, having the access to their love and attention all the years of our lives? Those uncertainties created a very emotional distance that is only now starting to settle down.*

*Before moving to New York I remember the perception that it held in most of our minds. New York was a place of culture, of civilization, the place where people went to establish themselves. It was also a place of high culture and life. No longer*

*would my siblings and I drive so close to the apple orchards, that we could pick the fruit ourselves out of the window of the car. No longer would we enjoy the summers filled with corn and watermelon, picked fresh from the fields. Driving was replaced by public transportation, apart from riding the church van on Sundays. We would however return to Maryland for summer vacations. Little did I know that I would return to Maryland in my adult life to write this dissertation project. Journey is central to migration...*

## Chapter 5: The Social Construction of Haitian Women's Identities

Walking on Fire is “exactly what many Haitian women do everyday... they always seem to have one foot over burning coals and the other aimed at solid ground”.<sup>170</sup> Women have been significant even in their absence and omission. This historical grounding locates Haitian women, the subjects of my project within the continuum of brave and influential women. The process of teasing out this women centered history involved pulling information from little known and obscure sources and most particularly reading history with an eye focused on the presence and involvement of women rather than their absence. The construction of Haitian women's identities that I focus on here begins at the historical root where we can come to understand the contemporary women's identity formation process. Not only does bringing this history forward help us to better understand the cultural location of women within their society but also through the popular usage of the phrase *fanm se poto mitan sosyete a*, women are the central pillars of society. By examining the production and usage of this phrase in the lives of women,<sup>171</sup> we can come to understand the culturally acceptable ways that women accept or resist normativity, regardless of where they are located.

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<sup>170</sup> Beverly Bell, *Walking on Fire: Haitian Women's Stories of Survival and Resistance*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001) ix.

<sup>171</sup> I use pseudonyms throughout to refer to the participants.

*Positioning Haitian Women in Haitian History*

Throughout Haitian history, Haitian women have been present as political actors, though in a secondary and mostly invisible role. When I think of Haitian women and their contributions to history, I am reminded of the difference that place makes and the importance of taking into consideration one's location. Without the knowledge of Haitian women's history, the established state control, the current state control and the issues that Haitian women face in their daily lives, it is impossible to analyze the way that they were political agents of change. While Haitian women have been suppressed from full recognition as contributors to Haiti's history, this work makes evident that women contributed in ways that cannot go unnoticed. Haitian women's cultural location must be understood before any real theorizing can be made.

In order to situate Haitian women's location, three historical sites that mark Haitian women's mobilizing around different forms of oppression were examined. The three major historical sites that characterize Haitian women's activism, resistance, as well as their subjugation are the Haitian Revolution of 1804, The U.S. Occupation of 1915 and the Duvalier regime of 1957-1986. I look at these three timeframes simultaneously because together they show the progression of women's organizing, looking across time will show us how things have changed but yet remained the same; it allows us to see more fully the extent of Haitian women's mobilizing against oppression. These sites are marked by the wide spectrum of women who across time represent systems of oppression that cross race, class and national boundaries.

The earliest historical moment to set the stage for the development of Haiti and its people is the Haitian Revolution of 1804. The Haitian Revolution of 1804 was not only a significant moment in Haitian history but Black history worldwide. Haiti became the first republic, second only to the United States in the Western Hemisphere. The example of Haiti challenged the way of life that relied on slave labor and production. As detailed in Chapter 2, it was critical that this slave revolt be contained, ignored, and discouraged and so for the first half of the nineteenth century, Haiti's independence was not recognized by Britain, France and the United States. After 1804, Haiti remained disconnected and invisible from the world both economically and politically. Haiti owed a great debt to France and the economy suffered due to its isolation and lack of skilled workers. France recognized Haitian independence only in 1838 in exchange for a financial indemnity of 150 million Francs, making it an indebted independent nation. Haitian history would continue to be also set with social division between the mulattos and blacks, an antagonistic division between the neighboring Dominican Republic. It became state controlled through the militarily elected president Duvalier, who declares himself "president for life" enforced by the paramilitary Tonton Macoutes, which would later kill and exile tens of thousands of Haitians. This history however seldom made mention of women, except maybe as wives of revolutionary men. Some of these men were most notably Toussaint L'Ouverture, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Henri Christophe and Alexandre Petion. We rarely hear about women such as Cecile Fatiman, who in 1792 was said to help lead the Bois Caiman ceremony that officially started the war of independence. Resistance took many forms, including suicide, poisoning,

participating in marronage, and rebellions. Black slave women killed their children and performed abortions as a way to set the terms for control of their sexuality and reproduction.

Women served the revolutionary war also as spiritual advisors to some of the leading men. Women such as Sanite Belair, Marie Jeanne Lamartiniere and Marie-Claire Heureuse were also successful leaders in the Haitian Revolution that go unmentioned.<sup>172</sup> With the end of the Haitian Revolution, “Haitian women, [became] then, the first females in the Caribbean to achieve citizenship within a modernizing nation.”<sup>173</sup> Their participation in the war of independence places Haitian women in a historical timeline of instances where resistance was the only route to freedom. Resistance took on the need for liberation on a national level. Haitian historian Patrick Bellegarde Smith documents that a woman, Louise Nicolas, headed the grassroots movement of 1844, known as the “Piquet Revolt”—a movement of armed resistance against the mulatto elite at Les Cayes, Jeremie, and L’Anse-a-Veau that “failed and solidified class antagonism.”<sup>174</sup> Haiti’s early history of freedom was met with its first U.S. occupation of 1915-1934. The period leading to the occupation was marked with unrest, as the presidency of Haiti changed six times between 1911 and 1915. The Haitian government grew increasingly incapable of fulfilling their debt repayment to both American and French banks. On July 28, 1915 American President Woodrow Wilson ordered 330 U.S. Marines to invade and occupy Haiti in order to protect American and foreign interests, as well as to re-establish peace and order.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Smith 38, Bell 94.

<sup>173</sup> Mohammed, Patricia, 50.

<sup>174</sup> Chancy, 39

<sup>175</sup> Paul Farmer, *The Uses of Haiti*. (Monroe Maine: Common Courage Press, 2003) 79.

Yet again, women took on a national battle during the 1915 occupation of Haiti. We see here that Haiti is once more caught between a dependent/independent binary. During this occupation, Haitian women engaged in activities that defied the Haitian and American governments. Under the occupation, the U.S. took complete control over the Haitian government. The U.S. gained control over all government decisions, limiting Haitian participation to local institutions, which were also subject to U.S. control. The National Guard was established during this occupation to maintain control through violence even after the U.S. Marines left. Haitian peasant women were highly active in organizing against the U.S. occupation. They “[smuggled] ammunition and intelligence on U.S. troop movements to insurgents throughout the countryside.”<sup>176</sup> This defiance was rooted in nationalist motives. After the occupation, “urban elite and middle-class women turned to advocating women’s suffrage and other legal rights for women.”<sup>177</sup> Though the U.S. occupation of Haiti targeted women for war crimes, Haitian women were able to join forces with nationalists and create an awareness of women’s issues as a result. This awareness of women’s issues was fermented during the Duvalier Regime.

A Haitian’s women’s movement began the work of organizing women around issues of national importance. In the early 1900s, Haitian feminists created a revolutionary movement that later went underground due to the anti-revolutionary activities of the Duvalier dictatorship.<sup>178</sup> February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1934 marked the first

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<sup>176</sup> Myriam Chancy, *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997) 39.

<sup>177</sup> Glick-Schiller and Fouron. *Georges Woke Up Laughing*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001) 146.

<sup>178</sup> Chancy, 39.

women's civil rights movement.<sup>179</sup> It was during the occupation in 1934 that the first women's organization, the *Ligue Feminine d'Action Sociale (LFAS)* was formed. This organization was predominately comprised of upper-class intellectual and professional women who worked towards social and political mobility.<sup>180</sup> Advocating for women's suffrage resulted in the right to vote in the 1950s. In *La Voix Des Femmes/Women's Voice*,<sup>181</sup> a monthly newsletter of the *LFAS*, the women express

Some would like to have political rights, but the majority wants civil rights. They want a reform of the civil code that annihilates women far too much. Like in France, said Mr. D, who were also in the car. The right to spend money. Rather the right to control those who spend it. In marriage, we are worth nothing, we are minors. But when the husband die, we're surprised to find ourselves in a majority sates loaded with responsibilities we didn't even know about. If duties are required from us, we also need to naturally have some rights.

The women urged the collective activism and support of all women regardless of class position to participate in the political process in order to secure rights.

Women of my country, Haitians, don't be unconcerned, make an effort, prove to everyone that you want to change for the better in your current social status, think especially to your sisters, poor illiterates, beaten, and remember your kids, work for a better future for them. With the voting card, we will surely get what has always been denied to us and a new era filled with achievements and victory will be opened to us: administration, teaching, professional orientation, social advancement, vice squad, etc.

In 1957, during the elections that brought the Duvalier regime in power, women cast their votes for the first time under the watchful eyes of the U.S. trained military. Madeleine G. Sylvain states, "The founders of the League believed that feminism should be more than a movement for political emancipation-it should be a movement for the improvement of society."<sup>182</sup> Their aim was the social and

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<sup>179</sup> N'Zengou-Tayo, 130.

<sup>180</sup> Bell 149, Bellgrade-Smith, Chancy, Sylvain.

<sup>181</sup> *La Voix Des Femmes/Women's Voice*. Vol. 1. No. 5 February 1936.

<sup>182</sup> Sylvain, 315

intellectual development of women. It was therefore recognized that the development of women was crucial to the improvement of society. In regards to socioeconomic activism in 1934, the league lobbied for equal minimum wage for men and women and three weeks paid maternity leave for women. Also important to the movement was the education of women. A literary movement among Haitian women followed such strides.

The Duvalier regime marked Haitian women's committed activism towards gender equality. It is within this gendered relationship between the State that women's consciousness, demands, claims and organizing was asserted. After receiving the right to vote, "Duvalier depicted women not only as mothers of the nation but also as important political actors."<sup>183</sup> Duvalier went on to develop a female division of the Tonton Macoutes, his military unit. This division was called Marie-Jeanne, after a slave woman whom he named "daughter of the revolution."<sup>184</sup> Though Duvalier was said to have created this female militia to promote gender equality between men and women, ironically, it only reinforced violence and cruelty against women. As this example of the Duvalier era reveals, the concepts of gender and gender system are developed and operate within the political, social and cultural economy of states. For Barriteau,

Caribbean women do not experience the state as a monolithic, homogeneous, entity. We imagine the postcolonial state as an 'incoherent multifaceted ensemble of power relations. It is highly concrete and yet an elaborate fiction; powerful and intangible rigid and protean; potent and boundary less; centralized and decentered.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Glick-Schiller et al, 147

<sup>184</sup> N'Zengou-Tayo, 132

<sup>185</sup> Barriteau, 196.

The two aspects that best define the Caribbean gender system are continuous ruptures and contestations, and an absence of gender justice. In the late twentieth century, Barriteau describes Caribbean gender relations as hostile conditions, where men and women argue that the Caribbean feminist movement exists to emasculate and marginalize men.<sup>186</sup>

Until 1979, married women, including Haitian women who married foreigners were legally minors and their rights to citizenship were limited. While possessing the right to vote, their legal and social status of being dependent remained the same. The Duvalierist state focused on a “patriotic woman” whose allegiance was first to Duvalier’s nation and state.<sup>187</sup> Through the Duvalierist state women moved from “increased politicization and raised consciousness” to their “transformation into political agents of social change.”<sup>188</sup> It was only after the overthrow of the Duvalier government that women began to openly mobilize. A demonstration took place in Port-au-Prince on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April 1986 where Haitian women took to the streets in protest.<sup>189</sup> The absence of Duvalier also allowed for the return of Diasporic women from living in exile. Carolle Charles noted that at least 60 percent of the members of groups such as *Fanm D’ayiti/Women of Haiti*, *Comite Feminin/Feminist Committee*, *SOFA/Worker Solidarity* with Haitian Women and *Kay Fanm/Women’s House* lived outside of Haiti at one point. With the support of women from the Haitian Diaspora, women living in Haiti were able to organize around women’s issues. Haitian women

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<sup>186</sup> Barriteau, 204.

<sup>187</sup> Carolle Charles, “Gender and Politics in Contemporary Haiti: The Duvalierist State, Transnationalism, and the Emergence of a New Feminist (1980-1990),” *Feminist Studies* 21.1 (Spring 1995) 2.

<sup>188</sup> Charles, 2.

<sup>189</sup> N’Zengou-Tayo, Marie-Jose, 118.

also organized within a women's movement. The period of 1991-1994 also marked a change in Haitian women's consciousness.<sup>190</sup> With the restoration of democratic order and the creation of a Ministry of Women's Affairs, Haitian women were gaining more social standing within their society. In its new essence these women were *poto mitan* women, they played a central role in the improvement of their lives as well as other women for generations to come. The history of resistance for Haitian women, which began during the early days of the revolutionary independence movement marked women's important role in Haitian society. These women, many of whom are pictured below and represented in the 1998 International Women's Day publication that is detailed in Appendix G because of their roles and responsibilities were central to the advancement of society and Haitian culture; they were *poto mitan* women, women at the center of society.

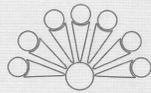
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<sup>190</sup> N'Zengou-Tayo, Marie-Jose, 119.

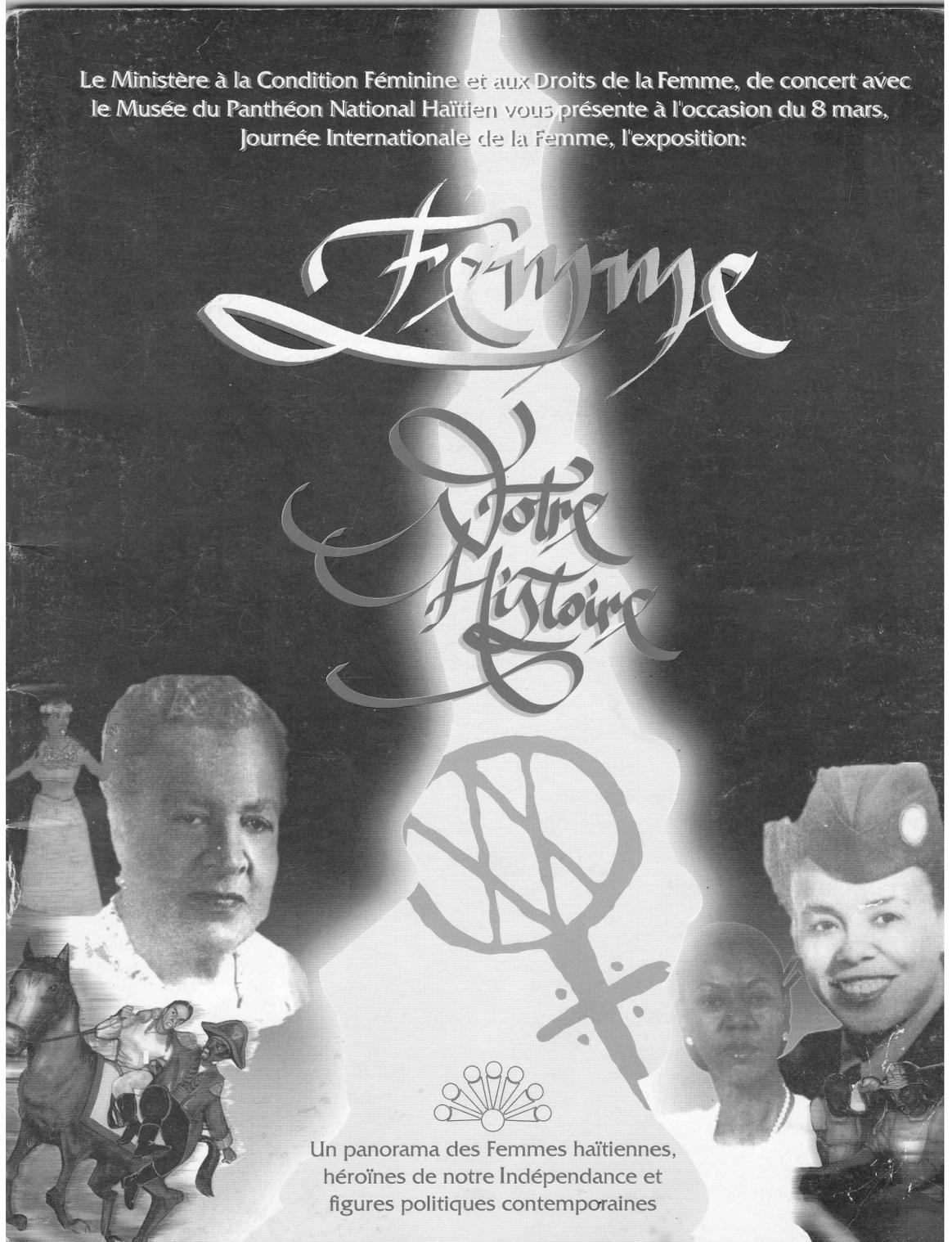
Le Ministère à la Condition Féminine et aux Droits de la Femme, de concert avec  
le Musée du Panthéon National Haïtien vous présente à l'occasion du 8 mars,  
Journée Internationale de la Femme, l'exposition:

Femme

Notre  
Histoire



Un panorama des Femmes haïtiennes,  
héroïnes de notre Indépendance et  
figures politiques contemporaines



**Illustration 5.1:** *Femme: Notre Histoire/Women Our History.*  
1998 International Women's Day Publication  
Front Cover Image

## Understanding the Term, Poto Mitan

### Poto Mitan: It's Origins and Usages

To say that one is a *poto mitan* woman thus invokes symbolisms of strength, honor, morality, and responsibility that span across many areas of life. Staying within the cultural parameters of Haitian identity I use the expression of the *poto mitan* to theorize Haitian women's identity formation and sense of agency. Exploring the roots of this cultural expression sets the stage for a discussion on the term's meaning and applicability to these women's lives in the D.C. metro area. I examine the aspects of the *poto mitan* woman that are simultaneously liberating, constricting and problematic.



**Illustration 5.2:** Poto Mitan Painting. Courtesy of the artist Metellus Bekens



**Illustration 5.3:** Poto Mitan portrait. Courtesy of the artist Frederic Gircur

The term *poto mitan*, which is widely used in Haitian culture, has its origins in Vodou (also spelled Voodoo, Vaudou, Vodun, Vodun)<sup>191</sup>, Haiti’s syncretic religious practice that combines Roman Catholicism and native African religion. Vodou is a “mixture of West Africa religious traditions, consisting of a series of rituals, dances, rhythms, and invocations to a variety of deities and spiritual beings (known as lwas).”<sup>192</sup> The word Vodou is said to derive from the language of the Fon tribe of Dahomey (Benin), *vo*, meaning the “introspection” and *du*, meaning “into the unknown”<sup>193</sup>. Vodou is practiced worldwide under different names and guises.<sup>194</sup> The

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<sup>191</sup> Flore Zéphir, *The Haitian Americans*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004, 3. Claudine Michel. “Women’s Moral and Spiritual Leadership In Haitian Vodou: The Voice of Mama Lola and Karen McCarthy Brown.” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 17.2 (2001) 68.

<sup>192</sup> Zéphir, 3.

<sup>193</sup> Zéphir, 4 and Michel, 68.

<sup>194</sup> Andre Louis. *Voodoo in Haiti*, 17

*poto mitan*, translated literally to mean center/middle (mitan)- post (poto) draws its powers from the two highest gods in the Vodou pantheon, Dangbala Wedo and Ayida Wedo. The *poto mitan* represents, “like the cross (in Christianity), the wood which is just,” it “has the power to cleanse, and to grant the wishes of the faithful and customers.”<sup>195</sup> The *poto-mitan* also symbolizes “Legba Ali-Bon (“Wood of Justice” or Legba Tree-of-the-Good), the way of all vodoun knowledge and communion with the gods.<sup>196</sup> A vital design feature in a vodou temple, the *poto-mitan* or center is always present even if the post exists symbolically. The *poto mitan* in vodou is described best as the wooden column that is located in the middle of the temple where vodou followers worship (see Illustrations 5.2 and 5.3). An important design element of the structure is its vertical axle. The design of the structure symbolizes a “communion with the spirits, the dead, the gods, and the “loas.” During the vodou ceremony, the gods are invoked by the initiates placing their offerings to the temple at the foot of the column.

Taken from its roots in vodou, the *poto mitan* is an expression that is used to describe Haitian women’s role in society. Author Kathleen Gyssels<sup>197</sup> writes about the linkage and re-appropriation of the term *poto mitan* in Haitian culture from the vodou house to the woman centered family. Similarly, politicians such as Aristide like to describe Haitian women as the *poto mitan* (central pole) of Haitian society to attract the female vote. Regardless of its intended use, *poto mitan* is “an accurate description of the central role Haitian women play in Haiti’s society, economy, and

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<sup>195</sup> Andre Louis. Voodoo in Haiti. 128

<sup>196</sup> [www.themystica.org/mystica/articles/vodoun](http://www.themystica.org/mystica/articles/vodoun)

<sup>197</sup> Kathleen Gyssels. “Le Poteau mitan, du peristyle vaudou a la famille matrifocale”.  
<http://www.potomitan.info/penteng/potomitan.php>

increasingly, politics.”<sup>198</sup> In his book, *Haiti: The Tumultuous History*, Phillipe Girard, connects and problematizes the term *poto mitan* by linking Haitian womanhood to the vodou loa Erzulie Danto.

In Haiti, women do everything. They cook, wash, mend clothes, fetch water and wood, and generally perform all the arduous housekeeping labor associated with raising four-five children without the comforts of modern appliances and running water... Women were to follow the example of the loa Erzulie Danto usually depicted as the black Madonna of Czestochowa, a single mother of the voodoo pantheon who was deceived, raped, and beaten by her male partners. According to legend, Erzulie’s tongue was cut off by fellow Haitians during the war of independence so that she would not talk under torture. Revealingly, the symbol of Haitian womanhood was a hard-working Cinderella who could not speak.”<sup>199</sup>

What is most problematic with the term is the simultaneous silencing and celebration of women’s strength. This limited domain offers little room for variation or alteration of Haitian womanhood. It is not until Haitian womanhood is separated from its vodou meanings that it can be used to describe women’s central position. Such a position replaces the silent woman with one that is active, present, and visible—the ideal of Haitian womanhood that is more readily embraced by my participants.

#### *Poto Mitan within a Black Diasporic Context*

Referring to the Haitian Caribbean woman who: “faced with surprises, inconsistencies, bad luck, and hardships, will not bow down, but will take on the role of mother and father.”<sup>200</sup>

With its first usage unknown, *poto mitan* shares close familiarity to “femme chataigne,” an expression used by Maryse Conde in *La Parole de Femmes* to describe the woman’s critical role in society. This “chestnut woman” does not break or fold

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<sup>198</sup> Phillipe Girard. *Haiti: The Tumultuous History-From Pearl of the Caribbean to Broken Nation*, 137.

<sup>199</sup> Phililipe Girard. 138

<sup>200</sup> Gyssels, Kathleen.

under the weight of life's problems, but rather remains whole. This strength crosses generations as is shown in the importance of the grandmother, a dominant figure that is "anchored in the memory of all Blacks around the world."<sup>201</sup> As both mother and woman, the grandmother is "venerated because she ensures the family's continuity, and the cultural cohesiveness of the group. She is the source of life and wisdom. African American author, Toni Morrison sees the grandmother as the repository of what she calls "ancient properties," which are indispensable to a complete sense of identity, racial pride, and loyalty to one's origin."<sup>202</sup> Women's centrality to cultural and social life is thus shared within a Black Diasporic context.

This central role that the grandmother plays is seen also in "Lazarus Rising: An Open Letter to My Daughter," where Myriam Chancy writes about the importance of her grandmother in her life as she tries to pass on the generations of knowledge that was instilled in her through stories, lessons and letters. She writes about her paternal grandmother, Alice Limousin, "whose care for me in my earliest years has left a permanent impression upon my mind, body, and soul."<sup>203</sup> Though women's central role in the family is often celebrated and a source of memories of precious childhood experiences, the view of the Black matriarchy of the Black Diaspora is often misunderstood, "the woman's strong-will is not a desire to dominate the man but to fiercely protect her children from the negative effects of slavery." Evelyne Trouillot, writes about this in *Rosalie L'infame*, where an African midwife kept a

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<sup>201</sup> Gyssels, Kathleen. Black women writers such as Paule Marshall (*Annie John*), Toni Morrison (*Beloved*), Alice Walker, and Angela Davis have written novels that show the parental triad.

<sup>202</sup> Gyssels, Kathleen.

<sup>203</sup> From, *The Butterfly's Way*, 234.

cord of about 60 knots, each commemorating a child she had spared from a life of slavery by killing it at birth.<sup>204</sup>

Unlike Maryse Conde, who uses the “chestnut woman” metaphor as a source of strength, the image of the Black woman in early Haitian literature (1804-1915) was shaped and formed by men who portrayed women in close relation to the way men’s sexuality was depicted, “Women are called *kokoye* (coconut), *labapen* (breadfruit), and mango, all fruits that fall from the tree with maturation.” In spite of these demeaning forms of representation of women as sexual objects, the discourse on women is more complex; “Women are also described as *poto mitan*, the center of the household, and therefore are expected to dedicate themselves to a monogamous relationship. These dichotomist constructions reflect conceptions of gender that associate men and masculinity with prowess, adventure, strength, while women and femininity imply vulnerability and weakness.”<sup>205</sup> Haitian women’s representation in the Haitian consciousness is a contradictory, complex and multi-layered image, as this chapter will reveal through an analysis of the *poto mitan* woman from the perspectives of the women who participated in this dissertation project.

### *Relating with/and Identifying as Poto Mitan Women*

When I think about what my participants understood when I asked them if they agreed with the statement that *women are the central pillars of society*, the majority of them agreed stating that indeed women’s role in society is central. The familiarity of the term also was an indicator of the woman’s relationship to this term.

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<sup>204</sup> “Evelyne Trouilout”. Interview by Edwidge Danticat of author BOMB 90/Winter 2005 Literature

<sup>205</sup> Carolle Charles, “Popular Imageries of Gender and Sexuality: Poor and Working Class Haitian Women’s Discourses on the Use of their bodies,” *The Culture of Gender & Sexuality in the Caribbean*, Linden Lewis, Ed. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003) 176.

The women who were most familiar with the term were the 1<sup>st</sup> generation women who grew up hearing this term associated to women in society. Most of the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation women, while they understood the expression through its literal translation, were not aware of this expression in Haitian culture. With its origins in vodou, none of the women made reference to this fact or the possible stigma that might be associated with this term.<sup>206</sup> This marked the effective re-appropriation of the term into Haitian culture. I raised this question because I wanted to get to the heart of some of the contradictions between what women think of themselves and what society constructs for them. Though most women felt that their roles were central and important, not all of them experienced this in their daily lives and interactions. The *poto mitan* had many meanings when it came to each woman's response. Though the meanings varied, each woman talked about their role with excitement and pride.

#### *Poto Mitan Responses*<sup>207</sup>

Using pseudonyms to respect the privacy of my participants, I set the responses in conversation with one another. The interviews took place either in the participants' home, work, or a location of their choice such as their church or a place of business. Three main conversations were revealed when asking the women to describe their understanding of the *poto mitan*. The most prominent discussion revolved around the responsibility that comes with the territory of being a *poto mitan* woman. This responsibility was both domestic and cultural. Women were the caregivers, the nurturers, and the producers of good leaders.

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<sup>206</sup> The practice of vodou continues to be regarded with disdain by both Haitians who do not want to be discriminated against and others who lack an understanding of the religion.

<sup>207</sup> All of these conversations are transcribed in the present.

For Ritha, work within the house is important because it helps both the family and the home function.

I make my home work. I know I must work, I know I must cook, I know I must wash, I know I must clean, I know to do all of these things to take care of the family-to help the family and to help the house. (Ritha, 1<sup>st</sup> generation)

Janet links the success of men to the presence of strong women. She believes that the nurturing quality of women stabilizes and grounds men.

Women are the central pillars of society. I do believe that because women have the responsibility as the caregivers. If you see like with the theory behind a great man is a greater woman you know for that man to be successful or to become where they are majority of the time its because of a mother who raised him or an aunt or whoever, a female who took care of him, who nurtured them. Its that nurturing nature that makes them where they are or from a wife who nurtured the husband so I truly do think that they are the pillars I mean the men, they can stabilize it but if you don't have good women... (Janet, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation)

The importance of women in the lives of men for Darline is due to the greater role that women play within the household. The woman contributes to all aspects of the household, especially in the care of children.

They always say that women are the central pillars because without women I think men cannot function. And no matter who he is, he needs the woman because the woman is the one who plays the bigger role within the house. Women, we always used to hear these words really and they always said women, they are the central pillars within the home because the woman plays a lot of roles. It is her who watches certain things, things that are not good for her to put back into its place, its her, even when, like if there isn't something it is her who has to see that and the husband also if the husband is going out its her who always has to help out the husband to say this, either this is not good, either this clothes is this way and this means that the children also, it is the woman who is always more active to care for the child. (Darline, 1<sup>st</sup> generation)

Both Arianne and Deena acknowledge the natural power and privilege of women to birth men into the world. From the role of mother to that of helper, the woman has the ability to make the man stronger.

We keep the cycle of life going. Without us that's it, so definitely and we have more sense and of course you know that... (Arianne, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation)

I do agree because I think women are very strong and then without the women you know the men cannot do. We need the women. She is very strong to help and I always say that women give birth to the man so you've got to help them you know but they need a lot of help like from the women like mother, not to baby you know mothering them you know but give them... make them stronger. (Deena, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation)

Despite the fact that Mika acknowledges that women are the central pillars, she also makes a distinction between first the changing times that empower women to be independent from men, being the "men in the family" as she says to women who are successful but do not know how to care for herself or her family.

In a way I agree with it because you know times are changing where you know women are not depending on men, women are doing their own thing or you know, they're basically, being kind of the men in the family, you know what I mean so I do agree with it but also like you know it just depends on the women in my opinion, so it can be, the woman can be a very successful woman but you know doesn't really know how to take care of herself or her family you know what I mean. I just think it depends on the person, but I really do agree with it though. I do agree. (Mika, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation)

Secondly, the women acknowledged that the *poto mitan* is valuable and thus adds physical value to any place. Some stated that the mere absence of a woman's presence in the home is noticeable from the moment you enter a home. The work of women in the home is thus visible.

What it means when they say women are the central pillars is if a place doesn't have women, things cannot be good. (Ritha, 1<sup>st</sup> generation)

If there isn't the woman they always say it's the woman who is not good but if it's the woman who holds the house. If there isn't a woman it isn't good, if there is a place without women, it is not good. (Darline, 1<sup>st</sup> generation)

While the *poto mitan* is held in high regard, there is a difference in how this value is weighed between men and women in the home. In the responses below,

Darline and Leonne support that the male adds respect to the house, the woman adds stability and her presence completes the intended function of the home.

Everywhere that you see men; it is not the same thing. Where the woman is; when you enter you will find it clean. There are some men who are clean also but when you enter you see and places where there isn't any men, it is all necessary, all necessary. When there is a man in the house the house has respect, but when it is women, there are women who don't respect herself and like you have houses that are "wishy washy" but the place that has the male, it has respect and the same way also, its all important the woman, when the two make, if there isn't a house also there are places where you see like places that don't have. (Darline, 1<sup>st</sup> generation)

In a house, if there isn't a woman it is not the same thing. If it's men only in the house, it is not the same thing. Since here men do everything, they cook, they wash, but a place where there isn't a woman, it is not the same thing. (Leonne, 1<sup>st</sup> generation)

Lastly, the *poto mitan* has an impact on society. She does not only occupy the space within the family but her influence extends to the greater society. For Alice, it is through the woman that culture is passed down within the family and the generations to come. She is the backbone that exposes her children to the language, the history and community events.

There is nothing that can be done without the woman, if a woman is not there, things don't happen. (Ritha, 1<sup>st</sup> generation)

Fernande is also the only woman who invokes her knowledge of the presence of Haitian women in Haitian history. She states that in some of the early history in the beginning of the independence of Haiti, women were present and strong behind their men. This strength, according to Fernande, is to be feared.

They can destroy, they have all the capabilities to destroy and to beat; maybe men can harm but women can destroy. I'm afraid of women. I'm a woman I don't think if I will ever defend a women, never I'm not a feminist, they can destroy they have all the capability all the temperament I mean because if something is built, a woman wanted it to be, wanted it to be there if something is not there you can look the woman was there if something has not been built

I can really bet on everything that a woman was at fault and if it was achieved also there was a woman behind it positive or negative. But I very much see the negative as well. I'm sorry. To answer your question, she's the central pillar, definitely. You can look you can look behind there will be always always always, a woman. (Fernande, 1<sup>st</sup> generation)

To further emphasize the influence that women have, Fernande references a proverb in French, "Ce que famn veut, Dieu le veut," what women want God wants. In Fernande's family, when a woman wants something, it is finished, she gets it. The will to get what they want is strong in the eyes of some women. This is true for Janet, who resisted being told that she could not do something and instead purposed in her mind to accomplish that goal, from putting a bookshelf together to pursuing her medical degree.

Fernande shares her understanding of women's larger role historically and in society based on lessons from her upbringing.

In my family, my stepmother says, when women want it, that's all, its finished. There is a proverb in French, "Ce que famn veut, Dieu le veut" What women wants God wants its, to tell you when they want something in history I think it's the same thing because there are some history at the beginning of the independent of Haitian was very strong behind their men. That is it, they say if everything is destroyed, its not there a woman is responsible but if it is built its because a woman wanted it. (Fernande, 1<sup>st</sup> generation)

The role of women to raise and nurture children is according to Murielle expected of women more so than men.

I feel like we mold men, we shape society the way it is we grow children we nurture them and I think up to a certain age the things that we instill in the little children, the little boys and girls carry and it's a woman who does that or people look upon the woman to do that more so than the father. (Murielle, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation)

Women's influences over different aspects of society are innumerable for Roseline.

I can definitely agree with that statement because without women society wouldn't exist. I just believe if nothing else you know women are powerful and we're unique and our qualities and our characteristics are essential to a lot of different things and I don't see how society would be any different you know its easy to say that you know women are to family and you know that kind of thing but I think its just one of those things that it crosses over many different things. (Roseline, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation)

*The poto mitan is not a stand-alone source of power and strength.*

Attributing to the faith of the women interviewed, some women acknowledged that it is unrealistic and disadvantaged to view women without men. Women are not alone and thus cannot ignore the presence of others in their lives. Mika makes the point that, "If we're fighting for equality, then we don't need the other sex sort of defeats the purpose of fighting for something collective and more powerful." Though single, Edeline emphasizes the point that it takes two together to build a society though women play a big role, as shown in the need for the creation of women. Edeline acknowledges that she had a group of women, her mom, sister and other friends who helped her care for her son. Like the other women whom I spoke with Edeline agreed that if there is no woman present, certain things cannot be done but together everything is possible.

Women, I don't think women by herself can be the *poto mitan* because I think it takes two together to build a society you know it takes all of us. Women play a big role in society because when God created he didn't create woman he created two, he created Adam and Eve so that means as long as there are two, it's a force...I don't really think I can say I made it through by myself with my son. I think I made it with a group; my mom was there, my sister was there, and I had friends. If a woman is not included though, it cannot be done I think if we are together everything is possible. (Edeline, 1<sup>st</sup> generation)

For some it meant that they were responsible for everything within their household, including caring for the children. All of the activities listed above

emphasize the way that the place of home plays a major role in constructing this identity for the women. Their roles were central in relation to their work at home. To truly encompass the *poto mitan*, a woman must operate successfully under multiple roles.

As I anticipated some of the responses, I expected to hear that the woman had a major role/responsibility within the family. This domestic, nurturing and care-giving aspect of women's roles has been present as the established normative behavior. What I did not expect to hear is that women are to be feared and that women destroy. This distinction between men and women reveals a very sophisticated understanding of women's power potential. The final discussion on women not being the sole power source is a very honest yet critical look at the realities of the lives of these women. Not all women were married and so others relied on the communities around them, the women who offered strength and support. The women talked excitedly about the *poto mitan* as a source of pride. Their understanding describe with respect the everyday tasks that are taken for granted but now put within the context of the *poto mitan* can find new meaning, a new source of pride as women.

I also expected some aspect of burden to be present. Instead the women accepted the numerous roles as a source of strength and identity. As the *poto mitan*, to be relied on, called upon could be draining but the positive meanings overwhelm and outnumber feelings of abuse and exploitation. There was only one instance where the women continue to play multiple roles to a husband who is emotionally absent.

While *poto mitan* can easily be interpreted as a purely domestic role and thus loses value, *poto mitan* for these Haitian women is liberating. It puts words to the countless areas of life that women influence.

#### Power Responses

Another facet that is embedded in my participant's reaction to *poto mitan* is their engagement with the power dynamic that is inherent in the idea, representation and meaning of the *poto mitan*. In the following conversations, my participants explore the power aspect within the term. They examine their own limitations as well as their capabilities as women.

For Deena, women are powerful because they move the world. She states that women don't get the credit that they deserve. "There is no society without women, we're the producers whether its food or caring for animals and I'm not talking about the food you eat I'm talking about planting you know cropping and things like that so I think there's no society without women." She acknowledges that women are beginning to be recognized for their contributions due to the women's movements. Part of the struggle, she continues, "lies in the established norms of society that are not easily changed. Those norms are rooted in who has the power and the struggle to share that power." Deena captures the importance of having a discussion about power and taking the time to define how this term applies to women's lives. The discussion that follows explores how the women interact with this term from a personal perspective, looking at how this power is defined and how this power is translated in the everyday lives and experiences of these women.

One of the initial reactions to the questions—do you feel powerful and how would you define power is that power is about being all knowing—that power is

about being self-sufficient and independent. The following narratives discuss the women's ideas about power from other points of view.

From a faith-based perspective many of the women resisted the use of this word to describe themselves because of their belief and reverence for God. Their faith became their source of power and strength.

Darline views power as strength, "To stand, to stand strong, and to be strong." For Roseline and Alice, power is evident in one's ability to influence others, whether in a positive or negative way. Respect also plays into the ability to influence other. Respect must be earned through your example to others.

I do feel like we have power and that I have power and I guess I would define it is as the ability to influence both in a positive way and in a negative way but I believe that in those terms we are very powerful as women. (Roseline, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation)

Power would be having some influence like knowing when you say something and then you have the influence and people do what you say, and then of course with respect like people look up to you, they respect you for who you are but then again its only on what you've done, based on your accomplishments as well um so that's how power is like having an influence on others to do what you tell them to do. (Alice, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation)

Janet experiences power within four locations of her everyday life; her physical self, her family, the church and at work. Janet does not experience this power alone, but rather is supported by her family, who in turn give her strength.

There is physical power, strength, and intellectual power, being a mother... I do feel powerful but it's not on my own but because of those around me who have helped me learn like my husband. With him, yes, I feel powerful, I feel like an empowered woman. He makes me feel beautiful; he makes me feel desired, like someone who in his eye has a high status.

Within the family, the woman has the power to control the mood of the household, determining whether it is happy or not.

A woman does have a certain power. I feel like the woman is the one that can hold the house together, that keeps the home happy. It's the woman's job, that's not the woman's only job but the woman has such a big part of making a home happy. If you make the home happy everything is happy-- the husband will be happy--the marriage is happy--the family is happy.

Within the church and as the daughter of a senior pastor, Janet experienced the power of influence because she served as a role model for the other youth.

The church, I feel empowered as well because of whether I admit it or not because of my status being the pastor's daughter of a senior pastor that puts you in people's eye whether I like it or not which growing I really had resentment of, having the eyes of the world looking on me. Everyone sees what you do but that was in a sense, that was a power because every parent was watching what you did and what you were and then they make their children do the same things so that was a power which I did not realize I had but in a sense that was there.

Within the space of work and especially as a medical doctor, Janet has the power to dictate health outcomes of her patients, most of whom are her senior.

At my job I do feel powerful in a sense that I'm giving I'm telling this adult 50 year old man what to do with his life what to put in his mouth and he has to listen to me and I sign a document that either tells him that he can be on disability or he can't.

Jocelyne perceives power through control. She is careful to observe that with power and control, consent must be given. Jocelyne shows a clear understanding of the differing degrees of power that we are all capable of. The power to give consent to rule is a very subtle but...

Power, when the person has power because the person is on top, the person is in charge (chief), it is this person who is directing, because the person has power the person is the chief, it is this person who is directing they say left, left. They say right, right, what is said must be done, it must be done because they are on top of you, they are chiefs but and sometimes there are those who don't listen to what the chief says and they do their own thing because sometimes the chief would say something and what is said is not correct but you who are on the bottom, the power of the chief you have seen that what the chief says is not right but you, what you decide to do, you do it. ...If you don't give them the power really they cannot have the power to be over you. (Jocelyne, 1<sup>st</sup> generation)

Murielle describes power through the daily decisions that she encounters, where she is proactive and is able to produce the result that she desires. “Having power is being able to wake up and know that if I want this I can go and get this or I can make this happen. Whatever, I can set my mind to and what you want is what you get basically.” (Murielle, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation)

Mika views power with being independent, self-sufficient and reliable.

Powerful to me is someone who is mentally, physically, emotionally stable, someone who can take care of themselves and if somebody else comes along take care of them. Basically, an independent woman for me is powerful, someone that doesn't need anybody but you know if somebody comes along to help them they won't be like, oh I don't need your help you know what I mean someone that can take care of themselves. (Mika, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation)

For Arianne power is about self-preservation. Not allowing life's situations to change or alter who you are and having a strong sense of self.

Not allowing anyone to change the dynamic of who you are by your experiences that you've had with them. For example if someone were to off the top of my head treat you as if you don't matter or they take advantage of you, for you not to allow that to change your nature of being giving or you know being a very altruistic person in a sense, even though that experience you know left a bad taste in your mouth, encountering the next individual you're still forthcoming with being able to help them and say you know what I'm here for you whatever you need. (Arianne, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation)

While many of the women experienced power over others, some women acknowledged the importance of power over self. For Ritha, power is about self-control and having control over your life. For Arianne, she is powerful because through everything that she's experienced in her life she had been able to bounce back, love with the same earnest, she is resilient, maintains and forges ahead with her life. Arianne's power has to do with personal, maintaining your personal identity in spite of life's circumstances.

Fernande does not feel powerful as a woman in particular. What she values most is the power of knowledge, intelligence and analytical skills. These responses are in contrast with Murielle who characterizes the power that women have through the gift of persuasion, modesty and charm. She says that we must be patient and mindful of this power in order to know how to work it best. Defining power was an important process that the women engaged in. The many understandings of what power means to each woman sheds light on how they might use that power in their daily lives.

With an understanding of the varying experiences of power in their daily lives, Haitian women must negotiate their many roles. Deena emphasizes that women are not the equal partners.

The double standards, the crazy expectations that she's here working just as hard as you driving the kids to daycare and you want her to come home take off your shoes run your bath make your meals and take care of you so we are in a different society where there's no maid there is not a bunch of family members to help care for that child so the Haitian men have not switched their mentality so I feel like our women here they feel abused and they look worn and they look really angry a lot and I watch them in the church crying all the time and its just that the men have not adapted to where they are and what the real realities are that they need to be equal partners. (Deena, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation)

Though the new society is different, Deena believes that the community holds the same expectations for men and women in their domestic lives. That Haitian gendered domestic normative roles still apply creates a false sense of freedom that cannot be enjoyed or at least publicly acknowledged. She says,

I see this till this day with my mother, she's always the one to eat last, she'll go without food or she'll make sure my father always has the biggest plate. All of the women in her family do this. They cook, clean, make sure everything is taken care of before the husband's home and then their the last to eat so and then their the backbone for the kids like the moral support, the counselor, the wife the mother the sister and to me that's feminism, that's the

pushing to make sure everything is okay for the family. (Deena, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation)

Unlike Deena and Murielle, Ritha doesn't see any difference between male and female immigrants. She states, "I see both men and women, they are flying, everyone is running." Whether it's the man who doesn't have time to eat or the woman who has the food but doesn't have the time to cook it, Ritha puts everyone in the same situation as immigrants while she describes two distinct roles for men and women in regards to family life.

The everyday roles of women either through their organizations or within the family affect the migration process. Eudine Barriteau<sup>208</sup> interrogates the relations of power within relations of gender. The importance of investigating power relations is posited as the most productive study on gender in the Caribbean. Power relations are fundamental to all relations within society, especially relations of gender. While theories of power relations using race and class as a unit of analysis is useful, power within the gender continuum is both important and needed in a Caribbean feminist scholarship. Barriteau explicitly theorizes the absence of power as a constraining factor in women's lives<sup>209</sup> and defines power in her earlier scholarship in two ways: "knowledge representing a critical source of power, and power as the capacity to affect access to resources and, to a lesser extent, as generalized stream of influence to alter outcomes, to define situations and to shape belief systems."<sup>210</sup> In Haiti, women play a very significant role in the economy. "They make up 48percent of the total workforce; they control around 90percent of retail trade and commercialization of

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<sup>208</sup> Eudine Barriteau, ed. *Confronting Power, Theorizing Gender: Interdisciplinary Perspectives in the Caribbean*, (Jamaica: University of West Indies Press, 2003)

<sup>209</sup> Barriteau, 8.

<sup>210</sup> Barriteau, 4.

agricultural products.”<sup>211</sup> Essentially, all Haitian women across all socio economic backgrounds participate in the economy through their work. Engaging in the discussion on power is thus a way that my participants examined their gender relationships everyday and greater role within society as a whole.

### *Women, Family and Leadership Roles*

The following series of discussions look at the variety of family and leadership roles in which women engaged. The majority of the women had leadership roles within their churches. They were the ushers, greeters, teachers, deaconesses, prayer warriors, welcome committee, event planning staff, newsletter writers and choir member of their churches. Their high level of participation kept them grounded not only in the church but also within the Haitian community. The church became the place where the community gathered, where Kreyol was spoken, Haitian food was shared and networks were established.

For Darline, the women’s role in the family is to take care of the house, the children and most generally this role is a domestic one. This domestic role is in addition to working outside the home. She makes a distinction between the husband who sits in front of a television, spends all of his time outside the house or the one who has the understanding to help their wife with her domestic duties. Darline is in the usher ministry, chorus, and women’s group.

Edeline describes a family as a man and a woman. Though single she says that things could be easier, or even worst if she had a husband. She accepts this fact and does not feel a sense of lack. “I’ve been making it on my own without a second hand so it has been okay.” Edeline emphasizes the importance of women’s choice of

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<sup>211</sup> Charles, 173.

staying home. The matter of choice when it comes to home life is important to Edeline. She states that she doesn't think the women's place is in the home because that thinking is about servitude. Such line of thinking she says is from the past and not appropriate for the society that we live. She makes the distinction of the cultural practices in Haiti where the man has dinner waiting for him at home, eats the best piece of meat and eats three times a day.

Fernande very clearly states the invisible presence of women in the home, "In Haiti, they are the master I mean but not openly because they are born to be women first. They are not feminist but they are still master, they have the last word, they definitely have the last word I mean softly, its not like roughly..."

Speaking from her own personal experiences, Jocelyne talks about the Haitian men who abuse their wives. Waking up at three o'clock for work she comes home to a messy house that was left clean. She admits that her husband will not even boil a single plantain let alone pick up after himself. She feels like she is being treated like an animal. Part of this treatment is aided by the culturally accepted domesticification of women. Jocelyne states that an American woman would never accept this treatment. While Jocelyne views tolerating her situation as a source of strength, her friends however believe that she is perpetuating her treatment. She states, "there are a lot of Haitian men who do not view women as anything they view you as if you were trash."

Within her church, Jocelyne services on the women's group, the usher group and visits and prays with the sick. She observes that, in both Haiti and the U.S., women are always active in everything and whatever is going on. "She always stands

high because whatever the battle or problem, women always play the bigger role. Women are called upon either in prayer or for words of encouragement. She is always active and standing in the fight.” In an interview with a local pastor and his wife, this same point about women’s involvement in the church is emphasized. Pastor Fadinel states, in “whatever church that you go to you will find three fourths women and one fourth men and certainly for us Haitians, there are a lot of things that women are doing that the men will not help out in...the women are always more perseverant than the men.”

Leonne believes that the duty of women is to take care of her children, take care of her husband and take care of the house. “Even though people go to work she must when she return take care of take care of everything.” Similar to Leonne, for Silvia, the presence of a woman in the house means that the woman is in charge of the house, she is the keeper of the house. This means working a second shift when she returns home from work. Silvia admits that she is not always able to complete her work at home, she leaves it for the next day.

Both Leonne and Silvia are deaconesses in their church. They prepare the communion table, making sure the tablecloths remain clean. Leonne states that she is always involved in the church activities, “I am always there.” Silvia is also an usher and in the choir. Silvia must generally make herself available.

Denise values being there to raise her children, stating that in America because of work, she has to leave her children and this is hard. Even when they are sick, she must leave them and go to work to make a living, this she could never accept.

Ritha teaches in Sunday school in the children's classes and she is in charge of a women's group along with being in the choir. The women's group is about helping, visiting the sick in their homes or at the hospital, helping them either through cooking or cleaning but generally encouraging them.

While Madeleine embraces her domestic responsibility, she has benefited from having a husband who is not tied to the strict gender roles within Haitian culture. She says that he is always present to help and would start and finish preparing a meal, even if it requires calling for help.

Janet spends a lot of her time in the church community, she is a Sunday school teacher, 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade teacher, youth group, singing group, youth steering committee, tutoring program, seminars for high school students and parents, advise students, children's ministry, health ministry, welcoming committee, singing, young women's group. For Janet the women in her church are doing quite a bit. The praise and worship team is majority female as well as the musicians where the drummer is a female. She has not seen women preaching or women pastors. There is availability for women to do a number of activities within the church.

Janet grew up with the assurance that she can do whatever she wanted and that she would receive the support of her parents. She is careful to note that she grew up as both a Haitian and American girl. As a Haitian girl she had to learn how to cook and clean not to become a good housewife but because cooking and cleaning were useful tools. For Janet, women have many roles in the family besides that of a wife and mother. She plays the role of the nurturer in the household and with the help of her husband, she holds the family together. As a team, she is able to make the home

happy, making it a comfortable place for the kids to come home to. Roseline supports the same view that the role of women in the family is to be her husband's biggest supporter and helper and to be an influence and positive role model to the children.

Janet adamantly distinguishes between men who just came from Haiti versus someone who is Americanized. Growing up she always knew that she could never marry a man who was raised in Haiti because of the different mindset he would possess on his arrival in the U.S. with. Janet states that she would never consider someone who is not Americanized for a few years. She talks here mostly about the cultural clash that might occur. "We would bang heads in the house because of the mentality of the majority of Haitian men in Haiti," the certain assumptions about the female's roles and positions.

Deena is very influenced by her parents. Her mother is nurturing and the caretaker, but she never gave up her power in the home. She has learned that respect requires the corporation of two people; otherwise the different gender roles will be abused. Deena makes an interesting point here about the woman's responsibility to rear the children when she states, "to say that a child is well raised or well behaved is a compliment to the mother." As Haitians, the question of "who is your mother?" is more common than "who is your father?" The question of "where's the kids mother?" usually is about the kids or the way the home is kept. For Deena she embraces the idea that women must really care and look after her family understanding the duty that she has, not as a slave or a mother but as a woman. A good woman is thus

someone who takes care of her family and who is respected by her community professionally.

Deena states that she participates in the political process by voting. She is an active member of Association of Haitian Professionals. Deena has volunteered at the embassy, participate in the National Organization for the Advancement of Haitians, and she tries to be involved with every Haitian organization that she is aware of existing. She has even worked with Caribbean professionals in an effort to connect the different communities. Arianne also gets involved whenever there is something that affects the Haitian community; she has for example rallied and signed the petition for Temporary Protective Status.

Murielle has learned that with gender roles, there is a place for the woman and a place for the man. She states, “there’s certain things that a woman should do but not because there’s nothing else to do, I mean there are things that innately make us a woman and things that are good to care for your family but that doesn’t mean you shouldn’t try to thrive your school and career, you try to balance and manage all your roles.” Like Murielle, Alice believes in balancing the many roles of women because “there’s nothing wrong cause you have to fulfill your role as a woman too so it’s a balance but it’s just the approach is different that the battle is different.”

This chapter has looked at the social construction of Haitian women’s identities. One factor that is important is the context of living in America. As Haitians in America, these women experience life through the lenses and location of these two cultures. As immigrants, it is important to acknowledge the cultural expressions that are brought with them.

Embracing the term “*poto mitan*” signifies an acknowledgment of one’s power and influence over their life. As the *poto mitan*, women are not acting alone—the women having the children without men but it is a place, a cultural place that is set apart from – for women. It is a place where women become visible due to their involvement in all aspects of their lives.

The general usage of the term for both first and second generation women was a positive connotation that helped each woman valorize themselves. Some women, depending on their home relationships were empowered rather than burdened.

The first generation came to the U.S. with their traditional cultural beliefs of women’s domestic role. Any male partner who challenged the dominant stereotype of the Haitian man was thus seen as a good man, essentially a man who is better than the norm. These women had stable homes where love and respect ruled the house. When a male partner is seen as stereotypical, there is a disruption in the household functions. The women who had these types of relationships were divorced, separated or unhappy at home with their partners. These women themselves were very independent, outspoken and unsatisfied with the imbalance of work in the home. With an understanding of women’s significance in society, first generation women who were married challenged to move beyond their expected work at home. Single first generation women on the other hand were accustomed to the idea of women’s strength.

In the second generation only one woman was married. The others were single and had very specific expectations in their future relationships. The second generation believed in a complex understanding of *poto mitan*. It was not dominated by the

domestic role though many of the women included this and embraced it, they sought more definitions that were based on their own strengths and qualities. Their mothers and the relationships that were modeled for them further influence the second generation.

In the next chapter, Haitian Community Building in Greater Washington, D.C, will be highlighted. Though there are few cultural institutions that aid the process of adaptation for the Haitian immigrant, this chapter will explore some of the reasons immigrants move to the area and build their lives here. It will highlight what the area offers to the Haitian immigrant. Most importantly, the task of the next chapter is to locate the community.

## Chapter 6: Haitian Community Building in Greater Washington, D.C.

The Washington, D.C. metropolitan area is the location that inspired and directed this research. Washington, D.C. has become the latest top destination for immigrants. Research shows however that immigrants are dispersed throughout the region, thus making the formation of single ethnic enclaves difficult.<sup>212</sup> Ethnic enclaves are found in the urban core, while ethnic communities tend to be in the suburbs. As reflected in my study, the majority of participants live in the suburbs of Maryland, rather than the District of Columbia. In their article, “Edge Gateways: Immigrants, Suburbs, and the Politics of Reception in Metropolitan Washington”<sup>213</sup> Marie Price and Audrey Singer offer the concept “edge gateways”<sup>214</sup> to identify the different pattern of immigrant settlement that is descriptive of the metropolitan Washington, D.C. area. Edge gateways are “multiethnic communities in which no single immigrant group dominates.”<sup>215</sup> Unlike inner-city neighborhoods, edge gateways receive clusters of immigrants in the suburban setting. The emergence of the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area as an edge gateway are due to the stability of the federal government that has maintained one of the lowest unemployment rates in the U.S., housing affordability, access to major and public transportation, residential

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<sup>212</sup> Marie Price and Audrey Singer, “Edge Gateways: Immigrants, Suburbs, and the Politics of Reception in Metropolitan Washington.”137.

<sup>213</sup> Marie Price and Audrey Singer, 138.

<sup>214</sup> This concept is derived from “Joel Garreau’s concept of the edge city—the concentration of business, shopping, and entertainment outside the traditional urban core.” (Price and Singer, 138)

<sup>215</sup> Marie Price and Audrey Singer, 138.

preferences, in particular the avoidance of black neighborhoods (with the exception Langley Park/Adelphi), and social networks.<sup>216</sup>

This chapter introduces Washington, D.C. to the reader by presenting snapshots of the community as Haitian immigrants experience it. Offering a glimpse of what makes this place distinctive and how the community has evolved, this chapter is divided into three sections: cultural institutions, in which immigrants stake a claim to their communities, perceptions of the Haitian immigrant community, in which immigrants reflect on their space and public presentations, and public representations of Haiti and Haitian identity, in which immigrants engage in displaying their Haitian ethnicity in the public spaces of the 2004 Smithsonian Folklife Festival and the D.C. Caribbean Carnival. The first section looks at the cultural institutions that are available to the Haitian community in D.C. The places discussed are the churches, money transfer agencies, professional and community organizations, a radio station, and a restaurant. The second section looks at how immigrants feel about their community. Is there a sense of satisfaction or disappointment that comes with living in this area? Lastly, the third section looks at how Haiti is represented in carnivals and festivals, parades and the experience of being Haitian publicly.

### *Cultural Institutions: Staking a Claim*<sup>217</sup>

#### Haitian Churches and Churches with Haitian Affiliations

The Haitian church serves as one of the most important institutions in which the immigrant population integrates into the community through establishing strong

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<sup>216</sup> Marie Price and Audrey Singer, 154-157.

<sup>217</sup> Refer to the appendix for a detailed list of Haitian Cultural Institutions in the Greater Washington, D.C. Metropolitan.

social networks. When I began my research on the Haitian community, the church was the first place in which I sought out Haitian immigrants. Not only is the church a centralized location for gatherings, but it is also the most common place where immigrants can turn to for support and insight into the survival and success of community life for the new immigrant. There are approximately twelve churches that serve the Haitian<sup>218</sup> community in the metropolitan D.C. area. The three Catholic churches that have Haitian affiliations are St. Camilus located in Silver Spring, Shrine of the Sacred Heart located in Washington, D.C, and Our Lady of Sorrows located in Takoma Park. The other nine churches are Protestant churches, ranging from Baptist, Adventist, Body of Christ, to Evangelical. Of the Protestant churches, one is located in D.C. while the others are primarily centered in the Silver Spring, Adelphi and Takoma Park areas of Maryland.

After being informed by my participants which churches served the Haitian community, I met and spoke with the pastors of three protestant churches. The first church that I targeted was Eglise Baptiste Du Calvaire. When I spoke with the Eglise Baptiste Du Calvaire pastor about the aims of my project, he gave me a list of Haitian churches in the area. I was drawn to Pastor St. Ulme's church because it is the largest Haitian church in the area. As such it has programs that targets the community's specific needs. This pastor along with the others I spoke with served as cultural brokers that allowed me access into the Haitian community.

The common experience, as we will see through the experiences of both Pastor Fadinel and Pastor St.Ulme are the issues of space and ownership is a

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<sup>218</sup> I identify these churches as Haitian on the basis of having Haitian leadership, Haitian language and Haitian cultural and ethnic composition of the people.

challenge for Haitian churches in the area. Pastor Fadinel does not own a facility for his church but rather rents out space in schools. His church, Eglise De Saintete, is like most Haitian churches in the area that function in public school systems, leaving very few to have independent buildings. Of the ones that do conduct services in a church building the space is rented out from another congregation. Pastor Fadinel explains how this lack of space affects how church services are conducted:

Having a nomadic church is very difficult. Our experience is that we go from school to school and sometimes for small reasons for example if there are renovations, they displace us and put us in another school. Very often you lose connections with friends of the church and sometimes even members of the church if they lived in a certain place you move and go to another place, they take advantage and go to another church and it is never an advantage...

Pastor Fadinel and his church did however purchase a building to renovate so they can have a stable location. Pastor St. Ulme's church was truly nomadic until it built its own facilities in 2006. Below is a photo history of the movement and growth of Pastor St. Ulme's church. Eglise Baptiste du Calvaire, EBC (Calvary Baptiste Church) started in early 1977 as an outreach mission out of the First Evangelical Church of Washington, D.C. Identifying the need for a spiritual community in Maryland and the growth of the Haitian population, Pastor St. Ulme moved to Maryland to start a local outreach mission.

Pastor St. Ulme founded the Haitian Baptiste Mission of Silver Spring as a continuation of the outreach ministry. With a congregation of nineteen, the formal inauguration of this new church occurred on May 16, 1982. From that time to February 1992, services were held in the First Baptist Church of Silver Spring. On November 5<sup>th</sup>, 1989, the church adopted its current name, Eglise Baptiste Du Calvaire (EBC). The congregation outgrew the 250 capacity of that location and so EBC held

its last service on Feb 28, 1992 and began the search for a permanent church building location. In fact, EBC acquired land at 10002 Riggs Road in July 1993 while using rented spaces to conduct services. The Temple of Israel was used from March 1992 to August 1992. Eastern Middle School was used from September 1992 to May 1999. Blair High School was used from April 1992 to April 2006. And lastly, University Baptist Church was used from 2000 to April 2006. On October 23, 2004, EBC began the construction of a new church building, boasting a 620 people membership. On April 9, 2006, thirteen years after the land was acquired, EBC conducted its dedication service for its newly constructed permanent church home.



First Baptist Church  
Of Silver Spring  
May 1982 to February 1992



Temple of Israel  
March 1992 to August 1992



Eastern Middle School  
September 1992 to May 1999



Blair High School  
April 1992 to April 2006



University Baptist Church  
2000 to April 2006

**Illustration 6.1:** Photo History of Eglise Baptise Du Calvaire  
Photo Courtesy of Pastor St. Ulme

#### Haitian Businesses

Participants talked about two types of businesses that they frequented; a Haitian restaurant Chez Yon Yon and two transfer agencies: UniTransfer<sup>219</sup> and Caribbean AirMail Inc. (C.A.M.), located in Maryland and D.C. respectively. There

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<sup>219</sup> Also known as Esther Transfer

are no operational Haitian food restaurants in Maryland. The only other establishment was Chez Mimose in Washington, D.C. that closed down in 2010. It was not a full service restaurant, but was advertised rather as a fine Haitian cuisine carryout located within a multiservice business that also had a small dining area. The services that are offered through C.A.M. are endless, ranging from translation services, legal aide, faxing, sending food and packages to Haiti, and selling Haitian merchandise such as CDs, DVDs and calling cards. Chez Yon Yon, the only full service restaurant closed down around 2008 after the owner moved out of the state. This restaurant is worth mentioning because many of my participants mentioned that this restaurant closed down and are not aware of any others. There are people who might sell food unofficially in their homes, but there is no standard restaurant.

Chez Yon Yon was an important facet of the Haitian community; in fact Echo d'Haiti called it an "unofficial community center for Haitian immigrants". In 2004, the bicentennial anniversary of the Haitian Independence the Smithsonian Folklife Festival selected Haiti as the country that was highlighted during the festival. Chez Yon Yon was selected to cater Haitian food at the 2004 festival, further extending the reach of influence of such a business. This business served many functions that surpassed serving Haitian food. It was a place where Haitian immigrants purchased tickets to community events, listened to Haitian news, and met other members of the Haitian community.

The former owner, Lionel Simeon was a former member of the Haitian band DP express and has lived in the area since the early eighties. In a Washington Post

article, “Home away from home cooking”<sup>220</sup> Eve Zibart highlights the many ways that Chez Yon Yon provided not only food but also it provided” entertainment, news, culture and pride.” Chez Yon Yon remained the most popular and the only official meeting place for the Haitian community. Chez Yon Yon was the spot to go to meet and greet, to learn and to gossip, to talk and joke, to comment on politics or music, to impress a Haitian date or family from out of town. It was also the place where Haitian businesses left their flyers and business cards, and Haitian balls, parties, and get-togethers were announced.

Food plays a very important role in the lives of Americans and most especially immigrants who have experienced some level of displacement from their homeland. More specifically, “whether preparing a cherished family recipe or noshing at an ethnic food festival, memory, public and private, mediates agency. We do race; we remember race; and we create culture.”<sup>221</sup> The usage of food for Haitian immigrants to recreate Haitian culture in Washington, D.C. is thus an area of life that significantly aids the process of adaptation and identity formation. *Citizen Restaurant* further identifies racial/ethnic foodscapes as markers of belonging and difference.

UniTransfer and C.A.M. are international money transfer agencies that wire money and also send food items via cargo to Haiti. Sending money home to Haiti is a very important reality in the lives of many Haitian immigrants who leave family members behind in Haiti. These businesses also serve as a cultural meeting place, where one can hear Kreyol spoken, buy calling cards, Haitian music and movies, pick up flyers for local Haitian events and advertise businesses.

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<sup>220</sup> Zibart, Eve. “Home-Away-From-Home Cooking” *Washington Post*. Friday September 29, 2006.

<sup>221</sup> Vicki Ruiz. “Citizen Restaurant: American Imaginaries, American Communities.” *American Quarterly*. 60.1 (2008) 3.

Nestled between the sounds of the “Caribbeana” show hosted by Von Martin at 7:00pm and “African Rhythms and Extensions” with host Koffi Kissi Dompere at 12:00am, the only Haitian radio program in Washington, D.C., “Konbit Lakay” is on the air for two hours on Saturday night (10pm-12am). Many participants identified the “*Konbit Lakay*” with Jean Yves Point-Du-Jour (Yves Dayiti) radio show as a marker of the Haitian community, though they did not personally follow the program, they were aware of its presence. Trinity Washington University International Affairs Professor and Institute For Peace Chairman of the Haitian Working Group, Dr. Robert McGuire, has been a part of the D.C. community for many years and leads the Haiti Program at Trinity College, comments on the radio show and the local Haitian community:

I’m not as familiar with the other communities as I am this one but every time I go to Florida or to New York um one of the first things I do is go through the radio dial and I get Creole radio, especially talk shows and their very “Engag’e” you know, very dynamic and here in Washington you really don’t have the same media you have one program a week a couple of hours on Friday, Saturday night and I don’t know to what extent that really kind of attracts the entire community or because I think the show has a kind of a political orientation to it that you know would attract certain people and maybe not attract others, so maybe those are some differences.

Haitian/American Organizations

The cultural institutions that are available to immigrant communities can greatly affect the adaptation experience. With a dispersed community such as the Haitian immigrant community in the Washington, D.C. area, these organizations are much more important to connecting community members with valuable resources. Reverend Evans Faustin founded the *Caribbean Help Center, Inc.* in 1995. Operated by Haitian immigrant, Evans Faustin, targets its services to the Haitian community as well as other Caribbean populations in the area. More specifically, “the program’s

target audience is immigrants and other residents of Montgomery County with limited English proficiency, with particular emphasis on those who are French, Creole, or Caribbean descent.”<sup>222</sup> Both Pastor Fadinel and a participant mentioned this center in our conversations. The only of its kind that serves the Haitian community, the CHC offers a wide range of assistance to the community ranging from employment and professional help, advocacy, translation services, educational programs for ESL, and many more important issues that affect the community.

The CHC has a facebook page that describes it as an organization that “provides, education, affordable health care, financial literacy, homeowner counseling, computer classes, a youth program, transportation, and assistance with day-to-day living to immigrants.”<sup>223</sup> It is their purpose:

To help individuals and their families access academic, economic and civic opportunity that enhances their ability to strengthen their neighborhoods, succeed at school and work, raise healthy families and become engaged members of their communities.<sup>224</sup>

Another organization, the *National Organization for the Advancement of Haitians (NOAH)* was discussed by my participants as an important location for interacting with the Haitian community and getting involved. With chapters in Miami, New York, Chicago, Atlanta, Los Angeles, and Port-au-Prince, NOAH is well regarded as “public policy information clearinghouse and advocate for the democratization of Haiti and it consulted by the executive branch of the United States as an intermediary between the governmental and private sectors within Haiti and

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<sup>222</sup> Caribbean Help Center, Inc. Facebook page.

<sup>223</sup> Caribbean Help Center Inc. Facebook page

<sup>224</sup> CHC Facebook page

abroad.”<sup>225</sup> Dr. Robert McGuire of the Trinity College Haiti Program and Institute for Peace in Washington, D.C. states,

That’s an organization that composed principally of Haitians who are successful middle, upper-middle class professionals many of them have not been three decades or so in Haiti. Their kids are in Washington; their kids are born here. NOAH was organized during the Clinton administration as a way of trying to influence U.S. policy towards Haiti so that would be another advantage of living in Washington. If you’re interested in the betterment of Haiti which you know is a common interest among the Diaspora when you live in Washington you feel that maybe you can try and influence U.S. policy towards Haiti—that’s been a goal, it makes Washington different for the Diaspora.

Lastly, the *Association of Haitian Professionals (AHP)* is an organization that “promotes the professional development, educational advancement, and socioeconomic enhancement of people of Haitian descent.”<sup>226</sup> Many participants have participated in AHP events, some of which include an annual picnic, functions at the Haitian embassy in D.C., book fairs, fundraisers and other community service events.

### *Perceptions of the Haitian Immigrant Community*

How do Haitians living in the metro Washington, D.C. area perceive their community? What are the aspects that draw them and keep them in this area? How do they see themselves being a part of this community? In this section about the perceptions of the Haitian Immigrant Community, I hope to answer these questions along with others. The responses addressed these questions by identifying the following aspects of the community: scattered, lack of cohesion, building community, and building affiliation. In an interview with Pastor Fadinel, he comments on the patterns of settlement of the Haitian community:

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<sup>225</sup> NOAH website, noahhaiti.org.

<sup>226</sup> AHP website, haitianprofessionals.org.

It feels like there isn't a concentration in a certain area...when we observe Maryland in general there are more Haitians than Washington, D.C., Virginia and when we learn also I think the Silver Spring area, between Montgomery County/PG, there are a lot of Haitians and that is why in the area there are the most churches, the churches have more people, there are some other churches in Columbia that doesn't have many members, there are a lot of Haitians in the areas but I feel also that there is a connection with diplomats that are in the area even if the diplomats work in D.C. but they live in Maryland.

Pastor Fadinel highlights here the tie between population size and the presence of cultural institutions.

Scattered

As a result of having a small Haitian population, no particular Haitian enclave or centralized neighborhood, members of the community live distances apart. There is also no centralized location for the few Haitian owned businesses that are operational. Though many Haitians are familiar with Silver Spring and its surrounding areas, there is no central space, the community is instead scattered throughout the suburbs of Maryland and parts of Washington, D.C.

It is easy for Haitian immigrants to get lost and become invisible in an area that has high populations of other Caribbean and Latin American immigrants. Mika and Leonne experience this difficulty locating other Haitians also because of a lack of cultural institutions that are themselves centralized, and thus draw the community together.

Here, it's really hard for you to find Haitians because they don't have Haitian stores anywhere or like Haitian clubs. It's just really hard to find Haitians in Maryland where as like New York or Florida it's very broadcasted that okay we're Haitian or this is a Haitian community. (Mika, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation)

It's scattered together and then we don't know each other...its seldom, its really seldom that you find one. The last time I heard any Haitian people talking, I was in Briggs Chaney. I went to make a transfer. (Leonne, 1<sup>st</sup> generation)

Deena acknowledges that the responsibility of building community in this area is in the hands of the individual community members themselves. Haitian immigrants have to make a concerted effort to find, join and contribute to what is already established.

It hinders it in some sense I feel like I don't participate in Haitian institutions. You think about what I did in New York, like we don't need anything else. My parents *tout la journe* (all the time) Haitian radio stations, Haitian church, Haitian friends and that's how my life was. In a sense that was kind of close minded in a way but it allowed me to stay within that whole Haitian thing, so here it's a little bit more difficult I have to make a little bit more effort to keep up with it. (Deena, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation)

Deena compares her experience in the metro Washington, D.C. area to her life in New York, where there is a long established vibrant Haitian community.

Disadvantages are definitely community. I feel like because its so spread out and everybody's all over the place there's no real sense of community and people are in transition and a lot and its very different from my life here where in New York where it is very family oriented its very community and church oriented and I feel that people young people in their twenties and thirties early thirties that I interact with a lot are very narcissistic, so they're always looking for that opportunity to make themselves or make their career which is so different from my approach to life so that's the disadvantage but the advantage is just being in the nations capital and just surrounded by culture and yeah the non profit capital of the world which is the kind of world that I enjoy. (Deena, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation)

Murielle distinguishes between the cultural expression of the local community and other more established community such as New York, Miami and Boston. Haitian identity is more prominent where the communities are larger. In the metropolitan D.C. area, where the community is not only small but also scattered, the Haitian identity is not an area of pride and is not often displayed in public. Haitian identity becomes a private expression that is shared in certain situations and in certain environments.

We have grown a lot within the past few years but in comparison to cities like Boston, New York, and Miami. I don't think we have a large enough population where we can have an advocate has been elected or has considered

a point person to go to. The Haitians here in this area are kind of different. I feel when you go to the other cites, it's, I'm Haitian and I'm proud. I think in this area you got to really dig deep to find out whose Haitian. I think there's a class issue too, I think there's a mulatto versus, no I'm Canadian, I'm Martinique, so I feel like here although its getting better you gotta really dig deep to find out who is Haitian and again recently there hasn't been a real issue to be like I'm Haitian. I'm sure if there's some issue with immigration and all Haitians have to go back everyone would be Haitian and again I don't know I guess that's a good thing too politically. Haiti does has issues but no one is really getting together to stop the immigration policies, to stop the number of peoples who are deported back versus other countries so I mean I guess they feel like its not touching them or not affecting them so its not a great need to address it. (Murielle, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation)

Murielle experiences the Haitian community through her family, who is not scattered but rather close knit and live within the surrounding areas.

My auntie who's here now is ten houses away so they've always been close even when they first came to D.C. its always been when my parents were living in Lewisdale this auntie was still about twenty houses away, so we've always been close nit and actually when they moved away from there they left the sister in Chillum so then that was a concern too like oh my goodness we're leaving her in Chillum but now her son is not far from here. All of them live within a 10-mile radius. Not far at all and I have cousins and stuff all close we have some cousins in D.C. my father I would say we don't live any farther than thirty minutes. (Murielle, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation)

Lack of Cohesion

Brought on by the scattered communities, strong group cohesion is an impossible task. Deena observes that instead of building cohesion, the Haitian community consists of many small groups that are working separately. The key to group cohesion then becomes forming partnerships and coalitions within the group's established organizations. In an interview with Dr. Robert McGuire he reflects on the mobilization of the Haitian community as distinguishing factors of the community:

This community is more political as a function of living in Washington, D.C. so that I've seen over time for example that this community will mobilize for demonstration at the Organization of the American States for example during periods in recent times when there's been a coup or something... can be vocal that way.

Similarly, Deena views the Haitian community and its potential to organize as a process that is aided by a political event that affects the Haitian community at large, both locally, nationally and transnationally.

We are very capable people as individuals but we don't have a collective mind. When we come together people are able to come together maybe to form a small business or successful business but not as a group so we are so disconnected and there are so many little groups that we cannot come together to form a powerful enough voice so I think that in a sense this makes us invisible. When we were trying to fight for TPS for these 30,000 Haitians it wasn't until someone like Clinton came out, its always like someone has to come out and fight for us because we're so disconnected that we can't but I mean and I feel like we've done that before you know when we shook the bridge in Brooklyn. (Deena, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation)

Pastor Fadinel acknowledges a lack of collaboration among the Haitian community, stating, "Haitians do not support Haitians". Like my participants who were interviewed, Pastor says that this stems from "a lack of development in the sense of our community, in the sense of businesses". He continues to state that "almost everyone who starts a business, those who are Haitian who start a business in the area, it does not stay, it does not last". Denise observes, "Here in Washington, D.C. I think we don't get together. We're more distant. I don't know if it's because of political things probably." Fernande who has traveled broadly both nationally and internationally states that "Over here it is the same thing it's very divided...everyone has its own group of friends and you have your own circuit actually...If you know about Haiti you know about the Haitian community, its as divided as anywhere."

Darline has watched the community evolve and change. She is most disheartened by the many Haitian businesses that were unsuccessful. The problem she

identifies is at the cultural level, where she says trust and cohesion is difficult based on:

The problem of unity, the problem is, when I act like we are friends, we are not friends really...when you trust your friend, they themselves violate you... but when we are together we build the community we make the business together, we work together we evolve together, its good and the same way in church also you'll see even if the usher is working together they come to a point when that one wants their own it breaks this is a problem

She further states the problem is with the Haitian community itself. While other cultures establish places of business, "Haitians, they don't have anything, Haitians don't have unity."

Even if they start, if you go to them, they themselves with their mouth they will tear it down. There was a Haitian store, they, the owners they push people out, when you enter into the stores they tear it down with their mouths and then they say Haitians are not good, but its them that has the problem, they don't know how to...

Darline has experienced being cursed out for bargaining and she says pushed out of a Haitian owned store that was passed down to three different owners. Another store, a clothing store in D.C. sold items with prices that were marked up according to Darline. Again, Darline experienced being pushed out verbally, the owners asking her not to return.

Another aspect that brings upon a lack of cohesion is group solidarity and group identity. Madeleine describes these according to three socioeconomic classes:

At home there are three classes: the one who doesn't know at all, those who might see something and those who can help. So we don't try to help those who don't know okay even if you see that the person is Creole. And even if the person comes and says "Good morning how are you?" You will see many people say "I'm fine thank you" and while you see the other one and you know you can address them...

Madeleine recalls observing Haitians interact with other Haitians publicly.

What I recall when I first came here when you enter a bus and you see a Haitian person who is lost they may take the wrong road and get off at the wrong stop. There are Haitians sitting there and they will not ask that Haitian where were you going? What bus did you need? There is none of that; while if you see a Spanish person enter the bus they will speak Spanish with the bus driver and you will see two other Spanish people come and talk Spanish with them even if they don't know what to say they would fight and tell the driver what they need. Haitians here they don't have this inside of them they are not patriotic.

For some the lack of media forums has hindered this group from forming strong bonds. Murielle states, "We have the one radio station every Saturday evening, Hispanics have television, Univision everyday if there was a forum its not well publicized and maybe there has to be an issue." Madeleine also comments that the media that was available was not organized in an accurate manner, offering out-dated news and repetitive programming. The TV channel that Madeleine was referring to was operational in the seventies and went from twice a week to once a week. Of the radio programs, Radio Konbit Lakay that comes on Saturday night, hosted by Yves D'Ayiti, Madeleine is appalled that the host has to beg the audience to call in to support the station. Hours passed where no one called to pledge their support.

Having a voice, an advocate for the community is also viewed as an important method towards building group cohesion. Pastor Fadinel also acknowledges this lack of a Haitian public voice, "a point of contact" that can serve as a centralizing and unifying force.

Usually advocacy groups come up or emerge as a result of some kind of conflict. Everything's been going okay so we got complacent. We don't have a point of contact with some person and I guess that's the nature of human beings when there's a problem someone arises as a focal point but right now I'm not aware of any advocates for Haitians, Haitian issues. (Murielle, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation)

## Building Community

Community is built when members begin to share the same interest. They develop the need to organize and form common grounds. In order to build community there has to be a strong collective Haitian identity, one where as Mika compares the space of New York:

When you go to New York, there are Haitians. They have their own boutiques, they have flags everywhere, you can hear them talking in the streets all the time where as here like you barely meet a Haitian and when you do its like they're afraid to let you know that they're Haitian, like they're ashamed.

Deena, who interacts with various Haitian groups and is active in her community, has noticed a change that represents the growth of the community.

I think we've been able to pull the Haitians out of some people I've been trying to do that for years and now I'm seeing the success and the fruit of that and the community coming together and I'm just really happy for that but I just feel like this place is not Haitian but it has to do with it's a structural thing it has to do with space and time cause I think Haitian people we naturally gravitate towards each other but this population is different. Its not the family population of the immigrant father coming to work and then bringing the family. It's the second generation or first generation person who came here a little younger and seeking a different type of opportunity and is a little bit more integrated to American culture.

The community is not representative of the long established Haitian communities, as this study has argued. Deena credits the Internet as an important tool that has simplified communication and community building within the Haitian community, "The internet technology has really bridged a gap just what we've been able to do with Evite and Facebook alone has just been phenomenal in connecting the community."

There is a noticeable change where people are identifying as Haitian. D.C. is a relatively new location compared to New York and Miami. Long ago I would say there was a big disparity between people who were hiding from it here.

The D.C. area I think it took a longer time for the Haitians in the D.C. metropolitan area to embrace the different culture to say we're Haitian versus I feel like New York they had their mark a long time ago so in little Haiti in Miami all this time I think D.C, of all the countries all the states on the East coast took a longer time to just identify and claim the Haitian roots. (Mika, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation)

Mika interacts with the Haitian community by attending the Caribbean carnival. It is where she can show her support and wear her flag proudly. Apart from the carnival, she does not know how to be more active in the Haitian community.

Arianne is also attending the 28<sup>th</sup> Haitian community picnic that is hosted every year by the Association of Haitian Professionals (AHP). Therese uses her role as a business owner to affect her community. She acknowledges that her work as a money transfer agent allows her to interact with the Haitian community and offer her assistance.

I help people translate documents from Kreyol to English. There are some clients who cannot read or write when they have documents they bring it to me and I help them translate and explain to them if they go somewhere and cannot talk and have problems some of them call me have the place call me and I interpret for them.

A second-generation Haitian American, Arianne's involvement with the Haitian community was spurred when she traveled to Haiti.

I actually had to travel to Haiti to experience because I sat down and thought okay if I die tomorrow, what have I contributed you know as a whole and I'm like Arianne you've gotta give back and I thought about the days that I spent in Haiti and the things that are important to them so right now I sponsor a child down there and um I've gone back when I went in February to teach at the school you know English and I'm hoping they would get supplies, school supplies to send down to them so just I guess just looking at where I am now

and thinking about how others in Haiti are struggling and I want to change the mindset that its just this chaotic, barbaric, Island and we don't know any better.

#### Building Affiliation

One important method that participants use to gain a sense of belonging is to seek affiliation through a church. Of the women who belonged to a church, the church played a central role in formatting a group identity. The church is a place that occupies the time and interest of participants. Often times the church is a place where networks are built and extended. The church is also for most participants the largest gathering of the Haitian community. Church becomes the place where people go to speak Kreyol, worship together with a community of Haitians. The church is a place where women gain access to leadership roles.

If I didn't go to church, if I didn't go to a Haitian church I don't think I'd identify myself with as far as like my Haitian background. The fact that I go to a Haitian church has made me become more connected with my Haitian community. (Janet, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation)

Darline knew that she had to find a Haitian church once she migrated to the U.S. Before coming to the U.S. she sought out Haitian churches in Maryland. Through her social network, Darline learned about a church in Maryland to which her friend who also migrated to the U.S. now belonged.

When I arrived I found that church. I met the pastor and other people and since that day I joined that church and I feel good. When I go to the church I feel truly that I am comfortable, I am comfortable.

Though many participants acknowledge the high cost of living in D.C, no one stated this as a cause for moving out of this area. An exchange is made between the advantages that come with life near the Nation's capitol. Living here comes at the expense of Haitian community formation.

*Public Representations of Haiti and Haitian Identity*

D.C. Caribbean Carnival

This year the Washington D.C. Caribbean Carnival (DCCC) will celebrate its theme, “one city, one carnival, one love.” The D.C. Caribbean Carnival was established in 1993 and has grown from nine to twenty-five bands and 150,000-well over 300,000 spectators.<sup>227</sup> The tenth anniversary of the D.C. carnival marked the start of visibility and incorporation for the Haitian community in D.C, when they were invited to participate.<sup>228</sup> The Washington Carnival Haitian Participation (WACAHAPA), organization has for a few years been in charge of representing the Haitian community at the Caribbean carnival. Haitian representation and participation did not start to develop until in 2004 for the bicentennial, the Haitian Sensation Association (HSA) was formed to organize for the Caribbean carnival. HSA proudly proclaims:

We are a group of young Haitians, who grew up in the Greater Washington D.C. area, and we would like to represent our culture and society through the D.C. Caribbean Carnival. Our goal is to educate, instruct, coordinate, and implement programs of culture and related activities. We will inform the general public and our community about Haitian art and culture through our music and dance.<sup>229</sup>

Viewed as the best showing ever, the 2004 the D.C. Caribbean Carnival became the D.C. “Haitian” Carnival.<sup>230</sup> “We want to make it big,” said Melinda

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<sup>227</sup> DCCC website

<sup>228</sup> Echo d’Haiti website

<sup>229</sup> Echo d’Haiti website. “HSA: ready for kanaval”

<sup>230</sup> Echo d’Haiti

Henry of H.S.A. before the carnival, “we want to make it like New York’s carnival.”<sup>231</sup>

They came from Washington D.C., Silver Spring, Maryland, Columbia, Maryland, Lanham, Maryland, Langley Park, Maryland, Hyattsville, Maryland, and even as far as Virginia to show solidarity. The vendors were sold out of Haitian flags, head scarves, even Haitian flag purses. Unlike the previous years, there was no discount on the Haitian products.



**Illustration 6.2:** D.C. Caribbean Carnival  
Source: Echo D’Haiti website

2004 Smithsonian Folklife Festival

The Smithsonian Folklife festival, sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution's Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, is an annual international production of cultural heritage that is presented outdoors on the Nation Mall of the U.S. in Washington, D.C. The Folklife festival began in 1967 and draws more than a million visitors. The festival is “usually divided into programs featuring a nation, region, state or theme...representing more than 90 nations, every region in the United States,

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<sup>231</sup> Echo d’Haiti

scores of ethnic communities, more than 100 American Indian groups and some 70 different occupation.”<sup>232</sup> In 2004, Haiti was chosen as the featured country, in celebration of Haiti’s bicentennial. Over 100 Haitian artists were featured at the festival. The theme was “Haiti: Freedom and Creativity from the Mountains to the Sea. As there is a “symbolic power of food to reflect cultural or social affinities in moments of change or transformation,” the presence of Haitian food and culture during the Smithsonian festival and Caribbean Carnival are both very important examples of the growing presence of the Haitian community in Washington, D.C.



**Illustration 6.3:** 2004 Smithsonian Folklife Festival: Haiti

Source: <http://newsdesk.si.edu>

### Conclusion

Though the community has a small population size and are scattered throughout the Washington, D.C. metro area, Haitians continue to build community

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<sup>232</sup> Smithsonian’s Folklife website

through social activities. Whether in a parade, a carnival or festival, Haitians in Washington, D.C. are making strong efforts to put Haiti and Haitian identity and culture in the public world's view. Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* explores the concept of nation and nationalism and posits that nations are like imagined communities. Nations are a product of a group of individuals' association to each other and "the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."<sup>233</sup> Similarly, the Haitian community in the metropolitan Washington, D.C. area is small and dispersed but has all of the qualities of a nation, a diaspora that belongs to a larger nation that spans transnationally across many spaces.

This chapter has explored the community as Haitian immigrants experience it. With the absence of an immigration history in the Washington, D.C. area I use my participants as a guide to what is important in the expression of their Haitian identity. The cultural institutions that are mentioned in this chapter are the institutions that my participants most frequented. In the next chapter, we will explore the personal significance of the space of Washington, D.C. as well as Haiti, two locations that the participants call home simultaneously. Within this space of home, Haitian women must negotiate their two cultures and create a safe space. As this dissertation takes on the lived experiences of my participants, it also explores my connections to the topic of migration and the Haitian community in the metropolitan Washington, D.C. area. I end the chapter here with a story reflecting on an instance where I experienced other

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<sup>233</sup> Anderson, Benedict, 6.

Haitians in the Washington, D.C community and the conversation around our meeting offers some insight about the next chapter's theme of home.

*Saturday, April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009 11:00am--It was Easter Weekend and my mother and I were food shopping at Bestway supermarket, the usual custom on Saturdays. We were deciding on whether to make fish for Good Friday, just as we had done when I was growing up. My mom gravitated to where the yucca was stocked. Yucca was not on our shopping list, but she had seen a woman with a shopping cart filled with fresh yucca. Knowing my mom to be a bargain shopper and never wanting to miss out on something good, she went to inquire to see if they were either on sale or just really fresh yucca. My mother joined the woman and began to pick through the stack of yucca, carefully breaking off a piece from its end to make sure that it was indeed fresh.*

*I was behind my mother on the adjacent shelf running down my grocery checklist—scallions, spinach, avocado, milton, eggplant, cabbage, limes... “Oh, these yucca are not good!”—“Oh, manyòck sa yo pa bon non” speaking to me from where she was standing. The woman responded, “Lakay!” I was astonished. I knew what she had just said but I had never heard the expression. “Home!” She continued, “oh, oh, apa se te yòn moun lakay ki la”. My mother confirmed, “mè wi”. They continued to talk. My mother noticed that she was choosing only the small yuccas and questioned her. “Apa ou pran piti yo, se piti yo ki bon?” No, the woman explained they were not to boil but to make cassaves. She told us that she was preparing homemade cassava bread for Easter. It is customary during Easter week—“semèn sent” to make cassave, fruit jam and lots of other foods.*

*Speaking with her some more we realized that she knew our family friend, the only Haitian person that I knew in Maryland when I first moved in 2003. She told us that, he had been to the hospital and was now resting at home. She attends the same church as our friend. We said that we would call our friend and stop by to see him and we all went our ways in the grocery, filling our shopping carts with ingredients that would become a dish from home.*

*I enjoyed going to Bestway supermarket because it was there that I heard people speaking in Kreyòl. It was one of the few places where I experienced on a small level my childhood of growing up in Brooklyn, NY, hearing Kreyòl at every corner. It was in Silver Spring, Maryland, a suburb of the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.*

## Chapter 7: “Lakay Se Lakay”: The Uses of Home in Washington, D.C.

This project about creating home in Washington, D.C. has taken the reader from the native homeland, Haiti, to the many states in the U.S. that served as locations of home. The journey of migration in which the women of this study traversed is one of negotiation, struggle and sacrifice. From the first generation to the second generation, journey took on a different meaning. First generation women left their homelands to establish new homes that in turn became the cultural breeding ground for the second generation, who embraced their parents’ culture as their own. Once in the U.S., Haiti continued to play an important role in the everyday lives of families that were separated. This project encouraged the women to remember, to recall, and to theorize their positions as women in society and in the family. “Creating Spaces of Home” brought the women to a point where they can say with confidence, Lakay!

Below, four members of the Haitian community in Washington, D.C. reflect on this topic of home at the 2004 Smithsonian Folklife festival that featured Haiti. Participants of the festival were also asked to reflect on their experiences being of Haitian descent.

Jesse Cabeche Mejias, Port-au-Prince-Alexandria, VA

“I was born in Haiti but grew up in the United States. In the 1960s, Haitians were always at the top of their class, so I was well regarded as a Haitian. However when the boat people came, Haitian became synonymous with black and poor” since I did not fit that stereotype and also because I am a light skinned Haitian, the statement I hear most from people is: you don’t look Haitian” people are amazed to find out that I am 100 percent Haitian I am proud to be Haitian, we have wonderful people, culture food etc and we have a beautiful country which I pray will be brought into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I am

also proud to be American, I have been happy to live here and enjoy the wonderful freedoms we have. I would like to be able to enjoy both Haiti and America.”

Edwidge Stephen, Port-au-Prince, Haiti-D.C.

“My parents moved to the U.S. in 1970 after spending several years in Belgium studying. My grandfather had to leave Haiti in the late 50s after being a senator in the Haitian parliament for a number of years. I was born and raised in NYC but from the time I was able to understand my parents told me that I was still Haitian and I would always have a connection to Haiti though our family ties and community in N.Y. The same way my parents won't let me forget that I'm Haitian they also maintain their dream of returning in Haitian and refuse to consider themselves diaspora.”

Marie M.B. Racine-Les Cayes, Haiti-Washington, D.C.

“I came to the US in the 1960s and have lived in DC ever since. I keep my connections with Haiti, where many of my relatives live. I go to Haiti at least twice a year. I work with grassroots organizations in Haiti helping them to get empowered and do their own building to their community on the road to self-development...”

Jacqueline Bruno-Les Cayes-Miragoane, Haiti-Washington D.C.

“I was born in the United States to Haitian parents. I was a young adult the first time I visited the island. I met my uncle and cousins for the first time. I had been prepared for the poverty and for the political situation. But no one had told me how beautiful the country is. The mountains and the sea are stunning. And the people are so beautiful and creative and remarkably resilient. I am so proud to be Haitian.”

The participants of this study are not alone in their stories and experiences of life in the metropolitan Washington D.C. area as the above quotes from the 2004 Smithsonian Folklife participants represent. Their journeys and routes to D.C. are not uncommon but rather reflect a larger community that had similar experiences. Despite the fact that each of their experiences was different, they all reflected on their Haitian identities. Identity formation is thus a very important and commonly experienced part of everyday life. The transnational complicates this process for Haitian immigrants even more than before. Reconceptualizing and reinventing the space of home is thus central to the transnational migration discourse. The term home is an emotional term

that is commonly used but not often examined. It is a term that describes both where a person lives and also invokes the feeling of home, where one belongs and wants to belong. Whether that home is located in a particular geography, across geographical borders or within the imagination of our memory, there is no denying the importance of this space. Through the processes of transnational migration Haitian women, like most immigrants must engage in the work of building home in a new space.

In the previous chapter about the community building of Haitians in D.C. we were introduced to the phrase, “lakay,” which means, “home” in Kreyol. This word was used to describe the feeling of identifying someone who was Haitian, they were simply called, “lakay.” In this concluding chapter we will breakdown the cultural significance behind that phrase. From the voices of my participants, this section seeks to define home on their terms. Locating home becomes a complex process. Because the meaning of home is different to each person, it became more important to define the terms/parameters of that place to the participants. This chapter is mainly about how home is defined and identified by my participants. Divided into three sections; identity, culture, and memory, all of which were methods that were used by my participants to gain access to this place called home. Before addressing my participant’s responses concerning their relationship with and understandings of the term home, a discussion to define and locate home is necessary.

Whether through self-identification or collective identity, the women represent what Haitians in Haiti would call the Diaspora. By definition, the location of this diaspora is “plural, fragmented, dynamic and open.”<sup>234</sup> The level of identity

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<sup>234</sup> Paul Brodwin, “Marginality and Subjectivity in the Haitian Diaspora,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 76.3 (2003) 384.

with this diasporic group differs for each transmigrant, depending on their relationship and emotional tie to the places called home. The transmigrants are “both ‘home bound’ and ‘homeless’; they are both nomads and settlers.”<sup>235</sup> It should be noted, “this homelessness is not defined by a lack of a home, but rather, it is characterized by a repertoire of ‘homes’ that Haitians have at their disposal, neither of which can ever emerge as the permanent and definite ‘home’.” Their homes are rather “both here and there.”<sup>236</sup> As transmigrants who “remain tied to their ancestral land by their actions as well as their thoughts, they may not frequently or ever travel home again.”<sup>237</sup> Home thus must be understood using its two most prominent uses, one being the actual geographic location of a place where somebody lives and two being where a person thinks he/she belongs.<sup>238</sup> “The stronger the emotional link to the place called “home” is, the stronger it influences a decision to migrate in requiring even more pressing grounds to make the decision to actually leave from ‘home.’”<sup>239</sup> The decision to move is not one that people take without a cause, in fact “most people prefer their home countries and will stay if conditions are even barely tolerable.”<sup>240</sup> As a “mythic place of desire in the Haitian imagining,” home is located in Haiti. To attempt to build home outside of the remembered homeland is thus an act of continuous negotiations.

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<sup>235</sup> Brah, 1997: 192.

<sup>236</sup> Fouron, G. “Haitian Immigrants in the United States: The Imagining of Where ‘Home’ is in Their Transnational Social Fields.” In Yeah et al, Eds. *Approaching Transnationalisms: Studies on Transnational Societies, Multicultural Contacts, and Imaginings of Home*. Norwell, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003. 239.

<sup>237</sup> Glick-Schiller and Fouron. *Georges Woke Up Laughing: Long-Distance Nationalism & The Search For Home*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001) 3.

<sup>238</sup> Andreas Demuth, “Some Conceptual Thoughts on Migration Research,” In Biko Agozino. ed. *Theoretical and Methodological Issues in Migration Research*, (Brookfield: Ashgate, 2000) 25.

<sup>239</sup> Demuth, 26.

<sup>240</sup> Demuth, 26.

...the work of making home, affective and physical, is an ongoing process. Against the assumption that movement takes place 'away from home' only when one leaves home...that 'staying put' is not without movement...home is about stasis, suggesting instead that homes involve 'a continuous act of production and reproduction that is never fully complete'. 'Homing desires' are not only the effect of migration, but are part and parcel of the daily practices of making home.<sup>241</sup>

In this chapter about the meanings of home, the participants were asked to define home. The first and second generation's responses varied greatly as most second generation women discussed home in terms of where they live, while the first generation also imagined home as a place of belonging. Carol Boyce Davies writes, "Home can only have meaning once one experiences a level of displacement from it. Still, home is contradictory, contested space, a locus for misrecognition and alienation."<sup>242</sup> From the experience of migration, first generation women engage in building home. Defining home for first generation women often led to locating home in Haiti. Some women struggled to limit such a dynamic place to words; they often replied that "home is home", with an implied sense of mutual understanding.

Well most of the time for people who are older who are here when they say home, it's their county if they came from Haiti. It's as if you were talking about Haiti except if they are talking about here-- I'm going home right now so this is the home here but if you are talking oh I'm thinking about home because things are not good or whatever happened. This is Haiti. (Therese, 1<sup>st</sup> generation)

As a place that holds positive association, home is also a place where some level of comfort is experienced. This comfort as Paulene shows derives from a feeling of belonging.

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<sup>241</sup> Sara Ahmed et al. *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*. Berg: New York, 2003, 10.

<sup>242</sup> Davies, 1994.

Home, Haitians always say that “home is home”, you must tell them it is not the same thing, even though they are comfortable here but home is home, there is a big difference. (Leonne, 1<sup>st</sup> generation)

A place where I feel comfortable, where I feel I belong, where I have a network. (Paulene, 1<sup>st</sup> generation)

Home is where home is. When you are at home you are comfortable, home is always home. (Darline, 1<sup>st</sup> generation)

Home is where you feel really comfortable to live in. (Edeline, 1<sup>st</sup> generation)

Comfort is also in regards to freedom in the place of home,

Yes, home when you are at home when you want to go out you go out. When you want to wake up, you wake up, but here you must go out to go to work things like that. (Leonne, 1<sup>st</sup> generation)

For Jocelyne the feelings of comfort and belonging are experienced outside of the home because of a lack of support and meaningful relationships at home.

When you are at home you are supposed to feel like you are comfortable because it is home, it is your home but there are moments like the way you are living you feel sometimes that you are afraid of your home because you feel that when you are out you feel better than when you are at home.

Work is the place where Jocelyne finds happiness and friendship.

When you are at work you feel more comfortable because you find people, you find friends, you find other people who are working together with you, you talk, share jokes, we laugh and you feel comfortable. It is this, this is home, when you go, when you are at your home you must be able to feel comfortable and I, for me every time when I go out I feel in a way more comfortable and when I go to my home in Haiti I feel good.

As a place of belonging, home is where you are not invisible. There is also a sense of safety.

Home is a place you feel you know people, people know you. You can go out whenever, like you feel good about it. (Denise, 1<sup>st</sup> generation)

Ritha talks of the value of community that is associated with home. She compares her home in the U.S. and in Haiti, saying that because of a lack of time and

resources, Haitians cannot truly experience the benefits of being at home in a place called home.

If you are at home and don't have any money you can just go to the garden to find peas in the field, pigeon peas, you find lima beans, okra, coconut, plantains you make a soup. Even if you don't have any money to buy meat to put in it at least to make something to eat but here if you don't have, you don't have.

If you are in need, you just run and go to this aunt to go find two pieces of plantains. You can't do it the same way here because the person must buy everything that they have so you cannot. Home, you find more, you have more freedom, you have more freedom when you are at home, and you have time. Here you don't have time, when you are at home you can have time if the weather is nice you go here, this aunt there, cousins and you all you sit down and tell jokes but here you don't have time to do this really you don't have time for conversations you are always stressed you are always running.

The second generation identified home in terms of the people, the family who make up the space as well as the comfort and safety that is expected.

Home to me, it means family, it means love, and it means relationship.  
(Roseline, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation)

A place where I can see my family and not have to worry about being kidnapped cause Haiti you know there is a lot of things going on in Haiti so, where I feel safe. (Serena, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation)

Home means a place where I feel safe and I feel happy and I'm with family. And that's one of the issues with my friends cause every time I was like I'm going home they know that means I'm going to Brooklyn because D.C, has not become home yet because the whole family component of it is still missing. (Deena, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation)

Home is also the most familiar place, the place where one is raised and the place where individuals can have their own undisturbed space.

I would define home as, the place where I was raised and my upbringing...where I'm more comfortable at. Like my scenery, the place that I'm just comfortable in my own element. (Mika, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation)

A place where I am in total control of the space that I occupy. I can be sociable but for the most part I like spending a lot of time alone. If I want to venture out I live not too far from my sister so I'll go over there spend about an hour or so and then retreat right back to my space. (Arianne, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation)

Another important factor that helps to shed light on a transmigrants' relationship with home are the connections either through family, financial responsibility or travel that they experience. The tension of "living here and remembering/desiring another place"<sup>243</sup> determines how people construct the identity of their diasporic group: how they map its boundaries, invest in it materially and emotionally, and construct its difference from other groups. All of the women who participated had a close relative living in Haiti. The first and second generation varied in terms of communication and financial accountability. An estimated 31 percent of Haitian adults receive cash from family living abroad. One quarter of all household income is derived from remittances. In 2007, Haitians overseas remitted \$1.6 billion to family members.<sup>244</sup>

Therese, who has daily contact with members of the Haitian community, works as a money transfer agent, one of the two in the area. She sees a change in the sending habits once families are unified in the U.S. There is always someone to take care of back home.

The customers come, yes, they take care of their family well in Haiti and they send all the time until they are able to send for their children and family. Some families it is only the women who are here and so she is helping the husband with the children and some it's the husband who is helping until the family comes to the U.S. continually and sometimes when their family comes they don't have an obligation to send the same way they are used to sending but when they have grandparents in other places they always send.

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<sup>243</sup> Clifford 1997: 255

<sup>244</sup> Robert Macguire, "Haiti After the donors Conference," *United States Institute of Peace*. Special Report 232 (Sept 2009) 3.

Darline is the sole person who is supporting her four siblings who are in Haiti. She sends money transfers regularly and is now working on an affidavit of support for them to enter the U.S. as permanent residents. She says that her financial responsibility to her siblings will only end when they leave Haiti and “get on their feet, *pran fil, yo degage yo.*” Leonne talks with her family in Haiti and sends money. Ritha sends money transfers when people are going to Haiti. She would send boxes of food and other items for both her family and people who she has met through her church. Ritha’s responsibility goes beyond her family.

Jocelyne does not send money transfers to her family in Haiti. When she visits Haiti, she does bring something for each member, such as a nightgown for her mom. She does give money when she visits but she says that her family is not in need. Her only brother who lives in Haiti is responsible for feeding and supporting their family in Haiti.

Sending money is an area of tension between the harsh realities of life as an immigrant in America and the expectation of financial support to those left behind. Denise who is unemployed struggles with this issue.

Because if you don’t send it they don’t know its so hard, its sad, its painful like they call you ask and I say I don’t have money but they think there’s money here, there’s money here but, but you’ve got a life. (Denise, 1<sup>st</sup> generation)

Deena, a second generation migrant reflects on what will happen when her parents’ generation who is committed to sending remittances is no longer able to support their families. She is not confident that her generation can keep up with the tradition that was started by her parents.

That truly worries me as the generation of our parents are kind of either dying or retiring and don't have the means to do that and the focus on remittances and what that does for Haiti you know I'm not sure if there is a reserve or if there's going to be a population that's going to be substantial enough to support that so that really worries me.

Deena's parents support her aunt who is in Haiti but the frequency does not compare to when the immediate family was separated. Once all immediate members were united, supporting other family members in Haiti did not hold as much importance. The sense of obligation is thus weakened when families are reunified.

My aunt but its not in the same amount and its not at the same frequency then you think what happens when my parents are not able any more and we have that reverence for my aunt but we don't have the same sort of allegiance to everyone else but then what happens?

The second generation identified the U.S. as home. It is the place where most of them were born, raised and cultured. Home was associated with a specific geographical location. Roseline has only visited Haiti one time and experiences her strongest emotional connection to the U.S.; she says, "I feel at home mostly in the U.S. because I am a second generation Haitian. I was born in the United States." Like Roseline, Mika has only visited Haiti once and knows very little about Haiti. Mika was born and raised in the U.S. and only knows about Haiti from what she reads or what her parents tell her. Both Arianne and Serena experience some level of disconnect to Haiti. Arianne left Haiti when she was young and Serena has not visited in ten years.

Edeline is one of the two first generation migrants who identifies with the U.S. as their home. Though she makes this statement, she also refers to Haiti as home simultaneously, saying, "I don't think I'm going back home. I don't think so, I don't think I'm going back to Haiti." She instead plans to retire in Florida. Denise states

that the U.S. is her home now, “but not just because I feel at home here because I know I can’t go back over there.”

Janet identifies with the U.S. as home because it is where her family and church are located, both very important parts of her life.

I think one of the main reasons that make it home for me is because of my family that’s here. I’m the oldest of thirty cousins in the area so it’s a huge family so when we have gatherings its big, it’s a family affair and that’s twelve aunts, I have at least ten uncles in this area. I’m the oldest of thirty cousins, so I can say that that is one of the reasons why I consider this home also my church community that’s part of it. This church my parents moved us down here to start the church so it started with us and it’s been over twenty-seven years actually.

Deena, who identifies with all things Haitian had to reflect before responding to the question about locating home.

That is really tough because I think I really came into my own and was really cultured here. Although my memories of Haiti are so vivid and fresh and I, you know born and raised there but I think because I really got to know and understand myself and life with my brothers and my parents here in the states that it feels like more like home for me.

Darline admits that though she is comfortable in the U.S., Haiti will always be home. “We come to find a better life, I am comfortable here because home if home was good I would not here, its because home is not good.” Both Fernande and Silvia enjoy life in Haiti.

Haiti of course. Because it’s my language my people and I feel comfortable. I like being there. (Fernande, 1<sup>st</sup> generation)

My home is always my home. Haiti I was raised in Port-Au-Prince but I was born in Aux Cayes and its Aux Cayes that I love, Port-Au-Prince is too busy, too busy you are always stressed out but when I go to Aux Cayes I walk. I walk around everywhere, the sun has set and I am walking with my family but if I were in Port-Au-Prince I would have to stay in the house. (Silvia, 1<sup>st</sup> generation)

Many women identify work as reasons that bring them to the U.S. and keep them out of Haiti. Work affords them the opportunity to support their families in both the U.S. and in Haiti. While work in the U.S. helps to stabilize, it also is a source of stress, especially for many of the first generation women who I interviewed who worked in service and hospitality oriented jobs.

Maryland is not my country really, my country is Haiti and when I am in Haiti I feel good. Here there are a lot of problems, a lot of stress not only at home but at work. My home, my country I feel really that I love my country Haiti because I feel that it is there that I feel good when I go but due to the circumstances of the country how things are, which forces you to leave your country and come here to find life but it is not like a country you like but really my country whatever you may here about it I prefer it than here because in reality my country there is no work, there are no jobs that why we have to leave to find jobs in this country the U.S. but no matter how it is you will always feel better in your country than here than in this country, the U.S. (Jocelyne, 1<sup>st</sup> generation)

Haiti, I love Haiti because here you find a way to work, you find money. Haiti there is not really any work but when you are in Haiti you feel comfortable because you are not running around waking up early in the cold and things like that. (Leonne, 1<sup>st</sup> generation)

Ritha identifies Haiti as home because it is there that she finds freedom. She states that in Haiti there is a network of support, other women, and other workers who perform services in the home, sharing the load of work that is within the home. In the U.S. Haitian women as well as many other women experience the second shift of work that is waiting in the home. Another aspect of life in Haiti that Ritha enjoys is having fresh ingredients that do not have to be purchased.

Home is home, when I am at home, when I am in Haiti so when I am in Haiti I have more freedom, when I am in Haiti if I am sick I can rest, when I am here if I am sick I cannot rest, big difference when I am in Haiti I find people who do services for me here I don't have anyone to help me do anything, here everything I must buy them when I am in Haiti I don't buy everything. If I find plantains I buy meat sometimes I don't buy meat, I have chicken we would have goat, there are some other things that we must buy, ingredients in

the market but we don't buy everything in the market, but here everything has to be bought, everything. (Ritha, 1<sup>st</sup> generation)

Madeleine acknowledges that if Haiti was a place where she could find the basic comforts of hospitals and doctors, and security, she would return home. She is retired and stays at home to care for her grandchildren. Such a sedentary lifestyle she says is having a negative impact on her health.

I always remember Haiti. Haiti...I never forget my country a day in my life and it is something that I say everyday. If my country had...change. Not a change for comfort but a change for security. If my home was a place where there was security and that had hospitals and doctors that are available for you at any time in the night anytime I would go to my home because I have reached a point where I am not working here okay and I am in a house all the time. I'm here, it's true that I am helping the children but its not a life its not a life and another thing again there are a serious of illnesses that I have that I think to myself if I was at home I would not have them because I would walk I would be active you see I know people it is true that I have a lot of family here but its not the same thing it's not the same thing.

As we will discuss later, the power of memory affects a person's relationship with their home. Denise identifies with Haiti as her home because she has been dreaming about Haiti frequently.

As mentioned earlier, with the creation of the 10<sup>th</sup> Department to encourage the participation of the Haitian diaspora in home politics, Haitians can truly embrace a transnational identity. Paulene and Alice identifies with both places as home. Paulene is first generation and Alice is second generation. Paulene says, "Both, I used to feel more at home here but since I started going back to Haiti I feel comfortable there also." Alice also feels the same way, "Both actually depending cause when I had the opportunity to go there I felt at home and I feel at home here cause I was of course born and raised here."

Belonging is one of the central feelings that accompany the sense of home. How much is this home a place that these women feel included, comfortable and successful within that space? What does this belonging look like? How is it expressed? Bell hooks writes in *Belonging: A Culture of Place*, “I have yearned to find my place in this world, to have a sense of homecoming, a sense of being wedded to a place. Searching for a place to belong I make a list of what I will need to create firm ground.”<sup>245</sup> Following hook’s lead, the participant’s discuss their feelings of belonging, their ethnic identification and their Haitian language. All of these factors contribute to a sense of identity and the women explore their identities.

When Darline visits Haiti, she tells me that she does not wear dressy clothing. She tries not to stand out but she is identifiably not as a local person. She admits that she has interjected English in her speech while at a doctor’s office in Haiti.

When they see me they ask me where I came from. I tell them I was here. No, you were not here; you don’t look like someone who lives here. I say I was here. I was not in the Capital but I am here in Haiti. They tell me no, you are not.

Though many first generation women dream of returning to Haiti, Jocelyne is the only woman who is currently saving and planning to return to Haiti within a few years. Visiting Haiti is difficult because Jocelyne always returns with regret, wanting to stay “forever” as she says. Jocelyne explains her plans for return.

The preparations that I’m making, I’m making preparations for when I go to find a place to live because I must live and I must have something in my hand for me to go to find to live. I started making preparations from now and I don’t know, this is in the Lord’s hand, it depends, I can be left with one year, I can be left with two years also, it depends on God, as long as I am finish making preparation I am going, I am going for good. As long as I finish making preparation I am returning I will not stay.

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<sup>245</sup> bell hooks, *Belonging: A Culture of Place*, 2

Ritha expresses her sense of belonging with her home, Haiti, in a very direct and powerful manner.

I love it; it's mine so when you have a child who is not good you don't throw it out so it's your child you keep it. Haiti is where my umbilical cord is buried. It's where my ancestors are so if it's not good if it's good I must. Oh child, I am happy I'm Haitian. I love my country; no one talks bad about Haiti in front of me.

Ritha became a naturalized U.S. citizen in order to better facilitate her husband's arrival in the U.S. Ritha laughs about becoming a U.S. citizen because she does not see the process as truly giving up your nationality. She says, "There is nothing that can make me forget Haiti. I cannot forget Haiti." Ritha instills the same love of Haiti in her children, stating:

We always tell them that Haiti is their home it's their country they are Haitian they're not [American]. They were born here but they are not American. Children at my house have gone to Haiti. The children love Haiti. They love the food, they like drinking coconut in Haiti, sugar canes in Haiti you buy some sugar cane here, peanut brittle from Haiti everything from Haiti the children love Haiti.

Due to Haiti's constant instability and depending on the circumstances for leaving the country there are many Haitians who have never returned to Haiti and do not have any plans to ever return. Leonne feels that life in Haiti cannot be compared to the U.S.

Here there are people who would say they will never go to Haiti but not me and I'm proud of my culture, working the land when you work you find good food to eat you don't eat foods with chemicals and these things, even though there are these things in Haiti they just go to the garden/field, you find the crops, harvest them come and cook food and these foods are filled with vitamins you don't have to buy in the market.

Though many first generation women feel like Denise, who says, "I think a lot of us stay here because we have to," some like Paulene do feel comfortable with her life in the U.S. She says, "I feel at home because I have attained a certain level of

integration that's facilitated my feeling comfortable. I have a network of friends. I participate."

Madeleine never planned to stay in the U.S. She arrived on a temporary visa. She did not want to become a permanent resident, but her sister advised her that she could travel between Haiti and the U.S. more freely, without having to worry about renewing a visa. It was her experience traveling with her family and being separated from them that caused her to decide to become a citizen.

When you go to places and you have an American passport you have more value because when you pull out that American document. When I went to Canada or anywhere when you arrive somewhere they tell you people who are American over here and people who are something else well I said well and I was separated from my husband and my children and so I said why it doesn't make sense.

Talking about becoming a citizen, Leonne says, "Really, I didn't feel anything. I know that my country is always my county." Leonne's American citizenship did not change anything about her sense of identity and belonging. She does not identify herself as an American. "American. No I cannot say that I am. I don't know. I don't feel at ease saying that I am American. I have the citizenship but that doesn't make me American. I am Haitian, I'm more, I'm Haitian more."

Turning to the second generation, many of them identify with America and feel a sense of belonging here. Alice says that, "This is the only place I know I mean so that's the place I call home, for now I call America home. I feel I belong here; I was born here so I feel like I belong here." Similarly, Roseline, she believes America is her home, "it's where I'm supposed to be."

Janet embraces a strong Haitian identity, stating, "I figure I'm not born there but I'm Haitian hey that's where my blood is from so yeah I'm proud to be Haitian, I

can say when I'm in the street yes I'm Haitian when I'm at work I'm like yes, I'm Haitian."

Murielle feels a sense of belonging to both of her cultures. She experiences some level of displacement from both cultures and doesn't feel like she completely fits into any one culture. "I never really cared to fit in any one thing. I've never liked to be labeled."

Deena does not feel like she has a sense of belonging to the D.C. area because she is separated from her family. To her family is the one component that creates a place of belonging.

I don't feel that I belong. What I really love is just family and being around them but I feel like there's nothing else that connects me to the place so I think the strong sense of connection and the longing is missing and I don't know what to do to get it.

Deena is also the only member of her family to become an American citizen. At first giving up her Haitian citizenship was an easy process, one that was only on paper, but then Deena started to reflect on the meaning and significance of the naturalization process.

Well I gave up my citizenship but that's only I feel that that's minor cause it's paper only. But that really hurt me that day when I stood there and denounced that part of my... I felt hurt I cried when I did it. I didn't realize it would be that emotional but I don't know if people feel the connection to Haiti that I felt.

Arianne does not have a sense of belonging to America because of America's most coveted debt system, home ownership. Arianne owns two homes, one a rental property, the other, her place of residence.

I don't like this whole in debt system that we have the whole I'm going to pay a mortgage for thirty years? I'm not a fan of that and I would prefer to live on an island where I can just buy a piece of land, work, live comfortably and not

be so driven by money so much and debt thinking about oh I have to work, I have to get a part-time job in order to make ends meet, it's a serious stress factor, so I would say my ultimate goal would be to transition from the U.S. into like another place where I can actually cultivate the space and make it my very own.

The first generation's ethnic identification is strong and has deep roots to home. Ritha talks about an encountering other Haitian people in her daily activities. Some people readily disclose their Haitian identity, while others remain unknown. The place that she interacts most with other Haitians is the church. She says, "In the church more in the church sometimes if I go to the market I can meet someone a Haitian or sometimes you go places also and it's not all Haitians that let you know that they are Haitian." Identifying someone as "home" is a safe marker of Haitian identity. It is a sign of respect and mutual understanding of acknowledging one's Haitian identity. Ritha acknowledges, "Sometimes in speaking the person can say, "hey home how are you doing?" and now you know that they are home and you make conversation." Ritha describes an encounter at a local Firestone tire store in which she meets another Haitian person working there.

Like a time when I went to a Firestone [tire shop] I went to check the car and I found someone and I spoke in English with him but he was Haitian and I didn't know he was Haitian. It was way later he came to check my car and said something and I said you are Haitian and you never told me you were Haitian. He said it's because I see who you are that I told you I was Haitian because there are Haitians when they come here I never let them know that I am Haitian because of the way they act. I am not going to tolerate stupid people but the way that I see you speak, the way you are is why I let you know that I am Haiti but there are Haitians and their attitudes I don't let them know I am Haitian. I am always happy to let people know I am Haitian I am proud even if people talk about Haiti. They can denigrate Haiti no matter how they denigrate it, the poorest country, the lowest of the low but I love it.

For the first generation, language was tied to Haitian identity.

Due to the multiple cultures that the second generation embraces, they must engage in a process of negotiating cultures. Roseline, second generation Haitian American and born in the U.S., feels Haitian because of her cultural upbringing. She tells me that she never leaves the Haitian part of her identity out when she introduces herself to people. Roseline describes what it means to be Haitian in American,

I'm a product of two unique cultures. I mean I feel like I'm very much Haitian because both of my parents are Haitian but of course I feel that I'm American because I was born here and I connect to the American culture as well. I just feel like I'm kind of just blessed to be a product of the two. I feel like both have been part of my life, not one more than the other I guess that's kind of how I would sum that up, I feel like I'm both. I don't feel like I'm more American you know than Haitian.

Another important contributing factor to Roseline's identity was her grandmother, who was an influential part of her upbringing. Through her grandmother she was able to learn to speak Haitian Kreyol. Roseline feels privileged to be able to speak Kreyol at work, to translate for her clients and give them access to the mental health system or the substance abuse treatment systems. Explaining such systems with a common language provides a certain level of comfort to her clients.

I was definitely raised in the Haitian culture and some of my fondest memories growing up as a Haitian American was of my grandmother because my grandmother who never learned English was my caretaker. If my mom would go to work, I would be home with my grandmother so I believe that Kreyol might have even been my first language because my grandmother did not communicate in English.

Home life was Haitian, from the food, to the language, to the culture.

Everything connected to me growing up or being raised even in the U.S. was directly connected to the Haitian culture from the food that I ate to the language that was spoken at home, it was always interesting being able to speak the language and even though I wasn't from the country or lived in the country at any time I thought it was really neat that I was bi-lingual, that I was

able to communicate in the Haitian language and like I said just spending a lot of time with my grandmother who was a big influence, big impact on my life and its just interesting to me that she's never one day of her life spoke English. Like that was really the biggest influence in my life growing up as a child having her there caring for me. (Roseline, 2<sup>nd</sup> generation)

The power of each generation to pass on culture is true for many of the second-generation women who are mothers themselves. Roseline's parents, for example, live with her for nine months out of the year and retreats to Haiti for three months. The presence of the grandparents in the household helps the continuation of Haitian culture in the third generation grandchildren. Roseline however laments over her children who do not speak Kreyol, "I've fallen short as far as making sure that it lives on in terms of my children. They don't speak Kreyol. They don't know the language and it is something that bothers me that its really gonna end with me."

Like Roseline, Janet is a mother who places great value on speaking Kreyol and most importantly, passing it on to the next generation. Janet's three-year-old son who was present during our interview speaks and understands Kreyol. Janet is grateful that her parents taught her to speak Kreyol.

Yes I'm American but when you look at other cultures, it doesn't matter how many generations, everyone is going to speak that language and okay yes our country is not perfect. We're going through some tough times but hey its Haiti, I can't say I was born there but its part of my identity.

My dad said English is your language, you're in America. Kreyol is your mother's language, your blood and so they taught us that since childhood and even though we spoke it backwards people used to call us outcasts cause we would speak in reverse. I think it's very important; it's part of who I am.

Janet doesn't claim to be neither Haitian, nor American. She explains the process of meeting and identifying with other Haitian students in college that helped her to be comfortable with her identity.

I identify myself as Haitian American. I can't say what's a true Haitian or a true American. I'm neither. I'm not a true Haitian, I'm not a true American, but I'm Haitian American only because certain things that you pick up in a culture, certain dialects, and certain idioms I don't know.

As I got older I found a way to really balance it and I think also understanding it more and appreciating it more than compared to when I was a younger child. I really had a hard time figuring out where I was, not where I was but how to say, I'm this instead of saying I'm this but I'm also that. Going to college I found that there were a lot of other Haitians and it was like, oh Ayisen! And then that just kind of opened the lines even more.

Deena is one of the few second-generation women who is active in the Haitian community at large. Other women are active and interact with the Haitian community through their churches. Deena purposely sought out this community, in its multiple locations because she needed the community to survive.

I would just be lost without it. There's nothing that even when I try to assimilate I have been here for 19 years and I spent most of my life away from the community. I was the only black girl in my graduating class and I went to school in England. [When] I moved I sought out the community. I just wasn't happy and comfortable without it.

Deena talks about her plans for the community. How she plans to share her Haitian culture with others. Her desire to promote Haitian culture is evident in her daily life.

I've talked to people about having a Haitian night event one night a week at a regular club where people can come listen to the thing. I already designed a plan for my Haitian restaurant so a lot of people have been talking to me about that so hopefully that will kick off.

It has brought me closer to them cause I kind of want to share with everybody what I miss about being Haitian and I think people hear about us and they hear what's presented to them and I'm such a lover of art and Haitian food and even when I posted [food she prepared] on my Facebook status people are like-- I want some. What is this? Can you give us some? When I have things at my house, I really get people to get excited about Haitian food and they get so excited about it but there's no one sharing it with them and that's a tragedy.

Deena is also very passionate about the role of language in identity, especially for Haitians.

I feel that Haitians in a sense they talk about their culture. They think food is culture but I see food as being culture in one way but it has to be integrated with so many things; an appreciation for the arts, appreciation for the history and most of all, appreciation for the language. I'm so upset that 85 percent of my Haitian friends cannot have a conversation in Kreyol. They cannot! I'm like what do you mean you don't speak Kreyol? They think I'm being a snob but I'm like they need to speak Kreyol cause that is a distinguishing factor of what it means to be a Haitian person.

Murielle describes her process of embracing her Haitian identity. Murielle grew up with an awareness of the stereotypes that were associated with Haitian culture. As a result of her parent's commitment to participating in the process of fighting against the stigmas that are perpetuated on the Haitian community, she participated in the protests that occurred in D.C. learning that the Brooklyn Bridge shook in New York from the weight of the marching protestors; Murielle feels a strong sense of pride and group affiliation with Haitians nationally.

When you're young you want to shy away from being different so elementary, middle school you're still trying to be everything but Haitian you want to be American. You're embarrassed that your parents don't speak the language. You're embarrassed that your parents look different so you kind of, you want to be as American as you can so when you hit high school you start to develop your own identity you learn about different [cultures]. There are Caribbean associations in the high school, you meet a couple of other people who are Haitian, who aren't shy to talk about it so then you start to get into your own.

Murielle grew up with parents who instilled a strong sense of cultural identity. Though Murielle acknowledges her different upbringing, of missing out on American popular music of the 1980s such as the *Double Dutch Bus* because she was instead listening to *Skatcha* and *Tabo Kanbo*, she still identifies as Black American due to her experience of feeling like a cultural outsider when she visited Haiti.

Being first generation here with my family when they came all they knew was Haiti so that what they implemented and shared with us. We knew who America was when we went off to school but once we came back into the house we ate Haitian food, we listened to Haitian music.

I'd put Black American cause I know the one time that we went to Haiti they laughed at us when we said we were Haitian and then we come to America I don't feel like there is a lot of things that I can relate to that's African American culture. I can't relate to chitterlings. There are certain things like tipping of the cow, certain cultural things that I'm just learning.

Murielle grew up with Kreyol being spoken in the home. Her grandmother and nanny, both of whom did not speak any English, raised her. Murielle describes her experience with visiting Haiti and speaking Kreyol, "We went there thinking, oh we can speak Kreyol and they was like, y'all talk "catcat talk." I'm like; I thought we were doing this right so they were just like "*sa yap di la?*" What are they saying? And I'm like we're speaking Kreyol." Murielle negotiates her two identities, saying,

I think I have the best of both worlds. I see the pros and cons of each culture, there are many things in Haitian culture I want to retain and pass on to the next generation and there are things that American culture, that I don't care too much for and don't wanna perpetuate that.

Mika identifies as Haitian-American, stating that both of her parents are Haitian and she was born in the U.S. Like Murielle, Mika acknowledges the advantages of having two cultural frameworks.

I do have an advantage over my parents being Haitian American. They're coming from somewhere and having to adapt, even though they've been here for a while, they're still having to adapt to all the changes whereas me I was raised here and the adapting to change isn't as hard for me. It's a process but I think they'll eventually get used [to it].

Holding on to home for immigrants can be seen in the physical space of home. The items that furnish, decorate, accessorize and play central roles in the function of the home are all reminders of a country that was not left behind, but a country that

traveled with immigrants in their suitcases, in their wallets and on their bodies. Every home that I walked into contained reminders of the home country Haiti, some homes were subtle, and others were prominent. Regardless of what the home looked like inside, each participant engaged in the process of ‘homing’. In *Uprooting and Regrounding*,<sup>246</sup> this process is described further,

‘Homing’ entails processes of home-building, whether ‘at home’ or in migration. Making home is about the (re)creation of what Eva Hoffman would call ‘soils of significance’, in which the affective qualities of home, and the work of memory in their making cannot be divorced from the more concrete materialities of rooms, objects, rituals, borders and forms of transport that are bound up in so many processes of uprooting and regrounding.

Walking into Darline’s apartment, the dinning room is the place where souvenirs were displayed. Darline’s china cabinet is filled with glasses, plate sets, small tea cups but what stood out were the small wooden cups and saucers with the word Haiti written in black ink. Small pictures that look like post cards line the cabinet. What was not visible was that Darline kept Haitian money, the old money that can no longer be used. She says “I just hold on to it as a souvenir of the country.”

Edeline’s townhouse is carefully decorated with wooded vases and sculptures in the living room. These items stand out to me because I entered her home with an eye for souvenirs from home, but they were a subtle part of Edeline’s décor. The kitchen is stocked with wooden spoons, a mortal and pestle and pots from Haiti. Talking about her items from home she says, “They’re from home. They’re nice and I like them. They remind me of home.” Even though I met with Denise outside of her home, she told me that she has small wooden sculptures in her home.

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<sup>246</sup> Sara Ahmed et al. *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*. Berg: New York, 2003, 8.

Janet laughs that she received a mortar and pestle as a wedding gift. She also has a plantain press for making fried plantains. She keeps her souvenirs in a centralized place in her home, the basement. Keeping the art, paintings and gifts together for Janet creates a particular feel. Janet remembers growing up that her parents did not have many souvenirs from Haiti in the home, except wooded plaques that read, “God is in this house” in Kreyol.

Similarly, according to Deena’s friends, she is the “biggest Haitian” they know. Deena acknowledges this saying,

Everything that I do from the girl growing up to being the homemaker I grew up with three brothers so by the time I was eight I had to start washing my own uniform for school and cooking for the whole family like in the (*chodyè*/large pot) on the outside [of the house] and everything like that so the boys were not expected to do that so its just the way that girls are treated differently we’re supposed to behave differently get ready for a husband, very typical.

Deena admits that in her home she has artwork, sculptures and the large Haitian pots that say, “I love you Jesus” on the lid. Cooking for Deena is a ritual that she cannot perform without the tools. She says, “I can’t cook rice at people’s house cause they don’t have the right *chodyè*. My friends are always coming for cooking lessons they’re like well “we know we have to come to your house cause we don’t have approved pots.”

Arianne was in the process of moving into her new home when we first met, so her home was not yet furnished, boxes and empty rooms filled her new townhouse. Arianne is starting a collection of items, artifacts as she calls them from Haiti. She has a wooden globe and a sculpture that she brought back from her last trip. Growing up in a Haitian household, Arianne remembers the many items that filled her home.

Most vivid are the miniature sculptures that she would have to dust for her mother every Saturday. The sculptures were wood and porcelain, very small and very dainty. Roseline whose parents live with her, has Haitian painting, art, and cooking accessories in her home. Her parents travel to Haiti annually and return with items from home.

Food offers a strong connection to the homeland. It is often the last practice to be abandoned by immigrants. Ritha talks about some of the foods that remind her of Haiti,

Pigeon peas, coconut, and rice that just came from the fields, okra, these things just came from the field, fresh with all of their juices, all of the sweetness, child, a person doesn't even need meat to eat this rice and okra or the rice and lima beans and coconut, child, you don't need anything. When we are talking about these things I say don't make me remember home. Or if you are having a good salt fish with plantains and you say don't make me remember home.

First generation women continue to cook Haitian foods at home for their families. For Darline, home cooked foods are the only foods that she eats, avoiding eating out at all costs. Edeline also cooks Haitian foods; she makes rice and bean with dried mushrooms. If she needs an ingredient for a meal she buys them through her co-worker who goes to New York regularly. Madeleine also makes every dish that she had at home. Any recipe that she forgets she calls her cousin who tells her what she needs for that particular dish. Finding the right ingredients for Madeleine and the other women is the main factor in making a true meal from home. Therese also cooks Haitian foods almost everyday in her home. Within her church, she is always called upon to prepare a Haitian dish for a particular function.

Keeping the food traditions were harder for the second generation. Some have kept up the tradition of cooking Haitian foods. Roseline enjoys Haitian foods at home, where her mother prepares the meals as she remembers from her childhood. A traditional food that Roseline remembers her mother preparing every January is Squash soup. The presence of Roseline's mother reinforces certain Haitian cultural practices, such as cooking. Roseline admits that she does not cook Haitian foods at home when her mother is away.

Each woman acknowledged that the key to making Haitian food is finding the right ingredients. While some like Deena and Edeline get some of their ingredients from larger cities like New York, other women were able to find ingredients in the local area. Particularly they all talked about the location of Langley Park, where Spanish markets and Caribbean markets are located. Americana, Red Apple, and other markets in the Langley park area were the places where the women purchased their ingredients.

Deena acknowledges the great importance that Haitian families place on food. Food preparation is an area of Deena's life that is very deliberate and with meaning. Deena buys different ingredients from Brooklyn, New York when she visits and stores them in Debbie Mayer bags, which keeps fruits and vegetable fresher longer in GreenBags. She says, "Food is the how we show that we care, is how we show that we love, you know cause if nothing else it's communicating we always knew that the warm food that was waiting there was the signal that you are loved and you are cared for."

The space of memory is where home is imagined, dreamed about and most desired for the first generation women in this study. Their emotional ties to the home country Haiti create this void space where Haiti can only be imagined and longed for. While many of the first generation women have returned to Haiti to visit, their ultimate dream is to live and retire there. Of the linkages of home and memory, Ortiz Cofer writes, “My grandmother’s house is like a chambered nautilus; it has many rooms, yet it is not a mansion...It is a home that has grown organically, according to the needs of its inhabitants. It is the place of our origin; the stage for our memories and dream of Island life.”<sup>247</sup> Our memories serve the need of filling the gap of longing for home and the circumstances that make returning home difficult. This place of memory is safe because for an instant our realities become possibilities. Remembrance is an act that describes our innermost capabilities.

We are born and have our being in a place of memory. We chart our lives by everything we remember from the mundane moment to the majestic. We know ourselves through the art and act of remembering. Memories offer us a world where there is no death, where we are sustained by rituals of regard and recollection.<sup>248</sup>

When Darline left Haiti in 1983, she remembers the beauty of the country. At that time, “the country was good, but now even if you have money you cannot live in the country.” Similarly for Edeline, when she left Haiti was clean, quite and filled with vibrant businesses. She remembers Champs de Mars at night, the central square in downtown Port-au-Prince—sitting there with friends or going out to lunch. “The stores used to be real nice, when I went there though the doors are closed, there used to be a nice perfumery store, nothing was the same, it’s like you have a lot of little

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<sup>247</sup> Judith Ortiz Cofer, *Silent Dancing: A Partial Remembrance of a Puerto Rican Childhood*, (Houston, TX: Arte Publico, 1990) 23.

<sup>248</sup> bell hooks, *Belonging: A Culture of Place*, (New York: Routledge, 2009) 5.

market women all over the place.” Edeline states specifically “I miss the Haiti I left.” Madeleine remembers all of the activities that occupied her on the weekends. From going to the beach, attending the annual Haitian carnival, Madeleine spent a lot of time performing leisure activities. Madeleine also remembers inviting people who were less fortunate into her home and helping them out in whatever way she was capable of doing. Paulene remembers Christmas time in Haiti. Denise’s favorite memories are of going to church and having family gathering on the weekends. Ritha remembers going on missions trips in the mountains, going to retreats during Carnival and camp during the summer. Ritha describes her experience at camp, “we laughed together, swam in the ocean, woke up early and had devotions, eat breakfast, went to meetings and when we’d return we’d sit next to the ocean under almond trees telling jokes, having contests and round tables.”

Work life is the area that creates the most tension for Ritha as she remembers that in Haiti, she never worked on Sundays. Ritha was a seamstress in Haiti. Sundays were reserved for church, youth meetings and going to church services at night. In comparison, in the U.S., Ritha has no choice but to work on Sundays, in which she admits, “run, fly and come to church, run, fly to work, you are always running, so it’s not the same.” Ritha reflects on the value that is put on work in the U.S., where she must go to work even when she is sick. This makes her remember her home country Haiti even more. “I remember Haiti because sometimes you can be sick, in Haiti you would be resting, you would be sleeping in your bed.” Ritha like the other first generation women all function in the U.S. by adapting to the practices that make up everyday life and build a home for themselves.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

*Creating Spaces of Home* journeyed through the lives and homes of twenty Haitian women who lived in the Washington, D.C. area. With the initial goal of examining the Haitian woman immigrant, this project by the very act of centralizing women's experiences has created a direct response to the larger gap in the field that characterizes the story of Haitian immigrants in the United States. By focusing on these women, they become the leaders that they have always been. Now, their strength is made visible. From the medical doctor, business owner, sales clerk, retiree, to the college student and cleaning staff---Haitian women are as diverse and multilayered as any immigrant group. Their experiences are varied and their pasts reveal further differences.

### *Review of Chapters*

*Creating Spaces of Home* started off with an introduction that outlined the reasons why Haitian women as immigrants should be studied more widely. This topic represented a major gap in the migration literature. Haitian history was then explored in order to situate Haitian women within a cultural perspective. Their roles and identities as women are thus understood within the cultural frameworks that are available. The introduction also identified the second major gap in immigration literature, which is a lack of attention to immigrant communities in the greater Washington, D. C. area. When the two gaps of work on Haitian women as migrants and specifically migrants living in the D.C, area are addressed, this study offers an important contribution to the field of migration studies. With the themes of home,

journey and agency, this project provided an introduction of the Haitian immigrant community in the D.C. area, specifically one that was woman centered. The four research questions that guided this study were: (1) Where does the greater Washington, D.C. fit into the story of Haitian immigrants' journey to the U.S.?, (2) How do Haitian women negotiate their everyday lives and identities?, (3) What happens when Haitian women are put at the center of migration research?, and (4) How are generational differences reflected in the lives of Haitian women immigrants?

“Journeys of Migration” attempted to answer the first research question concerning D.C. as a destination of migration. As such, this chapter highlighted the personal migration stories of ten first generation women (Darline, Leonne, Ritha, Edeline, Jocelyne, Madeleine, Fernande, Denise, and Silvia) and one 1.5-generation woman (Deena). The two other first generation women, Paulene and Therese, were not as detailed in their descriptions of migrating to the U.S. as were the majority of the women I met through this project. They were reserved and disclosed select information about their lives and experiences. The second-generation women were all born in the U.S and thus did not have a story of migration. Deena’s story was explored in this chapter because she was born in Haiti and migrated to the U.S. at a young age. What I found in their migration stories was that indeed there were some women who did live in the major destinations such as New York and Florida, but there were also women who had always lived in the metro D.C. area, making D.C. the first stop for some and second stop for others. For the women who journeyed to D.C. after living in a major city, they showed a preference for the D.C. area due to and in spite of its small Haitian population. Immigrants in D.C. were not forced to be a part

of a community simply because they lived in close proximity to a particular community fixture. They wanted to instead have the choice to find the Haitian community and be a part of it when they deemed it appropriate. The majority of the women led the process of migration for their families as primary actors who supported and sent for husbands, children and other family members. Silvia was the only woman who was secondary in migrating to the U.S. after her husband sent for her. Lastly, I explored my own journey of migration through a personal autoethnographic story.

The next chapter on the social construction of Haitian women's identities' primary aim was to explore the gendered based identities of Haitian women. From the Haitian cultural perspective, I examined the phrase that "women are the central pillars of society" and applied its meanings to the experiences of my participants. The construction of the *poto mitan* woman was meant to empower women and position them as active and immutable members of society. With an understanding of the origins of the phrase to be rooted in vodou, specifically, the *poto mitan* literally holds the roof up in the vodou temple. The term has been appropriated and used in the realm of family life. The symbol of the *poto mitan* woman served as a metaphor that allowed women to engage in a discussion about power in their daily lives.

Once the experiences of Haitian women as migrations were established in chapters 4 and 5, the community building aspects of Haitians in Washington, D.C. were explored. An important goal of this chapter was to give readers a snapshot of the Haitian immigrant community in Washington, D.C. The literature on Haitian migration has offered New York, Florida and Massachusetts as primary and

established destinations of migration. As an “edge gateway,” the Washington, D.C. area continues to attract immigrants. The most prominent cultural institution that marks the presence of the Haitian community in the Washington, D.C. area is the church. There are about a dozen churches with Haitian affiliations that are available to the community, three Catholic and nine Protestant churches. Calvary Baptist Church in Hyattsville, MD is highlighted in this chapter, as a case in which the growth and organization of the Haitian community came together to build the first and only building that is Haitian owned. This ownership is important and distinguishes Calvary Baptist Church from others in the community that continue to function as nomadic churches that rent spaces from other congregations and schools.

“*Lakay Se Lakay*” is the next chapter that gave each participant the opportunity to define home in their own terms. For first generation women, home was tied to the homeland. They detailed memories of home and lamented about being unable to return home due to perpetual instability of Haiti. Creating home in America is for the first generation a process of necessity, one that certainly does not replace the homeland Haiti. For second-generation women, home was more closely located in the U.S. For immigrants, the process of building home, in particular, “lakay” was of great importance. When analyzing the use of “lakay”, we see that “lakay” was not just a mere term that translates to home but instead “lakay” became a term that linked the Haitian diaspora transnationally. As such, the term was used only in reference to Haitians living abroad, in particular Washington, D.C. It became a term, a common language that easily created a bond of solidarity between Haitian immigrants. When Haitians traveled to the United States to states such as New York, Florida,

Massachusetts and Maryland, they were subject to the use and identification of “lakay.” When my participants used the term, it was a term of endearment, a term of identity and belonging. It was a term of remembrance, linking an idea, a feeling, an emotion, a place, Haiti, to its many dispersed people.

Within the context of transnational migration, the experiences of Haitian women must be understood through the multiple layers of identity. As women who must negotiate the power relations in their lives and thus reinvent themselves daily, Haitian women experience daily life through a lens of race, gender, and class. A review of the literature showed that women’s experiences are marginalized despite the fact that the migration of women has for periods of time outnumbered men. The literature also shows that Haitian women have been the catalyst that have aided in the migration of their families.

As an ethnographic study, the use of in-depth interviews and participant observation allowed me to explore the lives of my participants as women. As a researcher who shares some identity markers with my participants I connected our experiences with the use of auto/self-ethnography. As this project highlights the stories of twenty Haitian women, it is not representative. In the future, I would like to locate a larger research participant pool using more quantitative tools to capture some of the nuances of the larger community. Additionally, it is important to follow a select few families, exploring their history and stories and connections to the D.C. area. More work is left to be done on the community itself, and its institutions. This project spotlights specific aspects of the community in order to obtain a context for the participant’s community.

Lastly, an exploration of the meaning of home following the earthquake is increasingly important due to the physical loss of space, a space in which memories, stories and families are attached. What happens to the conception of Haiti as a location of home after the earthquake has destroyed sacred aspects of this home? Will this home be recognizable? Will Haitians now hold more firmly than before their memories of this home? Will they struggle with coping with such a great loss? This loss affects every aspect of life. This destruction has meant loss of family, a physical house, churches, schools and places of business. What happens to the tie between home and family? The earthquake will bring with it a new generation of Haitians who have a unique relationship with the land—with their home. For some this quake further distances them from this source of identity. For others, returning home is no longer a viable option or dream as situations in Haiti have worsened due to the damages of the Earthquake. As I think of home, this is a source of grief and pain for those who suffered immediate losses; I do hope to address this trauma in the lives of my participants in later revisions of this dissertation work.

For me home is where my family is. I can feel at home, while not being at home in the presence of my family. Home to me is a root system in which strong ties are planted. My youth is deeply planted in the U.S., New York City more specifically. What was special about this home in New York is that it called on and relied upon memories and cultural practices also from Haiti. As the women in this study have shown through their lived experiences of migration to the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, home is a concept that constantly changes as the needs for community and identification changes. As this conclusion shows, this dissertation has

sought to explore the lives of Haitian women as immigrants and shed light on the gendered based issues that make their experiences as migrants unique.

## Appendix A: Interview Questions/Guide

### *Issues of Home and Remembrance*

1. Where are you at home? (Haiti, U.S., both) Explain.
2. What does home mean to you?
3. What are your fondest memories growing up in Haiti or U.S.?
4. How often do you go back to Haiti and for what occasions?
5. What items remind you of your home? Why?
6. Do you have any items in your home that are unmistakably Haitian?
7. Do you celebrate any Haitian holidays? If so, how?
8. Do you think it is important for you to maintain your native language (French/Kreyol) here in the United States? If so, what do you do in order to maintain it?
9. Do you feel you belong in America? Why, why not?
10. What neighborhoods do you primarily conduct your daily activities? Why?
11. Have you ever wished that you were home (Haiti/U.S.) What were the circumstances of that particular experience?
12. In your opinion, what does it mean to be Haitian in America?
13. Do you want to maintain your Haitian identity? If so, what do you do to maintain it?
14. Do you feel that you have lost anything by migrating to the U.S.?
15. How do you recover some of this lost?
16. Will you ever return home? Why/Why not?

*Issues of Place: The Particularity of the Greater Washington area*

17. What are the advantages/disadvantages of living in the Greater Washington area?
18. Do you feel successful here?
19. How has this place changed you?
20. In what ways has this community changed? What events sparked this change?
21. Does living in the Greater Washington area help or hinder your efforts to maintain your Haitian identity?
22. What role did the proximity to Washington, the nation's capital play in your decision to live and work here?
23. What images and ideas come to mind when you hear Washington D.C.?
24. Are you attracted by these images? Why/Why not?
25. Are you politically active? In what ways?
26. Does D.C. offer greater access to political activity?

*Issues of Journey: Where have you been and where are you going?*

27. What states have you lived in and for how long?
28. How does D.C. compare to other states that you have lived/worked in?
29. Do you think D.C. is the last place that you will live?
30. Thinking about your journey and all of the lessons learned, do you think you could have been successful in D.C. when you first came from Haiti? Why?
31. What was your (family's) primary reason for migrating?
32. Did you come alone? Who did you migrate with? Who did you leave behind?
33. Do you have family in Haiti?

34. How do you stay in touch with your family in Haiti?
35. What are your goals and plans for the future?
36. How has living in D.C. brought you closer to/away from your goals?
37. Do you think D.C. is the “ultimate” destination for the Haitian immigrant? Why/why not?
38. Is there an ultimate destination for the Haitian immigrant? What is it? Why?

*Issues of Community Investment and Agency*

39. In what ways are you invested in the local Haitian community in the Greater Washington Metro?
40. Are you a part of any Hometown associations or other involvements? Which ones?
41. How does this role benefit the community?
42. What are the particular needs of the local Haitian community?
43. What issues are most important to you?
44. In America, do you wish to become part of a larger community? Which community would that be? Why that particular community?
45. Does the Haitian community in D.C. have advocates? Who are they? What organizations?
46. What forums does D.C. offer for the voices of Haitian immigrants to be heard?
47. Are these forums exclusive to D.C.?
48. Do you ever feel invisible?
49. When are you most powerful (influential)?

*Women’s Perspective*

50. What are your thoughts on the role of women in the family?

51. What informs your opinion about women's roles?
52. What are the attributes of a "good" Haitian woman?
53. In your daily leadership positions do you encounter discrimination from your male counterparts?
54. Do you identify yourself as either modern or traditional or combination?
55. Have you embraced the cultural ideals set for women? Why/why not?
56. What women role models did you grow up with?
57. Do you agree with the statement; "women are the central pillars of society"? Explain?
58. Do you think Haitian women have experiences as immigrants that are different from men?
59. As a woman, what societal issues are most important to you? Why?
60. What are the most important cultural lessons that you have taught/will teach your daughters?
61. What are your fears for the next generation of Haitian women?
62. What is the status of Haitian women in Haiti? Has this changed? If so, what are the causes for this change?
63. What do you know about women in Haitian history? How do you know what you know?
64. As a woman, do you feel powerful? If so, in what ways?
65. What personal, cultural, or societal barriers do you face as a Haitian woman in the U.S.?
66. Have you ever been rejected or discriminated against? By whom? Explain. Do you think race or gender was a factor? Why? Why not?
67. What are your personal thoughts on women who are feminists?

## Appendix B: Research Questionnaire

1. How old are you?
  - a. 18-23
  - b. 23-29
  - c. 30-39
  - d. 40-49
  - e. 50-59
  - f. 60+
2. How long have you lived in the United States?
  - a. Less than 5 years
  - b. 5-10 years
  - c. 10-15 years
  - d. 15-20 years
  - e. 20-30 years
  - f. 30 years+
3. How long have you lived in the Greater Washington D.C. Metro Area?
  - a. Less than 5 years
  - b. 5-10 years
  - c. 10-15 years
  - d. 15-20 years
  - e. 20-30 years
  - f. 30 years+
4. What is your zip code? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What is your documentation status? (Working papers, visa, permanent, citizen, other) \_\_\_\_\_
6. What is your level of education?
  - a. Some primary education
  - b. Some secondary education
  - c. Some technical or vocational training
  - d. None
  - e. Some college/professional
  - f. Bachelor's degree
  - g. Master's degree
  - h. Above Master's degree
7. Did you go to school in the U.S.? If so, for how long and what kind of education did you receive? (High school, trade school, business institute, vocational, college/university) \_\_\_\_\_
8. Are you presently employed? If so, what do you do?
9. Describe yourself in economic terms:
  - a. I am very comfortable.
  - b. I can pay all of my bills.
  - c. I struggle to get by.
  - d. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
10. Are you married? What is your spouse's race/nationality?
11. Where were you born? (Town/country)
12. What is your race?
13. What is your ethnicity?
14. What is your religion?
15. What language(s) do you speak?
16. What language do you feel most comfortable in?

## Appendix C: Fòm Pou Konsantman (Kreyol)

**Kouman pwojè a rele ?**

Washington, DC: Yon Kote Mwen Rele Lakay Mwen. Dekouvri Kijan Fanm Ayisyèn Kite Peyi Yo Pou Adopte Yon Peyi Tounèf.

**Poukisa pwojè sa a ?**

Se yon pwojè rechèch Marie Manouchka Poinson ap reyalize pou Inivèsite Maryland, College Park. Nou mandew pouw patisipe ladanl paske ou se yon fanm Ayisyèn kap viv/travay nan zalantou vil Washington. Pwojè sa a fèt pou egzamine ki jan fanm Ayisyèn antre epi viv chak jou nan zalantou vil Washington, konsa pou nou kapab konprann pi byen kouman yo adapte yo.

**Kisa m ap gen pou m fè nan pwojè a?**

Sa pral fèt sou fòm tèt-atèt kap dire inè nan yon kote ki bon ni pou moun kap fè rechèch la, ni pou moun kap patisipe ladan l lan, kote nap poze plizyè kesyon. Pafwa, nou kapab fè sa pa telefon. Lòt fason nou kap fè pou jwenn enfòmasyon se : ankèt, atelye travay, epi swiv avèk je nou. Patisipan an yo menm gen dwa deside kijan yo vle patisipe nan pwojè a. Pwojè a ap dire dezan.

**Eske enfòmasyon pèsònèl mwen ap rete sekre?**

Nap fè tout sa nou kapab pou n kab kenbe enfòmasyon pèsònèl ou sekre. Pou nou pi byen pwoteje idantite ou, nou pap sèvi ak non ou, amwenske ou ta ban nou pèmisyon klè pou nou fè sa. Map kenbe tout enfòmasyon mwen ranmase nan biwo pam lakay mwen, byen di anba kle. Nou pap sèvi ak non w ni sou ankèt yo, ni sou lòt papye nap sèvi pou ranmase enfòmasyon. Nap mete yon nimewo sou yo pito. Gras ak nimewo sa a, chèchè a ap kapab konnen kiyès ou ye, epi se sèl chèchè a ki konnen ki nimewo ki pou ou. Le pwojè a fini, nap kraze tout kasèt nou te sèvi pou kapte vwa patisipan yo, depi patisipan yo fin dakò ak nòt nou mete sou papye yo.

Si nou ekri yon rapò oubyen yon atik konsenan pwojè a, nap fè tout sa n kapab pou n pa mete non ou ladan l. Si oumenm oubyen yon lòt moun ta andanje, oswa si lalwa ta mande nou sa, nou kab pataje enfòmasyon ki konsène ou ak reprezantan Inivèsite Maryland, College Park, oubyen ofisyèl gouvènman yo.

Si nou ta aprann gen yon timoun kap sibi abi oubyen si gen yon neglijan oubyen yon moun ki ta vle fè oumenm oubyen lòt moun mal, nap devwale enfòmasyon ba otorite yo oubyen nenpòt lòt moun ki konsène nan sa, paske se sa lalwa ak règ pwofesyon an mande.

**Kouman pwojè a rele ?**

Washington, DC: Yon Kote Mwen Rele Lakay Mwen. Dekouvri

Kijan Fanm Ayisyèn Kite Peyi Yo Pou Adopte Yon Peyi Tounèf.

**Eske enfòmasyon pèsònèl mwen ap rete sekre?**

\_\_\_ Mwen dakò pou nou filme m, kapte vwa m, pran foto m pandan map patisipe nan rechèch sa a.

\_\_\_ Mwen pa dakò pou nou filme m, kapte vwa m, pran foto m pandan map patisipe nan rechèch sa a.

**Ki danje ki genyen nan pwojè a ?**

Pa gen okenn danje poutèt ou patisipe nan pwojè sa a.

**Ki benefis m ap tire nan pwojè a ?**

Nou pa fè pwojè sa a pou nou ede ou dirèkteman, men chèchè a kapab sèvi ak rezilta yo pou l aprann pi plis konsènan fason fanm Ayisyèn yo adapte yo nan zalantou vil Washington nan. Nou swete rechèch sa a ap pèmèt nou pi byen konprann fanm Ayisyèn yo, konsa lòt moun kapab benefisye nan rezilta yo a lavni.

**Eske mwen oblije patisipe nan pwojè a ?**

Ou patisipe nan pwojè a si ou vle. Ou gen dwa pa menm patisipe ladanl ditou. Si ou deside patisipe ladanl, ou kapab soti nenpòt lè ou vle. Menm si ou pa patisipe ladanl ditou, oubyen si ou ta kòmanse epi ou kanpe nan wout, pa gen okenn pwoblèm nan sa epi ou pa gen anyen wap pèdi poutèt sa.

**Eske mwen kapab retire kò m nan pwojè a le m vle?**

**Si m ta pran yon chòk pandan pwojè a, èske m ap resevwa tretman pou sa?**

Inivèsite Maryland pa bay okenn swen doktè, pap entèn, epi pa bay okenn lòt garanti pou moun ki patisipe nan pwojè sa a. Inivèsite Maryland pa bay nonplis okenn tretman oubyen dedomajman si ou ta pran yon chòk pandan ou ap patisipe nan pwojè sa a, amwenske lalwa mande nou fè sa.

**Si mwen ta gen kesyon, ki sa pou m fè?**

Se Manouchka Poinson ki ap travay sou pwojè sa a pou Depatman Etid Amerikèn nan Inivèsite Maryland, College Park. Si ou ta gen kesyon konsènan rechèch la, silvoulè kontakte Manouchka Poinson nan : 1102 Holzapfel Hall, College Park, MD 20742.

(301) 919-5599, [mmpoinson@yahoo.com](mailto:mmpoinson@yahoo.com).

Si ou gen kesyon konsènan ki dwa ou genyen pandan wap patisipe nan pwojè sa a, oswa si ou vle pote plent pou yon domaj ou pran pandan wap patisipe nan pwojè sa a, ou kapab pran kontak ak :

**Institutional Review Board Office (IRB), University of Maryland, College Park, MD, 20742; [irb@deans.umd.edu](mailto:irb@deans.umd.edu); 301-405-0678.**

**Kouman pwojè a rele ?**

Washington, DC: Yon Kote Mwen Rele Lakay Mwen Dekouvri  
Kijan Fanm Ayisyèn Kite Peyi Yo Pou Adopte Yon Peyi Tounèf.

**Si mwen ta gen  
kesyon, ki sa pou m  
fè?**

Laj patisipan an epi  
èske li dakò.

Rechèch sa a respekte tout regleman konsènan kijan pou trete  
moun ki patisipe nan yon rechèch, selon sa biwo IRB nan  
Inivèsite Maryland, College Park la mande.

Avèk siyatiw, ou dakò:

- ⇒ ou gen pou pi piti 18 an;
- ⇒ ou konprann tout kondisyon rechèch la.
- ⇒ nou reponn tout kesyon ou genyen;
- ⇒ ou deside patisipe san fòse nan pwojè sa a.

**Non patisipan an**

**DAT**

**Siyati ak dat.**

**Siyati patisipan an**

## Appendix D: Formulaire De Consent (French)

**Titre du projet**

Washington DC: Ma Maison Adoptive. Comprendre l'expérience  
Migratoire Des Femmes Haïtiennes

**Pourquoi une telle  
recherche?**

Il s'agit d'un projet de recherche mené par Manouchka Poinson à l'Université de Maryland, College Park. Nous vous invitons à y participer parce que vous êtes une femme Haïtienne vivant/travaillant dans la région métropolitaine de Washington. Ce projet vise à analyser l'expérience migratoire et la réalité quotidienne des femmes Haïtiennes vivant dans la région métropolitaine de Washington, en vue de mieux comprendre ce qui caractérise le processus migratoire dans cette région.

**Qu'est-ce que j'aurai  
à faire?**

La démarche comprend des entrevues approfondies d'une heure de durée à réaliser dans un lieu qui convient à la fois au chercheur et au sujet. Des entrevues téléphoniques seront parfois nécessaires. D'autres méthodes de collecte de données sont : enquêtes, focus-groups et observation. Les participantes peuvent s'engager dans le projet à n'importe quel niveau. Le projet durera deux ans.

**Qu'en est-t-il de ma  
confidentialité?**

Nous ferons de notre mieux pour garder la confidentialité de vos informations personnelles. En vue de protéger votre confidentialité, nous nous garderons d'utiliser votre nom ou d'autres identificateurs, à moins que nous ayons votre permission explicite. Toutes données recueillies seront gardées dans mon bureau personnel qui est sécurisé et verrouillé. Votre nom n'apparaîtra pas dans les enquêtes et autres informations collectées. Par contre, un numéro d'ordre sera utilisé sur tous les formulaires, enquêtes et autres documents. A l'aide de ce code, la chercheuse sera en mesure de retracer votre identité, si nécessaire, et seulement elle aura accès à votre numéro d'ordre. A la fin du projet, les bandes magnétiques seront détruites, une fois que les notes auraient été approuvées par les sujets.

Dans le cas où un rapport ou article aurait été publié concernant ce projet, votre identité sera protégée dans la mesure du possible. Si vous ou quelqu'un d'autre serait en danger, ou dans le cas où la loi nous oblige à le faire, des informations qui vous concernent peuvent être mises à la disposition des représentants de l'Université de Maryland, College Park ou des autorités gouvernementales.

**Titre du projet**

Washington DC: Ma Maison Adoptive. Comprendre L'expérience Migratoire Des Femmes Haïtiennes

**Qu'en est-t-il de ma confidentialité?**

En conformité avec les exigences/obligations légales et/ou les standards professionnels, nous dévoilerons aux personnes et/ou autorités concernées toutes informations qui nous seraient parvenues relatives à l'abus de mineurs ou négligence ou tout ce qui pourrait faire du tort à vous ou à d'autres personnes.

\_\_\_ J'accepte d'être filmée, enregistrée, photographiée au cours de ma participation à cette recherche.

\_\_\_ Je n'accepte pas d'être filmée, enregistrée, photographiée au cours de ma participation à cette recherche.

**Quels sont les risques de la recherche?**

Il n'y a aucun risque connu lié à votre participation à ce projet de recherche.

**Quels sont les bénéfices de la recherche?**

Le but de ce projet n'est pas de vous aider personnellement, mais les résultats peuvent permettre à l'investigatrice de se faire une meilleure idée de l'expérience migratoire de la femme haïtienne dans la région métropolitaine de Washington. Nous espérons qu'à l'avenir, d'autres personnes pourront bénéficier de ce projet à travers une meilleure compréhension de ce groupe d'immigrantes.

**Ma participation, est-elle obligatoire?**

Votre participation à cette recherche est entièrement volontaire. Vous pouvez tout simplement choisir de ne pas y participer. Si vous désirez participer à cette recherche, vous pouvez abandonner à n'importe quel moment. Votre décision de ne pas y participer ou l'arrêt de votre participation n'impliquera aucune pénalité ou perte de bénéfices qui vous seraient autrement octroyés

**Puis-je abandonner la recherche à mon guise?**

**Y-a-t'il des soins médicaux appropriés dans le cas où je serais blessée au cours de la recherche?**

L'Université de Maryland ne fournit aucun soin médical, hospitalisation ou autre forme d'assurance aux participantes à ce projet. L'Université de Maryland ne fournira non plus aucun traitement médical ou indemnités pour des dommages corporels résultant de votre participation à ce projet, à l'exception de ce que la loi requiert.

**Que faire si j'ai des questions?**

Cette recherche est réalisée par Manouchka Poinson du Département d'Etudes Américaines à l'Université de Maryland, College Park. Si vous avez des questions relatives à la recherche, prière de contacter Manouchka Poinson à: 1102 Holzapfel Hall, College Park, MD 20742. (301) 919-5599, [mmpoinson@yahoo.com](mailto:mmpoinson@yahoo.com).

**Titre du projet**

Washington DC: Ma Maison Adoptive. Comprendre L'expérience  
Migratoire Des Femmes Haïtiennes

**Que faire si j'ai des  
questions?**

Si vous avez des questions relatives à vos droits en tant que  
participante au projet, ou si vous désirez reporter un dommage  
résultant de la recherche, prière de contacter :

**Institutional Review Board Office (IRB), University of  
Maryland, College Park, MD, 20742; [irb@deans.umd.edu](mailto:irb@deans.umd.edu);  
301-405-0678.** Cette recherche est en conforme aux règlements  
de l'IRB de l'Université de Maryland, College Park concernant  
les recherches impliquant des personnes.

**Age du participant et  
accord**

Votre signature confirme que :

- ⇒ vous êtes âgée d'au moins 18 ans;
- ⇒ les règlements de la recherche vous ont été expliqués.
- ⇒ vos questions ont été adressées;
- ⇒ Vous avez décidé de participer librement et volontairement  
à ce projet.

**NOM DU SUJET**

**DATE**

**Signature et Date**

**SIGNATURE DU SUJET**

## Appendix E: Consent Form (English)

Project Title	Washington, DC: A Space Called Home Haitian Immigrant Women's Migration Experiences Revealed
Why is this research being done?	This is a research project being conducted by Manouchka Poinson at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a Haitian woman who lives/works in the Washington metro area. The purpose of this research project is to explore the migration experiences and everyday life experiences of Haitian women in the Washington metro area in order to capture the specificities of the migration process in the Washington metro area.
What will I be asked to do?	The procedures involve conducting in-depth one-hour interviews that will take place at a location that is convenient for both researcher and subject. In some instances there will be the need for phone interviews. Surveys, focus groups and observation are also methods that will be used to collect data. Participants can choose to be involved at any level of commitment. The duration of this study is 1-2 years.
What about confidentiality?	We will do our best to keep your personal information confidential. To help protect your confidentiality, your names or any identifying markers will not be used unless otherwise permitted by the subject. The data that will be collected will be stored in my home office, which is secure and locked. Your name will not be included on the surveys and other collected data. Instead, an identification code will be used on data forms. A code will be placed on the survey and other collected data. Through the use of an identification key, the researcher will be able to link your survey to your identity and only the researcher will have access to the identification key. According to federal guidelines, the signed informed consent forms will be kept 3 years after the completion of the study. When the project is completed, the tapes will be destroyed after all transcripts have been approved by the subjects. Hard copy data such as transcripts and notes will not be destroyed after the completion of the project. All hard copies will remain in the possession of the investigators. If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law. In accordance with legal requirements and/or professional standards, we will disclose to the appropriate individuals and/or authorities information that comes to our attention concerning child abuse or neglect or potential harm to you or others.

**Project Title**

Washington, D.C.: A Space Called Home  
Haitian Immigrant Women's Migration Experiences Revealed

**What about confidentiality? (Cont'd)**

- I agree to be [videotaped/audiotaped/photographed] during my participation in this study.
- I do not agree to be [videotaped/audiotaped/photographed] during my participation in this study.

**What are the risks of this research?**

There are no foreseeable risks. There are no foreseeable risks. The benefits of this project are that participants are free to ask questions or withdraw from participation at any time and without penalty.

**What are the benefits of this research?**

This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the investigator learn more about Haitian immigrant women's migration experiences in the Washington metro area. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of this immigrant group.

**Do I have to be in this research?**

**May I stop participating at any time?**

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.

**Is any medical treatment available if I am injured?**

The University of Maryland does not provide any medical, hospitalization or other insurance for participants in this research study, nor will the University of Maryland provide any medical treatment or compensation for any injury sustained as a result of participation in this research study, except as required by law.

**What if I have questions?**

This research is being conducted by Manouchka Poinson in the American Studies Department at the University of Maryland, College Park. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Manouchka Poinson at: 1102 Holzapfel Hall College Park, MD 20742, 301-919-5599, mmpoinson@yahoo.com. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact: **Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, MD, 20742 ; [irb@deans.umd.edu](mailto:irb@deans.umd.edu); 301-405-0678**. This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.

**Project Title**

Washington, DC: A Space Called Home Haitian Immigrant  
Women's Migration Experiences Revealed

**Statement of Age of  
Subject and Consent**

Your signature indicates that:

- ⇒ you are at least 18 years of age;
- ⇒ the research has been explained to you;
- ⇒ your questions have been fully answered; and
- ⇒ you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.

**Signature and Date**

**NAME OF SUBJECT**

**DATE**

**SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT**

## Appendix F: Haitian Cultural Institutions in the Greater Washington, D.C Metropolitan

1. Association of Haitian Professionals
2. Haiti Program at Trinity
3. Foundation Memoire
4. Toussaint Louverture Historical Society
5. The Haitian Art Society D.C. Metropolitan Chapter
6. The Haitian Institute of the Washington D.C. area
7. Association of Haitian Physicians Abroad
8. Association of Haitian Professionals
9. Association des Ingenieurs Haitiens et Americains (ADIHA)
10. Association des Medecins Haitiens a l'Etranger (AMHE), Balt/Wash Chapter
11. Socio Cultural Committee of AMHE, Balt/Wash Chapter
12. Haitian Institute
13. Haitian American Intellectual Property Association
14. Haitians United for Action
15. Voices for Haiti
16. NOAH National Organization for the Advancement of Haitians
17. Quixote Center Haiti Program
18. 50 yrs is Enough: US Network for Global Economic Justice
19. Washington Office on Haiti
20. Haitian Holiday Festival, Inc
21. SOMORA Societe de Modernization de l'Archaie
22. Howard University Haitian Student Association
23. Haitian Americans United (HAU) for Mother Lange, Baltimore
24. Haitian Embassy in Washington, D.C.

### Businesses

1. CAM
2. Chez Mimose
3. UniTransfer
4. Claude Barber
5. Premiere Barbershop
6. Konbit Lakay: WPFW FM 89.3
7. TV: TeleImage

### Religious Institutions

1. Eglise Baptiste Du Calvaire
2. Eglise de Dieu de Silver Spring
3. Eglise de la Nouvelle Generation
4. Eglise de Dieu de Saintete
5. Hillandale Baptiste Church
6. Horeb Haitian Company
7. St. Camilius

### Religious Institutions-Cont'd

8. Sacred Heart
9. Our Lady of Sorrows
10. Eglise Adventiste d'Horeb du Septieme Jour (Horeb Seventh Day Adventist)
11. Corps de Christ
12. Premiere Eglise Evangelique de Washington D.C.
13. Premiere Congregation Baptiste Haitienne de Washington D.C.

## Appendix G: Woman Our History

### Femme Notre Histoire

Women Our History is a panorama of Haitian women, heroines of our independence and contemporary political figures. This publication was The Ministry of Women's Condition and Rights, with the Haiti National Museum. March 8<sup>th</sup>, International Women's Day, 1998.

#### Our Heroines: Who Fought Against Slavery, for Liberty and Independence

Cecile Fatiman  
Toya (Vicotroia Mantou)  
Marie Jeanne  
Defilee  
Marie Claire Heureuse  
Suzanne Louverture  
Lieutenant Sanite Belair  
Marie Louise d'Haiti  
Catherine Flon  
Henritette St.Marc  
Guillaumette Charlot  
Pierrette Jolibois

#### Pioneers of the Feminist Movement:

#### Who Fought Against Exclusion, and for the Respect of their Rights.

Alice Garoute  
Leonie Coicou Madiou  
Emmeline Carries-Lemaire  
Madeleine Sylvain-Bouchereau  
Lydia Occide Jeanty  
Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain  
Yvonne Hakim Rimpel

Partial List of the Activist of the Women's League for Social Action (1934-1950)

Mme Lucienne Heurtelou Estime  
Mme Marie Louise Barou  
Mlle Gilberte Vieux  
Mlle Marie Therese Colimon  
Mme Yvonne Hakim Rimpel  
Mlle Lydia Jeanty  
Mlle Denyse Roy  
Mme Fenelon Boivert  
Mme Edith Efron Bogat  
Mme A. Bellerive  
Mlle Jeanine Lafontant  
Mme Emmeline C. Lemaire  
Mme Madeleine SylvainBouchereau  
Mme Alice Auguste Garoute  
Mme Fortuna Guery  
Mlle Jacqueline Scott  
Mme Marie Lavaud  
Mme Albert Staco  
Mme Lucia Chevallier  
Mme Cleane Desgraces Valcin  
Mme Jacweline Wiener Silvera  
Mme Leonie Madiou  
Mme Therese Pierre-Louis  
Mme Emmanuel Thezan  
Mme Lucie Marc  
Mme Jeanne Perez  
Mme Wanda Ducoste Wiener

Women in Politics: The Historical Significance of their Determination to Participate

*List of some women in politics from 1970 to 1990*

Mme Marie Carmelle Lafontant  
Mme Frank C. Paul  
Mme Josette Chandler  
Mme Carmene Christophe  
Mme Camille D. Silaire  
Mme Myrlande Manigat  
Mme Rose-Marie Nazon

*Women in Politics 1990 to 1998*

Ertha Pascal Trouillot  
Marie Michele Rey  
Claudette Werleigh  
Marie Laurence J. Lassegue  
Mathilde Flambert  
Claire Lydie Parent  
Yves Rose Pierre  
Adeline Chancy  
Lise Marie Dejean  
Raymonde Aide  
Ginette Cherubin  
Carole Denerville  
Denise Fabien  
Lorraine B. Casimir  
Myrtho Laurel Celestin  
Therese Guilloteau  
Marie Roussette Nicolas  
Maryse Penette  
Gerarda Elysee  
Farah Juste

## Glossary

Term	Translation
Anba bouch	<i>From under someone's mouth</i>
Antan yo	<i>To get organized, to come together</i>
Camionèt	<i>Bus</i>
Chack pen gen fromaj li	<i>Every bread has its cheese</i>
Chodyè	<i>Pot</i>
Ce que famn veut, Dieu le veut	<i>What woman wants God wants</i>
Chèf	<i>Leader</i>
Degaje yo	<i>To help oneself</i>
Demele	<i>To help oneself</i>
Diri sòs pwa	<i>Rice and bean soup</i>
Dòmi	<i>Live in work</i>
Dyaspòra	<i>Haitians living abroad</i>
Djon Djon	<i>Dried Mushrooms</i>
EnDeyò	<i>In the country side</i>
Fè moun	<i>Make people</i>
Fè ménaj	<i>To clean</i>
Fè mange	<i>To cook</i>
Fèt dè mè	<i>Mother's Day</i>
Fritay	<i>Fried food</i>
Eritye yo	<i>Inheritors</i>
Lakay	<i>Home</i>
Lakay se lakay	<i>Home is home</i>
Machan	<i>Market woman/merchant</i>
Mayi Moulen	<i>Corn meal</i>
Metye	<i>Vocation</i>
Natif Natal	<i>Authentic</i>
Pez banan	<i>Plantain press</i>
Pilon	<i>Mortal and Pestal</i>
Plase	<i>To live with outside of marriage</i>
Pran fil	<i>Become independent</i>
Poto Mitan	<i>Central Pillar</i>
Pwa cho	<i>Hot beans</i>
Rèstavek	<i>Child slave</i>
Sèvis dòd	<i>Ushering/Greeting</i>
Soup Joumou	<i>Squash soup</i>
Tèt ansanm	<i>"heads together"</i>
Tonton makout	<i>Duvalier's paramilitary</i>

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