HAITIAN IMMIGRANT WOMEN: A CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Susan H. Buchanan Stafford
Huntington, New York

Quoique les femmes aient joué un rôle important dans les processus de migration et insertion dans la nouvelle société, ce rôle-là n'a pas été toujours reconnu ni étudié en profondeur.

Cet article examine le cas de Haïtiennes: leur rôle dans le processus d'immigration, leur intégration au marché du travail ainsi que les changements dans les modèles domestiques et sociaux qui s'observent dans la communauté Haïtienne à New York. L'article présente une approche culturelle à l'étude de l'expérience de migration, tout en mettant l'accent sur les perceptions et attitudes des Haïtiennes par rapport à cette expérience -là.

L'article propose qu'une analyse de la migration et l'adaptation des immigrés reste incomplète si elle n'englobe pas le rôle des femmes dans ce processus, ainsi que leurs perceptions de cette expérience.

Although women have always played an important role in the immigration and resettlement process, this role has not always been acknowledged or explored in great detail by scholars.

This article examines the case of Haitian women, focusing upon their role in the immigration process, integration into the labor force, and changes in domestic and social patterns within the Haitian community of New York City. It presents a cultural approach to the immigration experience, with an emphasis on Haitian women's perceptions and attitudes about that experience.

The article argues that an analysis of immigration and a population's subsequent adaptation is incomplete without an understanding of both the female role in the process and female perceptions of that experience.

INTRODUCTION

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 neighbors—came as *workers* . . . Caribbean immigration

> to this country is old, continual and always included *working women*—as slaves; as house servants; seamstresses and factory workers; and as secretaries, saleswomen, nurses, and other professionals. (Mortimer and Bryce-Laporte, eds. 1981:xxvi-xxvii)

Despite women's importance in immigration, their role has often been overlooked or considered secondary in the scholarly exploration of immigration and resettlement. In particular, recent Caribbean immigration to the United States has been characterized by large numbers of female immigrants, who often initiate the move or who are the first to establish households in the new society. It can thus be argued that any analysis of immigration and subsequent adaptation is incomplete without an understanding of the female role in that process, and of female perceptions of the experience.

This paper explores the cultural meaning of immigration for one population of Afro-Caribbean women—those from the island of Haiti. Specifically, the paper focuses on the role of these women in the immigration process and their integration into a new labor force, as well as repercussions on domestic and social relationships within the Haitian community of New York City. Resettlement in the United States has generally improved Haitian women's opportunities to attain a higher standard of living for themselves and their families, but they view the experience with ambivalence, often lamenting that "lavi isit vin pi di pou nou" ("Life here has become more difficult for us"; see Note 1).

Although Haitian women per se were not the main subject of my research, their role in immigration and the consequences of their resettlement became more and more apparent as the research progressed.

During the course of my research, I met Haitian women and men from all socio-economic backgrounds. The majority of my contacts, however, came from the *petit bourgeoisie* or Haitian middle class. For the most part, the women came from large towns or from the capital, Port-au-Prince, had attended school through the primary grades, and in some cases had worked outside the home. The majority of these women entered the United States in the late sixties or early seventies.

Because my research focused on cultural patterns of ethnicity and collective behavior, this paper will stress basic patterns and themes that united the Haitian women I came to know in the mid to late 1970s. Before discussing these themes, I will briefly outline Haitian immigration to the United States, stressing Haitian women's participation and role in this movement.

HAITIAN IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES: AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Although Haitian immigration to the United States is generally thought to be a very recent phenomenon, it pre-dates the independence of both countries from their colonial masters.

In the late 1790s, French colonists and freed mulattoes, accompanied by their slaves, fled the revolutionary turmoil of Saint Domingue (Haiti's colonial name). They established colonies along the American seaboard in cities such as New Orleans, Louisiana, Charleston, South Carolina, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and New York. Notable Saint Dominguan émigrés included Jean-Baptiste Pointe du Sable, a trader credited with being the first permanent settler on the site of Chicago (Graham 1953:174; Spear 1967:5); John James Audubon, the naturalist, who arrived in 1803; and Marie Laveau, the "Voodoo Queen of New Orleans," born of Haitian émigré parents. Ottley and Weatherby (1967:47) note the female émigré presence in New York City in the late eighteenth century: "Creoles from Haiti flounced through the streets clad richly in West Indian materials; 'coal black negresses,' in flowing white dresses and colorful turbans made of mouchoir de madras strolled with white or mixed creoles. . . ."

During the early part of the twentieth century, Haitian immigration to the United States increased as Haiti suffered continuous political unrest. Reid's history of West-Indian emigration to the United States (1939:91) records the presence of approximately 500 Haitians in New York City in the 1920s. Most were males engaged in industry, trade, or white-collar professions. Many of these Haitians became active in the Marcus Garvey "Back to Africa" movement and other aspects of the Harlem Renaissance (Reid 1939:91).

After the American occupation of Haiti (1915-1934) ended, some American marines who had Haitian mistresses, wives, and children made special efforts to bring them to the United States. The Teachers College of Columbia University in New York City also recruited students through an educational and cultural exchange program. After World War II, Haitian women were attracted to New York, Washington, D.C., Chicago and Evanston, Illinois, and Los Angeles, California by opportunities to work as sleep-in domestics in American homes (Woldenmikael 1980, quoted in Laguerre 1984:169).

The greatest out-migration from Haiti began in the late 1950s, when François Duvalier assumed power. Duvalier instituted a regime of terror that stripped citizens of their rights and forced political opponents, intellectuals, and professionals to seek a safe haven abroad. The first waves of political refugees emigrated to francophone Africa, Canada, France, Latin America, and nearby Caribbean countries. As these countries closed their

doors during the 1960s, the United States also became a haven for expatriates, mainly from the Haitian upper classes.

By the mid-1960s, as the economy of Haiti continued to fail and political terrorism worsened, Haitians from the less privileged sectors of society joined urban middle-class and elite émigrés. Over half of the legal resident immigrants from Haiti who are presently in the United States entered since 1968. Their entry was largely a response to a backlog in processing their applications, which in turn resulted from changes in immigration law introduced by the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act. Another effect of the 1965 Act was that "illegal" entry became more feasible and faster than legal entry, which often took (and still may take) up to two years to effect. Thus, during the 1970s, Haitians from the poorest stratum clamored for tourist visas. Once in the United States, they merely "overstayed" their visit, joining the country's growing "undocumented" population. The most recent influx of Haitians occurred between 1978 and 1981, when over 40,000 people risked their lives to make the 800 mile ocean voyage to the United States, or fled the Bahamas, which threatened to deport Haitian workers.

DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW OF THE HAITIAN POPULATION

Since the United States Census does not list Haitians as a separate ethnic/racial category, statistics on the Haitian population in the United States are sparse. There are also a large number of undocumented aliens. Nevertheless, data from the United States Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service offer statistical clues to the demographic composition of Haitians.

Between 1953 and 1979, 50,002 Haitian women and 44,157 Haitian men were admitted as immigrants to the United States (United States Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service Reports 1953 through 1979, Table 9: Immigrants Admitted by Country or Region of Birth, Sex, and Age; see Note 2). This population tended to be young. The largest clusterings of arrivals between 1953 and 1979 were in the age ranges of ten to nineteen years (11,732 women, 10,603 men); twenty to twenty-nine years (12,285 women, 10,594 men); and thirty to thirty-nine years (9,054 women, 10,026 men).

Among the 40,000 so-called Haitian "boat people" who arrived *en masse* between 1978 and 1981 and were recorded by the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service, approximately thirty percent were women. This was also a young population, with the majority of female arrivals falling in the twenty to twenty-nine year old age range (United States Department of State, Cuban Haitian Task Force 1981).

United States Immigration and Naturalization Service tables showing the major occupational groups of Haitian immigrants indicate only one category in which women are clearly distinguished: "Housewives, children and others with no occupation" (United States Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1953 through 1979, Table 8: Immigrants Admitted by Country or Region of Birth and Major Occupation Group). The number of women in this category is consistently high, often comprising over fifty percent of the total annual number of Haitians entering the United States with legal resident status. These figures indicate that: (1) many Haitian women list themselves as housewives or as unemployed; or (2) these women are finally joining earlier emigrants who sponsored their entry (Dominguez 1975:13). The majority of women among the "boat people" classified themselves occupationally as vendors, agriculturalists, or domestics (United States Department of State, Cuban Haitian Task Force 1981), a reflection of their urban working-class or rural backgrounds.

MOTIVATION FOR MIGRATION

In Haiti, migration is a positively-sanctioned strategy for both men and women to achieve employment and upward mobility. Within Haiti, migration from rural areas to larger towns for the purpose of education or employment is common. Over the past ten years, Port-au-Prince, the nation's capital, has doubled in size and served as a major "commercial" center for travel agents whose business is emigration. Both internal and international out-migration are part of the Haitian socio-cultural and economic environment. Out-migration is an alternative employment strategy for people in an impoverished country with a chronically high unemployment rate, a subsistence economy, and little opportunity for its small educated class. Furthermore, the United States beckons as a land of unbounded opportunity for those willing to work. It has also served as a safe haven for political opponents of the Duvalier regime (François Duvalier or "Papa Doc," and his son, Jean Claude Duvalier or "Baby Doc"), as well as for those whose livelihood and security were threatened by the arbitrary law enforcement of the Tonton Macoutes, the para-military militia operating at the local level with total impunity to enforce the views of the dictatorship. The term, Tonton Macoute, refers to a bogey man in Haitian lore.

While recognizing that the political economy of Haiti is complex and that the movement of Haitian workers is part of an international circulation of labor, individual perceptions of the reasons for migration are important. Both the men and women I interviewed stated that major motivating factors were lack of employment *and* lack of opportunity for upward social and economic mobility. These factors tended to cut across class lines. Haitians from all classes view Haiti as a closed society, except

for those with political connections or who are elite by virtue of family background or wealth. As Haitians express it, "Ou pa kapab fè mouvman an Ayiti" ("You cannot move up in Haiti"); or, "Ou pa kapab fè lavi an Ayiti" ("You cannot make a living in Haiti"). These statements usually carry the implication that the reason for Haiti's plight is an historically unresponsive government that pays little attention to the well-being of its citizenry.

In the early years of the post-1950s out-migration from Haiti, upper- and middle-class Haitians fleeing the Duvalier regime could afford (or were forced) to emigrate as family units. Today, few families have sufficient funds to leave Haiti together. The average payment to a travel agent to arrange for the necessary papers, which are often false, is $1,500-2,000.00 U.S. currency. Even Haitians who have entered by boat have often paid similar prices, depending on whether their mode of entry is a small sailing craft, a commercial trawler, etc. Families select one member who seems most likely to obtain the necessary documents from Haitian and American immigration authorities. Women, particularly if they are single, are considered likely candidates, as they are thought to be less likely to permanently leave their families in Haiti. Also, once in the United States, women are able to find work as domestics, an avenue of employment which is generally not open to men.

Haitian migration to the United States has thus been primarily a chain migration (MacDonald and MacDonald 1964), where one or two individuals established a household in the host society and began to recruit relatives and friends to join them. Few Haitians now enter the United States without an established network of kin and friends who can offer initial assistance with housing, daily expenses, and employment. Although women have often been viewed merely as "secondary" migrants, following their partners once a household has been formed, many Haitian women have been either the first arrivals or the focal point of the recruitment process.

The case of Junie is a classic example. A nurse who had studied in the United States, Junie received an offer of employment from a physician in Pennsylvania. She worked for the physician for two years, during which time she saved her money and achieved resident status. Upon completing her "contract" with the physician, she returned to Haiti and married Gerald, who entered the United States on a tourist visa and simply overstayed the designated time limit. Junie and Gerald eventually achieved citizenship status.

Clérismé (1975) cites an example from his study of a cluster of Haitian immigrants in Brooklyn, New York who were from Bassin-Bleu, a town in northwestern Haiti. The immigration of one young woman in 1966 resulted in the development of a cluster of thirty-

six Bassin-Bleuans in Brooklyn, all of whom were related by blood or fictive kinship ties. Laguerre (1984:68-70) presents the case of Josephine, who arrived one year after her husband in 1960 and continued to recruit family members until 1972. She brought over a total of three goddaughters, three sisters, a nephew, two cousins, and her brother-in-law, all following her husband's death.

Through this process of chain migration, a number of Haitian communities have developed throughout the United States. The largest concentration of Haitians is in the nation's immigration capital, New York City. Numbering an estimated 250,000 to 300,000, the Haitian population of New York City has developed enclaves throughout the city. The majority reside in low-income neighborhoods in Brooklyn and Manhattan, which they share with other Caribbean immigrants and with Black Americans. A growing, wealthier minority of Haitians now reside in middle-income areas of Queens and Brooklyn.

The Haitian presence in these New York City neighborhoods is marked by Haitian Creole or French masses at Catholic churches; store-front Haitian Protestant churches; bilingual education programs at local schools; transfer companies sending remittances back to Haiti; restaurants that serve *griot* (fried pork cubes) and *diri ak poua* (rice and beans); music stores advertising the popular Haitian "mini-jazz" bands; and Haitian community centers that focus on delivery of social services, education, and legal assistance.

The majority of Haitians, especially new arrivals, work at unskilled or semi-skilled jobs in factories, service industries, and in domestic service. A small, but growing percentage of earlier immigrants hold professional, technical, or managerial positions or own small businesses. For the most part, Haitians are a phenotypically black population and a minority within a minority, distinguished from other black immigrants and from Black Americans by culture and language. Lack of documentation gives many Haitians a vulnerable and ambiguous legal status, and precludes return visits to Haiti. As this undocumented flow of immigrants from Haiti continues, many Haitians are attempting to regularize their status. A minority of immigrants have converted their resident status to that of citizen.

THE EMPLOYMENT OF HAITIAN WOMEN

In Haiti, women form an integral part of the subsistence-economy work force, particularly in their roles as cultivators and market women. Most factory employees in the industrial area around the capital city of Port-au-Prince are urban, working-class women whose deftness and willingness to work hard make them desirable employees. Although women from the elite sector of

Haitian society are often not employed outside the home, educated middle-class women often hold positions as secretaries, clerks, teachers, nurses, and doctors, as well as supervisory or managerial business positions. Thus, working outside the home is an acceptable and often required role for women in Haiti. It is part of their domestic role as mothers and wives who are responsible for the well-being of the household members, particularly their children.

For these reasons, many Haitian women arrive in New York with the intention of working, and with some work experience, albeit often unsuited to the new work situation. Haitian women use all resources at hand to achieve their goal of finding a job: kinship and friendship networks, Haitian community centers, employment agencies, social-service organizations, churches, and Haitian and American newspapers. Sometimes a friend will take a woman directly to a factory and train her on the job. At first, most Haitian women will accept any job to meet rapidly accumulating daily expenses, repay debts to relatives and friends who may have financed their entry, and accumulate savings for the expenses of future immigrants. They may also support family members who remain in Haiti.

The United States Census offers no general data on Haitian occupational distribution, much less specific information on Haitian women. However, the major avenues of employment for Haitian women immigrants can be defined as: factory work, with some concentration in the garment industry; service industries, particularly hotels and restaurants; domestic service, including house cleaning, care of children and the elderly, and office cleaning; and self-employment. If undocumented, these female workers are vulnerable to exploitation by employers who pay less than the minimum wage, offer no health benefits, pensions, or job security, and use the threat of the Immigration and Naturalization Service as a means of control in the workplace. Because of their double-minority status as blacks and women, their lack of skills relevant to an industrialized society, lack of fluency in English, and (for some) the legal issue, these women face many difficulties, both in their employment search and on the job. Like many women in Haiti, they are sometimes underemployed, working in seasonal, temporary, or part-time employment, or they are unemployed because their occupations are subject to lay-offs and slow-downs.

Despite the concentration of Haitian immigrant women in unskilled, menial jobs, a minority of educated Haitian women have obtained white-collar, technical, or professional positions. Wilda, a woman from the Haitian middle class in her late thirties, began work at I.B.M. as a keypunch operator. Although she was not fluent in English, she rapidly learned the language and her duties. Her skills, intelligence, and ambition impressed

her supervisor, who encouraged her to enroll in a programming course. Today, she works as a computer programmer for I.B.M.

Haitian women who have managed to master both English and a skill can be found in such occupations as doctors, nurses, accountants, teachers, insurance agents, laboratory technicians, and so on. The health field attracts many ambitious Haitian women, not only because it is traditionally acceptable and prestigious, but also because it allows flexible working hours and pays high salaries. Many Haitian women with minimal education aspire to become nurses' aides, and thus leave factory or domestic work.

Some immigrant Haitian women participate in the so-called underground economy, either as their main source of income or for supplemental income. For example, women skilled in dressmaking and embroidery work as seamstresses at home. Other women bake and cater baptisms, marriages, and other special occasions. Some sell Tupperware (plastic kitchen utensils), cosmetics, jewelry, or products purchased from their place of employment (such as handbags) to friends, relatives, and co-workers. Temporarily unemployed women, or those who cannot work full-time (mainly older women), open "day-care centers" in their homes, providing employed women with child-care services. Other women prepare meals for single men who prefer not to prepare their own or eat in restaurants. Haitian women who have amassed enough capital have opened boutiques, beauty salons, restaurants, and other small business ventures. Such entrepreneurial activity is consistent with economic strategies in Haiti, where the majority of the urban population does not have steady, full-time employment or income. Haitian women are renowned for their entrepreneurial skills, particularly rural market women who circulate most of the goods on the local level.

PERCEPTIONS OF WORK

Although many immigrant women formerly worked outside the home in Haiti, employment in the United States differs significantly from the Haitian experience. For rural women, subsistence cultivation involves the entire household, and thus remains essentially a domestic activity. Marketing requires women to travel long distances, often on foot, as they circulate through local and regional markets. However, children are cared for by older siblings or the older generation of women in the household. Women in urban areas in Haiti usually have a *bonn* (maid) or *domestik* (domestic)—often a young rural relative who has been sent to the city by her parents—who tends children and maintains the household. Even relatively poor Haitian women can usually afford this kind of service. Middle-class and elite women have several *bonns* and *gasons* (houseboys) who perform household chores, watch children, and handle daily affairs.

Work in the United States entails less integration of the work and domestic spheres than in Haiti, as well as daily travel by public or private transportation and considerably more complex child-care arrangements. Relatives who rendered services in Haiti are not always available, nor can many women afford household help. In addition, women in the United States have little control over their work hours and often have trouble adapting to an eight-hour work day and strict rules about absences.

Despite these complications, Haitian women generally take pride and dignity in having a job, although few of them express intrinsic satisfaction with the work itself. This dissatisfaction arises partly from the monotonous and menial nature of the jobs many of them perform, and partly from the realization that their wages, which seemed so enormous at first, barely cover their expenses. Moreover, racism and exploitation in the workplace detract from the positive aspects of work.

Paula's situation reflects the dilemma of many Haitian immigrant women:

> When I first came here, my cousin took me to an agency where I had to pay thirty dollars for placement. Although I only knew a few words of English, I speak French, so they placed me with an invalid French woman. I was supposed to take care of her during the day—give her medicine, make her meals, and just make certain she was alright. I worked eight hours a day for sixty dollars per week and paid for my own transportation.
>
> This woman treated me as though I were a slave. She expected me to clean the house and to run errands in addition to my assigned duties. She mocked my accent, called me a "Negress" and always told me that the "Negroes" had ruined Haiti by throwing out the French. I put up with that abuse because I had no choice. Without an alien card, it is hard to find a good job. I also needed the money to send to my mother in Haiti for her and my two children.

Women who held professional or white-collar positions in Haiti, or who did not work outside the home, initially suffer considerable downward occupational, economic, and social mobility in North America. Nicole, a former teacher in Haiti, has worked in a leather-goods factory for five years. She finds her job of placing linings and snipping loose strings from suitcases degrading and humiliating. As she says:

> The job I do is for an animal. It's the same day after day. No matter how fast I work, my boss complains about my slowness. He speaks to me disrespectfully because I am black and do not understand English very well. He

> knows I don't have an alien card and won't argue with him. He might report me to Immigration or fire me.
>
> Before I even get here, I am tired from pushing and shoving on the train. We only have a half-hour for lunch so I'm rushed then, too. When it's cold or raining, I don't feel like coming at all, especially because we often have no heat and I freeze all day. I used to be a school teacher in Haiti. Now, I'm doing a job that doesn't even require me to think.

For women such as Nicole, the work experience initially meant a significant loss of social status. Being a teacher in Haiti accorded one a certain prestige, but Nicole's social characteristics—her knowledge of French, educational background, and middle-class status—count for little in an English-speaking society where her skills are not immediately transferable to the work sector. In addition, she and others suffer from both categorization as second-class citizens because of their phenotype (including skin color), and lack of legal status in the country. Being an "illegal alien" consigns one to a nether-world of fear of discovery and carries a stigma of undesirability.

On the other hand, a major satisfaction with work lies not with the nature of the work itself, but with the opportunity to work coupled with the possibility of economic and social advancement. Increased earning capacity also means greater economic independence and the ability to accumulate savings to invest in one's future or that of one's children. This is especially true for women who did not work in Haiti, or whose incomes only supplemented those of their husbands. The work experience reduces women's dependence upon men and brings them new feelings of self-confidence and self-worth. As Nicole says:

> Here, I earn enough money to support myself if I have to do so. I know if something happens between me and my husband, I can feed and clothe my children. I don't have to wait for my husband to give me money for major expenses, and I can send money to my family in Haiti without checking with him. I am responsible for myself, and I like that.

For the most part, working in the United States enables Haitian women to provide their families both there and in Haiti with a higher standard of living. Thus, they more effectively fulfill their highly-valued roles as mothers. While working in Haiti is equated mainly with the daily struggle for existence and few opportunities for upward mobility, working in the United States means a solid opportunity for a better future and personal advancement.

OBSTACLES TO WORK AND ADVANCEMENT

Like Haitian men, Haitian women encounter many impediments to working which arise from linguistic and cultural differences with the dominant American culture. However, unlike men, women find their upward economic and social mobility further hindered by domestic and family demands. These responsibilities may prevent them from assuming full-time positions or accepting a better job, or may block their plans for continued education. Marie, a young woman of twenty-seven, is a case in point:

> Before the birth of my twins, I was able to attend evening classes at a local high school. I learned enough to get by, but I need to know more. Now, I am working. I have too many responsibilities to continue studying. I get up at five a.m. to prepare my children for the baby-sitter, begin to cook dinner for the evening, and get my husband ready to go to work. Then, I take the kids upstairs and catch the train and a bus to the factory in New Jersey where I do piecework sewing all day long. By the time I get home, it's too late to go to school. Anyway, I'm too tired to go to class and I still have lots of housework to do. I know I must go back, but when do I have the time?

Women's careers are also interrupted by pregnancies. This factor particularly affects women without alien cards who work at unskilled jobs where they can easily be replaced. Sometimes a pregnant woman loses her job unless she finds friends to fill in during her absence. Most women do not have the option of remaining at home with their children. They return to work shortly after giving birth because they cannot afford to be unemployed. Marie expresses the opinion of many young Haitian women on the subject of children:

> Most women I know here only want to have two children, if they have none. Some, like myself, want to have an operation so they won't have any more. I have three children in Haiti to support plus my twins here. It's too expensive, it's hard to find baby-sitters, and I want to be able to go to school again. It's just impossible with too many children.

Haitian men are also wary of the increased economic independence a job affords women (see below), and of the expanded social contacts (especially with other men) provided by work. As a result, it is often the male partner who poses the initial obstacle to the woman's entry into the labor market. As a woman seeks and obtains employment, her spouse becomes concerned about both the welfare of his children and his role as the family's principal provider. But eventually, the realities of economic life in the United States, coupled with the necessity for two

incomes to maintain a household and to meet the requirements of relatives in Haiti, override these objections.

CHANGES IN DOMESTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Resettlement in New York City, and especially Haitian women's new economic gains, have affected their relationships with their partners and children. Although behavioral changes have occurred, from the Haitian woman's perspective, cultural definitions and expectations of sexual roles have changed less rapidly.

Despite the full- or part-time employment of immigrant Haitian women and the additional burden that work entails, a sexual division of labor continues to be the major method for allocating household tasks. Thus, most Haitian women still bear the major responsibilities for housekeeping, cooking, and child care. Those women who had domestic servants in Haiti find themselves overwhelmed by these chores; some must even learn domestic skills. A verse from a song titled "Fanm d'Ayiti," pointedly summarized the plight of Haitian women:

Fanm d'Ayiti Nouyòk
Ponntché kou gason
8 è d-tan pa jou
Fo 1-fè siplemantè
Pou kouvé mouchè
Sa sé trop atò
Bos apè di-1 "faster"
Mari di-1 fè vit
Se 2 faktori

Haitian women in New York
Punch in at work just like men
Eight hours of work each day
Then she does overtime caring
For her husband
It's just too much
The boss yells, "Faster!"
Her husband says, "Hurry up!"
She works in two factories (see Note 3).

Sometimes, an older female relative is recruited from Haiti to care for the children and help with housework. Rarely do Haitian families in New York have a maid to perform these tasks, as they did in Haiti.

In some households, men have begun to lend a hand with marketing, cleaning, baby-sitting, and even cooking. These are chores they would not have performed in Haiti, and which are still culturally defined by both men and women as part of the

female domain of activity. Men who assist with these duties often do so reluctantly and/or only in the absence of a woman to perform them. For example, few men like to remain home with children and will either arrange for a baby-sitter or drop children off with relatives rather than have their freedom curtailed. Most Haitian women whom I met regard a man who willingly and equally shares the burden of domestic tasks as exceptional—an ideal to be attained.

Haitian couples who arrive in the United States together or within a short period of each other are thought to have a better chance of remaining together because they can simultaneously adapt to their new surroundings. When one partner initially settles in New York City alone, the partner who follows sometimes finds that his or her mate has a different set of expectations and no longer wishes to maintain the same kind of relationship they had in Haiti. This is particularly true when a woman emigrates first, and no longer wishes to be the subordinate partner in the marriage. In addition, her husband initially depends on her for money, socialization into American society, employment, and—assuming she has residency—for her signature on his residency papers. He may find this newly asymmetrical relationship intolerable.

Among the numerous factors that exacerbate antagonism between the sexes is women's greater financial independence. Haitian men grumble that women in the United States act like *gran moun* (adults) rather than *ti moun* (children), are not as submissive as in Haiti, and are more demanding. They reason that "Nouyòk gaté anpil fiy paskè yo vin konprann pouvoua lajan" ("New York spoils a lot of women because they learn the power of money"). Women also realize that their increased earning capacity, regular jobs, and the centrality of their income to the household give them more leverage and power with respect to their husbands. However, as a Haitian nun pointed out, women are sometimes afraid to exercise that power:

> The majority of Haitian women are still afraid to stand up for their rights in marriage. They still believe that the man should have the authority and that they should be subordinate to him. This mentality is deeply ingrained in both men and women, and it will change only slowly. Those women who do challenge their husbands by insisting upon more equality and personal liberty encounter a lot of opposition. Haitian men don't want to give women their freedom or give up their own privileges.

From the Haitian perspective, New York also spoils many relationships by creating new problems and exacerbating old ones.

According to many of my informants, "Haitian women are more mothers than wives." That is, their roles as mothers overshadow those of wives. Haitian women feel that fulfilling their responsibilities for their children's upbringing and moral education is exceedingly difficult in the United States. Their work schedules and lack of readily-available relatives to assist them require them to leave children in day-care centers or with a series of baby-sitters. Since they usually cannot be home when their children arrive from school, they may exercise little control over their children's after-school activities. They are also disturbed by the growing linguistic and cultural gaps between themselves and their children. The latter rapidly adopt English as a primary language and absorb American values and manners from television, school, and other children. While essential for integration of the children into American society and culture, these same factors undermine the moral authority of their mothers and frustrate efforts to instill Haitian values and mores.

Some families seek a solution to this problem by sending their children back to Haiti during their formative years. They prefer the Haitian educational system and can be assured that the children will receive a good, strict upbringing from their grandmothers. Women in New York whose children reside in Haiti fret about their welfare and lack of motherly attention and love, even though the children live with trusted relatives. However, it is not unusual for a grandmother or older female relative to raise the children of her daughter or niece. This strategy is both culturally acceptable and adaptive.

ACTIVITIES BEYOND THE DOMESTIC AND WORK SPHERES

Resettlement in New York City has not generally resulted in an expansion of Haitian women's activities beyond the realms of work and home. Once again, pragmatic and cultural constraints confine women to their traditional domains, while public activities remain the province of men. The triple burdens of work, children, and the household leave women little free time to devote to additional domestic or personal activities. The demands of the household and children are expected to take precedence over outside activities. For these reasons, Haitian women generally perceive that they have less personal freedom, mobility, and leisure time than Haitian men.

As in Haiti, both men and women still define the *foyé* (home) as the appropriate domain of women and locate women's primary responsibilities there. Beyond work and household-centered activities, women must often justify the time they spend outside the house to men. Although men are free to come and go at will, women must also often account for their whereabouts. Those women who participate in other activities must carefully balance their participation against real or perceived responsibilities at home.

Whereas the *foyé* is defined as the women's realm, *lari*—the street or any place beyond the home—is the male preserve. It is "dangerous" for women because "on the street" men test their sexual prowess. Consequently, Haitian women usually travel in someone's company if possible.

Despite these restrictions on their mobility, Haitian women maintain and renew friendship and kinship networks, primarily on the telephone and at family parties, visits, baptisms, marriages, and other major social events. Couples have some joint activities, but many women still complain that they are stranded at home while their mates go out with male friends or girlfriends.

Both men and women consider the church an appropriate and safe domain for women. Thus, Catholic and Protestant church services, associations, and activities provide many women, especially if they are unmarried, with a culturally-endorsed way to spend their free time. These church activities also provide a much-needed outlet for women's frustrations and sufferings.

Some women, particularly if they are educated, participate actively in Haitian cultural, social, community, and political organizations. Although there are a few exclusively female associations—such as the Girl Scouts, dance troupes, and women's soccer teams—many activities of these associations are directed toward young girls or young women.

Some educated, politically-aware Haitian women have attempted to mobilize others around feminist issues, either in general or within the context of expatriate opposition to the Duvalier regime. However, most Haitian women display a marked indifference to politics, a domain traditionally relegated to and dominated by men.

CONCLUSIONS

Through an analysis of the role of Haitian women in the immigration process and their integration into the urban, industrialized labor market of New York City, we see that their resettlement in New York has both improved and worsened their lives. Haitian women in New York benefit from increased earning capacity, a greater feeling of independence, and improved living standards, as well as from their perceived opportunity to work and achieve upward mobility. These positive factors are offset by increased domestic responsibilities engendered by work outside the home, the disruption of kinship support systems, loss of domestic help, and the needs of relatives in Haiti. Although Haitian women's greater economic independence in New York has somewhat improved their status within the family, there have been no drastic redefinitions of sexually-defined roles and attitudes on either an individual or collective basis. From the viewpoint

of the Haitian women described here, cultural definitions of sex roles and their accompanying behavior remain basically unchanged, and women still bear the brunt of child-care and household responsibilities. These women also face additional problems and abuses that often accompany their status as blacks in a predominantly white society. Moreover, many Haitians are undocumented aliens who work in menial, exploitive jobs. Thus, it is understandable that Haitian women in New York express considerable ambivalence about their lives, and perceive that in many respects, life has become more difficult.

Haitian women share many problems with other Afro-Caribbean female immigrants to the United States. However, their case is complicated by the fact that they do not enter with the advantage of speaking either English or Spanish, nor do they find a large indigenous population with whom they share cultural or linguistic affinities. Political conditions and poverty in Haiti make the possibility of return emigration less likely and less attractive for Haitians than for others from the Caribbean. Thus, Haitians must cope with a different set of adjustments and problems in adapting to their new milieu.

More detailed studies of female immigrants to the United States and throughout the world indicate that women play important roles in the emigration and resettlement process that, until recently, have been obscured. Female immigrants are significant links in the chain migration process, not just as followers of male "pioneers," but as individuals motivated to improve their own socio-economic status as well as that of their families. Once resettled, Haitian women play significant roles in the formation and maintenance of social networks which bind ethnic communities together. They also facilitate the entry, adjustment, and adaptation of later immigrants. The motivations of these women for coming, and the larger macrostructural forces operating to push them from their own country into more developed locations, are important areas of study. However, an emphasis on macrostructure tends to obscure the real and painful problems of women, men, and children whose very survival and futures are at stake. The perceptions of these immigrants and their understanding of their situations in their new countries of residence, as well as the influence of their cultures and historical backgrounds on coping strategies and adaptations to their new environments, are equally important subjects for consideration.

NOTES

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1. All quotations are presented in Haitian Creole. The paper is written in the ethnographic present.

2. United States Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service tables on sex, marital status, occupation, and country of last residence are unavailable for 1980 and 1981. In 1982, 8,779 Haitians were admitted to the United States as immigrants, including 4,113 women, 4,346 men, and 320 people listed as "unknown." In 1983, 8,424 Haitian immigrants entered the United States, including 3,878 women, 4,152 men, and 394 "unknowns" (United States Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1982 and 1983, Statistical Yearbook, Table IMM 4.3: Immigrants Admitted by Country or Region of Birth, Sex and Age).

3. This song comes from the record album, *Peyi-An Mouen* by Soley Levé, a musical group known for its politically-conscious lyrics.

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