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The Making of Migration Trails in the Americas: Ethnographic Network Tracing of Haitians on the Move

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Introduction

It is widely acknowledged that migration has the potential to contribute to human development and reduce social inequality, as codified in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (Crawley et al., 2017; Czaika & de Haas, 2014). However, migrants can also be subject to entrenched complex vulnerabilities resulting from social exclusion, marginalisation, climate-related disasters, wars, human rights abuses, and violence, at home and in destination countries. Haiti, in many ways, epitomises this continuum of intersectional inequities which create a path dependency for vulnerability. Path dependency shapes people's movements, and for many Haitians, these paths have been framed and reframed by history, from captivity to the middle passage, from enslavement to the Haitian revolution. Today, serial disasters, socioeconomic crises, social neglect, racist Western policies, and political cynicism have synergistically driven young people to urban slums or to destinations outside of Haiti altogether (Marcelin & Cela, 2017). For the largely undocumented Haitian population trekking across the Americas in search of a new life, the vulnerability they experienced—and are attempting to escape—in

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their homeland signals to social actors on these trails and in destination countries that those migrating are not protected by their own government and can be exploited.

This chapter reports on a multidisciplinary study that included a household survey and ethnographic network tracing to capture how educated youths, the human resources Haiti so desperately needs to rebuild its institutions, are caught on different migration trails in South and Central America on the way to the US–Mexico border. We use the concept of "circulation" to frame these fluid patterns of migration and the cultural experiences of those who move through them (Lee & Lipuma, 2002; Marcelin & Cela, 2017). On these trails, Haitians—already deprived of basic rights at home—carry their path dependency into a systemic vulnerability, compounded by unequal access to rights and social protections, and the unwillingness of many states and institutions across the Americas to adopt mitigating steps.

This chapter provides a contextual understanding of network formation among people on the move that potentially shapes their vulnerabilities in the Americas. Although the increasing presence of Haitians in Latin America has been widely acknowledged since 2010, government data are often limited. Some scholars have drawn attention to the role networks play in the formation of communities primarily through ethnographic investigation or, to a lesser extent, secondary data analysis (Cárdenas, 2014; Carrera, 2014; de Oliveira, 2017; Gomez & Herrera, 2022; Joseph, 2017, 2020; Montinard, 2019; Sá, 2015; Vieira, 2017). These studies confirm that circulatory movement is at the core of Haitian migration in Latin America, often blurring the lines between transit and destination countries for Haitians on the move (Audebert, 2017; Audebert & Joseph, 2022; Joseph, 2020). In this chapter, we provide a brief overview of the sociohistorical processes that have combined with environmental factors, including disaster events, to create path dependency to vulnerability for Haitians on these migration trails. Then, we discuss the study's methodological approach and data sources. We outline key findings and conclude by elaborating on the vulnerabilities that force many Haitians to leave their homeland, vulnerabilities they also experience, in varying degrees, on these migration trails.

Haiti's Unending Crises and Broken Social Contract

Since independence in 1804, Haiti has experienced and continues to be shaped by, a succession of political and social crises: state vs. society, urban vs. rural, rule of law vs. impunity, and extractive authoritarian political governance vs. democratic participation. In addition, crises have been imposed by external corrosive forces such as the coerced indemnity paid to France, US occupation, and continual socio-political interference from the US and its allies (Anglade, 1982; Bellegarde, 2013; Dupuy, 1997; Fatton, 2002; Gamio et al., 2022; Heinl & Heinl, 1996; Lundahl, 1982; Marcelin, 2012; Plummer, 1988; Schmidt, 1971; Trouillot, 1990, 1995). Compounding societal fragility are cascading natural and man-made disasters, such as hurricanes, earthquakes, and epidemics, and associated environmental risks that make complex emergencies an existential threat for Haitian society and its core institutions (Marcelin et al., 2016).

Further exacerbating the plight of Haitians is the rampant political dysfunction characterising the post-dictatorship period (1986 to present) leading to the pervasive political and institutional capture model that has taken a unique form in Haiti: minimal level equilibrium, a game in which powerful, parasitic networks of vested interests bleed various institutions and sectors to the brink of death (Marcelin, 2015; World Bank, 2022). In this perverse model, socio-political and economic institutions are sources of rent rather than means to creating opportunities, promoting well-being, and/or providing services for the public good (World Bank, 2022). Institutional destabilisation has fragmented Haiti's social fabric and eroded public trust at all levels, as the state has been unable to provide its citizens with even the most basic services, such as birth certificates and identification cards (Immigration & Refugee Board of Canada, 2015; INURED, 2017). To navigate daily life and access basic services, most of the population relies on informal personal networks. It is within this context of despair and lost hope in the country's future that the pathways for circulatory migration have been formed.

Haitian Migration Trails in Latin America

Contemporary Haitian migration must be understood in the context of US interventionist policy and its economic interests in the Caribbean, as these migration flows were partly driven by the US occupation of Haiti

(1915–1934) and its Dominican neighbour (1916–1924) when the land was expropriated from hundreds of thousands of Haitians who were then forced into labour on large plantations (Lundahl, 1979, 2011; Millet, 1978). Large-scale Haitian migration dates back to the early twentieth century, when agricultural labourers worked on sugarcane plantations in Cuba (Casey, 2012, 2017; Castor, 1988; Fouron, 2020; Laguerre, 1984; Millet, 1978; Schmidt, 1971) and the Dominican Republic (DR) (Martinez, 1999). Estimates suggest that during that time 200,000 Haitians worked in the DR and twice as many in Cuba (Audebert, 2011). Labour migration to the DR would eventually outpace migration to Cuba, fomenting periodic, and at times violent, anti-Haitian sentiment and culminating with the 2013 denationalisation and subsequent expulsion of Dominicans of Haitian origin (Joseph & Louis, 2022; Marcelin, 2017; OECD & INURED, 2017).

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Duvalier regimes' socio-political transformations led many upper- and middle-class Haitians to migrate to the US and Canada as these countries adopted immigration policies targeting non-European professionals (Fouron, 2020; Laguerre, 1984; OECD & INURED, 2017; Portes & Stepick, 1993) while others sought employment opportunities, primarily through the United Nations, in recently independent nations of sub-Saharan Africa (Jackson, 2014; OECD & INURED, 2017). Neoliberal policies introduced and promoted by USAID and the World Bank in the 1980s prioritised the development of the agro-industrial and manufacturing industries in the capital, intensifying rural-to-urban migration over investments in local agriculture (DeWind & Kinley, 1988). The Duvalier regime's eventual fall in 1986 gave way to urban and rural poor seafaring migration to neighbouring Caribbean nations and the US (Audebert, 2022; Cela et al., 2022; OECD & INURED, 2017).

In the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, Latin America would emerge as a choice destination, as newly restrictive immigration policies in the US, Canada, and France drove Haitians to alternative destinations. Less restrictive policies of some Latin American countries offered a solution for those searching for a new home (INURED, 2020; Joseph, 2017, 2020; Montinard, 2019; OECD & INURED, 2017; OIM, 2015). However, it must be noted that in Latin America, Haitians have not benefitted from the protections of international humanitarian law as they are seldom classified as refugees (Bilar et al., 2015). Nonetheless, contextual factors such as the Brazil-led United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) and the demand for low-skilled labour to build infrastructure for the 2014 FIFA World Cup and 2016 Summer Olympics made Brazil an ideal destination for thousands of young Haitians, some encouraged by smuggling

networks (Audebert, 2017; Carrera, 2014; Joseph, 2017; INURED, 2020; de Souza e Silva et al., this volume). By 2014, as Brazil faced one of its worst economic recessions and rising anti-immigrant and anti-Black sentiment led to deadly attacks against Haitians and other migrant populations, Chile, a regional economic powerhouse, emerged as an alternate destination (BBC, 2017; INURED, 2020; Morley et al., 2021). But by 2018, Chile's conservative government had launched a voluntary return initiative targeting Haitians (INURED, 2020), only to be followed by migrant regularisation policies adopted in 2021 that made it nearly impossible for Haitians to obtain legal status (Bartlett, 2021). These unhospitable measures frame the contexts for Haitian migration northward towards the US–Mexico border (OECD & INURED, 2017; INURED, 2020).

On these constantly changing trails, Haitians—unprotected and marginalised at home—carry a path dependency for vulnerability, compounded by unequal access to rights and social protections, and the unwillingness of many state and institutional actors across the Americas to adopt mitigating steps.

Methodology and Survey Demographics

This study includes data from three sources collected between May 2019 and May 2022 as part of the MIDEQ Hub[1]: (1) the MIDEQ origin survey administered in Haiti; (2) an ethnographic study of a sub-sample of the MIDEQ origin survey participants; and (3) a network survey tracing 181 Haitians in Brazil and Chile. The objective was to capture data on network compositions, migration costs, routes, and modalities of movement within and between countries. The study protocol was reviewed and approved by the Interuniversity Institute for Research and Development's (INURED's) US Department of Health and Human Services recognised Institutional Review Board, authorization number MD-S-020/1–2019-223.

The MIDEQ Haiti origin survey contains 11 sections, divided into two main parts: part one (Sections 1 to 6) for all households and part two (Sections 7 to 11) for households with migrants in Latin America only. The survey consisted of 949 households from five (out of ten) departments in Haiti: 33% (309) in the Ouest department, 20% (189) in Artibonite, 20%

[1] The Migration for Development and Equality (MIDEQ) Hub unpacks the complex and multi-dimensional relationships between migration and inequality in the context of the Global South. More at www.mideq.org

(188) in Nord, 16% (150) in Centre, and 12% (113) in Grande-Anse. Forty-five per cent (424) of households are urban and 55% (525) rural. The average number of people per household is 4.9 and the average age of household head is 40. Household size data is consistent with Haiti's national statistics bureau, where the reported average was 4.5 (IHSI, 2015).

More than half (57%; 543 of 949) of all households participating in the MIDEQ Haiti origin survey had a family member living in Brazil or Chile (hereafter referred to as "households with people migrating in Latin America") and 43% (406 of 949) were households without members living in Latin America (hereafter referred to as "non-migrant households"). 58% (313 of 543) of households with family members in Latin America were urban and 42% (230 of 543) rural. Households with family members in Latin America were oversampled so that a representative profile could be achieved, allowing for profile comparisons between households with family members in Latin America and those without. Of the 761 current people who have migrated[2] within the sample, 41% (309) had some secondary schooling and 26% (200) had completed secondary school, the former representing the most common level of educational attainment among them. 13% (100) had some (6%; 49) or completed (7%; 51) post-secondary or university education.[3] There were no notable differences in educational attainment by gender.

Ethnographic social network tracing is able to research interacting groups of people who are highly mobile and, in many instances, hard to reach (Brownrigg, 2003; Marcelin and Marcelin, 2003). The method uses purposeful or respondent-driven sampling (Heckathorn, 1997; Khoury, 2020) whereby eligible participants help reach or recruit other participants in the same network. Using this approach, we gathered data on mobility, itineraries, and transitional settlements, inventorying genealogically connected households in participant communities. An interacting ("whole" or "sociocentric") social network has multiple actors and requires different collection and analysis methods than single networks. Tracing requires that researchers obtain locations of participants' "place or domiciles", identify their "co-residents", and record the duration of each participant's stay with each set of co-residents for each domicile. Researchers explored migration histories, mobility, and the dynamics of social identities through in-depth interviews

[2] Each of the 543 households could report up to three family members living in Latin America accounting for the 761 total number.

[3] It is important to acknowledge that the migrating party was not interviewed. The individual-level migrant data (n = 761) was collected by proxy through the head of household.

with selected participants and informal focus groups with subsets of participants. Quantitative and qualitative data were analysed separately and later triangulated with ethnographic data sources.

The social network survey contains data on 181 individuals who migrated to Brazil or Chile obtained from a sample of 109 participants who were asked to provide details on up to 3 participants per household. These participants were all members of the networks we traced. Participants were asked basic household information including the relationships between those who migrated. For each study participant, basic sociodemographic and migration information was obtained: gender, year and location of birth, educational attainment, current country of residence, returnee status, and how many times they had left Haiti. Then, the interviewee was asked to provide data on each migration endeavour attempted by the destination country. Participants were allowed to provide up to three destinations for each relative or member of the group, including themselves. The series of indicators organised by destination country included information on the destination country, year of migration, reasons for migrating, and sources of funding.

Of the total sample, 63% (114) were male and 37% (67) female. The average and median age was 25. Haitians migrating to Latin America were relatively well educated, with 60% of respondents completing secondary school or higher (including technical/vocational school or university). 15% of study participants had only some primary school education or completed their primary school studies.

Findings

The Trajectories of Haitians on the Move

More than half (56%, 102) of participants in the social network survey reported living in Brazil, one-quarter (46) in Chile, and 14% (25) in Mexico. The remaining eight (4%) lived elsewhere. 46% (84) left Haiti only once while 41% reported leaving Haiti multiple times. Specifically, 29% (52) left Haiti twice, and 12% (21) three or more times (see Fig. 13.1 for migration routes).

Approximately half (90) of all respondents reported Brazil as their first destination, followed by Chile (27%; 49), and the Dominican Republic (20%; 37). Most (92%; 166) reported migrating to their first country in 2010 or later.

Fig. 13.1 Haitian migration to the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region

Migration and Brain Drain in the LAC Region

According to study participants, the principal objective of migration was to secure employment and seek new opportunities to fulfil their lives. 57% (103) reported work as their principal objective for migrating to the first destination country, followed by family reunification (18%; 32). Notably, all except for three of those who reported family reunification were women although the frequency of women migrating for work was nearly as high as men at 43% (26). Notably, in the MIDEQ country of origin survey, male migration for employment was viewed positively by a larger share of participants (72%)

than female migration for the same purposes (50%), with no notable difference in responses by gender. The third most cited reason for migrating to the first country was education (12%; 21).

During qualitative interviews, study participants reinforced the idea that Haitians migrate for host of reasons, which they describe as a search for a better life, or as they often say, "*kote lavi a fe kwen* [where life has a corner[4]]". A study participant in Mirebalais, Haiti, explains why her family member migrated: "That person decides that they can't live in Haiti because they have so many needs that are enormous and they have nothing to do". They decide to go to the Dominican Republic, Brazil, Chile, they also go to the Caribbean to find "*kote lavi a fe kwen*".

Another participant explained his reason for migrating to Brazil, "first of all so that I could study and to have a life that was more or less better than the one I had in Haiti". A family member provided the rationale for the recent migration wave towards Latin America, suggesting that "they didn't know that people could go there without visas, so they started putting USD $1,000 in their pockets and going where it was easiest".

While these data reinforce the dominant public narrative that Haitians leaving their homeland do so for economic reasons, this framing belies a very important fact: a significant portion of the youth migrating to and through Latin America are among Haiti's most educated. As data from both the MIDEQ origin and social network surveys illustrate, Haitians on the move in Latin America are relatively well educated when compared to Haiti's local population, with a significant percentage, 39% and 60% in the respective surveys, having completed their secondary school education. Prior studies of Haitian migration (Lemay-Hébert et al., 2019; OECD & INURED, 2017) corroborate this fact. In fact, the national study of migration conducted in 2014 found a positive relationship between higher levels of educational attainment and the desire to migrate, with public sector employment identified as the only potential mitigating factor (OECD & INURED, 2017). We argue that these youths are often better positioned to build on institutional networks—established in schools, universities, and/or through employment—that will serve as the capital they need to migrate.

The low absorptive capacity of Haiti's labour market (World Bank, 2015, 2022), the systemic institutional crisis that has affected all aspects of daily life in Haiti, the country's rule of law failure (Marcelin & Cela, 2021), climate-driven cascading disasters and calamities (Marcelin & Cela, 2017; World

[4] This expression generally means a place where one can live. However, in the Haitian rural imaginary a corner represents a space one can occupy undisturbed, therefore the expression suggests a desire to find a place to exist and pursue one's hopes and dreams in peace.

Bank, 2015, 2022), and the endemic structural and interpersonal violence that make human security and safety fragile (UNODC, 2023) converge in contributing to disillusionment and despair, particularly among its educated youth, fostering a desire to migrate. This calls our attention to the need for further scientific scrutiny of the impact of migration on Haiti's ability to rebuild its institutions and infrastructure (after disasters), and develop a true participatory democracy given the mass exodus of critical human resources.

Path Dependency, Circulation, and Intermediations in Migration

Haiti's precarious archives and registry system leave many citizens "undocumented" at birth. Some will remain that way until they decide to migrate. Cascading disaster events have exacerbated this phenomenon as the destruction of official records is common in times of disasters, particularly during the 2010 earthquake, and families regularly lose documents as they try to survive these events (Marcelin et al., 2016). Therefore, many Haitians legally come into existence through migration that requires official documentation to obtain legal status elsewhere. As in prior studies (Handerson, 2015; Montinard, 2019) our data reveal that securing official documentation in Haiti compels many Haitians to enlist the services of intermediaries who are often inefficient and/or corrupt.

While significant attention is paid to the expanding role of smugglers in migration, which, in 2016, was an industry estimated between US $5.5 and $7 billion globally (UNODC, 2018), the role intermediaries play in facilitating global migration is much more complex (see also Jones et al., this volume). Government bureaucracy, inefficiency, and graft are key features of vulnerability in Haitian society (Dias et al., 2020; INURED, 2020; Montinard, 2019) as all Haitians, irrespective of class, location, or political level, must use their personal or intermediary networks to secure timely services. The most vulnerable rely on paid intermediaries; others rely on the intervention of well-placed family members, friends, or former classmates. Thus, intermediaries of all sorts facilitate the international mobility of Haitians and influence their destinations and outcomes (Jones & Sha, 2020). Haitians migrating through multiple countries where there may not be a Haitian consulate or embassy experience serious practical challenges in accessing justice (OAS and IOM, 2016). Haitians on the move—marginalised by their own government—have little expectation that their human rights will be recognised by host governments.

More than half (56%) of MIDEQ country of origin survey participants reported using an intermediary to facilitate their trip. Similar results were obtained through the social network survey; however, as there were up to three destinations given per participant, this question was asked for each country. In the latter survey, almost half (49%; 89) of all migrants used the services of an intermediary for destination country one. Interestingly, the proportion increases to 63% (43 of 68) for the second destination and remains relatively high for the third country at 55% (12). Of those who used the services of an intermediary,[5] two-thirds (67) required assistance with document preparation; half (44) used their services to purchase airline or bus tickets; and 27% (24) paid for guides. Further, the social network survey captured the migrating party's aggregate experience across all destinations. One participant explained how the migration enterprise created demand for intermediary services of various kinds, including supplying invitation letters which this participant who lived in multiple destinations explained became "a business in itself". Thus, intermediaries are integral to facilitating international migration in Haiti.

Migration Capital: The Role of Social Networks in Haiti and Abroad

When asked why one country was selected over another, over one-third (35%; 64) reported being influenced by family or friends in the destination country; 27% (49) reported better employment opportunities and/or salaries; 18% (32) reported ease of migration. A non-negligible amount (8%, 15) reported migrating to pursue educational opportunities. When asked where they obtained the most important information needed to migrate to their first destination, almost two-thirds (64%; 116) reported family members or friends already in the destination country. These findings are consistent with those from the MIDEQ origin survey where almost half (45%; 243) reported receiving the most important information for their trip from family members or friends at destination. The remaining responses included information obtained from the migrant him/herself (10%; 18); family and/or friends in Haiti (7%; 13); and others (not family or friends) at destination (6%; 11). These data illustrate the importance of social networks (family and friends), particularly those already in the host country, in facilitating migration and how these networks serve as "migrant capital" (Busse & Vasquez Luque, 2016).

[5] As this was a multiple response indicator the total exceeds 100%.

One respondent shared how he was influenced "to go to Brazil because of family [he] had in Brazil. [His] uncle there... said Brazil is a bit better than the situation in Haiti". Another shared how a friend who had migrated before him influenced his decision:

> I have a friend who had a travel agency, and he was always visiting Chile...every person he helped migrate [to Chile] worked and after a short time, 6, 7, 8 months I saw that they were able to save USD $2,000 to send for their wife or child or another family member. Imagine if you are working in Haiti, you could never do that. [In Chile] …when their family needs USD $300, USD $400, USD $500 they can get it and send it. I wanted to find out for myself.

However, the qualitative data also revealed other sources influencing decision-making, including local media in Haiti:

> … in Haitian culture there is something called, *radyo djòl* [radio mouth], something from the mouth to ears, that's how information circulates. Once people hear … there's an opportunity … they just leave!... In Haiti, *"they"* make everything happen, that *"they"* you hear about…it's an entity you can't identify but it's an entity that says a lot in Haiti. *"They!"*

Thus, the decision to migrate does not always entail rational choice but may reflect one's hopes, if not their desperation.

Participants were asked about the *two* main sources of financing for their journey to their first destination, with most citing household resources (57%; 103), followed by their own resources (53%; 96). 41% (74) also reported financing their trip through family or friends outside the household. Just 7% (13) reported having financed their first trip with a loan.[6] This study participant explains how family members in Haiti support their ambition to migrate:

> Sometimes you have a family member who says, "I would like to leave the country, how can you help me?" …When you look at the country, young men, young women are struggling they have nothing to do… you tell them: don't start no mess, go there, be disciplined, work. … if they don't have a passport…you will give them the money to get their passport. Or you can give them some money to hold in their hands[7]….

[6] Since this indicator allowed for up to two responses, the reported proportions do not add up to 100%.

[7] The expression, "*bal yon ti kob pou l kenbe nan men l* [give them some money to hold in their hands]" is equivalent to giving them spending or pocket money to cover additional or unforeseen expenses.

When asked about the role of family members or friends living abroad, the participant elaborated:

> Sometimes when you have people in the diaspora… [those aspiring to migrate] make more demands of the diaspora asking them to send money.

As Haiti has the lowest Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita in the LAC region, Haitians find it costly to migrate to Latin America. In the MIDEQ origin survey, participants reported spending between USD $2500 and USD $3500, two- and three-times Haiti's per capita GDP, on their journey to Brazil or Chile. Notably, in both surveys the proportion of "don't know" responses to questions concerning migration expenses was slightly higher for female participants, many of whom were unaware of the full costs of migration as it had been organised by a male, usually at destination. Females migrating to Chile as "tourists" were the few exceptions.[8]

Migration: A High-Risk, High-Reward Investment

In the post-disaster context, the decision to migrate has been influenced by social networks, perceived economic opportunities abroad, the host country's migration policies, and intermediaries facilitating the process. Haitians choose to leave their homeland despite the significant challenges posed by such a decision.

The exploitation of Haitians desperate to leave the country has created markets for formal and informal intermediaries. Just over one-third (35%; 63) of participants in the social network survey reported encountering difficulties before migrating. A significant portion (83%, 52) experienced problems obtaining travel documents; many family members reported that: "Raketè te manje kòb li plizyè fwa [Intermediaries took his/her money many times]!", intimating that they paid for services that were never rendered. During interviews, one study participant living in Brazil recounted facing a series of delays while working with an informal intermediary to secure criminal background checks for him and his brother. Eventually, he received the documents and explained that he was helping his brother migrate: "because he can help me help my family back home…it's a chain, one pulls the other [to the host country]".

[8] Tourist migration to Chile required demonstration that one had sufficient funds for the trip. Therefore, women, in this instance, would have those funds on their person. However, Haitian women migrating to Chile were similarly unaware of the overall costs of migration, such as airline tickets and/or document preparation.

In 2020, when Panama adopted a new migration policy (Executive Decree 451) requiring tourist visas for Haitians in transit, those migrating chose the less expensive option of transiting through the DR, which also required a tourist visa. Dominican visa fees range between USD $40 and USD $60, depending on the type of visa sought. With increased demand, one participant explained that "the [Dominican Consulate] takes their passport for USD $250 but the [intermediaries] receive USD $450…for one visa". Based on this participant's allegation, Haitians are paying several hundred dollars simply to transit through the DR while intermediaries and Dominican officials pocket approximately USD $200 each. Among other challenges faced before departing Haiti, 10% of survey participants (5) reported that they did not have enough money for the journey; and 5% (3) were victims of corruption at the airport.

The proportion of participants experiencing difficulties while in transit to their first destination country was lower, at 14% (24). The nature of the difficulties experienced was distributed as follows: five (21%) reported insufficient funds; four (17% each) reported intermediary abandonment or theft by an official. One family member explained: "While in transit, the intermediary asked for more money and threatened that if he did not pay, he would be deported to Haiti". The proportion of respondents reporting difficulties during transit to countries two and three was much higher, at 43% and 41%, respectively. In the following example, two brothers migrating to Mexico, their third destination, are barred from boarding an aircraft in the DR.

> …I think this is serious racism because the people who were checking us in were done and let us go then a supervisor, a Black one at that, said we must have a transit visa. He stopped us…we asked them to cancel our tickets for us...but they said no, they didn't have the authority to do that…the ticket was purchased in France and France is not on the same time [zone]…we sent an email and tomorrow we will see what will happen [with the travel agency]. We will see if they can re-issue the ticket or reimburse us, but I don't know.

In this example, we see the importance of social networks, and the critical role family plays in the migration endeavour. The tickets were purchased in France by a family member. Unable to have their tickets re-issued or obtain a refund, family members had to purchase new tickets departing 6 days later while incurring the costs of the two brothers remaining in the DR for an additional week.

The proportion of difficulties encountered at destination was much higher, at 73% (131); most of the challenges were attributed to securing employment:

> The first thing [they try] to find out is whether there is work available...if there is work, they say, "My friend, I am going!" Sometimes they get there and the work that they did in Haiti they can't find it [there]. They may find other work that is worse than what they were doing in Haiti. Sometimes the person goes to work on a farm whereas when they were [in Haiti] they never worked on a farm. They worked in masonry, but they never did that before, but they must because they are now somewhere where if they don't work, they won't eat. They have to work in a profession that is not theirs which is unfortunate, but they do it, nonetheless.

Therefore, for youth looking for opportunities to make a living abroad, many are disappointed by the real challenges of labour market integration (Cárdenas, 2014; Sá, 2015). However, work, even under the most precarious circumstances, allows them to support themselves while pulling other family members into an extensive network of migrating Haitians now better positioned to support their families, and Haiti, from abroad.

Discussion

Haitian circulatory migration is a complex, collective project that encompasses multiple migrations from the homeland as well as onward migration—towards better opportunities and/or in response to the challenges of host country integration. Deprived of human rights and facing vulnerability at home (Human Rights Watch, 2023; INURED, 2017), Haitians carry their path dependency on these trails, where they face unequal access to rights and social protections and systemic vulnerability as they travel to and through South and Central America. However, this path dependency is framed and exacerbated by historic, hemispheric anti-Haitianism which "consists of ideologies, outcomes, policies, political strategies, and practices that reify the negative connotations associated with Blackness and Haitian nationality" (Joseph & Louis, 2022, 388). In spite of these challenges, migration remains a core strategy of Haitian survival.

In order to migrate, Haitians tap into existing social networks—what Busse and Vasquez Luque (2016) refer to as "migrant capital"—and may activate new ones (de Oliveira, 2017; Joseph, 2020; Sá, 2015). These networks provide pre-departure knowledge and information, financial resources,

contacts, and the emotional support crucial to transforming migration aspirations into reality. These networks are sources of both reliable and questionable information, which significantly influences migration decision-making through word of mouth, social media, and other platforms (Joseph, 2017; Sá, 2015).

Migration to Latin America is a high-risk, high-reward investment in an expensive endeavour that network members make in the hopes that as one successfully migrates, s/he will help others migrate or support those remaining in the homeland through remittances (Montinard, 2019; Nieto, 2014).

In migration studies, analyses of migrant decision-making processes are often reductive, focusing in time and space on the origin country, failing to capture what occurs as people are on the move. Ours and other studies (Sá, 2015) reveal that Brazil may be the destination of choice today and become a transit country or one of multiple destinations in the future. Haitian migration in the LAC region is contextual, subject to decision-making processes in different geographic spaces at different points in time.

The demographics of Haitians migrating to Latin America is in many ways misleading in terms of what it will reveal upon their arrival in the host country. While the principal motivation for migrating in this study was employment, this was also the most cited challenge encountered at destination. Some found the information they had received in Haiti misleading or false or that the reality at destination had since changed (Cárdenas, 2014). As has been noted elsewhere (Cárdenas, 2014; Sá, 2015), countries in the region tend not to recognise Haitian university diplomas, contributing to decreasing socioeconomic status and underemployment for educated Haitians. This illustrates how the path dependency one attempts to escape in the homeland, unemployment, and underemployment, can re-emerge in the host country. Despite these challenges—exorbitant costs, exploitation, limited employment opportunities—Haitians continue to migrate and encourage family members and friends—male or female—to follow suit.

Consistent with prior studies (INURED, 2020; OECD & INURED, 2017), we found that Haitian women are more likely to migrate under family reunification processes, though they are increasingly migrating on their own (INURED, 2020). Their dependence on a partner at destination was further reflected in their lack of knowledge of the processes or costs associated with their own migration. Haitian women's "restricted" mobility is consistent with the structural violence and gender inequality suffered in Haiti that fosters dependence on men (Cela, 2017; Cela et al., 2023; INURED, 2017). Hence, migration—even for the purposes of securing employment—was viewed less favourably for women than men. And, the migration of single women is

generally viewed with suspicion, if not outright disdain, presuming that the trip is financed (or official documents secured) through *quid pro quo* relationships with a paramour or intermediary (Cela et al., 2023). Both assumed scenarios reflect the gender-based dependency intrinsic to Haitian society in which a woman's mobility must be facilitated by a man in Haiti, in transit, or at destination.

With few exceptions, migration within the Global South carries risks prior to, during, and/or at destination for Haitians. Those migrating with undocumented status rely on networks at home and destination to finance an often-unpredictable journey (Dias et al., 2020; IOM, 2014; Kenny, 2013; Nieto, 2014). At the end of that journey is the hope of survival, which they understand as a space where one can support themselves and live in peace, *kote lavi fe kwen*. Largely influenced by their social network, "a better life" is reduced to the mere ability to secure employment (Joseph, 2017, 2022; Cárdenas, 2014; INURED, 2020), even for those with tertiary degrees. While this process has been well documented, the cost of these human capital losses to a homeland in perpetual crisis remains unquantifiable.

For Haitians, the search for a better life may lead to one or multiple destinations (INURED, 2020). For the undocumented, circumstances may prevent them from taking a direct route even when there is one intended destination (Audebert, 2017, 2022; Busse & Vasquez Luque, 2016; Cavalcanti & Tanhati, 2017; Hagen-Zanker & Mallett, 2020). Educational and economic status, as well as social and migrant networks, determine which routes (direct or indirect) are available to them (Handerson, 2015). Therefore, the characterisation of migration as merely a movement from origin to destination countries obscures people's experiences of journeying to and residing in multiple countries over time (Crawley & Jones, 2021; Audebert, 2022; Audebert & Joseph, 2022; Joseph, 2020; INURED, 2020). As economic, political, and/or social contexts change in host nations, Haitians may decide to migrate onwards. Undocumented Haitians may take alternate routes to their destination to avoid detection. Transit migration renders them vulnerable in contexts where laws, systems, cultural practices, and languages are different.

Changes in migration policies also re-route the paths of Haitians on the move. A threefold increase in migration of Haitians through Peru, between 2010 and 2011, substantially decreased in 2012 when Peruvian immigration laws were revised to require tourist visas (Busse & Vasquez Luque, 2016; Cárdenas, 2015). Similarly, before June 2020, many Haitians took advantage of low-cost flights to Panama (Busse & Vasquez Luque, 2016; Dias et al., 2020) to transit onwards to Latin America or north to the US–Mexico border

(Abdaladze, 2020). However, changes in Panamanian policies (Dubuisson, 2020) introduced an expensive and complex transit visa requirement, re-routing Haitians through the Dominican Republic (INURED, 2020). Policy changes create new markets, with some intermediaries adapting their services while new ones emerge to meet the demand. Such was the case with representatives from Dominican Consulates in Haiti, collaborating with local *raketès* (intermediaries), charging more than ten times the value of visas without the knowledge of their central government (Listín Diario, 2022). Yet, the Haitian government perpetuates its citizen's vulnerability through inaction and silence, failing to protect them from the predatory practices of local and foreign intermediaries or the human and labour rights abuses they suffer in transit or at destination. It is reminiscent of the abandonment Haitians—denationalised in the DR and expelled to Haiti—experienced from the Haitian government. Officially welcomed by the government in word but not in deed, they would eventually become stateless in Haiti as well (Joseph & Louis, 2022).

Conclusion

The vulnerability Haitians experience at home creates a path dependency that informs their migratory experiences in the Global South. Mirroring their experiences at home, Haitian migration in the LAC region has been largely characterised by precariousness, volatility (Gómez and Herrera, 2022), and anti-Haitian sentiment (Joseph & Louis, 2022; OECD & INURED, 2017). In Latin America, where they are seldom classified as refugees, Haitians do not enjoy the protections afforded by international humanitarian law. Although at various times since 2010, they have received complementary protection by states in the region, these mechanisms have been based on states' goodwill and can be withdrawn at any time.

The failure of the Haitian government to uphold a social contract with its citizens propels many to leave home. Its failure to defend its citizens' rights abroad signals to formal and informal intermediaries, host communities, and foreign governments that Haitians are vulnerable and unprotected. Haitians on migrant trails, thus, depend on the benevolence of foreign governments, advocacy efforts and support of migrant-serving organisations, and solidarity within their social networks to survive. Therefore, Haitians on the move must remain nimble to respond to evolving and often unstable contexts they encounter in their search for a place where they can live in peace, *kote lavi fe kwen*, and reach their full potential as human beings.

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