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“CHÈCHÉ LA VI”

AN EXPLOATION INTO THE SURVIVAL STRATEGIES OF HAITIAN WOMEN IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

by

Louise Mailloux

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Arts
Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
September 1997
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and Research acceptance of the thesis

Chèché la vi:

An Exploration into the Survival Strategies
of Haitian Women in the Dominican Republic

submitted by Louise Mailloux, B. A., C. G. S.

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

Thesis Supervisor

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ABSTRACT

Despite a copious literature on the plight of the male Haitian migrant worker in the Dominican Republic, the prevalent gender ideology in the Dominican Republic and in the male dominated social sciences, has obscured women's economic contribution. Haitian women crossing the same border have been largely ignored by researchers. Haitian migrant women workers' marginalization stems from several key factors that are structural, political, cultural and ideological in nature. The articulation of these systems of oppression include the divergent and unequal level of development in Haiti and the Dominican Republic; economic structures and policies in the Dominican Republic premised on the use of an exploitable foreign labour force to remain competitive; and, racial and gender ideologies that justify their extreme exploitation. Twelve Haitian migrant women workers provide a case study of how Haitian women resist economic marginalization and negotiate their daily survival in the Dominican Republic.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is dedicated to the Haitian women working and living in the Dominican Republic, but especially to the courageous women who shared their experiences with me.

I owe much to the *Centro de Trabajo Popular*, in Santiago, especially Cecilia (Milagros) Rosario and Mildred Dolores Mata for their friendship, support and guidance. Milagros is one of very few Dominicans to have made the effort to learn Creole, the language spoken by the overwhelming majority of the Haitians in the Dominican Republic.

My gratitude also extends to *El Núcleo de Apoyo a la Mujer*, in Santiago, an organization working to end violence against women, for providing office space and computer access. Susi Pola there is a wonderful and helpful friend, and a true feminist.

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My appreciation goes to Doña Laila Cruz for opening her home and heart to me in Santiago, as to Sonia Vasquez and Toni Enriquez for generously sharing their homes, as well as their ideas and contacts, while I was in Santo Domingo.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is about Haitian women who migrate to the Dominican Republic searching for a better life for themselves and their children, hence the title “Chèché la vi” (literally translated from Creole as to find life). Migration – for countless Haitian women and men – is a strategy to resist economic marginalization in Haiti. For generations, women, along with many tens of thousands of Haitian men, have crossed the border dividing Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Long the oldest and heaviest flow of Haitians to any country, it has been unabated since the early twentieth century when the sugar industry revived in the Dominican Republic (Plummer, 1981: 36). The Dominican sugar industry was the first sector of the Dominican economy to use Haitian labour extensively and remains an important procurer of Haitian labour.

Too many to count?

It is unclear how many Haitians reside, temporarily or permanently, in the Dominican Republic. Population estimates range between two hundred thousand and a million, although, the consensus is some five to six hundred thousand (Corten and Duarte, 1995: 94). Of these people, possibly 75 percent, or more, live and work in the Dominican countryside (Perez, CCDH, 1995, personal communication), and include Haitian nationals and anyone with

Haitian descendants born in the Dominican Republic without Dominican citizenship. How many of these are women and how many of those women are “migrant workers” is nebulous, since there is no concrete data on the number of Haitians who have resided in the Dominican Republic at different times (Murphy, 1991: 75). Quite possibly though, the number of Haitian women in the Dominican Republic (including first, second or third generation) could be two hundred thousand.

For this thesis, I adopt the following definition of a Haitian migrant worker in the Dominican Republic: a Haitian woman born in Haiti who has come to the Dominican Republic to work, no matter how many years she has lived in the Dominican Republic, and her offspring. It is largely arbitrary because many Haitians, although born in Haiti, have lived their lives in the Dominican Republic. Many feel they have emigrated permanently, although they are not Dominican citizens. Their situation is analogous to Mexicans in the United States or Algerians and Moroccans in France, who, although they are not citizens of their country of adoption, do not intend, for a variety of reasons, to return to their country of origin. A more recent census taken in 1991 suggests that there may be two hundred and forty-five thousand Haitian migrant workers in the Dominican Republic (male and female), not including Dominicans of Haitian parentage (Corten and Duarte, 1995: 107). This suggests that several thousand women come every year to work in the

Dominican Republic.

Apart from the accuracy of the above calculations, the sizeable Haitian presence in a country of about seven and a half million inhabitants has caused many social scientists to examine this migration from a variety of angles, ranging from economic development and political relations of the neighbouring states to state formation and cultural identity. The bulk of this research has focussed largely on the sugar industry and its disenfranchised Haitian labour force. Despite a copious literature on the plight of the male Haitian migrant worker, Haitian women crossing the same border are largely ignored by researchers. To my knowledge, there is but one study about Haitian women in the Dominican Republic.

In 1991, Seanida Jansen and Cecilia Millan published their ground breaking research, *Género, Trabajo y Etnia en los Bateyes Dominicanos* (*Gender, Work and Ethnicity in the Dominican Bateys*¹). This comprehensive account of women's experiences in the sugar industry sheds the first light on the lives and work of women in Dominican *bateys*, and challenges several assumptions of previous studies (Jansen and Millan, 1991).² To convey the

¹ Batey (sugar plantation).

² The book is not translated into English. Interestingly, that research was produced with the financial assistance of a Canadian NGO, OCSD (*Organisation canadienne pour la solidarité et de développement*), in collaboration with the *Programa de estudios de la mujer* of the Instituto tecnológico

experience of women in the *bateys*, Jansen and Millan interviewed 116 women in the eastern and the southern regions of the Dominican Republic, the two major sugar growing areas.

Research Focus and Scope

As Jansen and Millan only explore the lives of Haitian migrant women who live in the *bateys*, it seemed appropriate to examine the life and work of migrant Haitian women in other types of communities as well. Not surprisingly, almost all Haitian female migrants are employed in the informal sector of the Dominican economy as farm labourers, domestics, petty retail merchants or prostitutes, mostly in the Dominican countryside.

As a feminist anthropologist working in the field of development, a primary focus of my work was exploring the lives of these women to better understand the strategies they employ to ensure the survival of their families, and to discover the economic contributions they make to the Dominican and Haitian economies. Another was exploring the role of gender as a defining variable that shaped these women's choices and experiences as migrant workers.

Feminists in the field of anthropology have long not been content with

de Santo Domingo. I only became aware of the existence of this book once in the Dominican Republic.

theoretical frameworks that only consider kinship, ritual, economics and gender in terms of their construction and experience through culture. Instead, theoretical frameworks should be formulated in terms of how economics, kinship and ritual are experienced and structured through gender (Moore, 1988: 9). Furthermore, feminist anthropologists can contribute to both the fields of anthropology and development by detailing how gender, class, colonialism and race fuse to shape and structure human experience. Feminist anthropology and development do not limit themselves to uncovering systems of oppression but strive to highlight the role of gender in every social interaction.

Since both feminist theory and politics must infuse any project of thoroughly transforming social structures to achieve equality (Dagenais, 1987: 20), this entails exploring issues such as domination, power, resistance and agency. At first, feminist approaches focused mainly on mass social or political movements, union organizing, nationalist or liberation struggles, peasant and working class movements as sites of resistance and empowerment. However, the complexity and immense variability of social, economic and political forms of oppression and women's responses to them emerged, requiring feminists to revisit some of their assumptions. Women's struggles needed to be addressed at the level of everyday life, since resistance, even agency, are not invariably identified through organized movements.

Resistance emerges “in the very gaps, fissures, and silences of hegemonic narratives” and agency “is thus figured in the minute, day-to-day practices and struggles of third world women” (Mohanty, 1991: 38). Resistance, as Aptheker (1989) aptly demonstrates, is also about “creating the conditions necessary for life” and women “expanding the limits and restrictions imposed upon them” (169).

The exploration of the survival strategies of migrant Haitian women's raises important lines of inquiry concerning domination, resistance and agency. A paramount question centres on how we conceive these strategies and the women involved: are Haitian female migrant workers powerless victims, or, are they actively resisting – even if by their surviving marginalization – their exploitation? I begin with the proposition that migration can be, in itself, a form of resistance. Migration remains the quintessential survival strategy of the poor. Hence, unravelling women's strategies for survival through the migratory experience allows us to both uncover systems of oppression and understand the various ways individuals manoeuvre within these systems. As anthropologist James Scott suggests (1985: 42), there must be a recognition that within the parameters of global and local structures, human beings fashion their own responses, based on their own experiences, interpretation, histories and realities. As Scott (1990: 77) argues so eloquently, even the unorganized, self-interested acts of oppressed people can have a powerful

impact on economic and political systems and cause change even of revolutionary proportion.³ So while there may be little Haitian migrant workers can do on an individual basis against the existing social order, economic and political structures, there are certain options for some degree of manoeuvre. The aggregate of individual responses to these forces, as meek or insignificant as they may appear, can provide the impulse for change. In reality, Haitian migration undoubtedly tangibly and intangibly affects the Dominican Republic at various levels – demographically, economically, politically, socially and culturally (Jansen and Milan, 1991: 38).

A second fundamental issue concerns how feminists can best contribute to making the voiceless tangible subjects of history? Migration literature (and sometimes even feminist writings) perennially fails to incorporate the personal experiences of women, focusing instead on structural narratives. Absent of real subjects, such research often fails to account for the active quality of the migratory experience, thereby cloaking the dynamics of human agency and revealing a fragmented view of social reality. Focussing on the personal narratives and testimonials of 12 Haitian women migrant workers

³ Scott uses the examples of the French and Russian Revolutions, and points out that in both cases the peasants or workers involved did not set out to change the social order but to improve their working conditions (1990: 77). In the case of Russia, for instance, the downfall of the Tsarist regime was accelerated by the massive departure of thousands and thousands of soldiers who self-indulgently, individually, in an unorganized fashion threw down their arms and headed home. The soldiers knew that if they stayed at the front, they would miss the chance to gain from the land seizures breaking out in the countryside (1985: 293).

and their families provides the basis for a less abridged version of social reality.

By delving into some of the details of these women's daily struggles, perhaps this research can modestly advance the project Jansen and Millan initiated: to redress the invisibility of migrant Haitian women workers in the Dominican Republic. As well, this work addresses concerns first expressed by the distinguished Dominican historian Frank Moya Pons, who posits that social scientists have now exhausted researching the sugar industry; now it is the time to turn to other aspects of Haitian migration to the Dominican Republic (Moya Pons, 1993: 32). Even if the present study on Haitian migrant women workers in the Dominican Republic constitutes only a very modest contribution, exploring the experiences of Haitian migrant women outside the *bateys* sets out a different perspective to this complex phenomenon, and perhaps will foster further inquiries.

Thesis Organization

Chapters One and Two address methodological and theoretical issues about undertaking feminist research in the Third World, particularly in the Caribbean. Cognizant that knowledge is socially situated, and that research can be more objectively conducted without aiming for or claiming to be value-free (Mies, 1983: 122; Harding, 1991: 159), Chapter One outlines my

evolution as a feminist anthropologist and development worker. A brief overview of the treatment of women in the literature on Haitian migration to the Dominican Republic is followed by a summary discussion about methodology, including some of the vagaries of doing cross-cultural research from a feminist perspective.

Chapter Two focusses on developing an adequate theoretical research framework. A brief overview projects the trajectory of feminist debates in the fields of development and anthropology. In addition, such analytical tools as the sexual division of labour, the relationship between production and reproduction, waged and unwaged labour, and the international gendered division of labour are examined. This serves to better grasp the nature of women's economic activity and its value and to explain their marginalization as workers, an issue that I discuss in chapters three and four. Against this backdrop, the issue of race in gender analysis is then explored. Given that my research takes place in a cross-cultural and cross-racial context, it is essential to critically analyse the issue of race and its implications, particularly for feminist anthropology. I then turn to issues relating to households and migration. The household offers a unique vantage point to analyse the migratory experience and women's survival strategies but, as we shall see, it is not without its problems as an analytical category. The final section of the chapter briefly explores the nature of everyday resistance, beginning with

James Scott's splendid analysis of power and resistance.

Chapter Three provides a historical overview of political and economic development in Haiti and the Dominican Republic to underline the structural causes of Haitian migration, as well as the origin and composition of the Haitian migrant population in the Dominican Republic. Then an analysis of the racial division of labour within the sugar industry lays bare the dynamics of this migration.

Chapter Four focuses on the place of Haitian women in the Dominican labour structure, beginning with an examination of gender ideology in the sugar industry. This underpins the examination of how gender in the Dominican Republic is constructed, and its impact on women's work, notably the separation of the public and private spheres. Through this dichotomy, women have traditionally been designated as dependant and unproductive housewives. Thus, women remain largely confined to the informal sector, occupying the lowest paid jobs in a formal sector largely segregated by gender.

The focused life histories of twelve Haitian migrant women workers in Chapter Five provide a case study of how Haitian women resist economic marginalization and negotiate their daily survival in the Dominican Republic. Through the commonalities and differences of their personal

experiences, patterns of life emerge according to various factors that include socioeconomic background, education, legal status and language skills.

Through this exploration – and by letting women's voices to populate the text – Haitian migrant women workers in the Dominican Republic are acknowledged. I use the ethnographic present to represent the reality as it appeared to me during my visit, even though it is a bit awkward, as the circumstances in the women lives may have changed.

Chapter Six re-examines briefly Haitian migrant women's economic contribution to the Dominican and Haitian economy in light of the findings set out in the preceding chapters. It sets the links between personal and household survival strategies within the parameters of national and international economic systems. It also summarizes how Haitian migrant women workers resist exploitation in the Dominican Republic.

This research is a modest attempt to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on women, migration and work in the Caribbean by weaving a story of survival, resistance and agency rooted in the daily struggles of migrant women. It may also be useful to those collaborating with Haitian women to push back the confines of colonialism, imperialism, and race, class and gender oppression, and may stimulate further inquiries and provide one more platform to address their immediate needs.

CHAPTER ONE

The Elusive Female Migrant Worker

This introductory chapter addresses methodological issues concerning the undertaking of feminist research in the Third World, more particularly in the Caribbean. I first provide a brief literature review of Haitian migration to the Dominican Republic and its treatment of women. As Jansen and Millan (1991) note, beyond revealing a definite male bias, the silences and omissions evident in the bulk of this literature point to the need for further feminist research to allow women's experiences of migration to emerge. What methodological approach would most adequately concur with a feminist analysis? This is the question that I attempt to address through the second section of this chapter. I then discuss the methodological approach that I have taken to conduct this research with its limitations and implications. As I believe that research is influenced by one's place in the world, before probing these questions, I briefly summarize my trajectory, as a feminist anthropologist and development worker, to reveal some of my political beliefs and assumptions and explain the genesis of this research project.

Making Connections

Social justice has long been a preoccupation of mine. The brutal treatment

and destruction of indigenous populations the world over remain particularly disturbing. The oppression and exploitation of people in all its forms – political, racial, economic or gender-based – have always been a source of motivation and has influenced my work in international development. Growing up in Quebec with a father keenly interested in history and archeology steered me toward studies in anthropology as a teenager. Naturally, the history of the American continent has always been of special interest taking me first into the history of the Aboriginal people in North America, the Inca, Aztec and Mayan civilizations and the impact of colonization on them. As I travelled to Latin America in the early eighties, this awareness fast forwarded to the contemporary political situation in Latin America. Inexorably, human rights issues materialised as the dictatorships in a number of countries, particularly Chile, Argentina, Guatemala and El Salvador spawned many tens of thousands of refugees, many of whom settled in Canada. Haiti, of course, stood apart but visible among the most repressive and risibly corrupt regimes on the continent. In the early 1980s, Haitians were a highly visible group in Quebec as the struggle for democracy in Haiti became an issue for social justice committees and for international development NGOs in Quebec.

My interest in feminism developed in parallel. While I have been keenly interested in feminism and women's rights from adolescence and made it the

focus of my academic pursuits, my first real involvement with a feminist issue occurred while I was studying anthropology and living in Vancouver, B.C. The 1980s was the decade when violence against women was uncovered in Canada. In Vancouver, *Rape Relief* was clearly the leading voice and centre dealing with the issue, running a help line for battered women and victims of sexual assault, as well as operating a shelter for battered women and their children. During the period between 1982-1984 when I volunteered at the shelter, the predominant issue was violence against women in pornography, particularly the expanding video business. I recall participating in a number of demonstrations before a particular chain of video stores. Also at this time I became involved with an association of women in non-traditional trades upon starting work as an apprentice carpenter with an architect friend turned contractor.

I left Canada in 1984 to work in an international development education program for Canadian youth in Latin America and Asia. While gender was not the focus of my work, I raised gender issues as much as possible. Upon my return, I lived in Montreal for a couple of years, and was involved in public education work about Central America. While Haiti was not the focus of my work, information on the evolving situation was abundant in the French speaking media. As the situation progressed and the Duvaliers' regime wound down in the mid eighties, there were reports daily on the situation in

all the major media and community radio. Interest in Haiti remains high in Quebec, as in the rest of Canada, and has received considerable press attention over the last ten years.

For the last seven years I have worked primarily on gender issues, alternatively at the international, national (Canadian) and local levels. In 1990, I became program officer for the Latin America program at *MATCH International*. The mandate of this development agency was to support overseas women's initiatives, focusing on themes such as violence against women and gender and development. In 1992, I started my Masters degree. That same year, *MATCH* provided funding to the *Núcleo de Apoyo*, a small Dominican NGO working on issues of violence against women.¹ The *Núcleo's* program included psychological support and legal representation for women in violent relationships, as well as para-legal workshops for women to act as resource persons in their communities. The *Núcleo de Apoyo* also collaborated with a number of primary schools on the issue of child sexual abuse.

In 1994, my monitoring visit to the Dominican Republic explored the possibility of expanding *MATCH's* Caribbean program to that country and

¹ While *MATCH's* programming did not include the Dominican Republic at the time, for reasons too long to explain here, it had decided to make an exception and support the *Núcleo de Apoyo*.

perhaps Haiti to better reflect the language diversity of the Caribbean. The *Núcleo's* project was the only project in *MATCH's* Caribbean program in a non English speaking Caribbean country. Haiti and the Dominican Republic have always been in a peculiar situation in the Caribbean region. It has been difficult for organizations such as the *Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA)* to adequately respond to the needs or represent the views of women's groups of non-English speaking Caribbean nations given the differences in languages and the lack of resources. Feminists in the Dominican Republic have maintained much closer links to women's groups in Central and South America than with their Caribbean sisters. Haiti has been much more isolated in the region because of its status as a French speaking nation, the repressive nature of its political regime and its dismal economic situation.

When I visited the Dominican Republic in 1994, I asked Susi Pola, who was then the coordinator of the *Núcleo de Apoyo*, to arrange for me to meet with various women's groups. During that visit I met with representatives from a variety of organizations, including *CIPAF (Centro de Información para la Acción Femenina)*, one of the most prominent and well established feminist research centres in Latin America. I also met with representatives of small NGOs, one of which was the *Centro de Trabajo Popular*, a small non-governmental organization working with marginalized communities in and

around Santiago. Most of the CTP's work focuses on community organizing and, while it does not work exclusively with women, many of its activities are oriented towards women.

The CTP also worked with five Haitian communities settled in the area, on former sugar estates near Esperanza, about forty kilometres west of Santiago in the Cibao region. The Cibao stands on a plateau and its high valleys are more suited to grow coffee, fruit and vegetable than sugar but until a decade ago, several sugar plantations extended west of Santiago, supplying cane to the now defunct Esperanza *ingenio*.² When the government shut many unproductive *ingenios*, former Dominican and Haitian sugar workers settled there. Because of its proximity and direct road link to Haiti, the region has long been a central distribution point for undocumented³ workers for the sugar industry whose labour movements are conditioned by seasonal requirements in other agricultural sectors (Murphy, 1991: 89). Despite the decline in sugar production in that region, it is still a pole of attraction for both male and female Haitian labourers working in coffee, rice, fruit and

² *Ingenios* are sugar refineries. Each of the sugar cane growing areas might have one of several such refineries. La Romana, owned until recently by the US conglomerate Gulf and Western, is of the largest sugar refineries and plantations in the Dominican Republic. In the early 1980s, it employed more than twenty thousand workers, eighty to ninety percent of whom were Haitian cane cutters.

³ Due to the lack of record keeping in the Haitian countryside, peasants, who represent a large proportion of the Haitian migrant population, do not usually own a birth certificate, let alone a valid Haitian passport. Therefore, most of them truly come to the Dominican Republic undocumented. *Anba fil* (literally, under the wires) is an expression used for Haitian workers who enter the Dominican Republic through the fields, avoiding official border crossings.

vegetable production.

During the 1994 visit, the *CTP's* staff took me to Libertad, one of the Haitian communities with which it works. This brief visit gave me a glimpse into the life of Haitian migrant workers in the Dominican Republic who appeared to manage their survival on a day-to-day basis. The unsanitary conditions and the overcrowding of Libertad filled me with sorrow for people who did not appear much better off in the Dominican Republic than they had been in Haiti. I still remember one woman who took me aside to show me her family's cardboard shack, barely large enough for an old mattress on a raised platform, and just enough space in front of it (about one metre wide) for her to crouch and cook on an open coal fire. An old piece of fabric hung in the door opening. What impressed me beyond the obvious destitution was the evident care the woman took in keeping her little shack in order. The few utensils and eating vessels she owned were lined up against the wall and the ragged sheets were neatly spread on the bed with the family's clothes piled up in a corner.

Later, a small group of women gathered to talk. Naturally, the women talked about their harsh living conditions and the meagre earnings they got for backbreaking work as agricultural labourers. They also talked about their fear

of deportation.⁴ They spoke with nostalgia about Haiti while acknowledging that earning a living there was even more difficult for them than in the Dominican Republic. The Haitian women also talked with pride about the association the *CTP* had helped them create. The association provided a forum where they could discuss community problems and find solutions collectively, assisted by *CTP* staff. *CTP* also facilitated access to funding for community projects.

As I reflected later on what the Haitian women had been telling me about the harshness and precariousness of their life, I was inspired to make their struggle for survival the focus of my MA research project.

Real Workers Are Male

Upon my return to Canada, I began to search through the available literature for information on Haitian migrant women workers in the Dominican Republic. This proved a very frustrating process, and it was startling not to find a single article on the subject. Searches into the women and migration, human rights or women and work literature also proved unsuccessful. While literature on migration abounds and literature on Haitian migration to the Dominican Republic exists, it appeared that little had been written on

⁴ The latest deportation campaign occurred in 1991 and some of them had lost most of their possessions as a result. However, the army deports Haitians on an individual basis regularly.

the particular experiences of Haitian women as migrant workers in the Dominican Republic.⁵

During my search for this information, I poured over the literature about Haitian migration to the Dominican Republic. The Dominican sugar industry, I learned, had been the main destination for Haitian workers in that country. As the plight of Haitian workers in the Dominican sugar plantations became clearer, the lack of information about Haitian women became acute and I realized the necessity of travelling to the Dominican Republic if I was to complete my research project.

The Dominican sugar industry, I discovered, began to attract international attention in the late 1970s, when the London based human rights organization *Anti-Slavery Society* (ASI)⁶ presented a report to the United Nations based on the Supplementary Convention of 1956 on the abolition of slavery. This report exposed the severe exploitation of Haitian workers in the

⁵ My hopes rose again I when discovered one group in Montreal working for the rights of Haitian workers in the Dominican Republic, the *Comité québécois pour la reconnaissance des droits des travailleurs haïtiens en République dominicaine*. I visited the group's office several times but despite the best efforts of its coordinator to accommodate me and give me access to the Comité's resources, the many documents I perused yielded no substantial information on Haitian women in the Dominican Republic. A few paragraphs in a newsletter was all I was able to find about the situation of Haitian women in the Dominican Republic. I tried unsuccessfully to identify other Canadian NGOs who might direct me to other sources of information but most Canadian NGOs had pulled out of the Dominican Republic in the wake of the Canadian government's deep cuts in its overseas development assistance.

⁶ Now operating under the name of *Anti-Slavery International* (ASI), it was formerly known as the *Anti-Slavery Society for the Protection of Human Rights*.

Dominican sugar plantations (or *bateys*), and denounced the appalling working and living conditions as akin to slavery (ASI, 1979). The report told of forced labour; work camps where Haitians cut cane at starvation wages for 12 to 14 hours a day under armed guard; of inhuman living conditions - cramped and filthy barracks with no electricity or running water; and of workers brutalised and often imprisoned at night. The sale of workers,⁷ a trade abetted by a web of corrupt officials on both sides of the border, was also exposed (Plant, 1987: 72-82).

The Anti-Slavery report led to several inquiries on the Dominican sugar industry and its disenfranchised Haitian migrant labour force. In 1981, investigative journalist Maurice Lemoine published *Sucre amer: Esclaves aujourd'hui dans les Caraïbes* - translated into English in 1985 under the title *Bitter Sugar*, a momentous book, based on clandestine interviews with Haitian workers on both sides of the border. *Bitter Sugar* wove fiction and history into a vivid portrayal of the recruitment practices in Haiti and of the conditions endured by Haitian workers in the *bateys*. The ASI report, Lemoine's book and other disturbing studies on the plight of the Haitian migrant worker in the Dominican Republic prompted the International

⁷ Haitians are not literally bought and sold. However, from 1952 to 1986, the Dominican government had a contract with the government of Haiti and had to pay a fee for each worker delivered to state owned plantations. Once enlisted, Haitian workers became the captors of those who hired them. They were virtually held as prisoners on the plantations. Frequently, scores of Haitian labourers were also kidnapped at the border and diverted to private plantations by corrupt army officials.

Labour Organization (ILO) to send a fact finding mission to the Dominican Republic, in 1983, that confirmed many of the above allegations (Plant, 1987: 82).

Subsequently, numerous inquiries have documented the extent of the exploitation and the squalid conditions under which Haitian migrant workers in the sugar industry toil and live and offered historical, political, economic and cultural explanations for their plight. Through these various studies, it would appear that a comprehensive account of this migration emerges. Most researchers take a structural approach to account for this phenomenon although sometimes individual push/pull factors, such as the need for impoverished peasants to amass capital or repay debts are also mentioned (Murphy, 1991). Essentially, explanations for Haitian migration to the Dominican Republic rest on historical and economic factors that have led to different patterns of development in the two neighbouring states. Many researchers agree that the Dominican sugar industry is an example of capitalist production in the periphery that relies on the extreme exploitation of workers. The relentless agrarian crisis in Haiti, aided by a state apparatus designed as a vehicle for accumulation for a very small elite, is viewed as the major reason Haitian peasants emigrate (see, for example: Grasmuck [1983]; Corten [1986, 1993]; Moya Pons et al [1986]; Castor [1987, 1992]; Plant [1987]; Del

Castillo and Murphy [1987]; Murphy [1991]; Moya Pons [1993]; Lozano [1993]).⁸

While they provide an excellent overview of the sugar industry and its marginalized Haitian labour force, most of these studies totally ignore the experiences of Haitian women in the Dominican Republic. Only two of the above studies (Moya Pons et al, 1996; Murphy, 1991) discuss (briefly) the role of women in the sugar industry. Moya Pons' monumental study, for instance, entitled *El Batey*, the most exhaustive study of the Dominican sugar industry to date, hardly addresses the economic role of women. The explanation given is that women are not directly integrated into the sugar industry that employs male workers (Murphy, 1991: 88). Women are rarely and only marginally involved in plantation work. This work is usually limited to the off season and consists mostly of planting, weeding or applying fertilizers and women only earn 50% to 75% of what men are paid for the same work (Moya Pons, 1986: 94).

As to the work women perform, both paid and unpaid, in the sugar industry, it is portrayed as insignificant. Women's economic contribution through unpaid work is not fully acknowledged and certainly not valued. Women are defined as men's dependants. Consequently, they are perceived to be a drain

⁸ For an extensive bibliography on the relation between Haiti and the Dominican Republic and the sugar industry and its use of foreign labour, see Moya Pons, 1993.

on resources:

For the cane cutters, families represent an economic drain rather than a potential source of income... The characteristics of the woman [sic] in the CEA plantations are unemployment, economic dependency, [they] are viewed as with less appreciation than the man, [they] are considered as simply a sexual reproducer of manual labour and [social] reproducer of manual labour through domestic activities. (Moya Pons et al, 1986: 95, as translated in Murphy, 1991: 119)⁹

The literature provides very little detail on women's income earning activities except prostitution, which is addressed briefly by Moya Pons et al (1986: 70-1 and 96-7). Murphy, an anthropologist who has studied the Dominican sugar industry extensively, summarises the situation of women as follows:

Those few women who are economically active tended to be employed in low paying positions as domestic servants, or self employed as small scale, informal merchants. (Murphy 1991: 119)

Cultural attitudes toward women and work in the Dominican Republic are identified as the main explanation why they have a hard time finding paid work in the sugar industry. While Haitian women in Haiti are fully integrated in agricultural production, Moya Pons writes, Dominican attitudes toward women and work, particularly poor women, are different:

⁹ It was more convenient to use Murphy's translation than to attempt to translate the original text, to which I also have access.

The answer is not found in a transformation of her aspirations through trans-culturation but in a change of modes caused by the limited job opportunities for women in the Dominican plantations. There are few economic possibilities for the female population within the cane society. She is not offered jobs because it is considered that work associated with the cane: "is not work for a woman." (Moya Pons et al, 1986: 95, as translated in Murphy 119-20)

The issue of migration as an economic strategy for women is not satisfactorily addressed and very little attention is paid to their migration patterns or to their motives for migration. According to Murphy (1991: 106), given the lack of work opportunities for women in the sugar industry, a number of Haitian women apparently first cross the border in search of family members, with the secondary intention of finding a spouse. Murphy does acknowledge, however, that many Haitian women who cross the border are not attracted to the plantations but are looking for opportunities in other sectors (Murphy, 1991: 107). Unfortunately, women's economic activities inside or outside the sugar industry are discussed no further.

As noted earlier, Jansen and Millan's study on women in the *bateys* sheds much needed light on women's experiences and fills an immense gap in the literature concerning women and the sugar industry. Using a feminist framework, their study supports the thesis that Haitian women contribute economically to the sugar industry, both through their paid and unpaid work,

and examines how gender and racial ideology dictate women's work and life in the *bateys*. Jansen and Millan (1991: 19-26) agree with Moya Pons and Murphy that the gender ideology rife in the Dominican Republic marginalizes women as workers. They also agree with their male colleagues that the division of labour in the sugar industry is governed by a racial ideology that exploits Haitian workers to the extreme. The sugar industry's division of labour along racial and cultural lines, they maintain, is the most extreme manifestation of a race ideology that justifies relations of domination, exploitation and subordination within Dominican society (Jansen and Millan, 1991: 19-26).

Jansen and Millan provide socio-economic data such as age, education, marital status, attitudes toward reproductive health, and health problems women experience in the *bateys*. Women's economic activities are also explored: unpaid domestic work and income earning activities; paid and unpaid work as agricultural workers in the sugar industry; access to credit; and, the work profile of husbands; patterns of consumption and income distribution within marriage. Jansen and Millan argue that women are indeed integrated in the sugar industry, both through their paid and unpaid work. They also challenge some previous assumptions, notably concerning women's dependence on men, the level of economic activity among women through income generating activities, as well as the significance of this work

for their own survival and that of their families.

To expand upon the work of Jansen and Millan, it seemed appropriate that I explore the migratory experiences of Haitian women in other types of communities as well. However, I had to wrestle with how to proceed with this project from then on. The following section outlines this process.

Toward a Feminist Methodology

Engaging in participatory or action oriented research is a privileged feminist research methodology (Mies, 1983; Dagenais, 1987; Acosta-Belén, 1993). Ideally, such research is undertaken in collaboration with the women directly affected by the issues examined. Feminist research, Mies suggests, should not consist of abstract analyses and prescriptions. Rather, researchers should participate with those they seek to empower in defining the issues, theories and methodologies (1983: 125-9). The research should be a process of consciousness raising, and women who were previously objects, become subjects of their own research and action. Such research, grounded in historical materialism, should also contribute to the alleviation of women's oppression, with women's daily life experiences as the starting point for analysis.

The need to address basic survival issues, Acosta-Belén writes, ranging from

hunger and malnutrition to political violence and human rights violations, partially explains why action research at the grassroots level is so crucial to Latin American, Caribbean and other Third World feminist scholars (1993: 176-7). Hence, participatory and action oriented research with marginalized groups is favoured (Dagenais, 1987: 22-23). The Sistren Theatre Collective in Jamaica is a good example of this. Having started as an action oriented research project with poor unemployed Jamaican women with little formal education and no training, the research project led to the creation of a theatre group which both generated income for women and raised consciousness, bringing a critical women's perspective on issues such as poverty, unemployment and violence against women (MATCH International Centre, 1990: 48). Qualitative research, then, is the preferred method for feminist research (Mies, 1983: 122); since it pays attention to the individuals, and can be deployed to reveal links between the personal and broader economic and political systems (Dagenais, 1993: 113-15).

The Not So Ideal Reality

While desirable, participatory research is not always feasible, requiring both substantial time and financial resources, particularly for research in the Third World. My research has no pretension to serve as a model for participatory feminist research. Various limitations inherent in my project, not the least of which were financial and temporal, precluded engaging in the type of

participatory action research that many feminists advocate. Unfortunately, financial and time constraints allowed me to travel, at my own expense, to the Dominican Republic for only six weeks in the spring of 1995. It must be noted that I undertook this Master's degree while working more or less full time since the start in 1992.

Because I did not have the time and resources to conduct a participatory research project, it did not seem possible to me to engage Haitian migrant women workers in discussions about my theoretical and methodological perspectives. I turned to my Dominican colleagues to discuss the goals and methodology of my research and identify sources of written documentation about Haitian female migrant workers. I approached the *Centro de Trabajo Popular*'s staff, whom I had met in 1994, to ask if it would be feasible to conduct a very modest field research project and if they would agree to support this endeavour. I explained (via fax) my goal and proposed methodology. Their immediate and positive response was very much appreciated and gave me renewed hope. They offered to review my proposal, to direct me toward other organizations and resources, to facilitate access to Haitian communities, to act as intermediaries and interpreters, and to provide logistical support such as transportation and access to office equipment. Without their generous support, this research would not exist.

My attempts at identifying documentation in the Dominican Republic from Canada were futile as it was quite difficult to communicate with the Dominican Republic. The frequent power failures in the Dominican Republic made it difficult to communicate by fax. The high cost of international telephone communication also made that mode of communication prohibitive and very few Dominicans have internet capability. I decided to wait for my visit to the Dominican Republic to further discuss the goals and methodology with them and look for material relevant to my research.

Once in the Dominican Republic, I reviewed my methodology with my colleagues at the *CTP* and discussed it with several people I met in the course of my stay, all of whom provided encouragement. I made one presentation to a small group of students and professors at the university in Santiago. While everyone reacted favourably to the study's focus and methodology, some lamented that I only had six weeks to conduct the field work. My short stay would not allow me to really appreciate the different realities in the various regions of the country. As noted earlier, the North is not an important sugar cane growing area. Consequently, Haitian populations are smaller in the North than in other areas. On the other hand, the agricultural sector may be more diversified and more apt to provide work for women than other areas where sugar cane is grown intensively. Also, attitudes toward Haitians and employment opportunities outside of the sugar industry vary from one

region to the other (Sergia Galván, MUDHA, 1995, personal communication).

My Dominican colleagues were hardly surprised that I was having difficulty finding written information on Haitian women living in the Dominican Republic. Several women commented that the Dominican women's movement was not paying enough attention to the plight of the women of Haitian origin in their country. The sole work on the subject anyone suggested was that of Senaida Jansen and Cecilia Millan, but they suggested contacting a number of organizations that might help. The idea of a research project that would shed more light on the experiences of the migrant women workers from Haiti in the Dominican Republic was welcomed, as was my offer to share its results and send copies of my thesis to various Dominican organizations.

Only one person expressed reservations about the methodology of my research. She felt that it was presumptuous on my part to maintain that Haitian women contributed to the Dominican economy without having any supporting quantitative data. This led to an interesting debate on validity of qualitative versus quantitative research. Without recreating the debate here or the arguments that feminists have put forth so often on the value of women's work, suffice to say that we both agreed that a combination of qualitative and quantitative research would provide a more complete account.

At any rate, quantitative research was out of the question as far as my research was concerned. My goal was not to quantify Haitian women's economic contribution to the Dominican Republic's economy but to render it visible and acknowledge the resourcefulness women deploy to ensure their own, and their dependants, survival.

Data Collection in the Dominican Republic

I divided my time in the Dominican Republic between searching for written materials and conducting interviews. As I was based in Santiago, living with a Dominican family in a lower class neighbourhood near the city centre, my search for written materials required several trips to the capital, Santo Domingo, where most NGOs are located, roughly two and a half hours away by bus. I initially spent time looking for written materials at the universities and through NGOs.¹⁰ While there, I contacted several NGOs, the Haitian Embassy and two universities in search of information on the elusive Haitian female migrant worker. Fortunately, I was able to stay with friends of my CTP colleagues who generously opened their house for me. This was extremely fortunate because, unlike during my first visit to the Dominican Republic, I had to make my own contacts with a variety of NGOs and arrange appointments which often involved a certain amount of waiting.

¹⁰ I searched for documents in the libraries of the two Universities: Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo and the Instituto tecnológico de Santo Domingo as well as those of NGOs (see list in Appendix C). I also contacted individuals and NGOs, some of whom I interviewed. In Santiago, I searched for written materials at the Pontificada Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra.

One of my first tasks was to find a copy of Jansen and Millan's book on Haitian women in the *bateys*. Although a number of people knew about this study, it was not readily available. The only place where I could obtain a copy was at the Women's Studies Department at one of Santo Domingo's universities. Besides the Jansen and Millan study, very little written documentation exists on Haitian female migration to the Dominican Republic. Several Dominican non-governmental organizations do work with Haitian communities and with women to some extent. However, most of the information they produce focuses on the sugar industry and the male plantation worker.¹¹ Some of these organizations do reach out to Haitian women with programs and activities but do not undertake formal research projects on these women.

Even organizations that work specifically with women had little written documentation on the subject. One such organization is the *Movimiento de Mujeres Dominico-Haitianas (MUDHA)*. Created in 1983, MUDHA is one of two organizations working exclusively with Haitian and Dominico-Haitian¹²

¹¹ The most active Dominican NGOs on this issue include CEDMA (Centro de Desarrollo, Democracia y Medio Ambiente), SSID (Servicio Social de Iglesias Dominicanas), UJEDO (Union de Juventud Ecuménica Dominicana), COTEDO (Comisión de Trabajo Ecuménico Dominicano), IDAC (Instituto de Acción Comunitaria), APROFED (Asociación Pro-Fundación Estudios Dominicanos) and CCDH (Centro Cultural Dominico-Haitiano).

¹² For a variety of reasons that will be explored in Chapter Three, many migrant workers have opted to remain in the Dominican Republic and had children. While some of them acquire Dominican citizenship, the vast majority has no legal status as residents, immigrants or citizens. MUDHA (Dominico-Haitian Women's Movement) was created by Dominican women born of Haitian parents.

women in the Dominican Republic, raising awareness on their issues, and offering practical help on health and legal matters to improve their living conditions and legal status. *MUDHA* is also active in international fora, bringing attention to the plight of women in the Dominican *bateys* and the violation of their human rights. Much of *MUDHA*'s efforts are geared toward the *bateys* where conditions are the worst. While most of its published material consists of newsletters, *MUDHA* also produced a limited survey on the legal status of Haitian and Dominico-Haitian families in five *bateys*. To date, limited resources have prevented *MUDHA* from undertaking research outside the sugar industry.

The *Instituto de Investigación y Acción Jurídica (INVIAJ)*¹³ is another organization working for the human rights of Haitian women in the Dominican Republic. Created in 1994, *INVIAJ* has been working with other Dominican NGOs and lawyers to amend the Dominican migration legislation and to improve the situation for undocumented Haitian and Dominico-Haitian women. *INVIAJ* also works with women in *bateys* to inform them of their rights and try to help them obtain Dominican citizenship for their children. In 1995, *INVIAJ* undertook a study on the legal status of 150 women in four *bateys*. Like *MUDHA*, *INVIAJ* produces newsletters about the condition of women, focussing its attention on the *bateys*. Neither of these organizations has produced studies

¹³ *INVIAJ*: Institute for Legal Research and Action

on Haitian women outside the sugar industry.

Scope of the Field Work

Given the short period available to conduct my field work, it was essential to focus both in terms of its geographical location and scope. For logistical and practical reasons (and because my initial contacts resided in Santiago), it seemed natural to focus on Haitian communities with which the *CTP* worked or could facilitate contact. Therefore, some Haitian women were contacted through the *CTP*. Others, like the street vendors in the Santo Domingo market, were approached randomly. Those willing to participate were interviewed, and all participated voluntarily.

My *CTP* colleagues and I both agreed that conducting semi-structured interviews would be the best approach. We devised a questionnaire that Milagros Rosario of the *CTP* translated into Creole. Responding to open-ended questions, these women recounted the conditions that made them leave Haiti and those they found in the Dominican Republic; how they migrated, alone or as part of family units; how long they have been in the Dominican Republic; the paid and unpaid work they perform; their relationship with their family and community; their economic situation; as well as their status in the Dominican Republic. All the interviews were taped upon obtaining the women's permission.

The women who participated in this study worked either as agricultural labourers (Bernadette, Zénaïde, Germaine, Violaine) or as petty retail merchants (Liliane, Yvonne, Alice, Mirlande, Juliette, Mylène, Gisèle) except one woman who worked as a domestic servant (Pascale).¹⁴ One of these women had been a prostitute and agreed to talk about it. As the main focus of my study is on women who live outside the *bateys*, only two of these women lived in a *batey*.

Bernadette, Zénaïde, Germaine and Violaine all lived in Libertad and worked on farms nearby. Liliane and Yvonne also lived in Libertad but sold goods out of their homes to the residents of their community. Mirlande and Juliette lived in a *batey* about half way between Santiago and Puerto Plata and worked as petty retail merchants. Pascale lived and worked as a domestic in Santiago. Alice, Gisèle and Mylène were petty retail merchants who did business in Santo Domingo. By contrast to the women in the rural area who worked mostly out of their homes, the market women of Santo Domingo set up little stands on the sidewalks of the central market in the old city¹⁵ of Santo Domingo. Like other street merchants, they had to set up and take down their merchandise every day.

¹⁴ All the names have been changed to protect the identity of the women involved.

¹⁵ Zona colonial

During my stay, I spent three days in Libertad, made one visit to *batey* Baraguay and four to Santo Domingo for interviews and other research. My visits to Santo Domingo usually lasted a few days. I also made a visit to the Punta Fuera *bateys* near San Pedro Marcoris arranged through Altilde Loudor, a Haitian refugee who was working with a Dominico-Haitian NGO. There, I met with a group of women and spoke informally on a variety of issues including life in the *batey*, relations with the Dominican population and work opportunities for women. In Santo Domingo, I also met with a group of Haitian women who were creating an association for Haitian women in the Dominican Republic. Altide Loudor was the instigator and coordinator of that project. These were Haitian women and had lived many years in the Dominican Republic. They worked as petty retail merchants. They were hoping that their association would attract funding so that they could be a voice for Haitian women in the Dominican Republic and work to improve their situation.

For practical reasons, it was not convenient for me to stay in the communities where the Haitian women lived. With my very limited knowledge of Creole, I needed an interpreter to conduct interviews, though some women spoke some Spanish. The visit to *batey* Baraguay did not require an overnight stay. It was also not feasible to stay in Libertad given the lack of accommodation. It was easier to travel back and forth from Santiago either in the CTP's truck or

by bus with Milagros Rosario of the *CTP* who acted as my guide and interpreter. I did, however, spend one night in the house of a Dominican woman who lived at the edge of Libertad. Staying any longer would have been imposing too much on Dora, a woman in her fifties, who had to share her tiny bedroom with me. The next day, I accompanied Haitian women to a farm where they worked picking peas. By working alongside the women in the scorching sun, I could begin to appreciate the working conditions in the Dominican countryside.

The interviews were conducted in Creole. I took Creole classes at a cultural centre in Santiago once a week under the auspices of the *CTP*. These classes gave me the opportunity to familiarize myself with Creole and enabled me, at least, to greet Haitian people in their own language. I was also able to exchange a few sentences with the women being interviewed, ask some of the more simple questions such as their name, their age and the number of children they had, and understand, in a very limited way, their answers. This was eased by the fact that as my mother tongue is French, Creole is not a totally foreign language. Nevertheless, I had to rely on my interpreter to really understand what the women were saying. Being fluent in Spanish, I acquired some Creole through a Spanish/Creole dictionary and a grammar book that I studied at night and the weekends.

Being accompanied by a Creole speaking Dominican perhaps lessened the distance created by differences in nationality, culture, race and class. Not being accustomed to Dominicans speaking to them in their own language, the Haitian women warmed up to Milagros rapidly. Some of the women interviewed in Libertad knew her, since the *CTP* is involved with that community. So, while these women did not necessarily have regular contacts with her, the trust the organization had painstakingly built with the community over the years facilitated the interview process there.

Despite the friendly atmosphere of the interviews and the apparent openness of the women, I was aware of the limitations of the interview process in cross-cultural research. Cross-cultural research involves issues of structural inequalities and personal differences such as class, status, age, race and sexual orientation that influence both the process and outcome of the research (Dyck et al, 1995: 612). These issues were undoubtedly present in the research and became evident soon after I started my interviews with women in Libertad.

Undoubtedly, my presence (evidently a white woman from the North) in the Santo Domingo market and the two rural communities raised the curiosity of the people around. In Libertad, it led to an embarrassing situation that had to be resolved at the community level. As mentioned earlier, there were often bystanders during the interviews. The first day that I was doing interviews in

Libertad, some people overheard part of a conversation I had with one of the women. We were discussing the legal status of migrant workers and the problems associated with the lack of physical mobility due to the absence of proper documentation. We discussed the cost of a Haitian passport and a working permit, something that Haitian peasants definitely could not afford.¹⁶ After that conversation, apparently a rumour started to circulate that I was in Libertad to help some women obtain a passport. As there was a community association meeting that day, I was invited to dispel that fantasy and explain the purpose of my interviews. One man was not entirely satisfied with my response and demanded what assistance I could offer the community. One of the staff came to my rescue by suggesting that there was value in having the outside world know about their plight. After some discussion, the association members agreed, somewhat reluctantly, that there was value in my wanting to share with my fellow Canadians what I learned about them. I was able to resume my interviews with the women.

This incident shows that the residents of Libertad were not uncritically accepting my presence in their midst and were questioning my motives. Here I was, able to come from Canada to find out more about them, while the opposite would have been impossible, had they even wanted to. Naturally,

¹⁶ The Dominican law requires that foreign workers own a valid passport with a working permit. However, while it is publicly denounced, illegal migration is tolerated, if not encouraged by the Dominican State, as the illegal status of Haitian workers make them an easily exploitable workforce.

they wanted to know what a white person from Canada had to offer. The situation I experienced in Libertad, while uncomfortable, is not unusual. This type of incident in research situations has been described elsewhere (Mies, 1983: 136-8). It does raise, however, other questions such as the appropriateness for white Northern feminists to undertake cross-cultural research about women in the South. As one of the primary objectives of anthropology is to make sense of the immense diversity of human experience and how it is structured, this question has important implications. This issue will be discussed in the following chapter as it touches upon several issues at the core of feminist debates, not only at the methodological but also theoretical level.

To obtain additional information or clarify issues raised in my discussions with the Haitian women, I also interviewed several NGO workers. These interviews were usually quite informal and not recorded on tape. On most occasions, I took notes during these conversations and reconstructed them later, to the best of my ability. My discussions with Dora Eusebio of *INVIAJ*, Milagros Rosario and Mildred Dolores Mata of the *CTP* were very instructive. Milagros Rosario, for instance, spoke Creole fluently (one of very few Dominicans) and had been working with Haitian communities for nearly ten years. Other NGO workers, such as Sonia Pie of *MUDHA*, and Violeta Perez from the *CCDH* were Dominico-Haitian women who had been raised in the

bateys and shared many insights with me. Born and educated in the Dominican Republic, they spoke Spanish fluently, had Spanish names and had been exposed to Dominican culture all their life. Their unique vantage point proved invaluable.

Together, these women helped map the daily struggles of Haitian women in the Dominican Republic. In the course of my stay I talked to many people about my study, including a conversation with a man, on a bus, on his way to Haiti to recruit workers for the sugar industry; his stunning revelations are included in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER TWO

Women, Migration and Resistance

Researching Women

This chapter develops a suitable theoretical research framework to examine women's experiences of migration, particularly those of Haitian workers in the Dominican Republic. In addressing two major issues, this thesis first investigates the benign neglect or belittlement of Haitian women's economic contribution to both the Dominican and Haitian economies; and, then examines migration in the context of strategies Haitian women use to avoid economic marginalisation and to ensure the survival of their families. Throughout, the analysis considers how to treat these strategies and the women involved: are Haitian female migrant workers powerless victims or are they, by surviving marginalization, actively resisting the exploitation they are subjected to? This inquiry must then look at what feminists have learnt not only about women, work and migration but also about the nature of agency and resistance.

A brief overview of the trajectory of feminist debates in anthropology outlines analytical tools such as the sexual division of labour, the relationship between production and reproduction, as well as waged and unwaged labour

and the international gendered division of labour. This helps situate Haitian women's economic activity and its value, as well as explain their marginalization as workers, issues dealt with in more detail in Chapters Four and Five. This context helps to analyse Haitian migrant women workers' survival strategies, and how these strategies involve migration and are intrinsically linked to households – sometimes across borders. This question also warrants perusing recent theorizing about women and migration and exploring the nature of households, which offers a unique vantage – if not always a straightforward analytical category – to analyse the dynamics of migration and women's survival strategies. Feminist social scientists, particularly anthropologists, have raised a plethora of questions about households and women, as I briefly outline below.

This chapter also touches on the issue of race in feminist discourse since my research was conducted in a cross-cultural and cross-racial context. Race is an issue not to be ignored, as it goes to the core of the feminist project, raising critical questions about gender, class, colonialism and imperialism. It has direct implications for feminist anthropology, raising fundamental questions about the production of knowledge: “which must be considered in the context of the global hegemony of Western scholarship” (Mohanty, 1991a: 55), and of representation, particularly for Third World women. It queries whether it is legitimate for a feminist from the North to undertake research about women

from the South? While impossible within the scope of this thesis to completely address such a complex issue, some of the critical tensions of this intricate debate are broached.

Finally, this chapter explores the nature of everyday resistance and agency, starting from anthropologist James Scott's innovative analysis of power and resistance (1985, 1990). For oppressed peoples, Scott contends that resistance is often buried in the furrows of everyday life. The weak and powerless may, on the surface, appear to leave the rules of the dominant unchallenged but in fact they constantly, albeit covertly, challenge the boundaries of the permissible. This point is particularly relevant, given that women are often stereotyped as powerless victims of patriarchy. Under this vision, Third world women appear burdened even further by colonialism and imperialism and prisoners of tradition. Yet, another picture is starting to surface. Feminist scholars, like Mohanty (1991b), Aptheker (1989) and others, suggest, for instance, that resistance and agency emerge through the day-to-day practices and struggles of women. At times, the very act of survival must be viewed as resistance, when the very conditions necessary for life are threatened.

Women and Work

Scholarship on gender has expanded dramatically over the last quarter of a century, evolving into a varied body of knowledge, taking feminists through

different phases of theoretical debates and practices. Feminists have raised a myriad of new questions about women, problematizing bodies, identities, and agency while considering the gendered dynamics of global capitalism on social relations (Safa, 1995: 4). Despite advances in theory and practice in practically every field, including development and anthropology, issues relating to poverty or achieving equality remain atop feminist agendas around the world. The spectacular expansion of the capitalist system, combined with the intricacies of the global economy and its international division of labour, make these endeavours ever more daunting.

Feminists have studied the impact of capitalist expansion on social, political and economic relations and particularly on women. The failure to include gender in social and economic analysis, they argued, has often had disastrous effects on women. Caribbean feminists, for instance, have shown the negative impact of structural adjustment policies and the development of export processing zones on Caribbean women. For instance, failure to incorporate gender in the analysis of Caribbean economies and development policies has exacerbated women's economic situation, and prevented them from contributing to solve the problems facing Caribbean societies (Antrobus, 1988: 19). Similarly, feminist researchers have pointed out that to understand the impact of the global economy on Third World women, and on women in the Caribbean in particular, gender is but one factor to consider. As Mohammed

(1994: 144) points out, it makes little sense to understand the complexity of gender in the Caribbean without examining the nexus of class and race.

Feminist anthropologists have participated actively in the development of feminist theory and practice. They have often helped in advancing the debate on a variety of issues and have not shied away from tackling even the most contentious ones (Moore, 1988). In their own discipline, an initial task of feminist anthropologists was to uncover male bias. Much as ethnocentrism colours how anthropologists interpret other cultures in favour of one's own, male bias, feminists argued, tainted anthropologists' interpretation of the relationship between men and women (Moore, 1988: 4; see also: Golde, 1970; Gough, 1970; Rosaldo and Lamphere, 1974; Martin and Voorhies, 1975; Reiter, 1975, 1977; Lamphere, 1977). Feminist anthropologists have also rethought and reinterpreted data, and offered alternate perspectives on women's role and status (Draper, 1975; Friedl, 1975; Hiatt, 1974; Leacock, 1972, 1978; E. Morgan, 1972; Reed, 1975; Slocum, 1975; Tanner and Zihlman, 1976).

A further endeavour for feminist anthropologists was to reconceptualize gender as a principle of human social organization. The locus of oppression, it was first advanced, was to be found in the oppositional constructs of maleness and femaleness, nature/culture, private/public spheres, production/reproduction (see for example: Rosaldo and Lamphere, 1974;

Ardener, 1975; Reiter, 1975; Leacock and Nash, 1977). However, searching for the origins of women's subordination soon proved a pointless task, unsupported by cross-cultural data. Just as pre-feminist theories tended to ignore women's experience, initial feminist approaches to women's oppression sometimes wielded assumptions that produced theories that represented the experiences of Western women. Non-white and Third World critics promptly challenged assumptions of an ahistorical, universal unity between women based on a generalized and essentialist notion of subordination (Caulfield, 1980: 208).

In *The Use and Abuse of Anthropology*", Rosaldo (1980) insists that searching for the origins of women's subordination is a misguided journey to a theoretical impasse. Such exploration ignores the role of history and offers a primordial, trans-historical and essentially unchanging view of the world. She too initially advanced a universal domestic/public dichotomy hypothesis as the core of gender asymmetry, but later acknowledged its analytical limitations when confronted by the myriad of human interactions that compose social reality.

Explanations based on universal oppositional dichotomies, e.g., domestic versus the public sphere, rebound to biological arguments of the Victorian era, where the home was regarded as the "natural" place of women. This

discourse, derived from nineteenth century sociological tradition, invokes biological characteristics and “portray women as something other than the product of human action in concrete historical societies” (Rosaldo, 1980: 416). To always perceive the genders as dualistic opposites, with “woman” universally opposed to “man”, confines analysis to the innate differences between men and women, rather than enquiring how such differences are created by gender relations (Rosaldo, 1980: 401). Ultimately, it prevents us from asking and analyzing the significance of gender in the organization of human interactions, and, reciprocally, the significance of all social interactions to the construction of gender (Rosaldo, 1980: 415).

Feminist anthropologists have also made important contributions in changing the concept of work. Along with feminists in other fields, they have expanded the Marxist notion of productive labour to include women's role in work performed in the private sphere. Women's undervalued and invisible work in childbearing, nurturing, childrearing, feeding and clothing is considered, in feminist analysis, as economic activity necessary for the daily and generational reproduction of the labour force. Marxist feminists posited that women are alienated through their procreative role and lack of control over their own bodies, just as men are through wage labour (Jaggar, 1983). Labour then, can be productive, as it relates to the production of surplus value, as long as it can tap, extract, exploit and appropriate non-waged labour,

done mainly by women (Mies, 1985: 2).

Hence, a basic element of women's economic contribution, whether or not they manage to earn income, is unpaid domestic work, including preparing food, cleaning, washing, fetching water and gathering wood. This work ensures the maintenance of workers day after day, and lowers their labour cost. It also ensures the reproduction of the labour force. In the modern economy, employers no longer have to pay the biological or social reproduction of the labour force. It is left to the household, including the raising of children, caring for the sick and the elderly, all of which traditionally fall within women's domain.

An oft quoted study by Maria Mies (1982) on the lace makers of Narsapur in India delineates this relationship. While women may spend six to eight hours a day making lace, this activity is not defined as work, because it occurs in the confines of their home and is considered leisure-time activity. Mies argues that by defining women as housewives or dependants, and not workers in their own right, lace makers are forced to accept very low wages. As in other piecework industries, these women provide local middlemen with unfinished lace assembled elsewhere. They have no control over the process and are fully integrated in the world lace market through the sexual and international division of labour. This study is notable because it

articulates the interconnections between productive and reproductive relations, demonstrating that women's insertion into global capitalist relations is not dependent on separating the home and the workplace (Moore, 1988: 85).

According to Mies, this housewife ideology is also a central feature of the new international division of labour in four key sectors: large scale manufacturing in free trade zones; small scale manufacturing such as handicrafts or food processing in the unregulated informal sector; large scale agro-industry, plantations and family or cooperative production for export; and, the tourist and sex industries (Mies, 1986: 115).

Women's undervalued and invisible work in procreation, and their unpaid domestic labour, are an integral part of capitalist relations that does not depend on separating the home from the workplace. Despite problems associated with the notion of a private/public sphere to explain women's overall oppression, it remains as a useful analytical category, if adequately contextualized, to examine women's economic marginalization as workers. Chapter Four further discusses gender ideology, specifically detailing the construction of gender in the Dominican Republic that rests on the separation of the private and public domains.

Naturally, race is also integral to the construction of gender in the Caribbean, but particularly in the Dominican Republic. A fundamental element of the class and labour structures, race has a significant impact on women's survival strategies and the options open to them. The complexity of gender in the Caribbean mandates further examination of how class and race intersect, as set out in Chapter Three. However, race also has serious implications for feminist research, particularly in a cross-cultural/cross-racial context. As the present study involves a white woman (me) researching black Haitian women, this is an issue to be addressed here, by briefly tracing the links between race and racism in mainstream feminist research.

Race and Racism in Gender Analysis

As Third World and non-white feminist academics and activists engaged in feminist debate, some challenged presumptions that did not account for race, class or sexual orientation, all of which served to conceal differences between women (Moore, 1988: 7-11). In Britain and North America, black feminists voiced their anger at white feminists for failing to include the experiences and histories of black women, taking for granted the experiences of white women and assuming they were universal. Even when white feminists strove to include the experience of other groups, the perspective and reasoning were often racist, they charged (Amos and Parmar, 1984: 4). These critics maintained that stereotypes about the sexuality and family patterns of

black women and men are constant in feminist writings and are reflected in related political action. Anti-rape activism, for example, exemplified by white women walking into predominantly black neighbourhoods in "Take Back the Night" events and demanding more police protection, often reinforces racial stereotyping (black men as rapists) and justifies further coercive measures against black men (Bhavnani and Coulson, 1986: 82).

In her exploration of race and gender, Elizabeth Spelman (1988) notes a double standard held by many white feminists, who often fail to separate their whiteness from their womanness, viewing each manifestation of oppression discretely, with each identity layer atop the other. White feminists, she maintains, typically perceive discrete identities for black women, race and gender, concluding that the gender identity of black women is the same as their own (Spelman, 1998: 115). Race, black feminists argued, transforms the experience of gender, placing different women in different relationships to structures of power and authority in society (Bhavnani and Coulson, 1986: 85).

Not surprisingly, given the distinct experiences of gender between women of different races and classes, their struggles rarely converged and sometimes conflicted (Amos and Parmar, 1984). Whereas the mainstream feminist movement considered the family and sexuality as primary sites of oppression

and the heart of their struggles, black women in the United States and Britain often needed to address other sources of oppression, organizing around housing, education, welfare and civil rights issues. For black feminists, giving higher priority to one aspect of oppression, e.g., gender, to the exclusion of another, race, was inconceivable. All sources of oppression and exploitation needed to be considered simultaneously, leading to an examination of how race, class and gender are structured in relation to one another (Higginbotham, 1992: 254).

As a cultural construct, race, much like gender or ethnicity, is variable and assumes different meanings and purposes at various times and places. As a defining characteristic of the "other", race often expresses and justifies relations of domination or subordination (Charles, 1992: 147). Like gender, the concept of race is rooted in a dualist notion of biological differences. Unlike gender, however, which is attributed more easily to the male/female dualist western mode of thinking, race does not split as easily into two distinct categories (Kaminsky, 1994: 11). "Black", as race or colour, Kaminski argues, has become but one version of non-white in a multitude of "otherness". This, however, has not prevented Western societies from thinking of race in terms of white/non-white, "white" being the norm and "black" standing in opposition. We cannot overlook the significance race holds in Western societies, and especially in North America, in relation to gender and class,

often obscuring or overriding these other social characteristics. Like gender and class, race should be regarded as a social construct based upon the acknowledgment of difference and the simultaneous demarcation and positioning of groups from one another. Race then is a highly contested representation of relations of power between social categories (Higginbotham, 1992: 253).

The mainstream Western feminist discourse on Third World women is similarly criticized. Mohanty regards Western treatment of Third World women as integral to the global hegemony of Western scholarship (Mohanty, 1991: 64). Western feminists' assumption of an ahistorical, universal unity between women based on a generalized notion of their mutual subordination, and their presumption that Third World women have similar interests and desires as white middle class Western women, is also critiqued (Mohanty, 1991a: 64). Mohanty condemns the treatment of women as an "already constituted category before their entry in social relations", despite factors such as culture, class, race or colonization. Even Third World feminist critiques of their own societies are often used to reinforce Western prejudices of the superiority of Western cultures: "The imperative we experience as feminists to be critical of how our culture and traditions that oppress women conflicts with our desire of once colonized cultures to affirm the value of the same culture and traditions" (Narayan, 1989: 259). Mohanty criticizes the

portrayal of Third World women as powerless and dependent victims of patriarchy, colonialism, religious ideology and development processes. Being infused with racist assumptions, this categorisation operates from Western binary logic process by which power relations are structured in terms of possessing power or being powerless (Mohanty, 1991a: 71).

Amos and Parmar (1984), Bhavnani and Coulson (1986), and Amadiume (1987) express similar concerns about Western feminism and Western academics undertaking research in the Third World. Amadiume takes particular issue with Western anthropologists' and feminists' arrogance and insensitivity to Third World people, as they appear more concerned about themselves than the people they study (1987: 2). Besides problems concerning data misappropriation, such studies often transmit a distorted picture of Third World women. The motives of Western feminists are also questioned, especially when using data on Third World women to prove points of little interest or use to Third World women (Amadiume, 1987: 4). As Acosta-Belén (1993: 176) points out, white feminists have typically focused on the theoretical appropriateness of paradigms (socialists, marxist, radical, liberal, *etc.*) in pursuit of their intellectual, social and political agenda. By contrast, Third World feminists have been more concerned to formulate alternate strategies and immediate solutions to the multitude of basic survival issues confronting most of the population of Third World nations.

Both feminist anthropologists and their male counterparts have been criticized by black feminists and non-western anthropologists for perpetuating racism and colonial attitudes in the discipline. For non-western women and men inside and outside the discipline, the response to such charges has not been adequate (Moore, 1988: 192-3). Male anthropologists, Moore contends, have responded more readily to the question of power in ethnographic production, feeling perhaps less self-conscious toward this issue than to the charges of racism. Feminist anthropologists, Moore believes, have been more willing to reevaluate their theoretical position, and to use cross-cultural data to challenge essentialist claims in feminist theory that obscure the extreme diversity in human activity and cultural experiences of gender relations.

That said, the Caribbean region defies easy attempts to draw general conclusions on the issue of race and gender. On the latter, anthropologist Sydney Mintz, a prominent Caribbeanist scholar, reminds us that the ways in which Caribbean peoples think about gender in personal, social and cultural terms reflects the diversity of the region. Women's economic activities, for example, differ dramatically between Jamaica, Haiti, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. Similarly, ideas about sexuality and the proper role of women vary in terms of class and locality, and specific colonial histories (Mintz and Price, 1985: 7).

Researching Third World Women

Some feminist academics from the South believe that white women from the North have no business undertaking research on Third World women, and should stick to what they know best, their own culture (Amadiume, 1987: 10). Others, while equally critical of western science and social movements (Amos and Parmar, 1984; Bhavnani and Coulson, 1986; Mohanty, 1991a), do not share this uncompromising position. While Amadiume is justified in exposing racism, colonialism and imperialism in Western scholarship, taking such advocacy to an extreme would make it virtually impossible for anyone in a position of privilege to undertake research about those in less privileged positions. For instance, should members of a privileged class be prevented from researching issues of concern of the poor; should men be barred from research about women; and, by extension, is it impossible for those who live in industrialized nations to understand the realities of those who do not?

Uma Narayan disagrees with Amadiume, arguing that even if the oppressed are in a better position to talk about their own oppression, commitment to the contextual nature of knowledge does not hold that those not inhabiting those contexts can never attain useful knowledge of them (1989: 264). Many Third World academics come from privileged social classes, a situation that has not deterred them from speaking out for poor women in their societies.

Gita Sen, a founder of DAWN¹, an influential network of Third World academics and activists, acknowledges that social status or class difference does not preclude feminists from tackling issues they have not personally experienced. In her view, the privileged status of women in positions of formal power in developing countries make it possible to work effectively for change and represent the interests of poorer women (Sen and Grown, 1987).

Chandra Mohanty believes cross-cultural analysis to be possible, but warns that it must be free from homogenizing and systematizing experiences of different groups and treating them as phenomena judged against Western standards (1991a: 73). Instead, this vision of development, as articulated through the DAWN network, presses for a profound social transformation starting from the daily experiences of poor women, and rejects the male ethics of competition, hierarchy and aggressiveness (Sen and Grown 1987; Antrobus 1988, 1989). This process requires feminists to engage and challenge systems of oppression embedded in development theory and practice, including centuries of unequal North-South relations. Feminists from the North often focus on their issues at the expense of integrating the experiences of other women. Nor have they usually fully appreciated the significance of class, race

¹ Development Alternatives for Women in a New Era. Founded in 1984, DAWN is a network of Third World women researchers and organizations who also seek to propose an alternate development model from a feminist perspective. DAWN's twenty-two founding members were activists, researchers and policy makers in position of some authority in their countries. They sought to create a powerful global network that would concretely influence development planning.

or ethnicity or the historical, cultural or social differences resulting from the endemic and systemic exploitation of colonialism and slavery. Acosta-Belén (1993: 180), for instance, maintains that Western scholars have not sufficiently ventured outside of “their window of privilege to assess the historical consequences and manifestations of capitalist accumulation, imperialist domination, and the practices of the colonialist and slavery systems, as well as the post-colonial processes of displacement and marginalization on those who have actually experienced them”.

Another prominent feminist network, ISIS², calls for coordination and organization on a global scale, given the powerful international economic and patriarchal forces arraigned against women (Bunch and Carillo, 1990: 81). A fundamental goal of the DAWN and ISIS networks is to overcome differences traditionally separating women – race, class, ideology and gender consciousness – throughout centuries of unequal North-South relations. As women from different nations engage in a multiplicity of struggles, these may conflict with or complement one another. Constructive dialogue between women from the South and the North is possible, even if not necessarily easy or painless (Russo, 1991: 310). Through this process, Charlotte Bunch

² ISIS was created in 1974 as the Women’s International Information and Communication Service with office in Geneva and Rome. ISIS’s mandate is to promote communications among grassroots activist women’s groups. In 1984, ISIS was transformed into two organizations: ISIS WICCE (Women’s International Cross Cultural Exchange) based in Geneva and ISIS International, which publishes feminist analysis and information about women’s activities around the world and has offices in Chile and the Philippines.

contends, genuine solidarity can emerge, if “the feminist vision of South-North interaction is based on mutual learning and respect that seek commonality through recognizing and taking seriously women’s diversity. This has seldom been the basis of Western international work” (Bunch, 1990: 82).

Nonetheless, some Western researchers have earned the respect of their Southern colleagues. A common element of this research is that it be historically honed and context-specific (Mohanty, 1991b: 39). This reinforces the point that feminists must recognize and understand difference, and examine the complex ways in which gender, race and class intersect, and in turn, how this set of social forces interacts with colonialism, the international division of labour and the formation of the modern state (Moore, 1988).

Difference is now acknowledged among feminists, as few speak of feminism in the singular, just as they do not categorise women as a unified single entity (Crosby, 1992: 131). Categories sensitive to cultural and historical specificity replace unitary visions of gender identity with plural ones. Gender is treated as one relevant thread, among others, within the structuring and transformative nexus of class, race ethnicity, age and sexual orientation (Fraser and Nicholson, 1991: 34-35). Race, ethnicity, sexuality and class are elements that differentiate the many strands of feminism. The sexual

division of labour, the roles of women and men in production and reproduction, and the value assigned to these are useful provided they are generated through local, contextual analysis, and are cognizant that each is constantly challenged and transformed by social and economic change (Moore, 1988: 73).

Feminists in the North have also become better attuned to the scholarship of women in the South (Bose and Belén, 1995: 1-2). This scholarship, ranging from anthropology to geography, continues to refocus and redefine existing approaches required to rethink politics, economics and development (Lutjens, 1995: 4). Increasingly, feminists from the South and the North engage in collaborative work and international forums, and conferences on common concerns provide opportunities for feminists across the world to exchange ideas and critique each other's work.

While unwise to ignore the limitations imposed by race, class, nationality and language, the validity of doing research in cross-cultural environments lies in the additional knowledge and perspective (even if limited) it brings to the scholarship. This may be the only way that issues can be critically analyzed and moved forward. Narayan's warning (1987: 265) – that sympathetic individuals who are not members of an oppressed group may not fully understand the issues relating to an oppression that they do not share – is

more apt than Amadiume's "Westerners stay out" approach (Amadiume, 1987: 10). Insofar as feminists from the North are receptive to critiques, feminist debates are enriched, not impoverished, by different points of view. Multiple voices and alternate visions worldwide that reject the notion that women are passive or even deliberate accomplices of their subordination are still needed (Acosta-Belén, 1993: 182-3). Or, as Barbara Smith (1984: 77, cited in Russo, 1991: 309) straightforwardly puts it: "You can't run the tape backward and start from scratch, so the question is what are you going to do with what you've got? How are you going to deal responsibly with the unalterable fact of who you are, of having or not having privilege and power?"

In practical terms then, just how should a researcher from the North approach doing research in the South? A first step, perhaps, is to recognize that knowledge is socially situated, and can be more objectively conducted without aspiring or claiming to be value-free (Mies, 1983: 122; Harding, 1991: 159). As Alison Jaggar notes, the manner in which one formulates the problem is largely a function of one's own political beliefs and assumptions, and of the methodological commitments in one's questions (Jaggar, 1983: 133). Accordingly, feminist research entails researchers acknowledging their partiality, to be aware of their relational position of power as a researcher, and to recognize the same about those from whom they seek to acquire knowledge (Goetz, 1991: 152). Bhavnani (1993) suggests that "feminist

researchers need to critically assess the ways in which the women are represented in their research in relation to dominant views and how difference has informed the research" (as cited in Dyck et al, 1995: 613). She also urges that researchers discuss the micro-politics of the research, including the inherent power relations.

Cross-cultural research shows that the important feminist principle of creating non-hierarchical relationships in data collection is not always easily achieved.³ The complexity and unpredictability of the interviewing situation, and the underlying nature of power relations between researcher and research participants, exacerbate these power relations. They also mediate both the qualities of the relationship between the interviewer and the study participants, and the way the other is constructed through the research

³ In an attempt to expose the power relations embedded in ethnographic work, some anthropologists and other social scientists have, since the late seventies, explored alternate writing techniques. These include the identification of the field worker as an actor in the ethnographic situation, commentary on cultural differences, and the examination of global systems of domination through the exploration of symbolic manifestations in the lives of individuals (Mascia-Lees et al, 1989: 7-8). For examples of the "new ethnography" by women, see Myerhoff (1978), Nash (1979), Rosaldo (1980), Shostak (1981), Cesara (1982) and Alverson (1987).

While new modes of representation offer new perspectives, they are not necessarily free from ethical or methodological problems. Anthropologist Marjorie Mbilinyi discovered this while reflecting on producing a joint narrative with a Tanzanian peasant woman on the history of women in colonial days (1989: 216-25). While Mbilinyi's informant saw the value of the research and participated enthusiastically, difference in interpretation threatened the relationship and the project several times. Mbilinyi acknowledges these differences and admits that as the writer of the account she has the final say on what and how events are reported and what interpretation is given to these events. This creates ambiguity, Mbilinyi writes, about the character of the work relationship and the integrity of the finished work, even if the authorship is attributed to both the people who tells her life story and the researcher (1989: 224). Mbilinyi is not the only anthropologist or feminist who has experienced this dilemma.

practice, particularly in cross-cultural settings (Dyck et al, 1995: 612). They warn about the potential for researchers to unintentionally reaffirm essentialist notions of socially constructed categories such as race.

The above discussion serves as a backdrop to my research. Cognizant that all knowledge is socially situated, I hope to not unintentionally harm the women whose courage and determination I wish to acknowledge. Obviously the world we live in is fraught with racism and, while we may not be able to entirely rid our perspective from the environment that has influenced our minds, it is possible, at times, to transcend the limitations imposed on us all by sexism, homophobia, racism, imperialism or any other dominant ideology.

Migration and Households

As noted earlier, the household offers a unique locale from which to analyse the dynamics of migration and women's survival strategies. I chose to analyse Haitian women's migratory experience through the household because, in the Caribbean (Haiti and the Dominican Republic particularly), it is the social unit to which women belong and frequently head. Some of the questions to explore are: what is women's role in the migratory process; how do they experience migration; what role does migration play for household survival strategies; and, what does feminist scholarship tell us about women and households?

Early accounts of migration usually dismiss women's experiences or categorize women as dependants of men. These accounts of migration, cloaked in neo-classical economics, emphasize rational economic behaviour and efficient resource allocation, revolving around individualistic or "push pull" variables such as personal ambition, desire for freedom or education (Portes, 1978: 5-6). Conversely, structuralist theorists view migration as a function of global economics.

This world-system approach emphasizes the role of labour movement, defining migration as a function of capitalist penetration of Third World. Labour migration is part of the dynamics of the same overarching unit constantly changing according to the forces and conditions that alter their relative position (Portes, 1978: 9). Third World economies are bound in a series of exchange mechanisms regulated by capital to secure a continuous supply of cheap labour (Portes, 1978: 10-11). National immigration policies, including bilateral labour agreements, structural differences in labour markets, foreign investment patterns, and devolution of local economies are among the principal global structural factors (Boyd, 1992: 640). All such exchanges have a transformative impact on household composition and resource allocation (Monk and Alexander, 1993: 168).

Until the early 1980s, most scholars assumed that women lacked an

independent or specific role in the migration process (Chaney, 1993: 102).

However, as transnational mobility becomes increasingly less of a barrier for capital and people, the need for new sources of cheap labour has led to new patterns of migration. A body of research accumulated since the mid-1970s on women and migration reveals significant gender differences in migration patterns, as well as complex economic and cultural variables (Moore, 1988: 96). With women's steady incorporation into the global capitalist system as wage labourers, migration is now more readily recognized as an economic strategy for women.

Recent migration research clearly challenges the idea that women are left behind in the rural areas, or that they simply follow their husbands, as dependants (Moore, 1988: 94). Gendered studies on labour movements in recent years have shed light on this new reality. However, Safa (1981) and Sassen-Koob (1981) are credited as among the first to link the world capitalist system and the central role women play in the migratory movements in export processing, thereby uncovering much of the logic of the new international division of labour (Chaney, 1993: 106; see also: Elson and Pearson, 1981; Safa, 1981, 1995; Nash and Fernandez-Kelly, 1983; Nash and Safa, 1986; Green, 1990).

Feminist researchers have also shown how migration affects women and

men differently, and how it alters gender relations, including the sexual division of labour and male authority in the family (Pedraza, 1991: 321). Gender, migration research reveals, plays a significant role in decisions to migrate (Moore, 1988: 93-98). Migration has implications for women's economic activity, marital status, identity, autonomy, self esteem, fertility rates, traditional patterns of dependence (Pedraza, 1991: 321; Buijs, 1993), and on the selection of household survival strategies (Boyd, 1992: 657).

As with other areas of feminist inquiry, migration research reinforces the view that generalizations can not be made about migrant women as a category. The fact that female migration needs to be analyzed within the context of "historically generated social, political and economic structures of both sending and receiving societies" (Boyd, 1992: 642) is also now accepted. Migrant women vary in age, economic, social and political status, education and work experience. Women migrate alone, or in the company of friends or family members. They may travel only a short distance to a city or cross continents. National origin, ethnic and racial identities are other fundamental sources of difference among migrant women (Chaney, 1993: 100).

Migration studies derive considerable insight from studying the impact of migration on households. Specifically, the introduction of households and

social networks in migration research sheds light on human agency within the parameters of global and local socioeconomic and political structures and the general construct of race, class and gender. It also provides an alternate analytic framework to the oversocialized structuralist view of migration “in which people were passive agents in the migratory process, projected through time and space by social forces” (Boyd, 1992: 641). Finally, this locale sets out the crucial role women play in the migration process since it is the site where the full range of productive and reproductive activities that women must assume to survive within the migratory environment (Chaney, 1993: 111).

To date, most research on women’s international migration focuses on labour moving from developing to industrialized countries, or to export processing zones in the former. Relatively little attention has been paid to women’s migration between two impoverished nations. The present case is also interesting because much of this migration occurs within the informal sectors of Haiti and the Dominican Republic – largely populated by women, and where the receiving country, paradoxically, has high unemployment, as I elaborate in Chapter Three.

But just as migration tended to dismiss the role of women in the migratory process or failed to appreciate the impact of migration on women, feminist research underlines the need to re-examine the concept of household from a

gender perspective. For instance, neo-classical and neo-Marxist households models often aggregate individuals as a unit with similar interests (Wolf, 1990: 45; Hart, 1992: 810). The household is treated as though it was an individual with a logic and interests of its own. Conversely, the behaviours and interests of individuals are viewed as reflecting the interests of the household (Folbre, 1986: 5, cited in Wolf, 1990: 46). The assumption is that the household functions as a unified socio-economic unit (Evans, 1991: 51). Households treated as a cohesive, unidimensional unit ignore the possibility of conflict or members having different interests; or the importance of relationships outside the household to the economic viability of its members.

Those researching poor people, both in advanced industrialized nations or Third World countries, too often refer to the sum of behaviours within family units as households strategies (Wolf, 1990: 46). Unequal resource allocations – income, labour or food – within households are commonly attributed to household strategies. This failure to analyze intra-household relations, domestic stratification by gender and generation often obscures, and even suppresses, the voices of the less powerful. This analytical problem can be compounded in that household members often internalize the rules governing intra-household distribution, which are rendered as natural and legitimate, and even accepted as such despite the inequalities they embody (Hart, 1992: 811). As Bruce and Dwyer suggest, it is doubtful that if men's and

women's access and control over resources differ systematically in the outside world, their personal economies are served by a common strategy (1988: 3). Or, given the profound difference often found between women and men's realms, that their needs and interests will converge substantially within the family or household. Many researchers, particularly feminist economists and anthropologists, dispel the notion of an altruistic allocation of resources within households for concealing male power and female subordination. Instead, the dynamics of households are typically complex, hierarchical and conflictual (Bruce and Dwyer, 1988; Wolf, 1990s, Kabeer and Joekes, 1991; Evans, 1991; Hart, 1992, Kabeer, 1994).

Another problem associated with the treatment of households as socio-economic units is the strong connotation of co-residency by which household members live and work in close proximity, sharing the proceeds of their labour – *the one pot, one roof model* (Evans, 1991: 54). Cross-cultural evidence indicates however that production and consumptions units are much more heterogenous and shifting than previously thought, especially in complex rural economies where household patterns of organisation are subject to wide variations in terms of space and time.

Polygamous households in sub-Saharan Africa are a case in point, usually structured around a number of separate but interrelated households where a

number of decisions are taken by co-wives, independent of the husband (Evans, 1991: 54). The rights and obligations guiding the relationships between husbands and wives and the various members of the household, also vary substantially. In many polygamous arrangements, men and women have different economic obligations regarding the raising of children or with kinship obligations beyond the household.

Hart (1992) suggests viewing households as political arenas constituted by sets of rules, rights and obligations governing gendered and generational relationships. These, in turn are constantly being reinforced, or redefined, daily as intra- household negotiations, or bargaining, and struggles occur (Sen, 1990, cited in Hart, 1992: 811). Clashes in decision-making reflect the inequality of bargaining power of household members that depend, in part, on rights and obligations of individual members (Kabeer, 1994: 117), and on their position in the larger economy (Kabeer and Joekes, 1991: 2).

Focussing exclusively on the household, therefore, may provide only a partial understanding of women's activities. Women often engage in extra familial relationships to pursue personal goals, or simply survival, and residential, kinship and occupational solidarity among women is common worldwide. Personal networks are often crucial to women's survival strategies, and an important vehicle for social and economic action. The content of these social

relationships varies considerably, most consisting of dyadic relationships between two individuals, based on kinship ties or neighbourliness or patronage bonds, as well as reciprocal exchanges of labour or information (March and Taqqu, 1986: 7).

For instance, a woman may ask a neighbour or a relative to look after her children in case of an emergency or if she is working outside the home for short extended periods. Neighbours may help each other by helping or lending money when a family member is sick. Support networks often include extended family and kinship relations but also neighbourhood groups, peer support network, church or ritual associations, collective labour groups and peasants associations (March and Taqqu, 1986, cited in Fleming, 1991: 38). These organizations play an important role for poor women in many ways, such as pooling resources through communal kitchens, pooling labour and resources in cooperatives or even organizing around issues (Fleming, 1991: 39).

Anthropologists have long recognized that key functions of the household – production, reproduction, consumption – are not always carried out by co-residential groups. Nor is co-residency always a primary factor in social structure, marriage, descent or citizenship, which are governed by relations external to the so-called household (Roberts, 1991: 62). In brief, households are

neither universal nor natural units, and shift and change over time and cross-culturally with respect to the relations of production in specific environments (Evans, 1991: 58).

Because the household is not always the most important reference group (Evans, 1991: 54), some anthropologists even dismiss it as a useful analytical category (Kabeer and Joekes, 1991: 2). Yet, women the world over do form domestic groups. These differ markedly across cultures, or even regionally, according to a variety of factors, and are becoming more diversified as changes occur in economic structures globally. To re-iterate, households do link the personal with larger structures (Kabeer and Joekes, 1991: 1), and is the locus of different sets of relations – kinship, economic – that can be useful conceptually. As Evans (1991: 58) notes, they cannot be realistically analyzed from a set of generalised *a priori* assumptions, as discussed above.

Still, the household is an important category of analysis for gender studies, it being the site where productive and reproductive activities converge, particularly for women in the Caribbean (Chaney 1993). It is also the case for the migrant Haitian women in my study, in which the household predominates in their migratory experiences and in survival strategies. How households figure in those strategies depend on various factors, as discussed in Chapter Five. Households provide a vantage point where human social

relations are played out daily in a setting where the role women play in the migratory process is made visible.

Given this theoretical background, I return to the question posed earlier: are the efforts of Haitian women migrant workers to control their destiny futile given the global forces at work? My response is implicit in the following section that describes how the survival strategies Haitian women migrant workers use should be conceived as resistance.

Survival Strategies and Resistance

Until recently, research on women and resistance focussed primarily on large scale social or political movements or union organizing. True, women have created vibrant social movements to defend and advance women's interests, leaving virtually no stone unturned. They have challenged military dictatorships, multinational corporations, religious institutions and governments. They have reclaimed indigenous heritages and fought oppression wherever found. However, despite the visibility that women's issues have acquired globally in recent years through organized movements, much remains to be discovered and expressed on women's personal experiences of resistance. While resistance clearly accompanies all forms of domination, it is not always identifiable through organized movements (Mohanty, 1991b, 38). For numerous reasons, organized or collective action is

not always the way women chose (or that is available to them) to resist the forces that exploit their labour and marginalise them (Ward and Pyle, 1995: 51).

Research on industrial labour and its connections with the informal sector and household labour has changed the way feminist researchers conceptualize and analyse resistance, particularly its covert and collective nature. Everyday resistance takes place in factories, on shopfloors and other worksites around the world (Ward and Pyle, 1995: 52). Examples of women's tactics to stall production and gain some margin of control over their working conditions abound. These include the strategies of immigrant women in the high technology sector in the United States, who take advantage of managers' sexist and racist biases as pretexts to obtain more rest breaks (Hossfeld, 1990), or to slow production (Peña, 1987). Immigrant women in England have used wedding and baby showers to exact some degree of control in shopfloor interactions (Westwood, 1985). In Malaysian factories, women have used spirit possessions to the same ends (Ong, 1987).

Ward and Pyle (1995: 52) identify three categories of everyday resistance: strategies that make use of traditional structures combined with spontaneous daily resistance in the formal workplace, as in the examples above; strategies that challenge household structures and organization; and, the act of survival

itself. Extreme conditions of poverty force women to organize around issues of survival, often at the individual or family level. Hence, resistance can be found in the communal kitchens of poor women in Peru and Bolivia in the face of debt and structural adjustment; or the *comedores populares* (popular kitchen) of market women of Lima to reduce the burden of housework (Nash, 1988); or in “the materiality and politics” of the everyday struggles of Chicanas on the US-Mexico border (Anzaldúa, 1991). Examples of “survival as resistance” are also to be found in how women of colour in the United States pass on strong survival skills to their children to resist poverty (Dill, 1988).

The nature and dynamics of everyday resistance are more easily perceived through a brief examination of James Scott’s theory of resistance. Using field work observations of social relations between peasants and landlords in a Malaysian village to expose the dynamics of human agency from the point of view of the oppressed, Scott convincingly challenges conventional notions of power and hegemony. In essence, Scott argues that no hegemonic order, no system of dominance can be so encompassing or controlling as to completely prevent the subordinate from acting in opposition to the dominant discourse or at least imagining a reversed social order, no matter how pervasive (1995: 331). In *Powers of the Weak*, Janeway (1980: 21) puts forth the argument that if power is a process of human interaction, we can expect to find participants with conflicting interests, and differing amounts of authority, but each

capable of swaying the other to some degree.

Even in the face of seemingly inexorable conditions of domination, as in the case of serfs, untouchable or slaves who may have no knowledge of alternative models of social order, the inevitability of domination does not make it necessarily just in their eyes, Scott argues (1990: 79). To illustrate this point, Scott uses the example of peasants faced with the apparent inevitability of the weather. The fact that peasants may have no control over the weather does not prevent them from attempting to influence its course to bring it within human control through a panoply of rituals. Thus, even though the serf, the untouchable or the slave may have difficulty imagining a different social order, "they will certainly have no trouble imagining a total reversal of the existing distribution of status and rewards" (Scott, 1990: 80).

Unsurprisingly, examples of the symbolic inversion of the social order, often embodied in ritual practices or folk utopias, are found in every highly stratified society.

Scott concludes that researchers must find other reasons for compliance and quiescence than the internalization of the dominant ideology by subordinate groups (Scott, 1990: 85). His theory suggests that contrary to being victims of the dominant's ideology, subordinates do act in opposition to dominance.

While these acts of defiance are often found outside of collective or organized

acts of rebellion – theft, pilferage, foot dragging or in songs, satire that mock the powerful or legends that magnify the powers of the weak – they should be recognized as legitimate acts of resistance and explicit displays of rebellion, even if motivated by self-interest. That such acts of resistance by poor Malay peasants spring from self-interested material need makes perfect sense.

Indeed, is it realistic, Scott asks, that impoverished peasants take on as the real object of their resistance, the elusive and impalpable capitalist system, even if they identify it as the source of their oppression (1985: 182). Instead, we should be satisfied that peasant resistance (for instance) arises from no more than a need to ensure physical safety, to ensure food supply, and that landlords, employers or tax collectors be identified as the oppressor (1985: 295). To dismiss self-interested acts of peasants is to ignore the material context of peasant politics and indeed of most lower-class politics.

Given the consequences that overt acts of defiance may warrant – punitive measures, coercion or repression – these acts typically are disguised in allegorical forms or hidden from the dominant. It is quite reasonable to accept that in most circumstances, the people who have little freedom of expression in the social order have a vested interest in avoiding any explicit display of insubordination. On the other hand, it is not in the interest of those whose rule is challenged through such acts to publicize the insubordination – as they do not wish to expose the tenuousness of their authority. As Scott maintains,

“the nature of acts themselves and the self-interested muteness of the antagonists thus conspire to create a complicitous silence that all but expunges everyday forms of resistance from the historical record” (1990: 36).

Whether everyday forms of resistance have transformatory potential or are a source of empowerment is still subject to debate among researchers. Often, women’s resistance only temporarily mediates women’s individual circumstances without creating change in the structures and institutions that control their labour (Ward and Pyle, 1995: 52). However, as the peasants’ everyday acts of defiance in the village of Sedaka in Scott’s study suggest, these acts not only serve to navigate an intricate web of power relationships, but help peasants push forward demands, work the system to their advantage, and challenge the dominant ideology to affect broader social change. One recent study of Filipino domestic workers in Canada shows how these women use private, unorganized everyday acts of resistance to alter the conditions of oppressive environments where they have little bargaining power (Parikh, 1994). Through these everyday acts of resistance, the women in Parikh’s study, like Scott’s peasants, keep pushing back the limits of the ideological boundaries that oppresses them and exploits their labour.

As Parikh aptly argues, the everyday defiance of the Filipino domestics – from lying, shirking and playing on stereotypes, to asserting their intelligence and

their sense of independence – serves to undermine the ideology of inequality employers embrace. More concretely, it is a way of “escaping the idiosyncratic, arbitrary and tyrannical regulations imposed” or as a challenge to their employers efforts at extracting “free” labour from their nannies (1994: 153-5).

Jacqueline Jones (1986: 131) depicts similar tactics among black women in the U.S. South as those Parikh describes in her study of everyday forms of resistance: domestics sabotaging the best laid plans of white housewives; tobacco workers declaring their own holidays whenever family or community interest dictated; domestics (who were day workers) arriving late and leaving early to participate in their important community events; all stratagems designed to resist claims of their employers on their labour (cited in Aptheker, 1989: 209). However, central to the black women’s resistance in Jones’s South, is the struggle of these women to care for and nurture their own children, and to preserve their identity and culture. In a context where black women were employed as domestics and expected to work ten to fourteen hours a day, or to be available twenty four hours a day, in the case of live-in servants, the will to nurture, educate and instill race pride, became a form of resistance.

Hence, everyday resistance is taken one step further. For Aptheker, women’s resistance is clearly informed by the logic of survival (1989: 174). Constrained

by patriarchal, racist and class restrictions, the vast majority of women live their lives around the cracks and crevices allowed them by this multifaceted authority. Out of the rigors of daily life, women resist through personal and work related networks, forged with other women on a daily basis. They resist by designing strategies to help them cope and improve the quality of daily life. Where the quality of life is constantly undermined, and connections between people are continually imperiled Aptheker argues, such strategies, form the fabric of life and are strategies of resistance (1989: 180).

Resistance, then, need not reside in overt or collective defiance, nor entail principled selflessness, organization or intentions that negate the basis of domination itself. It may also include symbolic or inconsequential acts that may be unorganized, unsystematic, opportunistic and self-indulgent (Scott, 1985: 292). As Scott's Malay peasants or Jones' black women show, it is also inherent in the peasants' assertion of the right to a decent subsistence or the black domestics' right to care for and nurture their own children. The words of Mohanty and Aptheker now resonate more clearly when they affirm that resistance emerges from the everyday life practices and struggles of third world women, and, by creating the conditions necessary for life.

The migratory experiences and survival strategies of Haitian migrant women are based in this context and explored in Chapter Five. Before delving into the

intricacies of their daily struggles, the next two chapters detail this context to better understand Haitian migration to the Dominican Republic, and review the factors shaping that migration and the race and gender ideologies that circumscribe the experience of female Haitian workers in the Dominican Republic.

CHAPTER THREE

Haitian Migration to the Dominican Republic

Given the exploitation Haitians are subjected to in the Dominican Republic, why do so many continue to migrate, to a country with high unemployment levels, especially in the countryside? This phenomenon can be explained by examining the sugar industry, its treatment of Haitian workers and the conditions workers are fleeing from their homeland. A historical approach may uncover the structural elements underlying this migration, leading to a better understanding of the forces shaping the experiences of the hundreds of thousands of Haitian migrant workers who went to the Dominican Republic in this century alone. A brief overview of the political economy of Haiti and of the Dominican Republic underscores the divergent paths of development of the two neighbouring states. As racial ideology is intrinsic both to the sugar industry and the national cultural identity of the Dominican Republic, analyzing race provides important signposts to the place of Haitian workers in the hierarchy of the Dominican workforce. Chapter Four then focuses on a gender analysis of the labour structure in the Dominican Republic.

An Island Divided

The histories of Haiti and the Dominican Republic are interwoven by geography and colonization. Discovered by Columbus in 1492, the island of Hispaniola, now divided between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, was the first Caribbean island colony. The Dominican Republic and Haiti share a legacy of slavery and colonialism under the hegemony of Europe and the United States. Both countries have suffered political instability throughout their history, with dictators and dictatorial leaders governing for most of the island's history. This century alone, repressive dictatorships ruled for more than thirty years on both sides of the border – Trujillo in the Dominican Republic (1930-1961) and the Duvalier family (1956-1987) in Haiti. The United States occupied both countries during the first half of the twentieth century - Haiti from 1914 to 1937 and the Dominican Republic from 1915 to 1930. Both episodes were an integral part of the U.S. foreign policy's establishment of American economic and political control over the region.

Despite these common features, the Dominican Republic and Haiti differ significantly in terms of language, culture and economic development. Until the latter part of the 19th century, Haiti dominated the bilateral trade between the two nations. By the turn of the century however, the situation had been reversed. While the Dominican economy experienced a boost fuelled by the revival of the sugar industry, Haiti 's economy continued an inexorable

decline. Haiti never recovered, and in the twentieth century fell further into economic and political bankruptcy. It remains among the poorest nations in the world. In 1995, the gross national product per capita of Haiti was \$370, the lowest on the American continent, while in the Dominican Republic the rate was \$830.¹ Annual per capita income growth (1965-1990) is 0.2 and 2.3 percent for Haiti and the Dominican Republic respectively; the proportion of urban population 29 and 60 percent; and, population density is 205 and 148 per square kilometre (Corten and Duarte 1995: 95).²

Relations between the neighbouring states have always been uneasy at best. The quest for identity and independence on both sides of the border has contributed to enduring political tensions. Repeated acts of Haitian aggression against the Spanish colony of Santo Domingo in the 19th century, including twenty-two years of occupation from 1820 to 1844, exacerbated the strains between the two nations. A strong residue of animosity between Haiti and the Dominican Republic persists, long after Haiti ceased to pose a military threat. In the twentieth century, the Dominican political elite revived and cultivated memories of past conflicts, leading to widespread anti-Haitian sentiments

¹ See Appendix D: Economic Comparison of Haiti vs. Dominican Republic.

² In the wake of structural adjustment policies, accompanied by currency devaluations in the 1980s, the Dominican Republic ranked as the third poorest nation in the Caribbean, after Haiti and Guyana (McAfee, 1991: 27).

among Dominicans, fuelled by the presence of many Haitians on their territory.

Sugar and the Legacy of Slavery in Haiti and the Dominican Republic

The Spanish conquerors first colonized the island of Hispaniola, named it Santo Domingo, then promptly began a system of slavery. Forced labour was first extracted from the indigenous people to cultivate sugar cane and mine gold. The harsh conditions of slavery, combined with the devastating epidemics brought by the Spanish conquerors, soon decimated most of the indigenous population. As early as 1501, the Spanish started importing christianised African slaves from Spain (Logan, 1969: 11). The importation of slaves directly from Africa to the Caribbean began in 1517. By 1650, the indigenous population had virtually disappeared, leading to a drastic increase in the slave trade.

Soon the Spanish discovered that Hispaniola was poor in gold, the chief interest of the Spanish Crown, and their attention quickly shifted to Mexico and Peru after the discovery of sizeable gold reserves there. As a result, the colony of Santo Domingo became a backwater and remained sparsely populated. Sugar cane growing, introduced in 1493, rapidly declined in the Spanish colony and virtually ceased by 1650 (Logan, 1968: 31), replaced by coffee and cattle production. With Spain having virtually abandoned the

colony, a rural elite, the *caudillos*, came to own immense cattle estates and maintain private armies that ruled in quasi-feudal fashion over the various regions of the colony. The rest of the land was farmed by peasants under the *comunero* system.³

Meanwhile, France had established another slave colony, which it called Saint Domingue, on the western part of the island. An extremely lucrative and diversified plantation economy on their part of the island emerged, producing vast quantities of sugar, indigo, coffee and a variety of other products for the French market. By the end of the eighteenth century, the 800 plantations of Saint Domingue produced more exports than the entire English Caribbean plantation economy, due largely the enormous amount of slave labour. From 2,000 in 1681, the number of slaves increased to 117,000 in 1730, peaking at 480,000 in 1791 (Prince, 1985: 11).

Haiti's Independence

At the end of the eighteenth century, France lost their colony to a massive slave rebellion. Haiti thus became the first nation in modern times to be born out of a successful slave rebellion. However, the devastating war of emancipation– lasting from 1797 to 1804 – ravaged the economy and heavily

³ Under the *comunero* system, land was held in common, although the state actually owned most of it.

mortgaged the nation's future. No sooner had Haiti gained its independence than a series of obstacles, internal and external, combined to mortgage its political and economic future. Rivalry, strife and cleavages between former (slave) military leaders, the light-skinned, French-speaking literate *affranchis*⁴ and the mass of former slaves tore the struggling nation apart.

The new state was ill equipped for the challenges of government, since France had not, at the outset of the 19th century, developed local elites experienced in territorial and local government. The emancipation war had destroyed most of the plantations, and the white population were either dead or had fled; the relationship between France and Haiti terminated. The former military leaders who formed the new governing elite had no experience of civil administration or self government, and the population was at least ninety-five per cent illiterate (Logan, 1968: 94). The political ambitions of the new elite led successive leaders to proclaim themselves emperor, king or president for life, and divided the nation into small warring kingdoms.

Various Haitian military leaders also attempted to "liberate" the eastern part of the island under Spanish control from slavery and unify the island under their rule. Haiti eventually defeated the Spanish colony in 1822, and reigned

⁴ The *affranchis* were former slaves who had bought or been given their freedom. They were allowed to own property and some even owned slaves.

over the whole island until expelled in 1844. Haitian attempts to unify the island helped drain the country's assets and increased its foreign debt. The Spanish colony also suffered economically because of these incursions in its territory, but it recovered more easily from its losses than did Haiti.

Besides internal strife and costly invasions, Haiti confronted other serious obstacles. Unlike many later former colonies, Haiti did not obtain international recognition immediately. The news of the successful slave rebellion met with the hostility of slave holding nations, fearful of revolts in their own colonies. The cost of freedom for the new nation proved excessive. France, which had first hoped to retake the former colony (the costly Napoleonic wars in Europe prevented this), agreed to recognize Haiti in 1825. In exchange, however, Haiti had to pay an indemnity of 150 million francs, which it only finished repaying in 1922, consolidated under a US holding (Prince, 1985: 17). By contrast, Spain did not demand compensation when the Dominican Republic became independent. In addition, Haiti suffered from the ostracism of European nations and the United States for most of the nineteenth century.

While the two factions of the emerging Haitian ruling class (the former military leaders and the *affranchis*) acquired land and consolidated their economic and political power, the mass of former slaves settled on unused

land or migrated to the hills to engage in subsistence agriculture. A system of sharecropping developed on the large estates that were in the hands of the new elite, and a peasant subsistence economy gradually replaced the plantation economy. Understandably, former slaves preferred to cultivate their own land to feed themselves than work on the sugar or indigo plantations of the new economic elite. Plantation conditions were akin to slavery – the only compensation being relief from corporal punishment and less onerous working hours. Despite repeated attempts to introduce forced labour on plantations after the abolition of slavery, peasant pressure eventually forced the government to distribute land.

In return for ceding to peasant demands for land reform in the mid nineteenth century, the governing elite introduced various forms of taxation, which alongside complementary measures, maintained its economic base and maximized revenues from the peasantry. This first was achieved by exercising a highly centralized control over the means of production (principally through land ownership), by imposing heavy taxes and by controlling trade and prices. Finally, a coercive apparatus to ensure peasants' compliance was established (Lundahl, 1992: 203-4). Described as rapacious, predatory and parasitic, the Haitian state has been a vehicle for the enrichment of a very small elite, which lead the country into growing dependence and indebtedness, financial bankruptcy and misery (Castor, 1992: 130).

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the population of Haiti continued to grow steadily. Rapid increases in population made Haiti one of the most densely populated countries in the Western Hemisphere. With limited access to land, high birth rates resulted in near endless sub-divisions of land among peasants. In certain regions of Haiti, repeated subdividing of the land resulted in 80 percent of peasants owning fewer than five hectares. Half of these peasants have access to less than one hectare, and 25 percent less than half a hectare. Agricultural experts estimate that seven hectares is the minimum amount of land a Haitian family requires to live decently (Métraux, 1960: 29).

Twentieth Century Haiti

The U.S. occupied Haiti from 1915 to 1934, and in the process, many more Haitian peasants were forced off the land. In 1918, the U.S. Government, under the direction of Secretary of State Franklin D. Roosevelt, redrafted the Haitian constitution to allow foreigners to own land. One goal of American policy during the occupation was to attract plantation agriculture to Haiti. Under U.S. occupation, Haiti passed over thirty legislative measures to that end (Lundhal, 1983: 99). This strategy accelerated the proletarianisation processes in Haiti, transforming peasants into a semi-proletarianized labour force (Corten (1986, 1993). The subsequent consolidation of properties in the hands of American companies sent three hundred thousand Haitian peasants on the migratory path (Bellegarde-Smith, 1990: 84). Most went to Cuba and the

Dominican Republic, where American companies already controlled large land holdings to grow sugar and fruit. Ironically, after refusing to cut cane in Haiti, thousands of impoverished peasants had to cut cane in their neighbour's yard. American companies formally encouraged this emigration to remedy the perceived overpopulation.⁵ Emigration also proved advantageous economically, since each migrant was required to pay a departure tax, which was used to liquidate part of Haiti's foreign debt (Lundahl, 1983: 121).

Having brought the country decisively within its sphere of influence, the United States no longer needed a formal occupation to exercise economic and political dominion over Haiti. The departure of the U.S. in 1934 was followed by elections, but successive governments abided by the economic policies established during the occupation that allowed for the increased penetration of foreign capital into the Haitian economy and greater foreign access (mostly US) to large land concessions for mining and export agriculture (Dupuy, 1985: 144).

⁵ We must first bear in mind that while Haiti and the Dominican Republic have roughly the same population, Haiti occupies only one third of the island. Second, 1 percent of the population in Haiti owns 60 percent of the arable land. Third, coal provides some 80 percent of Haiti's energy consumption. This, combined with peasants' use of increasingly marginal land, resulted in an irreversible ecological disaster. By the mid-1950s, forests covered only seven percent of the Haitian territory (Lundahl, 1983: 115).

The Duvalier Era in Haiti (1956-1987)

Elected on promises of social reforms initiated by his predecessors, François Duvalier focussed instead on depleting the state coffers, just as most of his predecessors had done before him. Ten years after coming to power, the economy was in a virtual state of collapse, public finances in chaos, and public facilities falling into decay. Even the subsistence economy had become less viable as population increases rendered the land less productive.

Duvalier added a new twist to the predatory state, however, by centralizing economic and political power in his own hands and embarking on a reign of terror. Opponents were eliminated through a series of purges and killings designed to eradicate opposition from all sectors of society. Political parties, the Church, the army, the commercial sector, mass media, the educational system, labour unions and government administration were all targeted. By 1959, with no institution left unscathed, the legislature was a mere executor of Duvalier's whim and will (Dupuy, 1985: 159). In 1964, he drafted a new constitution that ceded him absolute powers, buttressed by an effective apparatus of repression (Dupuy, 1989: 162). An estimated 65% of state revenue was spent on state security, with much of the balance lost to personal use (Rotberg, 1971: 197-8).

Despite the departure of the Duvaliers in 1987, Haiti has experienced a

constant decline in state revenues, with a corresponding increase in its external debt. (IDB, 1993: 114). Between 1991 and 1995, the country was politically paralysed, and the commercial and financial embargo imposed by the U.S. to restore democracy exacerbated an already grave economic crisis. Thus, migration continues to be the only hope of survival for a significant segment of the Haitian population.

The Dominican Republic

As the Haitian economy continued to decline at the end of the 19th century, the sugar industry in the Dominican Republic was reborn, aided by political events in other parts of the world. The U.S. Civil War (1861-1865), the Franco-Prussian War (1870) and the Ten Year War in Cuba (1868-1878) disrupted sugar production in those countries (Betances, 1995: 25). Between 1886 and 1924, successive governments opened the sugar industry to foreign capital, (Betances and Spalding, 1995: 4). The collapse of the European sugar beet industry during World War I dramatically expanded Dominican sugar markets. Large scale sugar production in the Dominican Republic began in the 1920s, consolidated largely through North American and Cuban investments during the American occupation (1915-1930), and garnered substantial foreign earnings for the Dominican elites (Latortue, 1985: 18).

As in Haiti, the U.S. occupation brought the country definitively within the

U.S. sphere of influence. U.S. occupation forces initiated a program of public works that accelerated the development of a national road network; organised a national police force with extensive powers independent from the local elites; weakened the economic base of the elites; legalised land titles held by the sugar and timber companies and helped survey the lands held by U.S. interests, effectively forcing small farmers out.

The U.S. occupation led to increased coercive powers of the Dominican state. The newly created national police quickly gained effective control over the whole territory and emerged as the political elite. In 1930, Leonidas Trujillo, a young officer who had risen spectacularly through the ranks to become chief of the national police, was elected president. The same year of his election, a terrible hurricane devastated the island, providing an excuse to assume dictatorial powers. Trujillo ruled over the country ruthlessly until his assassination in 1961, and personally had a profound impact on economic and state development.

Trujillo sought to integrate the Dominican economy into the international financial system while strengthening his own power base, using the state as a vehicle for accumulating wealth for himself and his supporters.⁶ The new

⁶ When the U.S. placed the Dominican government under receivership in 1915, many American sugar companies made substantial land acquisitions. Trujillo later acquired large tracks of land, many of which U.S. firms previously owned. Because of Trujillo's acquisitions, the U.S. share of the sugar industry had fallen from 93 per cent to 26 per cent of the total in the late 1950s (Betances, 1995:8). After

elite's capacity for capital accumulation, the payment of the foreign debt and the creation of a central bank facilitated foreign investment in the local economy. World War I then buoyed sugar prices in the international market. The increased investment capital allowed Trujillo to initiate a minor import-substitution industrial strategy.

Following his death, his political successors pursued most of the economic strategies initiated by Trujillo. Balaguer's near three decade rule offered a favourable environment for foreign investment, concentrated principally in mining, sugar, tourism, banking and commercial services. Construction became a growth sector, and in recent years, export processing zones, (mostly in the garment industry) have expanded rapidly. By 1991, this sector employed 135,000 workers, mostly young women. These nearly four hundred firms have become the leading source of exports under the Caribbean Basin Initiative (Safa, 1995: 34).

Due to their distinct beginnings and separate paths of development, the Dominican Republic has become a more prosperous country than Haiti (Appendix E). Haiti's devastating emancipation war isolated it both

Trujillo's death, his estate devolved to the Dominican state, which created a state corporation (the *Consejo Estatal de Azucar-CEA*) to handle his properties. As of 1986, the CEA still produced 60 percent of sugar while La Romana, owned by American interests, produce around 30 percent and the plantations owned by the Vincini group (a private Dominican company) produced 10 percent (Jansen and Milan, 1991: 36).

economically and politically from the rest of the world and, it was ill prepared for the art of government. Its land tenure system, the manipulation of the state apparatus for the benefit of a tiny despotic elite (and its failure to develop the economy) led Haiti to economic and political bankruptcy. Migration has been and remains for countless Haitians a key survival strategy.

The Need for Haitian Labour

While in decline, sugar remains a pillar of the Dominican economy. As indicated earlier, numerous researchers have sought to understand the Dominican sugar industry's dependence on Haitian labour and its deplorable treatment of Haitian workers. Most researchers examine the Dominican sugar industry's extensive use of Haitian labour in the context of the world economy, in which Third World nations are encouraged to pursue an export-oriented agro-development model, sustained by a grossly underpaid labour force. In the Caribbean, the plantation system has been the favoured mode for capital accumulation. Stimulated by industrial capitalism, first in Europe and then in the United States, the plantation economy has, until recently, been the basic mechanism for the accumulation and transfer of capital from the periphery to the centre (Sassen-Koob, 1983: 178).

Unlike other forms of capitalist agricultural production, the colonial plantation system depended on the extensive use of forced labour. After

slavery was abolished, this was done by manipulating workers' subsistence through payment in kind, extending cash advances or credit for products in company stores at non-competitive prices, and retaining a percentage on company vouchers. Labour was extracted as workers remained indebted through high interest rates charged on advances on their pay (Aguiar, 1983: 118). Another distinctive characteristic of this type of plantation system is its payment of workers for their production, *i.e.*, piecework, not their labour time. Paid only according to the quantity of cane cut, workers usually bear the risks during bad crops, with no form of security. The Dominican sugar industry, with its disenfranchised Haitian labour force as its backbone, is a prime example of this system. Whereas a slave represented a substantial investment for his or her owner, contemporary employers of Haitian workers have a small investment in their field hands. The worker is expendable; if sick or too old to work, he is replaced for a few dollars (Murphy, 1991: 95).

The question remains of how this system continued unabated in the Dominican Republic and why the sugar industry has to import Haitian labour when unemployment is so high in the Dominican Republic, especially in the countryside. Despite the relative growth in the economy over the last quarter century, unemployment and underemployment are persistently high in the Dominican Republic. Estimates of employment for the late 1970s suggest levels between 25 and 30 per cent at the national level, and close to 45 per cent

in the countryside; the level of underemployment in the rural areas is nearly 60 per cent (Murphy, 1991: 113).

The explanation for this apparent paradox is twofold. A structural explanation only supplies part of the answer. Other factors, more political and cultural in nature, supply the balance. The articulation of these sets of factors provides a more complete explanation for this phenomenon.

Stair-Step Migration and Sugar Production

Grasmuck (1983), argues that Haitian migration to the Dominican Republic is an example of an international *stair-step* migration system. As Sassen-Koob (1983: 177) notes, capitalism has often been presented with the problem of labour scarcity, a problem it needed to solve to fulfil an area's potential to generate surplus. To realize this potential, labour is imported from a peripheral society to occupy positions undesirable to native workers, especially in sectors that rely on a high labour/capital ratio (Grasmuck, 1983: 154). This process shares many economic political and cultural characteristics that accompany migrant workers imported to industrialized countries from the Third World. Interestingly, in this case, this process occurs between two peripheral economies.

Haitian labour destined to the sugar industry was first sought earlier this

century to remedy labour shortages in areas of low density in the Dominican Republic countryside. Later, Haitian labour became a remedy for an industry with very low productivity, a direct result of government development strategies (Grasmuck, 1983: 152; Corten 1986: 199). Because of the availability of a cheap and plentiful source of labour from Haiti, little investment occurred to modernise the Dominican sugar industry. The practice of importing labour when a labour surplus exists in the recipient country is often used to increase the source of cheap labour (Portes, 1978: 32; Sassen-Koob, 1983: 177). Increased production in the Dominican sugar industry was achieved by extending the land under cultivation and importing additional migrant labour from Haiti. As a result, the Dominican sugar industry, one of the largest sugar producers in the world, has among the lowest productivity levels (APROFED, 1994: 10). The average cut sugarcane per worker is 12-15 tons in Australia, 7 tons in Jamaica, 5-6 tons in Puerto Rico, but 1.5 tons in the Dominican Republic (Grasmuck, 1982: 167; Murphy, 1991: 60).

Many Dominicans resent the presence of Haitian workers because of their willingness to work for extremely low wages, which deflates their salaries (Lozano, 1993: 101; APROFED, 1994: 19). With earnings in the sugar industry below the level of absolute poverty by Dominican standards, sugar cutting is not considered a viable option (Grasmuck, 1983; Murphy, 1991). So, while it imports labour from Haiti, the Dominican Republic continues to experience

agricultural stagnation. Between 1966 and 1978, for instance, the industrial sector received around 60 percent of government development funds, while the agricultural sector received 28 percent (Betances and Spalding, 1995: 11). In 1985, a national survey on rural women found that 65 percent of Dominican rural households were landless or owned less than one and a half hectares of land (Mones and Grant, 1987: 41). The increasing land concentration and fragmentation in the Dominican countryside led to extensive migration from rural to urban areas. Internal migration generates labour surpluses in urban centres and migration to the U.S. (Grasmuck, 1983: 152). Indeed, the Dominican Republic exports as much labour as it imports. Remittances from Dominican expatriates – half million Dominicans in the United States, mostly in the New York city area and Puerto Rico – are a major source of revenue, second to tourism as the highest foreign earning source.

Ethnicity and Sugar Production

For most of the twentieth century, the Dominican sugar industry depended on foreign labour. Haitians represent the overwhelming majority of cane cutters in the sugar industry, the worst paid and most backbreaking work in the Dominican countryside. Put simply, work conditions are horrendous. In 1980, La Romana, the largest sugar plantation and sugar refinery in the Dominican Republic, employed more than 20,000 sugar workers, 90 percent of them Haitian cane cutters (Lemoine, 1981: 231). The new recruits (*kongos*),

usually poor peasants, get the hardest, back breaking work available, cutting cane twelve to fourteen hours a day. A few Haitians, with several years in the Dominican sugar plantations, called *viejos* (old ones), move up to better jobs such as driver or supervisor, and benefit from the very restricted upward mobility available to Haitians. Dominicans fill mostly supervisory positions and jobs requiring special skills (Lundahl, 1983: 139).

According to del Castillo and Murphy (1987: 64), the division of the sugar industry's labour structure along ethnic lines results from cultural policies designed to reinforce the Dominican national identity, *i.e.* that of a "white" nation. Undeniably, race has always been an important factor in shaping social, economic and political relations, both in Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Race plays a role in state and class formation, and is a factor in the economic development of both nations. While outside the scope of this thesis, it is important to consider that in Haiti, the question of race has been a crucial element in the formation of social classes and the development of present economic structures.

Initiated by Trujillo in 1932, the Dominican state engaged in a "dominicanization" campaign, favouring the immigration of Latin Americans and Europeans, and the deportation of Haitians back to Haiti (Murphy 1991: 46). These policies effectively restricted the entry of non-whites

by imposing a \$500 U.S. tax on immigrants. Censuses taken in 1935 and 1950, for instance, revealed marked divergences in ethnic distribution in the Dominican Republic: whites increased from 13 to 28 per cent; blacks decreased from almost 20 to 11.5 per cent; and mulattos declined from around 70 to the vicinity of 60 per cent (Logan, 1968: 14).

Factors such as the immigration of Jews from Nazi Germany in 1938 are credited for some increase in the white population. However, the massacre in 1937 of thousands of Haitians who had settled in the border region in the 1920s and 1930s also explain the dramatic changes (Hoetink, 1985: 64). Following the massacre, Trujillo enacted a deportation program to repatriate Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent back to Haiti. Interestingly, Trujillo, who acquired many sugar estates in the 1950s and could have hired Dominican labourers to work on his plantations, chose instead to use Haitian labour, following the practice initiated by the U.S. in the 1920s (Silié, 1993: 173). Despite legislation prohibiting the use of non-white foreign labour, a special provision to allow the temporary entry of Haitian workers to overcome labour shortages during the sugar harvest was passed.

To control the number of Haitians entering the Dominican Republic, an intergovernmental contract was negotiated in 1952 at the time Trujillo started

his sugar ventures (Betances and Spalding: 1995: 8).⁷ Under this bilateral agreement, Dominican sugar plantations started to officially import 12,000 to 15,000 Haitian workers annually (Lemoine, 1981; Castor, 1987). Typically, workers were obtained through a network of recruiters, military personnel and government officials (all of whom profited from the lucrative trade) and transported by truck at night to private and, more recently, state farms (Lemoine, 1985; Castor, 1987; Plant 1987). This trafficking often involved kidnapping workers from state plantations and transferring them to privately owned ones (Castor, 1987: 132).

This scheme has been profitable to dominant economic interests in the Dominican Republic, Haiti and abroad. In the Dominican Republic, many bureaucrats and investors benefited from their association with the *Consejo Estatal de Azúcar*, the Dominican corporation that manages the state owned sugar cane plantations and refineries. Balaguer granted the civilian and military bureaucracy considerable latitude to enrich themselves in return for their support. Senior military officers were granted concessions to grow sugar for the government mills, and from 1966 to 1978, about 40 percent of sugar cane produced for the CEA mills came from these lands (Betances, 1995: 13). Military control of the border provided further opportunities for such

⁷ After the fall of the Duvaliers, the Haitian government ended the inter-governmental contract. However, the offensive recruitment practices and harsh treatment of Haitians workers seem to still go on (APROFED, 1994: 20-23).

enrichment. In Haiti, the Duvalier family and the Haitian oligarchy allegedly received millions of dollars through a government contract to provide Haitian workers for the state owned Dominican sugar plantations. Not surprisingly, none of these transactions were ever accounted for in Haiti as state revenues (Latortue, 1985: 118).

However, the number of workers needed for the sugar industry is at least double the number recruited through official channels. Thus, illegal Haitian migration is an essential ingredient in making the Dominican sugar industry's competitive in the world market. Illegal migration takes various forms but involves the same schemes as with the intergovernmental contract. While Dominicans tend to perceive Haitians as a homogenous group, their situation in the Dominican Republic varies according to their legal status (Murphy, 1991: 147). One group consists of workers who enter legally through a contract and leave after the harvest. A second involves undocumented workers who enter the Dominican territory, avoiding border crossings (or *anba fil* – literally translated as under the barbed wires). Another group consists of workers who enter legally but remain in the Dominican Republic after the harvest; they reside almost permanently in the Dominican Republic thereafter. The undocumented children, born in the Dominican Republic of Haitian nationals, make up the last group (Veras, 1993: 112). The majority have given birth to children in the Dominican Republic who have

no nationality, and the children are neither Haitian nor Dominican, as the Dominican state refuses to grant them citizenship, disregarding its own constitution.

While illegal immigration of Haitians is officially condemned by the government, the continuous presence of Haitians on Dominican soil represents a windfall for the sugar industry by reducing the cost of recruiting Haitian workers every year. During the off season for sugarcane cutting, some workers are retained on the sugar plantation to cultivate and plant. Others move to other agricultural sectors, such as coffee that starts as the sugar harvest finishes. Without proper documentation, such as a visa or a work permit, this illegal immigration leaves Haitian workers totally unprotected when on Dominican territory (Murphy, 1991: 121).

In recent years, economic changes brought about by the collapse of sugar prices and the restructuring of the world economy have led to Structural Adjustment Policies and currency devaluations. All the factors have increased informal sector activity and the growth of low paying jobs in free trade zones factories, making Haitian foreign workers even more vulnerable as they compete with Dominicans for scarce jobs and depress salaries.⁸

⁸ While Free trade zones absorb some of the labour surplus in the Dominican Republic, it represents only a fraction of the (labour) offer.

Racial Prejudice in the Dominican Republic

Evidently, race plays a predominant role in the labour structuring of the sugar industry. However, racial prejudice is not unique to that sector. In the Dominican Republic, most of the poor are black and dark-skinned Dominicans are also discriminated against. This warrants examining how racial prejudice justifies the exploitation of “black” workers.

The presence of Haitians in the Dominican Republic is often called “the Haitian problem.” Anti-Haitian sentiment, a phenomenon institutionalized and manipulated by the elite, portrays the presence of Haitian migrants as a threat to Dominicans’ racial and cultural integrity (Murphy, 1991: 134). Their own African ancestry, and centuries of slavery, have largely disappeared in Dominicans’ self-image. To define themselves as close as possible to a Spanish nation, Dominicans have cultivated a near mythical Indian and Spanish ancestry (Charles, 1993: 159). School books rarely mention African ancestry, instead emphasizing their Spanish and Indian heritage – the latter being largely fictitious as the indigenous population became nearly extinct by 1650. (Menéndez Alarcón, 1994: 306).

Prejudices against blacks permeate Dominican popular culture and everyday life. The Church, the press and the educational system transmit negative images of Haitians. Racial prejudice can be found in jokes, in political confrontations, in school yards, in the workplace, in the media, *etc.*

(Menéndez Alarcón , 1994: 303). As a result, anti-Haitian feelings still run high among the Dominican population (Veras, 1985: 254), I was told repeatedly that Dominicans did not like Haitians and treated them badly. During the same visit, *Rumbo* (a magazine comparable to *Maclean's*) published an article (Dore, 1995), asking if Dominicans were racists or merely anti-Haitian.

Haitians who have retained more of their African heritage are frequently vilified, and portrayed as inferior, brutal and unclean. For instance, one woman from a working class neighbourhood told me that her mother told her when she was a little girl never to buy anything from a Haitian woman because, her mother said, Haitian people urinate and cook in the same pot. Haitians' religious beliefs (*vodoun*) contain many traces of their African heritage, but are often equated with witchcraft and evil (Veloz, 1977: 105-106):

Dominicans sometimes call me Haitian of the devil! I don't respond to them... they don't want to have anything to do with Haitians... Also when I go fetch water, they want to get their water before me even though I was there before, they want their water first, Haitian of the devil...! (woman in Jansen Millan's study, 1991: 135)

Dominican nationality then is synonymous with white, Spanish culture and Christianity while Haitians represent the black race, Africa, voodooism and superstition (Lundahl, 1983: 133). This portrayal of Haitians as primitive and inferior differs little from the views held by Europeans under slavery. Then

and now, Africa is represented as the dark continent, conjuring denigrating and threatening images of a place lacking knowledge or culture, people that were primitive, unrefined, ignorant and possessing evil traits and desires (Knight and Crahan, 1979: 2).

Dominican historians generally fail to acknowledge that Haitians abolished slavery in their country. Instead, memories of past brutalities and cruelties the Haitian armies committed against the Dominican population are cultivated (Lundahl, 1983: 133). The elite has repeatedly used the threat of Haitian invasion, real or imagined, to foment hostility among the Dominican population toward its neighbour. As the two nations began to resolve differences through diplomacy by the end of the nineteenth century, such fear mongering shifted from the possibility of a military invasion to one of mass migration, a threat not only to the Dominican territorial integrity but to its national identity (Moya Pons, 1993: 18-32).

Such chauvinism was fomented more systematically during Trujillo's autocracy, and then again under the government of Joaquín Balaguer (1966-78, 1984-1996). Balaguer's administrations developed an imposing Spanish cultural infrastructure. While not as sanguinary as his predecessor, Balaguer pursued the cultural policies begun by Trujillo, and even published a controversial anti-Haitian book in 1983, *La isla al revés* to promote his racist

ideology.⁹ *La isla al revés* contains references to animal-like levels of fertility, low moral values and promiscuity of Haitians and people of African origin, who spread repugnant [*sic*] diseases in the Dominican population. Haitians are also accused of “incest and other practices no less barbarous contrary to the Christian institution” which constitutes a “testimony to their tremendous moral deformities” (Murphy, 1991: 135-6). While Balaguer’s writings might be dismissed by some as ludicrous or just insane, his political and ideological influence cannot be downplayed.¹⁰ The book was immensely popular and was reprinted five times (Moya Pons, 1993: 27).

While these statements have been denounced by other Dominicans, the elite is largely responsible for fomenting or reinforcing anti-Haitian feelings. This in turn is used to help justify the subhuman treatment of Haitians in the sugar industry. For Haitians, it has also meant continued repression, with the latest expulsions being carried out as recently as 1991. Reports of military patrols brutalising detainees, forcibly separating of families, confiscating property and destroying citizenship papers are fully documented (ASI, 1993; Americas Watch, 1992; Lawyers Committee, 1991).

⁹ The book is a re-edition of a previous book Balaguer wrote in 1947 that Balaguer does not acknowledge (Murphy, 1991: 135).

¹⁰ Balaguer was president for most of the last thirty years (1966-78, 1984-1996).

Cheap Haitian labour ensures that their presence is somewhat tolerated, but they live with the fear of deportation if arrested, or assignments at plantations in the East (if male). Even Dominican citizens of Haitian origin live with this fear, particularly during deportation campaigns. Soldiers may arbitrarily rip up their *cédula* (identity card), because of their very dark skin, leaving them without any documentation to prove their Dominican citizenship (Murphy, 1991: 93-4).

Race and Class in the Dominican Republic

Race issues in the Dominican Republic have not produced the same level of social cleavages and level of violence as in the United States or South Africa. Still, it is a determining factor in the social ordering of Dominican society, and given its roots in slavery (Jansen and Milan, 1991: 23; Charles, 1993: 149-50; Albert, 1990: 54). Race permeates social relations, and this correlation delineates race and class. This relationship is not a strict one and may vary according to other factors such as gender, region or education (Charles, 1992: 147). For instance, "whiteness" increases at the higher levels of public service, armed forces, executive and managerial posts and institutions of higher education. Economic reality denies Dominicans with darker skin entry to most clubs and better restaurants and stores. Skin colour also affects staffing of positions involving dealings with the public, such as in banks, public relations, sales, tourism (Albert, 1990, 120; Menéndez Alarcón, 1994: 303; Dore, 1995: 10).

In the case of the Dominican Republic, race issues are mitigated by the fact that the majority of the population is mixed. The relative isolation and scarcity of the population, and the Dominican economic structure, allowed for a greater blending of the European and African populations (Hoetink, 1985: 59-60). Initiated during the Spanish Conquest, the diversification process continued for several centuries, with the forced migration of Africans brought into slavery and immigration from neighbouring nations, as well as from Europe, the Middle East and Asia. As in other Caribbean nations, Dominicans have developed a Creole culture.¹¹

While at least 70 percent of the Dominican population is of African origin, very few Dominicans would categorise themselves as black (Charles, 1993: 158). An elaborate and creative colour coding was devised to avoid categorising Dominicans as black (Logan 1968; Del Castillo & Murphy, 1987; Charles, 1992; Menéndez Alarcón, 1994). To describe darker skinned Dominicans, one uses the label “indio” (literally translated as indian). This colour system is institutionalized in official documents, including passports.

¹¹ The term creole takes on a variety of meanings depending on context. Sometimes it refers to someone born in the colonies as opposed to Europe or to a person of mixed parentage. In other instances it may refer to language. In this thesis, it refers to cultural forms developed in the Caribbean as an outcome of colonialism (Sorensen, 1993) which forced heterogeneous populations into a new cultural arrangement. Creole culture is strongly influenced by the culture of the Europeans (Menéndez-Alarcón, 1994) and is embodied in a strong class structured society (Drummond, 1980). Creole culture encompasses heterogeneity due to the diverse backgrounds of the society's members. While the expression of this heterogeneity takes multiple forms, it is a part of a hierarchical value system based on the principle of ethnic difference. In relation to the national culture of the colonizer, Creole culture is often the culture of the marginalized, not only in class, but in racial and ethnic terms as well (Benitez-Rojo, 1992: 274).

The skin colour spectrum includes light indian, cinnamon indian, dark indian and chocolate indian, among others (Albert, 1990: 70-1). The term Black is never used, although some Dominicans use the term mulatto as a self-effacing term when admitting to being of African origin (Menéndez Alarcón, 1994: 307).

As a social category, racial identity is contested and transformed constantly (Sorensen, 1993: 19). Dominican culture then, should be regarded as a process of constant flux – a process further intensified by international migration (Sorensen, 1993: 24). Migration to the United States, particularly in recent years, has played a significant role in redefining Dominican identity and Dominicans' self-image. In essence, however, Haitians who work in the sugar industry and agriculture, doing work that Dominicans despise, and for extremely low wages, combine the worst blend of social characteristics: poor, black and from Haiti. Therefore, racial prejudice takes its most extreme manifestation when referring to Haitians, the ultimate "others". In the Dominican Republic, the term "Haitian" is considered an outright insult. Perceptions of Haitians as destitute peasants, conditioned to ill treatment in their homeland, reinforces the notion that Haitians are to be treated inhumanely as workers (Murphy, 1991: 147). Dominicans perceive cane cutting as "work for slaves", and most cane cutters are blacks from Haiti who work under conditions reminiscent of slavery. This perception, "although

not the cause, helps to maintain a particular system of exploitation.”

(Murphy, 1991: 114).

As noted earlier, Haitians and Dominico-Haitians mostly live and work in the Dominican countryside, although many have found the cities and occupy various low paying jobs. Outside of the sugar industry in the Dominican countryside, Haitians work as field hands at salaries well below those paid to Dominican workers. Haitian male workers also work in the construction business, again earning a fraction of what their Dominican counterparts earn. It is almost impossible for Haitians to work in the formal sector of the economy (other than the sugar industry) as this is limited to those who can produce a Dominican identity card. Some second generation Haitians achieve this through various methods, outlined in Chapter Four. Dominico-Haitian women sometimes get jobs in the free trade zones, provided that they can produce the appropriate documentation.

This backdrop helps situate migrant Haitian workers in the Dominican economy. The next chapter analyses the gender ideology that helps exclude women from formal employment in the sugar industry, explaining why women are benignly neglected in academic studies of the industry and in agriculture generally, and why Haitian migrant women populate the informal sector of the Dominican economy.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Construction of Gender in the Dominican Republic

This chapter sets out by describing the place migrant Haitian women occupy in the Dominican economy, examining how the gender ideology in the sugar industry excludes women from formal employment. Although my fieldwork focuses on women outside the sugar plantation, the sugar industry is a textbook illustration of gender ideology prevalent in the Dominican Republic. The origins of the gendered division of labour in the Dominican Republic are retraced to clarify the dichotomy between the domestic and public sphere, and establish a framework to study women and work in that country. Chapter Two posited links, between the gendered division of labour and women's marginalization as workers in many parts of the world, on this dichotomy. Defined primarily as housewives, hence dependants, their unpaid work in the private sphere/home, while useful to capital, is not considered "work", and therefore has no value. This ideology has acted as a formidable mechanism to devalue women as workers and justify their marginalization. Unsurprisingly, Dominican women populate the informal sector of the Dominican economy and the worst paid jobs of the formal sector disproportionately, segregated along gender lines, e.g., the free trade zone assembly factories. Thus, gender ideology determines what place Haitian

migrant workers occupy in the Dominican Republic –and by extension in the world economy, and their choice of survival strategies. This gender analysis complements the political, racial and structural explanations for the need and place of Haitian labour in the Dominican Republic, and presents a more complete picture of the labour structure and composition.

The Sugar Industry and Gender Ideology

When I asked why only men are employed as cane cutters, generally the response was that cane cutting is not work for women (Moya Pons et al, 1986: 98). Yet women work as cane cutters in other Caribbean islands, notably Barbados and Jamaica, and in parts of Africa and Asia. The only logical conclusion then is that women are excluded from cane cutting, or any other work requiring manual labour, largely due to cultural factors, rather than physical ineptitude (Moya Pons et al, 1986: 98; Jansen and Millan, 1991: 19-26). In other words, women are culturally defined as incapable of plantation work (Murphy, 1991: 95).

This gender ideology in the sugar industry is the primary factor for women being largely excluded from formal employment. The sugar industry (and its male researchers) define women as agents of consumption rather than of production. By this view, women make no economic contribution as a member of a conjugal unit, let alone to the Dominican economy.

Furthermore, women are considered a drain on male earnings and on the sugar plantation by using housing, water and electricity (when provided), and a liability giving nothing back directly to the sugar industry (Moya Pons, 1986: 97-8).

With the emergence of the feminist movement globally, female researchers and activists have challenged traditional concepts of women's nature, and concurrently ascribed value to women's domestic work. These researchers provide an opposite analysis of women's contribution to the economy. Speaking about the Dominican experience, Jansen and Millan (1991) offer a different vision of women in the sugar industry than their male counterparts. Their analysis does agree that the prevailing gender ideology entails a clear preference for Haitian men for cane cutting which greatly limits women's chances for employment in the sugar industry. This clearly marginalises women as workers and forces them into dependant relationships, and is compounded because only working men have the right to housing in the *bateys*. Women's access to housing is contingent on the presence of a male plantation worker in the dwelling. This sometimes forces women to make various domestic arrangements to ensure the presence of a male worker¹ – extended families, multi-family dwellings or the presence of adult male children in the family's quarter – to secure a roof over their own head and

¹ Officially boys can become employed at the age of sixteen.

that of their children. Otherwise, they have no choice but to leave the *batey*.

Jansen and Millan concur with their male colleagues on the notion of a gender ideology in the sugar industry but strongly disagree about women's economic contribution. They maintain, similarly to feminist colleagues (see Chapter Two), that the invisibility of women's work has been an integral element of capitalist accumulation, whose importance has only recently been demonstrated, (Jansen and Millan, 1991: 14).

For instance, Moya Pons (1986: 93) reports that only 15 percent of women who lived in the *bateys* were working, while 82 percent had never been economically active (Moya Pons et al, 1986: 93). Interestingly, the percentage of women who reported working at the time of the Jansen and Millan study was 72 percent and less than 3 percent declared that they had never worked (1991: 98-9). The percentage of women who reported having ever worked as agricultural labourers in the sugar industry was only 19 percent, similar to what Moya Pons had found in 1986. In another study, female researchers found that 45 percent women were economically active, mostly through their own income generating activities (Bobeá and Guzmán, 1985: 127).

Jansen and Millan maintain that these anomalies rest partly on the definition of work. Statistical measurements based on the concept of "work" and

“employment” devised by census takers and economists are frequently misleading. This is particularly the case in the Caribbean, which is characterized by high unemployment, underemployment and job insecurity in the formal sector, and where, “employed” or not, women are adept at “making a dollar bill” in home-based activities interwoven with domestic activities and child rearing (Barrow, 1986: 131-2). But being constantly classified *a priori* as dependants makes it difficult for women to think of their activities, such as baking bread or washing clothes for a pittance, as real work (Jansen and Millan, 1991: 92). Women in the *bateys* have likely assimilated the dominant ideology that defined them as non working because most of their income generating activities are an extension of the domestic sphere and occur in the home.

Another potential source for the discrepancy is that previous studies did not report the unpaid agricultural work that women sometimes do for their husbands, such as loading cane on carts (Violeta Perez, CCDH, 1995, personal communication). It is also possible that some of the agricultural work, for which women receive payment, is not reported because it is treated as sub-contract work, and does not appear on the plantation’s books since it is men, not women, who are contracted by the sugar plantations. Although women typically receive a credit note to exchange for food in the company store, this contribution still can hardly account for the difference because women are

only marginally employed in plantation work. The discrepancy more likely resides in a common inadequacy of conventional economics: work in the informal sector, where women are found in large numbers, is simply not recorded as such.

Women's work

A basic element of women's economic contribution, regardless if they earn an income, is their unpaid domestic work. This labour includes preparing food, cleaning, washing, fetching water and gathering wood. Such endeavours ensure that the male worker continues to sell his labour at an exceedingly low cost day after day. As noted earlier, it includes the raising of children, and caring for the sick and the elderly, tasks that traditionally fall within women's domain. In the modern plantation system, employers no longer need to subsidize the biological or social reproduction of the labour force, unlike their slave owner counterparts (Murphy, 1991: 95). The cost of the reproduction of the labour force is left to the household. The sugar companies do not support women or those too young or old to work, and with rare exceptions, only the male worker has access to rudimentary medical care.

Accordingly, women, through their unpaid labour, bear reproduction costs through the sexual division of labour, which has been usually ignored by male researchers. Interestingly, in this case, the migration process forces

Haitian women into dependant relationships and household patterns that conform with those prevalent in the Dominican countryside. Presumably this diminishes women's bargaining power within the household more than when in Haiti or even outside the *bateys*, and stifles their ability to contribute to the survival of their family through income generation.

Women in the *bateys* expect to work: 84 percent would accept any offer of agricultural work if given the opportunity, and Haitian women arrive on their own, directly from Haiti, hoping to do so (Jansen and Millan, 1991: 115). While perhaps not successful, a number of Haitian women evidently come to the *bateys* to find work; they do not necessarily arrive as "dependants":

I arrived alone from Tiote (Haiti), I came with the kongos, to find work." (Haitian woman quoted in Jansen and Millan, 1991: 136)

I came alone from Haiti to La Romana, in batey 18... I started to work in the fields." (Haitian woman quoted in Jansen and Millan, 1991: 136)

Geographic isolation greatly impedes women's ability to earn income. Some *bateys* are located near villages (*bateyes agrícola principales*), towns or even cities (*bateyes centrales*), but others are kilometres away from the smallest

hamlet (*bateyes del campo*).² As one NGO worker stated:

Some of those bateys . . . You have no idea . . . The Dominican Republic is a small country but you go to one of those bateys and you think you are at the end of the world (Sergia Galván, MUDHA, 1995, personal communication).

Sometimes workers are allowed to use vacant land surrounding living areas for small gardens where they grow vegetables for their family and sell any surplus (Murphy, 1991: 118). However, these meagre plots are at risk whenever the plantation acquires land to plant cane. Hence, few of the households have gardens on sugar plantation land. Even when work opportunities are severely curtailed, women in the bateys attempt to earn their own income through income generating activities, even if the amounts generated are often minuscule.

As noted earlier, women's income generating activities generally consist of some undertaking closely connected to the domestic sphere, and requiring little capital. Usually labour intensive, often with the help of children, typically daughters, the products are for a clientele in the *batey* (Jansen and

² *Bateyes centrales* are the principal administrative unit of the sugar plantation industry and this is where the sugar refinery is located. They are often located in urban or semi-urban environments, with no clear geographical or economic boundaries between the *batey* and the surrounding community. *Bateyes agrícola principal* are an intermediate type of sugar plantation located in the countryside near villages that provides a link between rural sugar plantations and the *batey central*. Because of their administrative component, these *bateys* are better serviced and equipped than the *bateyes del campo* that are strictly sugar cane growing plantations and have the lowest level of services and transportation system.

Millan, 1991: 100-1). These activities often consist of washing and ironing, or preparing and selling food, but sometimes, women and girls can work as domestic servants for *batey* managers, shop owners or people in nearby communities (Murphy, 1991: 120). Other income generating activities include midwifery, sewing and petty retail. In Jansen and Millan's study (1991: 103), almost a quarter of the women interviewed had two income generating activities, and 5 percent had three.

I get up at five in the morning, I have my coffee. I put the peas in water and I make breakfast, I then make the dough for the bread. I bake it in a zinc oven and I put it on the window sill at six in the morning, which is when I open. While I keep an eye on the bread, I do housework. I wash my husband's and my grand-children's clothes... (woman in Jansen and Millan, 1991: 143).

I make sweets and I sell rice, peas, oil. That's how I can support my children (woman in Jansen and Millan, 1991: 144).

My money, I put it all in the house, I wash clothes for others because my husband's salary is not enough. Everything is so expensive . . . my husband give me my part and he keeps the rest (woman in Jansen and Millan, 1991: 143).

Girls are often expected to help their mothers with their work.

My mother took me out of school when I was seven. She was selling food in the sugar plantation and I helped her . . . I never could learn how to read or write (woman in Jansen and Millan, 1991: 138).

I did not go to school. I harvested coffee . . . a lot of coffee, every day (woman in Jansen and Millan, 1991: 138).

I studied until grade three. I couldn't continue because here in the batey there were no teachers . . . (woman in Jansen and Millan, 1991: 138).

Evidently, few opportunities for children to attend school exist, even when a batey is close to a village or town. Families of cane cutters cannot generally send their children, including those born in the Dominican Republic, to school, since most lack the citizenship status needed to enroll.³ Jansen and Millan (1991: 51) found that all the Haitian-born women they interviewed were illiterate, compared to 60 percent of the Dominico-Haitian women.

As often happens, women tend to use most or all of their money for the maintenance of the household, while men keep a portion to themselves. The amount that a man gives to his wife for food and other household necessities varies widely and at his discretion. While some men may give a substantial portion of their pay for their wives to manage; others will only give money sporadically, especially if they are in a relationship with another woman (Jansen and Millan, 1991: 124). Most men contributed only a portion of their earnings to the household, and kept the rest for their personal use, meagre amounts in light of the low wages in the *bateys*. While comparatively small in cash terms, women perceived their contributions as crucial to the survival of their family.

³ A number of NGOs have opened schools in the *bateys* in recent years as an attempt to remedy the lack of access. Organizations such as MUDHA also offer literacy classes to adult women.

Haitian Women and Prostitution

Prostitution in the Dominican Republic is a reality that cannot be ignored. In the *bateys*, people generally hold the view that women resort to prostitution because of financial difficulties (Moya Pons: 1986: 71). Some women assert that women do it by choice or "because they like it" but others contend women do it out of necessity (Jansen and Millan, 1991: 118). Jansen and Millan state that prostitution was never mentioned among the income generating activities that women reported to them. However, they do not dismiss the possibility that many women use sex to support themselves in the *bateys* but argue that its prevalence is exaggerated, due largely to sexist and racist stereotypes. Interestingly, nearly 46 percent of the women interviewed said they knew someone who was a prostitute (Jansen and Millan, 1991: 116-18).

Undoubtedly, the sugar industry has attracted prostitution, with networks, usually organized and managed on a regional basis by bar owners, in the *bateys* and surrounding communities. Often, women working in the sex trade commuted from one *batey* to the next according to a rotating schedule based on pay day, staggered purposely to maximize revenues (Moyan Pons et al, 1986: 96). Other women work on their own or through a *chulo* (pimp). More often prostitution is a last recourse in desperate circumstances, rarely practiced in one's own community, unless a very large *batey*. The amounts

women can earn through prostitution vary from a few cents to a few dollars

(Moya Pons: 96). Altilde Loudor, from Alas de Igualdad described the

situation of one young woman:

There was this twenty-two year-old woman in the batey who had been working as a prostitute in town since she was eighteen. She has three children. She was working in the bars and had a room where she brought the men. She would leave her children with her mother and visit them every two or three weeks. She didn't like doing this work, she got beaten up by men many times. We convinced her to stop and helped her find work in a free trade factory. She hopes she doesn't have AIDS. If she doesn't she was lucky because they usually don't take any precaution. (Altilde Loudor, Alas de Igualdad, 1995, personal communication)

A number of young women also arrive in the *batey*, unaware of what might happen to them. Some are quite naive and do not know what is going on. A *viejo* will look for an unattached and pretty girl and offer her a mattress to sleep on. After a couple of weeks, the *viejo* will tell her that she has to get to work if she wants to eat. He may beat and rape her if she refuses. With no place to go, she will comply. Sonia Pie of MUDHA recounted the situation of one young woman in a *batey* whom MUDHA was trying to help:

Recently, there was this case in a batey of a young woman who was very pregnant and the chulo insisted that she keep working. She didn't want to so he beat her up . . . he even kicked her in the belly. (Sonia Pie, MUDHA, 1995: personal communication)

Sometimes very young girls are coerced into prostitution, forced by their

parents to have sex with men in positions of power in the *batey* to repay some debt or to obtain special favours (Pie, 1995: 26). MUDHA has expressed publicly its concern about this situation.

Prostitution is a common feature of tourist areas in the Caribbean, and recent media reports indicate that Dominican tourist areas exploit very young women, frequently teenagers from underprivileged and abusive families. (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1996). How many Haitian women may be involved in this trade is unclear, as its covertness obscures the extent that Haitian women use it as a strategy for survival.

Violence Against Women

The precarious status of Haitian women in the Dominican Republic puts them in a very vulnerable position, exposed to all sorts of abuses. Violence against women, while believed widespread, especially in the *bateys* where over-crowding and poor working and living conditions support violence, is a problem generally neglected (Altilde Louidor, Alas de Igualdad, 1995, personal communication). While the incidence of rape is unknown, there is ample evidence that this crime goes both underreported and unpunished, unless the victim happens to be Dominican (Sonia Pie, MUDHA, 1995, personal communication).

Rape of young girls, particularly, goes unreported. Several reasons account for this, including that as a result of rape, a girl becomes a legitimate target for men's sexual advances. But there is also a myth about virginity in the culture: once a girl is no longer a virgin, men feel they don't have to respect her anymore, and that they can have sex with her. So, she runs the risk of being raped again. When a girl is raped, she is discreet about it. (Sonia Pie, MUDHA, 1995, personal communication). With all the myths and prejudices surrounding black women and sexuality, it is not surprising that Haitian women are viewed as sexual merchandise. (Pie, 1995: 26).

MUDHA has tried denouncing incidents of violence against women and girls but has run into considerable resistance. Haitian and Dominico-Haitian organizations accuse MUDHA of being influenced by Dominican feminists and of trying to divide the community. I was told, for instance, of a particular case involving a Haitian refugee who had raped three little girls, two of whom were Haitian and the third a Dominican. While arrested on account of the rape of the young Dominican girl, there was pressure applied to the first two families not to report the rape of their little girls:

When he committed the first rape he was arrested but the unions and the Church put a lot of pressure on the family to drop the charges because he was a (Haitian) refugee. He did it again, and once more there was pressure not to charge him. Now, he is in prison because of the little Dominican girl (Sonia Pie, MUDHA, 1995, personal communication).

A wide variety of social forces underlie the nexus of race, class and gender plays a large part in the treatment of the Haitian female migrant population in the Dominican Republic.⁴

A crucial factor exacerbating the vulnerability of Haitians is their illegal status in the Dominican Republic. Besides preventing most Haitian women from seeking or obtaining legal remedies to wrongs and abuse they are subject to, it renders them more malleable and exploitable as a labour force. Naturally, this extends beyond the *bateys*, affecting Haitian migrant women workers in other agricultural sectors of the Dominican countryside; as domestics in towns and cities; women involved in the sex trade and "self employed" as petty retailers or through other income generating activities in the informal sector.

Interestingly, a number of women appear to work independently as petty retailers but often, "self employed" workers are linked to formal sector firms. Several scholars, like Portes (1978 and 1981) have shown that such informal sector activity is done primarily for formal sector firms. This informal trading represents an efficient and lucrative means of distributing both nationally produced and imported products to domestic markets (Amin, 1980: 25, cited in Harrison, 1991: 178). Such informal economic activities use a practically

⁴ Most rapes in the Dominican Republic do not get reported as there is considerable stigma attached to being raped. In this case, the rape got reported and charges laid most likely because the perpetrator was Haitian (Susi Pola, Núcleo de Apoyo, 1995, personal communication).

free labour force, and subsidize the formal sector by producing goods and services at reduced prices (Harrison, 1991: 178).

The subordination of Haitian women in the Dominican economy is due both to their vulnerability as workers, and the gender ideology prevalent in the Dominican Republic. The gender ideology prevalent in the sugar industry is not restricted to that sector but consistent with the division of labour in the Dominican countryside, where men are given preference in wage work and women forced to find alternate ways to generate income (Mones and Grant, 1987: 42).⁵ Most rural Dominican women (82 percent) carry out activities linked to the households that do not conflict with their assigned social function of reproduction (Mones and Grant, 1987: 42). In the face of the structural adjustment crisis of the 1980s, low-productivity activities designed to ensure the household's survival have proliferated. Women usually participate in agriculture during the labour intensive phases, mostly during the harvest in crops traditionally employing women, such as coffee, cotton, tomatoes, tobacco and peanuts, and to a lesser extent, potatoes, beans, chickpeas and melons (Mones and Grant, 1987: 43). However, for certain crops such as coffee, Haitian workers are preferred because of the low wages they accept (Mones and Grant, 1987: 43). The steady disintegration of the sugar

⁵ Interestingly, in the National Survey on Rural Women carried out in 1985 by female researchers, it was found that 84 percent of Dominican women in rural areas were contributing to the household through income generating activities. This is a much higher figure than the 21 percent reported in a general rural census taken in 1981 (Mones and Grant, 1987: 40-1).

industry, combined with the low productivity of state owned sugar plants, has increased reliance on Haitian labour in other agricultural sectors. Many Haitian women and men work as seasonal workers in coffee, cocoa, rice, vegetable and citrus production. Many Haitian women also work as petty retailers, both in rural and urban areas. This is an informal sector activity for which Haitian women are famous and that they dominate in Haiti. The importance of this activity warrants examining it briefly.

The marginalization and exploitation of women in Haiti has been documented (Neptune Anglade, 1986, 1988). However, Haitian women in Haiti play a crucial role in one aspect of the rural economy: the commercialisation of crops for local consumption. In Haiti, women participate significantly in agricultural production and play a key role in the commercialisation of crops, as petty traders in rural and urban areas (Sylvain Bouchereau, 1957; Mintz, 1961 and 1964; Anglade, 1978; Neptune Anglade, 1986, 1988). This longstanding activity often has ensured the survival of the household at the micro economic level (Neptune Anglade, 1986: 104). Currently, nearly every Haitian household could not survive without the income generating activities of women (Neptune Anglade, 1988: 40). In addition, women in Haiti historically were an integral part of peasant farming, helping to grow some crops for themselves or for sale locally, and others for export. Women exercise control over the revenues of local crops,

which they market, while men do the same for export crops (Sylvain Bouchereau, 1957: 138). But with the reduction of arable land, women have been shunted aside, their participation in agriculture dropping from 82 percent in 1950 to 49 percent in 1982 (Neptune Anglade, 1995: 171). Peasant women are now twice as likely to be involved in market activities than in agricultural production (Neptune Anglade, 1995: 163). In rural areas, where over 90 percent of petty retail merchants are women (Neptune Anglade, 1986: 163), commercial activity is the women's domain and is central to the movement of goods and money generated from farming (Métraux, 1960: 55). In addition, women sell clothing, bedding and a variety household and personal necessities, such as soap, matches and coal for cooking.

Haitian women also enter the informal commercial sector at a very young age compared to industrialized countries, where schooling is compulsory until the age of fifteen or sixteen. Expected to take over their mother's trade, little girls from the age of eight or nine onwards are trained in commercial matters, learning to haggle under the supervision of their elders (Métraux, 1960: 55). Haiti's participation rate for girls aged ten to fourteen in the informal economy is striking (30 percent), even measured against comparable countries. The rate of participation for girls of the same age in the Caribbean and Latin America rarely exceeds 5 percent (Neptune Anglade, 1988: 120).

Women's commercial activity increases until they marry (*plaçage* or marriage).⁶ Women continue being very active throughout their child bearing years, contrary to the custom in many other countries. Of women involved in income generating activities, only one percent abandon these activities upon having children, and 45 percent of women over 65 continue informal market activity (Neptune Anglade, 1995: 171). Haiti and Bolivia are the only countries in the western hemisphere where women's income generating activities seem to increase with the number of children. In 1982, the official statistics for the economically active female population in Haiti was 46 percent, markedly higher than in the Caribbean (20 percent) or Latin America (12 percent) (Neptune Anglade, 1988: 117).⁷

Origins of the Sexual Division of Labour in the Dominican Republic

The sexual division of labour in the Dominican Republic derives from colonial times and is rooted in the notion of separate spheres for men and women (Safa, 1995: 45). Yet, these categories have not remained static, shifting through time as cultural norms, political goals and economics dictated. The first Europeans sought to impose their social, cultural and religious beliefs

⁶ *Plaçage* is a consensual union. It is governed by a set of rules and obligations similar to those of marriage. Because marriage is a costly proposition, most Haitian peasants opt for *placage* instead of a formal marriage.

⁷ While the reliability of these statistics may be questionable given their source, Haitian women still have a higher participation rate than women from other countries.

upon the populations of the new world, including values dictating the organisation of work. Still, the Spanish used both indigenous men and women as slave labour in the gold mines in the early days of the colony, but as the number of women increased, Spanish traditional values and gender roles soon prevailed, even for slaves.

The Spanish brought women slaves in part as a measure of social control, hoping their presence would decrease the possibility of insurgency (Albert, 1990: 20). Generally, the sexual division of labour in the Spanish colony called for men to work in the mines and plantations. Women performed domestic work or its extension (small animal husbandry, vegetable garden, food preservation, weaving, selling food in the market), though some did field work (Albert, 1990: 30). While it is nearly impossible to estimate how many African women were enslaved, most in the Dominican Republic were undoubtedly acquired to perform domestic work (Liriano, 1993: 52).

For some time, these norms surrounding the colonial sexual division of labour hid the fact that in many parts of Africa women did most of the fieldwork. Whether the Spanish knew this is not apparent but they clearly preferred male labour in agricultural production, in the beginning at least. According to colonial beliefs, women were less productive than men, more fragile and aged faster (de Barros Mott, 1993: 85). However, plantation owners

later rationalized that women slaves were just as effective as men on the plantations, and cost less (Knight and Crahan, 1979: 12).

The proportion of women slaves in the Caribbean increased to nearly 50 percent of all slave arrivals by the mid eighteenth century, up from 20 percent in the early days of the slave trade (Knight and Crahan, 1979: 12). In mid nineteenth century Cuba, for instance, women had a higher productivity level as cane cutters than men (Moya Pons et al, 1986: 98), and were required to cut cane for up to twenty hours a day, even in the ninth month of pregnancy (Reddock, 1985: 65). Some work, such as the extraction of sugar and boiling of cane juice, was very dangerous and required workers to stay alert throughout the night. Given these hazards, this work was often done by women, whose market value was often half that of male slaves (de Barros Mott, 1993: 87). As agricultural production shifted from sugar to more lucrative crops such as cotton, women often became preferred workers.

In the Dominican Republic, with the population scarcer and the economy based on cattle ranching, the need for female slave labour was much reduced. Since the Spanish colony of Santo Domingo did not use female slave labour as extensively as other colonies, this helped preserve the Spanish colonial *casa/calle* distinction. Fostered by Catholicism, the colonial ideology relegated women to the home, as a way of maintaining family honour and female

virginity (Safa, 1995: 45). While this private/public sphere separation was never entirely followed by the poor, since women had to work for the survival of the family and were integrated in the peasant economy, it was held as the norm. The prevailing view among Dominicans still is, especially among lower class men, that women should not work outside the home, their role consisting in raising children and maintaining the home (cleaning, cooking, washing); above all, they are the possession of the head of the household (Moya Pons et al, 1986: 95).

Nowadays, the confinement of women to the home has been supplanted by occupational segregation in the workforce (Safa, 1995: 47). Even as Dominican women are increasingly present in the labour market, especially in the export processing zones and the informal sector, the traditional gender ideology ignores women as breadwinners, and in the division of labour in the household:

Men are seen as workers with family responsibilities, while women view themselves, and are viewed, as wives and mothers with economic responsibilities (Safa, 1995: 48).

So women in the Dominican Republic and in Haiti are integrated in the economy along gender lines. The gender ideology prevalent in the *bateys* is not unique to that sector but a reflection of the division of labour in the Dominican country side. This marginalizes women and forces most to devise

income generating activities to ensure the survival of their household. Race ideology in the sugar industry is also not unique to the sugar industry but systemic to all economic and social relations in the Dominican Republic. Therefore, we can expect that the prevalent race ideology keeps Haitian women in the lowest paid work in agricultural sectors outside the sugar industry and in the informal sector in urban areas. Certainly, dark skinned Dominican and Dominico-Haitian women (men too, of course) are discriminated against, and even vilified (Pie, 1995: 26). Expressions such as “maldita negra” (damned black [woman]) or popular sayings such as “no te casas con una negra que atrasas la raza” (don’t get married to a black woman, you’re going to do damage to the [white] race)⁸ are common (Albert, 1990: 114). The combination of being a woman and black carries with it the assumption of weakness and ineptitude (Durán, 1987, cited in Albert, 1990: 127).

This is not to oversimplify what it means to be “black” and “woman” in the Dominican Republic, nor to treat black women as a homogenous group. As noted earlier, the issue of race in the Dominican Republic is tempered by a series of factors – class, geography, language or legal status – that shape and define individual and collective experiences. The exploitation of Haitian female workers is not due solely to the colour of their skin, or their gender.

⁸ The ideal being white.

Other structural factors, linked with colonialism and the international division of labour, all impoverished Haiti more than the Dominican Republic, and forced many Haitians to migrate to survive.

In the next chapter, I present my findings from the fieldwork that I conducted in the Dominican Republic in the spring of 1995. This case study – based on the survival strategies of twelve Haitian women – reveals the nature of their economic contribution to the Dominican and Haitian economy, how this is articulated through household strategies, and how they constitute resistance and hence, agency.

CHAPTER FIVE

Survival Strategies and Resistance

This chapter specifically addresses the survival strategies of migrant Haitian female workers in the Dominican Republic. It shows that the circumstances and strategies of these women vary according to a number of factors, such as class, education, legal status and language skills. Family and personal networks also play a part in their survival strategy. The first part of this chapter situates the women geographically, and sketches the contour of their daily life, followed by a further exploration of the commonalities and variations of their experiences. The Haitian women I interviewed live and work in four distinct locations: Libertad, Batey Baraguay, Santiago and Santo Domingo, and are grouped together accordingly. Before introducing each woman, I describe briefly each location. As noted in the introduction, I use the ethnographic present to represent the reality as it appeared to me during my visit.

Libertad

Libertad is a community of several hundred people located about forty-five kilometres west of Santiago, on the highway leading to the border with Haiti (see Appendix D). One of several communities where Haitian migrant

workers have settled in the wake of the restructuring sugar industry, coffee, rice and other vegetable crops have replaced sugar cane. As a former *batey*, six rows of decaying barracks that used to house cane cutters and other smaller buildings form the core of the community. The barracks are built with concrete floors, tall wooden walls and metal roofing, its rooms small, about two to three square metres, housing up to six individuals. These dwellings have no electricity, no running water and very poor ventilation, forcing the residents to add canopies to the front to provide shelter from the sun. Current residents have also added dividers, made of scrap materials, between the rooms to provide each family with a minimal sense of privacy. There are narrow pathways between these rows, bordered by gullies on both sides to allow for rain water to drain. Around these permanent buildings, other Haitian families have built their own little shacks. Made of scrap materials, mostly wood, cardboard and corrugated iron, some of these shelters seem fairly sturdy, but others appear as if they could be blown away by a strong gust of wind.

Dominican families also live in Libertad. They are landless peasants, and are much less numerous than their Haitian neighbours. But on the whole, they appear better off, generally having better houses, with some access to electricity. One or two of the Dominican families even own refrigerators, used for their retail business. There are a few mixed marriages between

Dominicans and Haitians but they are not very common, as language barriers and racial prejudice hinder communication between the two communities. Generally, Dominicans and Haitians keep to themselves. Many Haitian residents of Libertad have been living there for several years, some up to fifteen. Most work as agricultural labourers or are “self employed” as petty retail merchants. A few young women work as domestics in nearby Esperanza, a town of a few thousand inhabitants five kilometres away.

At the time of my interviews, Libertad residents were harvesting peas and rice, earning eight to sixteen pesos a day during the harvest.¹ In Libertad, the day typically begins between five and five thirty, the usual morning meal consisting of bread and coffee. Then, Haitian men, women and children depart for work as day labourers, and can be observed walking – sometimes with nearly an hour still to get to work – along the road with their ragged sacks in the predawn light.

Upon reaching the fields, a boss assigns tasks. Work starts around seven to take advantage of the cooler hours – by nine o’clock it is already suffocatingly hot. At the end of the day, the workers bring their sacks for measuring. As each of their shares is measured, the labourers watch to ensure they are not cheated. Once everyone is paid, they head home for their main meal of the

¹ When I conducted these interviews, eight pesos were worth approximately one Canadian dollar.

day. During the day, the community is relatively quiet but becomes animated later in the afternoon when the farm workers return from the fields.

Liliane is a woman in her late thirties, the mother of six children, operating a little store from her home in Libertad, selling food such as bread, salami, coffee and spice, as well as household items such as coal, matches and soap. Three of her children live in Haiti, and three are in Libertad. Of the latter, two were born there and have a Dominican father of Haitian origin, Liliane's present husband who works as a day labourer. These two children, a girl and a boy, live with the couple in one room in the barracks. Liliane older daughter lives in Libertad with a Haitian man, with one child, and speaks Spanish adequately enough to work as a domestic in Esperanza.

Liliane complains that it is difficult to make a living in Libertad. People have little cash and she often has to sell on credit, and barely makes enough to live. At first, when Libertad was still a sugar plantation, she was making and selling bread to the workers with her eldest daughter. She later tried work as a labourer but found that she was much slower than the other women and became discouraged. With the help of her husband, she managed to buy a bit of merchandise to sell. Her ten year old daughter helps with the business when not at school. She patrols the community with a small plastic bucket on her head, where there are her few items for sale.

Yvonne operates a tiny shop from the window sill of her home. In her mid forties and living alone, she has been in the Dominican Republic for twenty-five years. Like Liliane, she sells food and household items to residents of Libertad. Her four children are grown and live in Haiti, with her husband's family. She sent them to Haiti because she believes the family context there provides a better environment than Libertad. Her youngest daughter, nearly eighteen, visits every few months and brings with her merchandise to sell. Yvonne gives her money for her upkeep in Haiti.

Recently, Yvonne borrowed a considerable sum of money to buy clothes in Haiti to sell in Libertad. Unfortunately, while in transit, the money was stolen. Now she has to repay it, little by little. Because she participates in a *san*.² (a rotating fund), she does not have to repay the entire amount immediately. Every week she contributes her share, and a part of the money that she previously borrowed.

In her forties, Zénaïde works as a seasonal labourer, and lives with her husband, whom she met upon arriving in the Dominican Republic ten years ago. Her five children and five grand-children are all living in Haiti. Zénaïde originally came to the Dominican Republic to earn income to help her

² Rotating credit fund. The *san* works on the same principle as the West African tontines. The mechanism of the *san* is described later in this chapter.

children build a house in Haiti. She confesses that life in the Dominican Republic is more difficult than anticipated, and she is not earning near the amount expected. In the past, she was able to occasionally send money, but now she feels old and tired, and has problems with her eyes.

Zénaïde came to Libertad with a girlfriend. Without a place to stay, a Haitian man (her present husband) offered to let her stay with him. Not having many options, she accepted, and they have been together since. Zénaïde's husband is also a farm labourer. The couple share expenses for the household but she and her husband keep their savings separate, to be spent on their respective families, when possible. In 1991, they were deported to the Haitian border but managed to return to Libertad a few months later.

Violaine is a woman in her thirties, with three children. At the time of my visit to Libertad, she is not well. She gave birth a few months before and pregnancy related health problems linger. Unable to work for the moment, Violaine is the only one of the twelve women I interviewed, who is almost entirely dependant on her husband for her own, and her children's, survival. In Haiti, she was subsisting by "selling a few little things" and living with her mother.

She has tried to leave her husband twice and had returned to Haiti but once

there she felt rejected by her own family. As her husband (the father of the two youngest children) was not sending any money, she decided to return to Libertad. Violaine complains that her husband gives her no money for her to do business, and is also upset because he drinks a lot and becomes abusive. The oldest of her children is a nine year old boy who has to work to help Violaine with daily expenses. Unhappy and depressed with her situation, she feels she has nowhere to go.

Bernadette is a woman in her mid thirties who came to the Dominican Republic with her husband and her father-in-law seven years earlier. Bernadette and her husband first went to the East to work in the sugar plantations but the conditions were bad, so they left. Bernadette has three children, two of whom live in Haiti. One is already grown and married. Bernadette is very unhappy in the Dominican Republic and wants to go back to Haiti but the couple's economic prospects there are not good and she is afraid of violence. The self-imposed exile is the only option for the moment. In Libertad, Bernadette and her husband work as field hands on nearby farms, and she cooks meals for additional income.

When Bernadette comes back from the fields, she starts a fire by the door inside her minuscule, windowless dwelling to prepare meals that are sold to other workers. Despite the danger of fire, she says she prefers to cook inside

her shack to keep the breeze from blowing out the fire. With barely enough space for a bed, Bernadette and her husband's belongings hang on nails the walls and on ropes stretching across the room. At the foot of the bed, the couple has erected a little altar for the family spirits. A piece of cloth serves as a door.

Germaine is a woman in her early forties living alone in a little shack by the highway, who also works as an agricultural labourer. She has been in the Dominican Republic for fourteen years, spending several in Libertad. Her husband left a few years back and has not been heard from since, and she is no longer close to her family in Haiti. Her shack stands apart from the rest of the Haitian households, on the opposite side of the highway.

Recently, Germaine had the misfortune of losing two children, one to an illness, the other to the highway, hit by a car right in front of her dwelling. Left with such deep wounds, she finds comfort in religion and emotional support from the Evangelist church across the road. Her recent conversion to the Evangelist church entails (or at least appears to) suppressing her longstanding belief system strongly rooted in *vodoun*. She candidly talks about the struggle going on in her mind.

Batey Baraguay

Mirlande and Juliette both live in a *batey* on the old highway between Santiago and Puerto Plata an hour north of Santiago. The *batey* is the site of an old antiquated mill that still processes sugarcane from the area. Housing consists of barracks similar to those of Libertad but unlike Libertad, large trees provide some shade. There are no other buildings than those provided by the government. At the time of my visit, the harvest is over and there are only a few men around the *batey*. Sugar cane still stands in nearby fields, too scrawny to harvest.

Mirlande operates a little store out of her room, selling cooking items such as spices, vegetables, rice and oil. She has been in the Dominican Republic for twelve years, several of them in *batey* Baraguay. She has five children living with her, all born in the Dominican Republic. Her husband works in the plantation during the harvest and moves to other agricultural work during the off season, leaving Mirlande behind.

Juliette is a friend of Mirlande and has been living with her temporarily. Her husband has left her for another woman. No longer having a husband, she has to make other living arrangements to stay in the *batey*. To get by, she is making sweets with peanuts sold in the streets of Puerto Plata, half an hour away by bus. As a tourist area, Puerto Plata is a pole of attraction for a number

of Haitian men and women. Juliette's children are back in Haiti with her relatives. She has returned to the Dominican Republic, temporarily, she says to get back on her feet. She plans to go back to Haiti as soon as possible. Some women come to Puerto Plata from nearby *bateys* to sell sweets and fruit to tourists in the streets or on the beaches. Others walk along the beaches offering to braid the hair of North American and European tourists who flock to the area.

Santiago

As I noted earlier, Santiago is the second largest city in the Dominican Republic, a large provincial city and the commercial centre of the North, with a population between two and three hundred thousand. By Dominican standards, Santiago is an affluent city, built on export agriculture, mostly tobacco and coffee money. Santiago also hosts one of the largest tax free export processing zones in the Dominican Republic, and boasts of advantageous economic conditions to foreign owned companies and excellent living standards available to their managers (Calderón and Gonzales, 1993: 17).

The few Haitians who live and work in Santiago are mostly employed in the construction business or as domestics. There are also street vendors who congregate on the side of one of Santiago's streets, near the city centre. The area has been dubbed the "Haitian market", populated at the time of my visit

mostly by male merchants. A group of young Haitian women and men apparently congregate every evening in one park, also near the city centre, which has acquired the name of “park of the Haitians”. My Dominican colleagues believe that the women are prostitutes, and several attempts to engage them in a conversation fail, the women remaining evasive as to their livelihood in Santiago.

Many Haitian men who work in the construction industry live on the construction sites and guard them at night. Some of them have wives and children with them who ostensibly beg in the streets during the day. It is unclear why these people are allowed to stay in Santiago when the authorities take pains to restrict the entry of Haitians by erecting check points on all the highways leading to the city. I suspect that corruption plays a role, as the construction business uses Haitian labourers who earn as little as a quarter of what Dominican workers make (CTP, 1995, personal communication).

Pascale is the only woman that I interviewed who lives and works in Santiago. At twenty-two, Pascale is single and works as a domestic for a Dominican family. She has been in the Dominican Republic for six years. In Haiti, she was living with an older brother and his family after her parents died but didn't like it there. She begged her other brother, who works as a day labourer in construction in the Dominican Republic, to bring her.

Like clockwork, Pascale's life is determined by endless housework chores and the demands of her employers. She hopes to eventually work in the free trade zone, aware that she would be exchanging the drudgery of domesticity to that of the assembly line. But she points out that her earnings would be four times greater. She goes to evening school five nights a week, trying to complete grade two.

Despite Pascale's wishes to work in a free trade zone factory, it is almost impossible for a Haitian woman to work in the export processing zones. This option is limited to those with a Dominican identity card (*cédula*) and who can speak Spanish proficiently enough. Some second generation women of Haitian descent aspire to this and are able get work in free trade zones, if they can produce the proper documentation. To fulfil her dream of working in a Dominican factory, Pascale first has to become of Dominican citizen, in one of two ways. She can marry a Dominican, the most likely option, or she can be "adopted" by a Dominican family (in exchange for a certain fee). As will be discussed, this latter option is one of the "irregular" ways used to circumvent the system.

Santo Domingo

The other women that I interviewed live and work in Santo Domingo. As a city of over a million people and the centre of government and business,

Santo Domingo is the hub of economic activity in the Dominican Republic. Haitian populations congregate mainly in two neighbourhoods of the city, *Cristo Rey* and in the market area of old city that has been dubbed *Petit Haiti* because of the number of Haitian and Dominico-Haitian families who live or work there. The market in the old city bustles with activity, with daily arrivals and departures of colourful trucks from Haiti loaded with merchandise. Haitian market women sell clothing and body care products at little stalls, their merchandise bought on credit from larger merchants and resold on the street. Other Haitian women sell food that they prepare on the street.

The women that I interviewed work and live in *Petit Haiti* in rented rooms in nearby rundown apartment buildings for between two and four hundred pesos a month. The buildings are clearly grossly overcrowded. For instance, in one of these rooming houses, approximately fifty people share one toilet and one sink. The residents complain that the children have skin problems and all sorts of other ailments.

In her early forties, Alice is a petty retail merchant who has been coming to Haiti for about ten years. She buys and sells goods both in Haiti and in the Dominican Republic, mostly merchandise that she can carry easily across the border. About a year and a half ago, she broke an ankle during one of those

crossings and had to remain in Haiti until it healed. She usually spends a couple of months in each place. When she has earned enough to buy more merchandise, obtained on credit, she crosses the border again to sell her goods. She lives alone with one small child, and her other three children live with relatives in Haiti. Her husband left her for another woman, and Alice says that she has to work much harder than before to support her children.

At thirty-two, Gisèle also works as a petty retailer. She has been in the Dominican Republic for three years, sharing a room with a cousin and two children. She has eight children, six of whom live with her parents in Haiti. Any money left after she has paid for rent and food is sent to Haiti to support her children, the eldest of whom is a girl of sixteen. Alice would like her daughter to learn a trade rather than become a street merchant like her.

She says that her husband, although no longer living with her, occasionally provides money for the children or lends her money for the business. She spends every day in the market, from morning to dusk. There is little entertainment at night. After she and her cousin gather their merchandise, they eat and spend the evening resting and chatting with the other residents of *Petit Haiti*.

Mylène has been coming to the Dominican Republic for a number of years. At

thirty eight, she is the mother of six children who live in Haiti with relatives. She met her husband, a Dominico-Haitian man in Santo Domingo. He owned a truck and they had a fairly successful business trading between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. They had decided to live in Haiti after the Duvalier regime fell but her husband, a supporter of Aristide, was shot and killed in the period following the 1991 coup. Having lost all their belongings, she came to the Dominican Republic and was accepted as a refugee.³ Her refugee status ended when she took part in the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) repatriation program. She borrowed money from Dominican friends to establish a small business, and resumed her petty retailing activities, travelling back and forth between the two countries. In November 1994, she was mugged and robbed in Haiti when purchasing merchandise there. She also had malaria and stayed in Haiti until she recovered. Having just returned to the Dominican Republic with a niece, she hopes her Dominican friends can help her once again.

Migration Patterns and Motives for Migrating

Most of the women I interviewed did not come to the Dominican Republic with husbands, although several (but not the majority) are living with men at the time of my interviews. Others, who came with husbands or met them

³ After the 1991 coup, there were about 30,000 Haitian refugees in the Dominican Republic. By 1995 most had been repatriated (Hypolite, Haitian Embassy, 1995, personal communication).

in the Dominican Republic, are no longer with them. Some are now living with a man, while others are alone, with, or without, children. Some women have migrated alone, others with friends or relatives. Often, another family member or a relative already worked in the Dominican Republic, which facilitated the decision to come.

When asked why they came to the Dominican Republic, most recount having difficulties with their families in Haiti. Clearly, the economic situation is a major factor for leaving Haiti. The political instability is also mentioned, which is clearly linked in women's minds to the economic situation. The women all perceive the situation to be better here than in Haiti.

I came here because I thought that I could earn enough money to put some aside and help to build a house for my children but I found out that life here was not that easy. (Zénaïde)

I was living with my husband in Haiti. I was selling in the streets. My husband was not treating me well. I came to visit my father who had been working here in the sugar plantations for twenty five years. I had not seen him for many years, so I decided to visit him and decided to stay. (Liliane)

I came to the Dominican Republic with a cousin. I was fourteen years old. I came here...to find life. I was very hungry. (Mirlande)

There's no choice if you want to eat. (Gisèle)
I have been coming here for many years. I met my husband here. He was Haitian but he was born in the Dominican Republic. (Mylène)

My older brother Rafael brought me to the Dominican Republic when I was sixteen. We are orphans and he was here, working. I was staying with another brother and his family in Haiti but we did not get along. Rafael had promised me he would come for me some day. (Pascale)

A major difference in migration patterns between women of rural and urban origin is that those from urban areas in Haiti migrate to Dominican cities, while rural women go to the countryside. The Haitian market women in Santo Domingo indicate coming from poor neighbourhoods of Port-au-Prince, the capital, or from Cap-Haitien, the second largest city. Most of the rural women report very low levels of formal education, few having completed primary school.

I come from Ouanaminthe. I went to school until grade five. My father worked the land. He did not have money to send me to school. He could not afford to pay for the books. (Violaine)

I never went to school. My brother went for a while but he died when he was young. My sister and I, we never went. (Zénaïde)

I never went to school. My mother died when I was four years old. I lived with my father. He took another wife. I grew up with my eight brothers and sisters. I started to sell in the streets when I was eleven years old. (Juliette)

I grew up in a village. My family was very poor. We did not have enough to eat. (Liliane)

The market women in the Santo Domingo seem on the whole to have more formal education than Haitian women from rural areas. Most I talked to during my visit have completed at least primary school, and several have

completed one or two years of high school.

I was born in Carrefour (Port-au-Prince neighbourhood) and lived with my mother and father. My father died when I was young. I was only able to complete grade seven or eight. (Alice)

I completed grade seven but I had to leave school to help my mother when my father died. (Gisèle)

Most Haitian women I met hope to go back to Haiti, even after spending ten or fifteen years away. The main reason stated is to be with their family, and many have children and other relatives in Haiti. For some however, their emigration that started as a temporary measure is becoming permanent. Several women in Libertad, for instance, feel that they cannot go back because they will return to the same situation they left. They dream of the day when they would have enough money to start a good business in Haiti but the possibility seems more remote with each passing day. For one of these women, going back to Haiti is not even an option, having been in the Dominican Republic for too long.

My dream is to go back to Haiti and open a store. It would be easier to do business there but I don't have enough money to go back. I cannot go back to Haiti without money. I would have to be able to rent a room, be independent. I just have enough to live here. (Liliane)

I asked them (the spirits) to help me go back to Haiti but they haven't helped me. (Germaine)

I'd like to go back but I can't. I don't have any money. My family has rejected me. (Violaine)

I feel Dominican because I have been here for so many years even though I was born in Haiti. My mother was

born in the Dominican Republic. She met my father in Haiti when Haitians were deported (in 1937). My father cultivated land near the border, on the Dominican side. I would go to Haiti if I had enough money to buy myself a little store, but I don't have the money and I can work here. I feel Dominican now. (Yvonne)

Legal Status

The legal status of the Haitian population in the Dominican Republic is a major factor in the choices open to them in the labour force. Over the past five decades, Haitian women and men have rooted themselves precariously within the borders of the Dominican state without any legal protection. The lack of citizenship papers for those born in the Dominican Republic has an impact on every aspect of their lives. It also affect their children because, without a birth certificate, a child cannot attend school. A birth certificate is essential to obtain a Dominican identity card (*cédula*), a document necessary to obtain employment or to move freely. Dominicans are supposed to carry this document always, ready to display to the authorities.

To bypass the system, some Dominico-Haitians and Haitians obtain Dominican papers via "irregular" methods (MUDHA, 1994: 1). Some purchase documents, others register children born in Haiti as born in the Dominican Republic. During elections, political parties will, in exchange for votes, provide false documents to Haitians and undocumented Dominico-Haitians (MUDHA, 1994: 1). This was the case of Ramón who has worked in

the sugar industry since age sixteen. Born in the *batey*, Ramón started work as a cane cutter. Now a *viejo*, he has held various jobs in sugar plantations and presently works as a foreman (overseeing *kongos*) on a private sugar estate that he says pays better than working in the government plantations. At the time of the interview, he is also a recruiter for the plantation owner, on his way by bus to Haiti. While discussing his origins he explains how he got his Dominican citizenship:

President Balaguer gave me my Dominican citizenship. It was at the time of the election...to vote for his party. Many Haitians got in that way. Later he gave land to landless people. My dad received a little piece of land to cultivate. He even got a certificate for it. (Ramon, sugar plantation recruiter)

In other instances, a person may acquire Dominican citizenship by arranging to be adopted or formally recognized as a child of a Dominican citizen. One woman I met in Santo Domingo (whom I shall call Carmen) recounts the story of how she became a Dominican citizen:

My parents are Haitians. They have lived here all their life. They came here without any documents. They were working here and nobody was asking them for any documents. So they didn't bother registering us. Later on it became a real problem because you need a birth certificate to go to school. The teacher asked me for my birth certificate but I didn't have one. She kept telling me to bring it in or to leave or to send my mother to talk to her. I was ashamed because my mother couldn't speak Spanish. She could not come to the school and meet the teacher. But I was stubborn and I really wanted to go to school. Every time she asked for my birth certificate I just kept silent and kept doing what I was doing. In the end she let me stay.

Then, I had problems again in grade five. I really needed a birth certificate. I went to someone who made one for me. It was not a real one but I used it for school. My birth was not registered. You really need a proper birth certificate to obtain your cédula (identity card) if you want to study or work.

Later on someone agreed to declare me as their child, someone who is a citizen with all the proper papers. That's how I became Fernandez. My name used to be Toussaint.

But most Haitians are unaware of the possibility of registering their children at birth in the Dominican Republic. This is a procedure distinct from baptizing children, something that most Haitian can do quite easily at the local church, at no cost, as opposed to registering children. Parents do not have to register children necessarily at birth, but the price escalates as time goes by. Some Haitians who know of this option manage to register a newborn in the Dominican Republic even if it was born in Haiti. However, registering children of Haitian parents involves identifying officials who are willing (for a price) to overlook the fact that the parents of the child are not Dominican citizens. To register a child, Haitian parents need special connections, either through a church, an NGO, or through client/patron relationships. Murphy (1991: 69-70) has described how workers in the sugar industry, for instance, use this type of relationship to enlist the cooperation of supervisors. One major strategy for workers is to ask a superior to become the godfather of a child, creating certain obligations between the worker and his supervisor.

Lack of proper documentation creates major problems for Haitian migrant women workers in the countryside. Their lack of mobility, for instance, restricts access to merchandise, due to the military monitoring traffic on the highway. For instance, on the road that links Santiago to the Haitian border, several check points stop buses in an effort to keep Haitians away from Santiago and Puerto Plata. Those identified as "Haitian", because of their dark skin, are vulnerable to various forms of harassment. Beyond the insults, anyone "who looks like a Haitian" is asked for identification. This often leads to heated exchanges when dark skinned Dominicans are mistaken for Haitians (CTP, 1995, personal communication). If police or soldiers suspect someone is Haitian, the person is asked to show her/his passport. If she/he does not carry the appropriate document, the person has to disembark, and may even be arrested. As a result, the women of Libertad working as petty retailers must devise various ways to obtain goods to sell, except perhaps for produce obtained locally. The women I interviewed have children who can be of assistance.

Sometimes I go to Esperanza but I often get harassed by the police. If I go on a bus with my children they could ask me to get out. They might let my children go freely because they have their birth certificate and their father is Dominican but I am afraid to go on a bus. My older daughter goes to Esperanza six days a week to work. She can get things for me there. (Liliane)

I get my daughter who has both citizenship to buy merchandise for me. She brings things from Haiti when she visits. The rest I can buy here. She has her cédula and she can go all the way to Santiago if she wants. (Yvonne)

The women who work in urban environments such as Santo Domingo have more opportunities to transport merchandise from Haiti to the Dominican Republic or even get it in Santo Domingo from Haitian or Dominican wholesalers. One explanation is that the Southern border is the major crossing point for Haitians who work in the sugar industry. As a result, Haitians can circulate more freely than in the North of the country.

I buy clothes on credit from a Dominican wholesaler and often sell on credit. When I have enough money I pay the wholesaler. I sell on both sides of the border. (Gisèle)

I buy whatever is cheaper in Haiti or in the Dominican Republic and I sell it where it is more expensive. (Alice)

Prostitution

It is difficult to even approximate how many Haitian women resort to prostitution to survive in the Dominican Republic. Given the stigma attached to it, women do not generally want to talk about it but without a doubt, it is a strategy that some women must resort to. One woman interviewed admitted using prostitution earlier in her life to support herself and her children.

I used to do it until six years ago. I did it because I didn't have any money. I didn't have a husband. He died. I had four children that I had to raise alone. I did it by necessity. It's not something you do just like that. Many times I thought I should stop, that it was not a good thing.

Men know who does it. They would arrange to see me when they wanted to have sex. I didn't go around advertizing it. (Yvonne)

However, the presence of prostitutes seems to promote a climate of tension in rural communities; not only single men visit prostitutes.

The worst thing about it was the problems it caused with the other women. Often the men had a wife. They would know that their husband had come to me and they would be very jealous. They would insult me...threaten me. Once I was threatened with a big knife. Now I don't do it anymore, only very occasionally, because of all the problem it creates.

Now I only do it with this one man. He gives me money. It's not that there is no demand. There is demand but I don't want to do it anymore. If I was going to do it, it would be with men from another community. (Yvonne)

Juliette and Mirlande, who live in a *batey*, despise the women in their community who make a living from sex. As we talk, they point with their chin to a group of three women examining the merchandise of a travelling salesman. Juliette and Mirlande accuse the women of flaunting themselves and causing many quarrels in the community; the contempt in their voice and manner is palpable.

Finding support

The women in my study are likely to find support through their personal networks. The primary source of support comes from relatives but sometimes it also comes from friends and neighbours. Mothers, sisters, fathers, brothers, aunts, uncles and cousins and nieces are, both in Haiti and the Dominican Republic, the relatives turned to for support. Unsurprisingly, the Haitian women I interviewed all say that their family networks are very limited in

the Dominican Republic. This is especially true for the women who live alone – Yvonne, Germaine, Juliette, Alice, and Mylène. Most of these women maintain strong ties with their relatives in Haiti. Women like Liliane, Mirlande, Bernadette, Violaine and Zénaïde, who live in the Dominican countryside and are part of households may rely on husbands and children, but the family network does not extend beyond those individuals. Gisèle lives with a cousin and Pascale has a brother.

Whether or not Haitian women's earnings constitute the main source of financial support for the household, all the women with children indicate that they use almost all their earnings for their family. Their husbands, on the other hand, keep a portion for themselves. From my interviews, it appears that husbands give a portion of their income to their wives for their business or pay for certain expenses of the household. The contributions to the household vary and seem totally at his discretion. Haitian husbands often have financial obligations to more than one household, or wife. Sometimes, this second household is located in Haiti, other times in the Dominican Republic. The women who are separated from their husbands can only hope to receive help from their former husbands occasionally.

My husband earns between 100 and 150 a week. He gives 50 for food and keeps the rest. Sometimes he also gives me money for my business. I decide what I do with the money. (Mirlande)

He gives 50 or 100 pesos for the children when he feels like it....now that he is with this other woman. My children are back in Haiti. I am staying with a friend in the batey. She lent me money to do business. (Juliette)

He gives me money to buy food to cook. If he has 300 pesos, for instance, he gives me 100, he keeps 100 for his family in Haiti and he keeps the rest for himself. (Bernadette)

In the two rural communities in my study, most people live in nuclear family arrangements. Sometimes a relative or an acquaintance from Haiti might stay with a family until she/he decides to move on, or has found another type of living arrangement. For the women of Libertad and *batey* Baraguay, while economic support is likely to come from spouses and children, neighbours likely help with food, medicine and remedies, or look after each others children. Juliette, for instance can stay with her friend Mirlande while Mirlande's husband is away. Mirlande also lends money to Juliette to buy ingredients to make the sweets sold in Puerto Plata.

When I meet with them, the women in *batey* Punta Fuera near San Pedro Marcoris tell me that the female neighbours of a dying pregnant woman took upon themselves to feed her and her two children. The woman's husband, a sugar cutter who drinks his pay away, had abandoned her to her fate, and does not take care of the children. After the woman died in childbirth, her neighbours continued to care and feed for the children. At the time of my

interview, the fate of the children is still very uncertain. The women say that the father of the children is talking of taking them back to his own mother in Haiti but they fear that he will abandon them in the streets.

The market women that I interviewed either live alone with children or with a female relative. Although husbands have been a major source of economic support at some point in their life, none presently has a husband. Alice and Gisèle, whose husbands are still alive, say that their former spouses occasionally give money for the children, and feel they can turn to him in case of an emergency. Support for the Haitian market women can also originate from other sources, either a relative or other merchants.

I have been here for three years with my cousin. We share a room and help each other. It's easier because we can look out for each other. I don't have anyone else here. (Gisèle)

If I am not able sell, the others will help me with food. If I am sick I have to go back to Haiti. There's no one to help me here. (Alice)

These women also maintain strong connections with their relatives in Haiti, even if they do not travel there regularly. Most of the market women seem to buy on credit, using money they collect from the *san* but they also borrow from their relatives in Haiti.

Pascale who lives in Santiago says that her brother visits occasionally,

sometimes bringing her a little gift. She gets emotional support from her Dominican girlfriends who are fellow domestics. In case of an emergency, she is likely to turn to the religious order she associates with in Santiago, as her brother does not visit very often, and she has no means of communicating with him. She does not maintain a strong relationship with her other siblings in Haiti because she feels they did not treat her well when she lived with them. Neither, does she feel close to the family she works for.

Rotating Credit Fund (*San*)

Most of the Haitian women in my study participate in a rotating credit fund – called *sol* or *san* by the Haitian population. It is an extremely prevalent form of collaboration, not only among women but also men; much of the *san* consists of mixed groups. For some women, it is the only form of credit available. *San* is similar to other rotating credit funds – like the *tontines* in West Africa – where money is pooled into a common fund and used successively by each participant. For instance, ten people may agree to each contribute ten pesos a week to the *san*. A hundred pesos are given to one person, then another until all the participants have received the pooled money. The amount of money involved varies from one *san* to another. As the *san* is based on an honour system, people are careful in their selection of partners. Some credit circles involve an investment of a few pesos, others can amount to five hundred or one thousand pesos, can take place on a daily,

weekly or monthly basis. The women interviewed generally use this money to buy merchandise, then repay the money with profit made on merchandise sales.

Formal networks: The church and NGOs

Beyond personal kinship and other informal networks, the women I interviewed are affiliated with two types of organizations: the church and non-governmental organizations. Beyond providing for basic needs these organizations often play other crucial roles, such as mediating access to the legal, medical and educational systems. Often Haitian women have their children baptised in the local church, hoping that later on their children will be able to obtain Dominican citizenship.

The presence and activities of various churches and missionaries in almost every rural community also makes church groups the most likely form of formal support available to Haitian women. However, securing support from these institutions often requires religious affiliation or conversion (or the appearance thereof). Given the negative perceptions most Dominicans hold about *vodoun*, Haitians understandably do not openly admit their faith in *vodoun* or *vodoum*-related practices. Almost invariably, when asked about

vodoun, Haitian women are evasive in their answers, or flatly reject the idea.

I am evangelist. My husband was evangelist. I don't like vodoun. You have to dance and move your body in all sorts of ways. I don't like that. (Zénaïde)

I'm not into religion. I don't follow the gagá⁴. When they have festivities, I'll go and dance a little but I don't belong to any Gagá group. (Liliane)

I don't believe in spirits, only in God. (Yvonne)

Given the prejudices around vodoun and the image it conjures for Dominicans, it seemed quite possible that the Haitian population feel safer, at least in rural communities like Libertad and *batey* Baraguay, in denying their beliefs publicly, while continuing privately to hold to them. However, others are more ambiguous in their answers, indicating perhaps that their religious affiliation to the local church does not necessarily entail abandoning all beliefs associated with *vodoun*. As an example, when asked about her religion, Juliette decidedly answers she is a Baptist, adding that if she meets a man, she wants him to be a Baptist. Later when talking about her childhood and the death of her mother when she was a very young child, she says her mother was killed by witches. Later on, she confides that she does not like witchcraft, which is evil and for that reason, one must always repay a debt or a

⁴ Of African origin (most likely Yoruba), the Gagá is socio-religious phenomena often found in the sugar growing areas of the Dominican Republic. Gagá synthesizes elements of vodoun and catholic spirituality and rituals. At certain time of the year, members of a gagá group come together to perform the religious rituals and dances. The colourfulness and excitement surrounding the Gagá produce something of a carnival atmosphere but the Gagá remains nonetheless a religious cult (Rosenberg, 1979: 9-17).

witch might kill your children.

While discreet, some Haitian women and men admit to appealing to spirits (or *lwas*) to secure their support in relation to health, money or luck. A corner of the home is reserved for the *lwas*, and a piece of coloured fabric hangs for each courted spirit, most often the spirit of a dead family member, and food is placed on a dish.

*We give them to eat, some nuts, corn and other things.
They come when we give them something to eat. You
know they are there when the piece of fabric moves, they
come with the breeze. They usually come on a Tuesday,
Thursday or a Friday... but they come when they want to...
(Bernadette)*

Germaine's mental state appears, to me as an outsider, shaky. Struggling with the death and loss of two children, she is seeking spiritual support from the local church organization to cope. From Germaine's comments, this support clearly depends on her religious affiliation with that particular church, and abandoning vodoun's beliefs and practices. As she recounts the tragic event and its aftermath, Germaine reveals how her *lwas* have failed her, how she now only believes in God and how a witch has killed her son, despite the external appearance of a car accident.

*Witches come at night and suck the blood of
children. Even when they are buried witches can go
and unearth them. When the child dies the witch
can come and the child turn like the devil. When
my child died, a witch came and tried to take his
soul. I had put his pants under the bed to protect*

the child against the devil until he was buried but during the night my boy came. He had changed into the devil and I had to fight him through the night.

When we did the ceremony for him, one woman became possessed by the spirits . She said it was a witch who killed him. Witches, they eat children. There are some in this village but I can't tell who... (Germaine)

Germaine's striking revelation serves as another example of how women may hold on to one more set of religious beliefs. More interestingly, it is an example of the views that fuel the prejudices Dominicans hold against the Haitian population, and leads naturally to the question of racism. How do the women feel about their treatment in the Dominican Republic? Does it affect their ability to survive in the community they work and live in? The residents of Libertad generally say they are not treated too badly by their Dominican neighbours, but as a rule try to avoid contact.

I don't mix and I don't pay attention to those who say bad things about us. When you're not at home, you have to know how to behave. (Zénaïde)

I don't mix with them. When you are a cockroach, you don't stand in the chicken's path. (Violaine)

Those (Dominicans) who are new here, who just came down from the mountains, they are racist. But those who know us, who have been living here for a long time they behave correctly. (Liliane)

However, prejudices exist, and many Haitians feel unduly harassed. Almost everyone I met mentions how Haitians are ill treated in the Dominican

Republic. The tone of one's skin, level of income, ability to communicate in Spanish are all factors that can trigger derogatory remarks (though not everyone experiences it to the same degree).

They call us names..."Haitian of the devil, go back home." I am proud to be Haitian. We are black but we are not more stupid for that. We are human beings too. (Alice)

I was at school one day and this little boy, a Haitian came by. He was selling peanuts. The Dominicans started to yell names at him. I told them to stop. I told them I was a Haitian too. They said you are not Haitian. You are not that dark. (Pascale)

I have been here many years. I like it here. I have good friends. I have no problems with Dominicans. (Mylène)

In addition to the church, NGOs have attempted in recent years to improve the lot of Haitians and Dominico-Haitian in the Dominican Republic. In Libertad, the CTP, a secular organization with origins in the left and funded by agencies such as OXFAM, tries to play a significant role toward the empowerment of the community and of women. Until recently, Libertad's residents did not have such a formal type of organization, and conflicts and problems were resolved on an *ad hoc* basis. There was no collective means to reflect on the working and living conditions of Haitian workers and collectively attempt to improve them. Through CTP's grassroots organizing efforts, the residents of Libertad are experimenting with a community association which discusses problems and seeks to find and act on common solutions.

In return, the CTP helps the community access small amounts of funding for community initiatives, and responds to the needs of individuals in dire circumstances. For instance, through their association with the CTP, the community was able to build a modest community hall that also serves to give literacy classes to Haitian children. Another small community project was the planting of trees around the houses, and members were encouraged to gather wood for a fence to protect the young trees from wandering goats. The CTP helped to acquire barbed wire and trees were transplanted in the enclosure. Older children were put in charge of the watering. Through their association with the CTP, the women (and men) of the community are acquiring new skills, and now have somewhere to turn in case of a serious illness.

It is outside the scope of this thesis to examine the intricacies and politics of this relationship and its effect on Libertad's residents. Still, it must be noted that the CTP sees that it is within its mandate to empower the Haitian migrant population, and its work is informed by this vision. By trying to address both the practical needs and strategic interests of the community, Libertad's residents are gradually starting to see themselves as a community with common purposes (CTP, 1995, personal communication). The CTP staff is conscious of the power relations that exist between themselves and the

Haitian community and are careful to avoid being seen as a welfare type organization. For instance, the CTP makes it clear to the community that its role is to help people to learn to work together as a community, and does not usually initiate projects or disburse its resources for community projects. Rather, it acts as an intermediary between funding organizations and the community, insisting that the community demonstrate its seriousness around the projects it identifies by providing a matching contribution, sometimes monetary but usually in the form of work.

During one of my visits, I witness a discussion between the CTP and the community association that coincides with Haiti's National Day that the community wants to celebrate. At the meeting, the association members are discussing with CTP staff the extent of the CTP's contribution to the celebration. Naturally, the community hopes to have a joyous celebration with special food and drinks. The CTP has to tread carefully, for it wants to support the celebration but does not want to foot the bill. Through a fairly lengthy discussion, the CTP convinces the association's members that they have to hold a celebration within the community's means. This requires collecting a few pesos from each of the parents to buy soft drinks for the children. The CTP agrees to donate two hundred pesos to cover other expenses.⁵

⁵ About ten Canadian dollars.

Recognizing that women's interests would be drowned out in the community association, the CTP encouraged women to create their own association to parallel the community association. This gives the women who participate a chance to identify and discuss their own concerns. The CTP also offers primary health care and leadership workshops. At one meeting that I attend, there are at least fifteen women, who recount the advantages of being on their own. They cite being able to discuss personal health problems that would be embarrassing in mixed gatherings, and tell me that with the encouragement of the CTP staff, they are able to find the nerve to speak at community meetings. Although Haitian women do not usually shy away from engaging in discussions with male kin or neighbours, they are more timid when speaking in public.

The women also express their satisfaction with the CTP for helping them to obtain a sewing machine. It is the property of the association and paid for by renting it out to different women in the community. One or two women know how to sew, and are making clothing for sale, while others use the machine for their own needs. At the meeting to prepare for their National Day, some women offer to sew little squares of cloth to make small flags for the children to wave at their parade, if the association agrees to pay for the cloth.

The process that the CTP has initiated seems to have transformatory potential but it is perhaps too early to predict what impact it will have on the community and the women in the longer term. It is interesting to note that in individual interviews, the women of Libertad fail to mention the role the CTP plays in their life, even though some of them are members of the association.

The market women in Santo Domingo rely entirely on family and personal networks to survive in the urban environment. Religious affiliation does not play a part in coping with their daily struggles, but it is a central feature in Pascale's life. She has been able to find work in the city through her affiliation with a religious order, and stresses how much solace the religious order gives her to cope with the solitude she experiences as a foreigner and domestic servant. For the women working and living in Santo Domingo, there is no formal association they can turn to, although groups such as MUDHA, INVIAJ or ASOMIH could play such a role.⁶ Two women associated with ASOMIH, Mireille and Anne are also street vendors in Santo Domingo, and both are having problems at the time of my visit, largely due to their legal status in the Dominican Republic.

⁶ ASOMIH (Asociación de Mujeres inmigrantes Haitianas) is a newly established organization working for the rights of Haitian women in the Dominican Republic.

Mireille, for instance has been doing business in Santo Domingo since 1987. Like the other market women that I met in Santo Domingo, Mireille is supporting a family of five in Haiti. She went back to Haiti in 1990 but had to leave in 1992 because of the political violence. Since 1995, she has been able to go back and forth between the two countries until recently, when she was robbed of all her merchandise and papers. When I meet Mireille for the first time, she is at the embassy trying to get some help to return to Haiti, but without much luck so far, and seems to have exhausted her personal network.

I lost everything. I was robbed...All my money. I don't have enough money to rent a room. I have been staying with different women but they are not used to it and they don't like to share. I don't know where I'm going to stay tonight. (Mireille)

Anne has been in the Dominican Republic for much longer, arriving in 1970 to join her mother, also a street merchant. Anne met a Dominican man, whom she married and had children. Her husband left for another woman, taking all their belongings, which were in his name. She has no hope of recuperating any of the property she has worked for. Like Mireille, the merchandise she has bought on credit was robbed and she has no money to go back to Haiti to be with her mother and youngest children.

There are common themes running through the stories of Mireille and Anne

and the other Haitian market women. Like the other market women, they are single parents whose income is essential for the survival of their respective families. All are vulnerable to theft, and have little recourse when it occurs. Yvonne, Juliette, Alice have also been victims of thieves. Interestingly, at the time of my visit, there is no apparent talk in ASOMIH about working with the Haitian market women.

Everyday Forms of Resistance

In itself, surviving in the Dominican Republic is a form of resistance. Five of the twelve Haitian women I interviewed are single mothers, and each has several children residing with relatives in Haiti. They perceive migration as being their best strategy for survival. Most remain nostalgic about Haiti and clearly, for these women, migrant life is not easy. However, even most of those with husbands and who live in rural areas do not contemplate returning to Haiti in the near future. If they suffer as migrant workers, they know they would suffer even more in the Haitian countryside without any work.

The Haitian women also resist by defying Dominican immigration law through their illegal border crossing.⁷ Most of the women I interviewed

⁷ There are various methods to cross the border. Some Haitians pay low-level officials to assist them but the vast majority understand that there is no need to pay anyone; although officially closed for extended periods of time the border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic is often unguarded, left "open" for the migration of sugarcane workers (Murphy, 1991: 89).

admit having crossed the border without proper documentation. For the women in Libertad and Batey Baraguay, proper documentation means owning a passport with a valid working visa, a very unlikely proposition given its cost. In any event, the risk involved with illegal border crossing seems worth taking, as the Dominican authorities appear to tolerate their presence most of the time so long as they stay in the rural areas.

Although the Haitian women in Santo Domingo state they have valid visas, there is no way to confirm this during the short period that I was acquainted with them. I do not ask them to produce any papers and they do not offer to show them to me. There are reasons to doubt their answers, as I have been told (and have read) that most of the people who bring merchandise from Haiti bypass official border crossings. This involves carrying merchandise through the fields, which makes for a long journey. As I noted earlier, Alice says that she broke her ankle while crossing through the fields when the border was closed.

The women who live in the rural areas, it is obvious, all are in the Dominican Republic without passports or work permits. Liliane, for instance, came to the Dominican Republic in 1985, where her father worked as a cane cutter for over twenty years. Deported to Haiti twice, in 1987 and in 1991, she spent several months in Haiti, made it back to Libertad, and then narrowly

escaped deportation again in 1993 by hiding in the house of Dominican friends. At the time, the Dominican armed forces were increasingly vigilant along the border, making it more difficult to re-enter the Dominican Republic. Liliane, like others in Libertad, had to leave most of her belongings behind. Her husband was also deported, even though he is a Dominican citizen. He was able to return much earlier than Liliane. Zénaïde also spent several months in Haiti in 1991 before daring to return to Libertad.

Under these conditions, how can the women working as day labourers resist the exploitation they are subject to? The answer may be found, perhaps, in a benign act of defiance that I was able to witness during my stay, and to which I was an unknowing participant. As I noted earlier, I spent one day picking peas with Haitian women. To make life simpler for everyone, I attach myself to one of the women and I become her field hand for the day. She gives me a sack to fill and quickly instructs me how to pick. The harvest is coming to an end and several pea pods have evidently dried on their stalks. I ask my supervisor if I should pick those dried peas and she acquiesces. At the end of the day, I give her my day's work. I find out when the sacks are emptied to be measured that I have picked far too many dried peas. The boss grumbles and shakes his head in disapproval. Whether he knows that these are the peas that I picked is not clear. What is certain is that he does not dare openly challenge the woman who cleverly has used my presence to defy him.

Religion is the basis for another survival strategy, but as shown above, to receive the support of the church, women must give the appearance of conversion. I do not wish to doubt the religious feelings of the women I interviewed or suggest that they are insincere if and when they convert to one of the various Christian denominations dispersed throughout the Dominican countryside. However, by all accounts, church groups often perform an important role in the rural communities such as providing schools, as in the case of *batey* Baraguay. Often, they offer women a helpful network in times of need. It is perhaps not surprising then that in Libertad, most of Haitian women state Evangelism as their religion, when the Evangelist church is the only one around. In *batey* Baraguay, the women interviewed state that they are Baptist, the Baptist church being the only one in the vicinity.

The Haitian women's association with the CTP in Libertad certainly meets some of their basic needs as they clearly indicate during the meeting that I attend. Whether they are conscious of the strategic interests that the CTP is trying to bolster or the increased bargaining power they may gain in the community through this association is not clear, beyond individual claims of increased confidence.

My short stay did not permit me to explore in depth the many possible strategies women may use on a daily basis to actively resist their condition as migrant workers, wives and mothers. Unfortunately, far more questions remain than are answered. For instance, how do the women negotiate with their husbands or convince them to increase support for children? How do the women who feel cheated by foremen at local farms retaliate? What do they say among themselves about Dominicans? Do they play the local church against the CTP for their own benefit? These are questions that, unfortunately remain unanswered.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

In light of the theoretical perspective and context previously established, we now return to my initial lines of inquiry. This conclusion analyzes the significance of Haitian women's migrant work in term of its economic value and relationship to the Haitian and the Dominican economies; their place in the global economy; and, the relationship between everyday resistance, migration and survival strategies in light of the experiences of twelve women.

Women Are Real Workers Too

The picture that emerges is of Haitian women integrated in the Dominican economy through the informal sector, a process by which they are included, yet marginalized. This stems from several key factors that are structural, political and cultural (or ideological) in nature. The articulation of these systems of oppression include the divergent and unequal level of development in Haiti and the Dominican Republic that forces Haitians to emigrate; economic structures and policies in the Dominican Republic premised on the use of an exploitable foreign labour force to remain competitive; and, racial and gender ideologies that justify the extreme exploitation of these particular foreign workers. As Chapter Three describes,

racial prejudice in the Dominican Republic takes extreme manifestations when referring to Haitians, the ultimate “others”. Perceptions of Haitians as destitute peasants, conditioned to ill treatment in their homeland, reinforce the notion that Haitians are to be treated inhumanely as workers. Chapters Two and Four establish that the links between the gendered division of labour and women’s marginalization as workers, as in many parts of the world, is based on defining women primarily as housewives, hence dependants. The housewife ideology, as feminist scholarship has shown, rests on the idea that women’s unpaid work in the private sphere/home, is not considered “work”, thereby having no value and justifying women’s marginalization as workers.

Gender and race ideologies prevalent in the Dominican sugar industry are not unique to that sector but systemically permeate all economic and social relations in the Dominican Republic, and in the gendered and ethnic division of labour. While the most rigid manifestations occur in the sugar industry – where, for instance, Haitian male workers are given the worst possible jobs in deplorable working conditions and women are largely excluded from formal employment – the division of labour along gender and ethnic lines is widespread. Haitians workers occupy the lower strata of the Dominican workforce in agriculture, construction and domestic service and other parts of the informal sector.

The Dominican sugar industry is very instructive with regards to women and work. Jansen and Millan's analysis of gender and ethnicity in the *bateys* illuminates, for instance, the extent to which the prevalent gender ideology in the Dominican Republic, and in the male dominated social sciences, has obscured women's economic contributions (1991). This is clearly manifest in the fact that given the vast literature that exists on Haitian migration to the Dominican Republic, only one study on Haitian women migrant workers in the Dominican Republic was ever published.

My research confirms the hypothesis put forth by a number of feminist scholars that migration is an economic strategy for women as independent actors rather than as dependants. Whether from rural or urban areas, the majority of the Haitian women I interviewed made independent decisions to migrate, motivated by economic necessity. Most arrived in the Dominican Republic alone, consistent with the findings of Jansen and Millan. The reality of the sugar industry forcing women into dependant relationships – combined with gender blindness to the economic value of women's work in previous studies – prevented this reality from emerging.

The life stories of the women in my study also reveal the significant economic contribution Haitian women migrant workers make to the Dominican and Haitian economies. Put simply, Haitian migrant workers are

clearly a source of cheap labour for the Dominican economy, particularly in the countryside, where the majority live and work. Haitian women are often preferred as workers in agriculture, because they can be paid lower wages than their Dominican counterparts. Haitian petty traders can be credited with the circulation of goods and services between the two countries. While this trade operates largely underground, possibly cheating the state of some tax revenue, it is a valuable vehicle to formal sector firms, both national and transnational, for distributing products in local markets at lower costs, especially in the urban areas. Finally, Haitian women make “ideal” domestics, easily exploited, because of their illegal status.

Haitian migrant workers also contribute directly to the survival of households based in Haiti. The earnings of several of the twelve women directly supported children in Haiti. While, these remittances may be small, even minute individually, the aggregate is probably significant. While outside the scope of this study to quantify the economic activity of Haitian women in the Dominican Republic, this remains an important issue to be explored. Despite the paucity of quantitative data, my findings affirm that Haitian women migrants are integrated in the world economy, although not in a direct fashion as, for instance, the women of India who work as lace makers for the global market.

Haitian women migrant workers do share other commonalities with the women of Narsapur. First and foremost, Haitian migrant women have no control over the larger economic process – beyond what they produce on a daily basis. Defined as housewives and further marginalized for being “Haitian”, these women are forced to accept very low wages and occupy specific spots in the Dominican labour structure to keep that economy more competitive. Thus, they are fully integrated in the world economy through the sexual and international division of labour. This connection is more directly evident for women who work as labourers in export agriculture or as “self-employed” retailers (see Chapter Four). My findings also appear to confirm Mies’ pronouncement that women’s insertion into capitalist relations is not dependent on separating the home and the workplace, and further validate the “housewife ideology” theory.

Survival and Everyday Resistance

As the literature on migration demonstrates, migration is a key survival strategy for the poor, and supports my initial supposition that migration is itself a form of resistance. There is then a relationship between the survival strategies of Haitian migrant workers and the concept of resistance, first outlined in Chapter Two. Everyday resistance, I have argued, is inherent in the oppressed to assert their right to a decent living, to care for and nurture their own children, and to ensure conditions necessary for life. When these

are threatened, as is the case of Haitian women migrant workers, survival in a foreign and exploitative environment constitutes resistance. Resistance then can be found in the very strategies women design to ensure their own and their children's survival, both in the short and long term.

When I first came into contact with the Haitian women of Libertad, their circumstances suggested their survival mode, barely making it from one day to the next, an impression that was also reinforced through conversations with my Dominican colleagues. Later on, it became clear that Haitian women were not surviving in the sense of barely being able to stay alive and tend only their personal needs. As I discovered, their survival strategies sometimes extended to households beyond the border, often with long term implications. Some have children in Haiti that they help educate. Others have children born in the Dominican Republic that are likely have better economic prospects (even if they are not able to become Dominican citizens, they may, at least, speak Spanish fluently) and may be able to help their aging mothers. As we have seen, Haitian women are making use of their children's better position in Dominican society in their survival strategies.

Clearly, Haitian women workers in the Dominican Republic are a heterogenous group. While the women I interviewed were all poor in economic terms, they did not all share the same socio-economic background,

and were not marginalized to the same extent. For instance, the market women in Santo Domingo have a higher socio-economic profile than the women in rural areas, yet for all of them migration is also a strategy to resist economic marginalization. They may more easily acquire merchandise than their rural counterpart, and keep closer contact with their families in Haiti. However, they have less immediate access to kin and personal networks than their rural counterparts, and may be more isolated when dealing with survival issues in the urban context.

Households figure prominently in the life of the twelve women I interviewed, appearing almost as a constant. Almost all of them are members of households and they are an important element in their survival strategies. As mentioned earlier, these households may be located in the Dominican Republic or in Haiti, and women may be connected to more than one. However, the nature of the connection varies between the women and households they belong to. For instance, Yvonne (Libertad) and Juliette (*batey Baraguay*) have no relatives in the Dominican Republic, like most of the market women of Santo Domingo, but maintain very close connection to their families in Haiti. They may even be the main provider for these households. Zénaïde and Antoinette are connected to households in both countries to varying degrees, whereas some of the other women (Liliane, Mirlande, Violaine and Pascale) keep only loose connections with their

families in Haiti. Germaine does not have very close relations with relatives in either country.

Thus, kinship and other personal networks play an important role in survival in both the rural and urban context, as do more formal ones like churches and NGOs (when present). Haitian migrant women depend on immediate family connections to survive both in the rural and urban areas. However, Haitian market women (and one domestic worker in Santiago) do not appear as tied to male kin as women in the rural areas. Interestingly, even though the women of Libertad are not required to live with adult male kin to secure housing, as do the women in the *bateys*) almost all the women I encountered in Libertad have husbands¹ (Yvonne and Germaine are exceptions).

The degree of control these women have over household resources varies. Generally, Haitian women in the Dominican Republic can access about a third of their husbands incomes, although men retain discretion over distributing their earnings. Haitian migrant women control their own earnings, even when married, both in the rural and urban areas, although the latter did not have husbands. While Haitian women outside the *bateys* may not have more say over husbands earnings than the women inside, they

¹ Even beyond the women I interviewed.

have more choices of work, and more access to paid employment in the agricultural sector, although this depends on many factors. In the North, there is less of a monoculture and the proximity of *batey Baraguay* to Puerto Plata also increases women's ability to generate income as compared to other areas of the Dominican Republic.

Despite being vulnerable due to their illegal status and the racism they experience, Haitian migrant continue to resist the conditions of their exploitation, both as workers and as women. This is apparent in the tenacity of women who were robbed of their merchandise or money (Juliette, Mylène, Yvonne and Anne), but who find ways to struggle on. It is also evident in the women's refusal to stay away, even when deported to Haiti (Liliane and Zénaïde). They return inexorably because there is no other choice, "if one wants to eat", as Alice says, and helps explain the thousands upon thousands that cross the border *anba fil*. Resistance may also require feigning religious conversion, or accommodate more than one set of beliefs and practices, to secure much needed help from religious organizations; or by playing by the rules of NGOs, who broker power and resources. Resistance may also require one obtaining Dominican papers through "irregular methods". In brief, Haitian women migrant workers resist at the margins so as not to succumb to the predatory forces of the capitalist system in Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

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APPENDIX A

Questionnaire

A. Personal Background

1. Name
2. Age
3. Do you have children?
4. How many?
5. How old are they?
6. Do they go to school?
7. Did you go to school?
8. What do you remember most about your childhood?
9. Why did you leave Haiti?
10. Do you intend to go back?
11. What is your religion?
12. Are you married?
13. What does your husband do?
14. How long have you been living here?

B. Work

1. What do you do to earn money?
2. What work do you do in your home?
- 3.. Who has primary responsibility to take care of the children in your home?
4. What does your husband do in the home?
5. Did you work in Haiti?
6. What did you do?
7. When did you come to the Dominican Republic?
8. Did you come alone or with other people? Who?
9. How do you find work conditions in the Dominican Republic?
10. How are you treated by Dominicans?
11. What are the major problems you are facing in the Dominican Republic?

C. Identity

1. What is your nationality?
2. Do you feel you are Haitian or Dominican?
3. Do you feel your children are Haitian or Dominican?
4. What do you do if people insult you or treat you badly?
5. Do you have proper documents to be in the Dominican Republic?

D. Finding Support

1. Who are you likely to turn for help in this community?
2. Who helps you?
3. What do you do to help them?
4. Do Dominicans sometimes help Haitians?
5. Do you get support from family members in Haiti?
6. What kind of support do they offer?
7. What kind of support do you offer them?

APPENDIX B

Glossary

Anba fil: Haitian workers who have crossed the border illegally.

Batey: Sugar cane plantation.

Cédula: Dominican Identity card.

Ingenio: Sugar refinery.

Kongo: Haitian cane cutter, new recruit

Lwas: Spirits.

San: (also sol) local micro-credit organization.

Viejo: Haitian worker in the sugar industry.

Vodoun: Also voodoo or vodou. Haitian religion that combines African and Catholic beliefs and practices.

Zafra: Sugar cane harvest.

APPENDIX C**List of Organizations and Individuals Contacted
(by alphabetical order)**

Alas de Igualdad
San Pedro de Macoris
Contact: Altilde Louidor (Sisa)

Asociación Profundación de Estudios Americanos – APROFED
Santo Domingo
Contact: Gleni Obispo

Asociación de Mujeres Haitianas – ASOMIH
Santo Domingo
Contact: Altilde Louidor

Amelia Caroît – Dominican lawyer specializing in immigration and international law
Santo Domingo

Centro de Documentación de Identidad
Santo Domingo
Contact: Germana Galván

Centro Dominicano de Estudios en Educación
Santo Domingo

Centro de Investigación para la acción femenina CIPAF
Santo Domingo
Contact: Juanita Montaldo

Centro de Trabajo Popular – CTP
Santiago
Contact: Mildred Dolores Mata & Cecilia (Milagros) Rosario

Centro de Planificación y Acción Eucumenico – CPAE
Santo Domingo
Contact: Toni Henriquez

Centro Cultural Dominico-Haitiano
Santo Domingo
Contact: Violeta Perez

Christian Reformed World Relief Canada – CRWRC
Santo Domingo
Contact: Caspar and Leanne Geistencer

Cooperación Internacional Para el Desarrollo – CIPED
Santo Domingo
Contact: Sonia Vasquez

Coordinadora de Organizaciones no Gubernamentales del Area de la Mujer
Santo Domingo

Embajada de Haiti
Santo Domingo
Contact: Melius Hyppolite (Ministre – Conseiller)

Instituto de Invesitgación y Acción Jurídica – INVIAJ
Santo Domingo
Contact: Dra Dora Eusebio

Instituto Tecnológico de Santo Domingo
Programa de la Mujer
Santo Domingo

Movimiento de Mujeres Dominico-Haitianas - MUDHA
Santo Domingo
Contact: Sonia Pie and Sergia Galván

Núcleo de Apoyo a la Mujer
Santiago
Contact: Susi Pola

APPENDIX D

Map of Haiti and the Dominican Republic

Source: Plant, Roger, *Sugar and Modern Slavery: A Tale of Two Countries*. Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey, Zed Books, 1987.

Selected Indicators Comparing Haiti and the Dominican Republic ¹²⁹

Demographic Profile

Selected Indicators Comparing Haiti and the Dominican Republic

Economic Development Profile

1965-1990 GNP GROWTH

(in percent)

Source: Corten and Duarte 1995

Dominican Republic

2.3%

Haiti

0.2%

1991 GNP GROWTH

(in percent)

Source: 1991 PC Globe, Inc.

Dominican Republic

8.1%

Haiti

0.5%

1991 GNP PER CAPITA

(in \$US)

Source: 1991 PC Globe, Inc.

Dominican Republic

\$830

Haiti

\$370

ELECTRICITY CONSUMPTION (1987)

(in millions of kWh)

Source: 1991 PC Globe, Inc.

Dominican Republic

5,296

Haiti

450

LITERACY RATE

(in percent)

Source: 1991 PC Globe, Inc.

Dominican Republic

77

Haiti

41

NUMBER OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Source: 1991 PC Globe, Inc.

Dominican Republic

123,748

Haiti

6,288

IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)

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