

Conflicting Ambivalence of Haitian Identity-Making in South Florida

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Abstract: This article discusses constructions of identity, home, and belonging among first and second-generation Haitian-migrants living in South Florida. Conflicting polarities mark the lived experiences of the Haitian interviewees, and as such, migration theories of integration as the "melting pot" or "salad bowl," are rendered useless for understanding immigrant experiences. To another degree, the notion of social hybridity is elaborated upon for its resonance to ontological concepts among Haitian-Americans, especially in regard to the push and pull of living in the United States with remaining sentiments toward Haiti. For many of our Haitian informants the notion of class stratification defined their perceptions of selfhood. So too, our Haitian-American interviewees described their differences from other Afro-descendant experiences as African-Americans, further situating their Haitian-ness as being unique. What is clear from analyzing narratives of these Haitian-Americans is the mutability of their imagining belonging-ness and the polyvalent meanings associated with their ambivalent identities.

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"Identities are points of temporary attachments to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us" (HALL, 1996, p.6)

"There is a point of no return unremarked at the time in most lives" (GREENE, 1966, p.9)

1. Introduction

Because of social and political instability in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries on the isle of Haiti/Dominican Republic, a large number of Haitian immigrants have continually sought a better life in the United States. Such Haitian émigrés represent a broad diversity of socio-economic and racial backgrounds, and in adapting to everyday life in the United States, are forced to (re)negotiate their Haitian identities. To understand some general issues of belonging and social consciousness among Haitian-Americans, this paper will analyze the biographies of seven first and second generation Haitian immigrants, two of whom are male and five are female. (From here on, we will refer to our interviewees as either "Haitian immigrants," or as "Haitian-Americans.") [1]

What follows is an examination of Haitian-American perceptions through biographical-narratives or from the standpoint of the life story. Important to our research is analyzing how Haitian-Americans differentiate between their Haitian identities and their American identities and what conflicts arise through their self-descriptions of home, migration, generation, appearance, and social class. [2]

As will be evident below, how these Haitian-Americans conceptualize their ethnic awareness and the means by which displacement has altered such notions, especially in reasserting views of belonging away from homeland, are central to our concerns here. For some, adopting new sensibilities appears to be easier whilst for others there is greater longing and nostalgia for homeland loss. What we are arguing for is an ontological mapping between the here and there, or the divergence of identifying with the host country and/or homeland and those mental processes for perceiving the dualities of belonging associated with immigrant lives, in this case Haitian-Americans. These are in essence cognitive considerations associated with politically-forced migration and perceptions of dwelling in one place and then another within one's lifetime. In some cases these home associations may be very much part of the imagination as utopic places. As such these are social "processes" or "how people perceive, act, think, know, learn and remember within the settings of their mutual, practical involvement in the lived-in world" (INGOLD, 2000a, p.171). Such processes of belonging include bringing aspects of social life to the host country and recreating cultural behaviors and norms as many Haitian-Americans try to do in the United States. [3]

To these varying degrees, perceptions Haitian-Americans have of their host environments are different mental maps than those described by INGOLD

(2000b) in finding one's way, for example, through a landscape. These are not cartographies. Rather, mental mappings of place and time for many Haitians have more to do with the understanding of migration from one country to another (Haiti to the United States). For the Haitians in our study this displacement and the unsettlement of family life are more dependent upon individual views of kin ties and place as narrated to us about their lifetime experiences. Whether, for example, as a second-generation immigrant one is told about leaving the homeland or as a first-generation immigrant having experienced it oneself, overall such ideas are representative of creating mental spaces for the idyllic. For instance, pastoral images of Haiti are often recreated through Haitian-American narratives of remembrance about the idealistic everyday Haitian life. Other Haitian-Americans explain the ideals of living in America and its boundless opportunities. [4]

In our examination of Haitian participants, we find their ideas of "duality," and even, divergent and multiple feelings of loyalty and belongingness are the strongest means through which they indicate ambivalent sentiments toward Haiti and the United States. The interviewees discussed how color gradient, rather than race in Haiti, demarcates social privilege: the lighter the skin, the greater the privilege. For all of our interviewees, home is an imagined Haiti, an amalgamation of nostalgic memories and mythification of historical facts. All described Haiti according to conflicting polarities: light-skinned and dark-skinned, rich and poor, upper class and lower class. For the most part, the Haitian participants conceptualize home between South Florida and Haiti both as utopian and dystopian. For our Haitian interviewees, South Florida is a haven and refuge, affording them comfort and allowing them to escape economic and political repression; even so, most of them do not identify with American culture, making their asylum claims all the more ironic. As a place, Haiti is an emotional and tranquil pastoral-space, invoking contradictory feelings of pride from nationalistic sentiments and shame because of poverty and a history of despotic politics. [5]

With regard to Haitians' perception of self in relation to African-Americans and Afro-descendant Caribbeans in South Florida—some Haitians express a sense of superiority over other Blacks, but especially in relation to African-Americans. Most do not and cannot identify with African-American heritage in the United States. This is not uncommon amongst other Afro-Caribbean immigrants living in the United States (WATERS, 1999). African-Americans often feel threatened by the Haitian presence in South Florida because of popular beliefs Haitians are an alternative and cheap source of labor. Additionally, African-Americans also faulted Haitians for not understanding the particularities of the positioning of African-Americans as a disenfranchised and segregated cultural-grouping in the United States. Similarly, Haitians and other Caribbean immigrants often want to distance themselves from African-Americans in order to achieve economic and social progression on their own terms as immigrants and access mainstream America through different means (WATERS, 1999). Haiti after all was the first free Black-nation in the Western Hemisphere and Haitian-Americans as an ethnic group have derived much nationalistic pride from this historical fact (CHARLES, 1992). [6]

As will be evident below, using thematic analyses for our biographical interviews, the following variables have influenced identity formation among Haitian immigrants: social-class, which is based upon affluence and gradations in skin color; birthplace is also significant, whether our informant was born in the United States or in Haiti; another variable is age, which is especially important in assessing how old the person was when migrating to the United States, or having implications for generational identity. While these social indicators express variations of Haitian identity, the following historical overview will introduce Haiti as a place and then contextualize the transnational processes of the Haitian exodus. More specifically, the brief history of Haiti will focus upon the social, political and economic factors, which have shaped the reception of Haitian immigrants within the United States. [7]

In general, what we will address in this article are pivotal concepts toward what HANNERZ (1997, pp.15 and 1) proclaims as "an emergent transnational anthropology," and more pithily to those "key concepts" attributable to the same as "flows, boundaries, and hybrids" with specific reference to Haiti. By following HANNERZ' lead in regard to transnationalism and our particular orientation of Haitian migration to the United States, we also see cultural concepts from Haiti being practiced and adhered to by Haitian-immigrants as "flows"; we too see differences between Haitians with a Creole-Franco-identity contrast their heritage-awareness to the cultural practices and legacy of African-Americans as transforming ethnic "boundaries"; and like HANNERZ (1997, pp.10 and 12), the determining factors of Haitian-American identity, we view as a complex "hybridity," expressing a "betweenness" of Haiti and of America in our study—all of which points to the dynamics of the social aspects of immigrant identity and in this case Haitian-American ambiguous-identities. By implication such transnational variations of identity as encountered among the biographies of Haitian-Americans of our study are multifaceted and at once express these three determinative, oscillating, and perceptual processes. Meaning, our analyses will elaborate upon the immigrant mentalities of Haitian identity-formation in the host context of the United States through the interpretation of some Haitian-American life-stories. [8]

2. The Socio-Historical Context of Haitian US-oriented Immigration

2.1 Haitian history—Pre revolution

On December 5, 1492, the Spanish conquerors led by Christopher Columbus, landed in *Ayiti* (Haiti), an island inhabited by the *Tainos*. After their arrival, the Spaniards enslaved this indigenous population eventually leading to their complete decimation. In order to restock the slave supply for mining the island's gold, the Spaniards entered the African slave trade and introduced the first Blacks to the New World. After the gold was depleted, Spain abandoned the western part of Hispaniola, which is now modern-day Haiti. During this early colonial period France often contested Spain's power in the Caribbean with eventual control over Haiti proper by the mid-seventeenth century. The immense prosperity of Haiti from cultivation of tobacco, sugar, coffee, cocoa, cotton and

indigo, and the increase in French migration made it a thriving colony. Such flourish likewise demarcated the temporary end to Spanish dominance over Hispaniola with the Treaty of Ryswick in 1697, in which Spain conceded the western third of the island to France (MADIU, 1987). [9]

During this era France likewise continued the slave trade in order to increase its profit. Known as "the pearl of the Antilles," Haiti was the most affluent French colony. According to ZEPHIR (2004, p.28), the census of 1791 reported the slave population at 500,000, the White colonists at 40,000, and the *Affranchis* or *gens de couleur* at 28,000. Haiti, then named Saint Domingue, was highly divided between three main classes, each with its own internal stratifications. The White class was partitioned into three social groups. *Les grands blancs* ("big Whites") were the colonial officials, *les couches moyennes* (the middle class planters) were the overseers and *les petits blancs* ("small Whites") were the landless shopkeepers and retail merchants. The *Affranchis* were mostly Mulattoes, the offspring of French fathers and Black slave mothers. Many *Affranchis* possessed slaves, studied in France, and considered themselves to be French-persons of color. The freed colored group also included some Blacks who had been able to buy their freedom or acquire it by other non-specified means. Lastly, the slave class was divided into two main groups, the *negres bossals* born on the continent who were characterized by the French as uncivilized whilst the *negres creoles* born in Haiti were considered to be civilized by the French colonialists. What is evident by all of these Haitian categories, based on a system of class and color, imposed by French colonizers, is how Haiti's citizens continually internalize these attendant constructions of identity and self-perception. [10]

2.2 Brief history of Haitian revolution

Aside from French colonialism shaping social classification, perhaps the most pivotal period in Haitian history is its revolution and age of independence. Thus, following the successful engagement of Black slaves and *Affranchis* in a 12-year battle for Haitian independence, it was January 1st, 1804, when Haitians realized the first black republic of the world. From its inauspicious beginnings, "the new nation was divided along color lines and ownership of the land" (ZEPHIR, 2004, p.42). Moreover, the new Republic was rife with problems such as the assassination on October 17, 1806 of Jean-Jacques Dessalines, leader of the independence wars and self-proclaimed emperor of the Haitian Republic. This tragedy divided the country into two main camps, the Mulattoes in the west and the south, and the Blacks in the north, only to be reunited again in 1820. Further hampering Haitian independence, was the French imposition of a fee on the new Republic claiming reparations for lost French plantations.¹ Many countries like the United States and various European nations shared such repressive measures and economic embargoes by refusing to trade with Haiti (MADIU, 1987). This economic isolation and schism prompted a serious economic crisis for Haiti, which was an unfortunate legacy of colonialism from which the country has not yet recovered to this day. [11]

1 Haiti was not able to pay off this debt until 1947.

2.3 Post-revolutionary Haiti

After the Revolution, the new black and mulatto elite infiltrated the colonial positions of power and utilized the military to maintain control over the population and to protect the land from potential foreign aggression. Haiti, having been the First Black Republic, had represented a threat to the stability of European colonies dependent on the labor of slaves. Consequently, Haiti erected a political system divided into various military departments. As such, the mass exodus of many Haitians from all social classes to the United States continued unabated because of totalitarian regimes within Haiti and despite advocacy toward more democratic ideals. Modernity, rather than being a product of an internal dynamic, actually resulted in the economic dependence on remittances from Haitian-Americans. [12]

2.4 The American occupation of Haiti

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the United States government along with the United States military helped to centralize political power in Port-au-Prince, professionalize the army, and build modern roads. Religious power was transferred from the Catholic Church to Protestant churches, and the mulatto elite was elevated once more to a more prominent socio-economic and political place. During the American occupation, local guerrilla movements were suppressed (MADIOU, 1987). Only when the U.S. marines withdrew from Haiti did dissent become more visible and was embodied by "Revolution of 1946." It was *Noirisme* ideology which forged a space for Black middle-class leaders over the prominence of the mulatto elite. The ensuing crisis from this so-called revolution caused many military interventions to control the uprising of students, trade unions, and communist groups. This calamity served as a precursor to the consolidation of the Duvaliers' dynastic dictatorship wherein father and son maintained power from 1957 to 1986 (LAGUERRE, 1998). The first Duvalier known as "Papa Doc" decreased the power of the military and primarily relied on his paramilitary allies, the *tonton macoutes* (state police) to maintain control causing the flight of many intellectuals and professionals between 1957 and 1964 mostly to New York. This group was well educated and had financial means. Its members had planned to return to Haiti once the Duvalier regime collapsed (TROUILLOT, 1990). They constituted the first phase of Haitian immigration to the United States. [13]

When Francois Duvalier (Papa Doc) proclaimed himself "President for Life" in 1964, a second wave of immigration of middle class Haitians started. Again in 1971, with the transfer of power from Duvalier the father, "Papa Doc" to Jean-Claude the son, "Baby Doc," large numbers of Haitians from both rural and urban areas boarded sailboats to reach Florida (TROUILLOT, 1990). This represented the third wave of immigration of Haitians to the United States. Between 1977 and 1981, more than 50,000 Haitians arrived by boat in south Florida and another 5,000 to 10,000 by airplane (STEPICK, 1992, p.57). Only from abroad could dissidence take place since the paramilitaries were able to infiltrate underground hideouts of political activists. [14]

2.5 Democratization period in Haiti

In 1986 Jean-Claude Duvalier was ousted, leading to a period during which Haiti witnessed multiple ephemeral and governments mostly controlled by Duvalierists who attempted to retain power after the demise of the dictatorship. In 1990 Jean-Bertrand Aristide was elected Haiti's first democratic president. A year later, he was ousted by a military coup. The U.S. government placed an embargo on Haiti and according to ZEPHIR (2004), the poorest sectors suffered the effects of this embargo. One more time, Haiti was propelled into another state of emergency causing another emigration wave seaward on boats and make-shift rafts to the United States. In 1993, more than ten thousand Haitians were admitted to the United States under a family-unification plan. Aristide was returned to Haiti late in 1994 under the protection of the United States government to finish his term before it expired in February 1996. Upon his return, Aristide was specifically instructed by Washington to dampen his political discourse and to encourage reconciliation. [15]

Yet regime swapping in Haiti became as chronic as parliamentary changes in Italy, and much like the game of musical chairs. During the late 1990s, Rene Preval, was elected to office at the end of Aristide's term, himself also a member of the Lavalas Party like Aristide, and then Aristide's election to the presidency again following Preval's downfall, illustrates this last point (DUPUY, 2007). By his second term, Aristide's former supporters had joined efforts with other dissenters and formed an alternate movement called Convergence Democratique (DUPUY, 2007). In response to the new opposition, Aristide's supporters formed their own groups, known as *chimeres*, who allegedly engaged in criminal activities and violence. Because of the advent of *chimeres* during the end of the last decade of the twentieth century into the twenty-first century, another wave of Haitian migration took place. By February 2004, opposition to the presidency of Jean Bertrand Aristide grew intense along with the popularity of the new civil society coalition Groupe des 184, also garnering international support, and culminating in Aristide's ouster. Ironically, Aristide's forced removal took place one month after the celebration of Haiti's Bicentennial Anniversary of its independence. [16]

2.6 Haitian reception in the host-land

Local officials, natives of South Florida, and other immigrants met the migration of Haitians to the United States with great resistance. According to STEPICK, STEPICK, EUGENE, TEED and LABISSIERE (2001), Haitians were amongst the most heavily discriminated groups. U.S. authorities, for example, intercepted boats before they left Haitian waters, incarcerated undocumented Haitians disproportionately and disapproved political asylum requests from Haitians more than from any other national group. [17]

The efforts to isolate Haitians and continue their forced and unlawful removal failed because of staunch opposition from civil and human right groups, church organizations, and black Americans (STEPICK, 1992). In the early 1980s, however, Haitians figured among four groups: homosexuals, hemophiliacs,

intravenous drug abusers and Haitians listed as the primary groups at risk for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) according to the Center for Disease Control (CDC). Even though Haitians have been removed from this list, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the late 1980s refused to accept blood donations from individuals of Haitian descent (STEPICK, 1992). [18]

Nevertheless, it is also important to note why experiences of the poorer Haitians in South Florida were not shared by all within this immigrant group. The Haitian professional classes who boarded airplanes *en masse* during the first wave of migration during the 1960s were not held at Krome Detention Center in Broward County, Florida. In addition they most likely spoke fluent French and English as well as Haitian Kreyol and generally were equipped with social skills allowing them greater mobility. Also, they created organizations like the Haitian Refugee Center (HRC), the Haitian American Community Agency of Dade (HACAD), The Haitian-American Chamber of Commerce (HACC), Fanm Ayisyen nan Miami (FANM) all of which provided them with social and economic status whilst also being seen in public to care for poorer Haitians (STEPICK, 1992). [19]

In 2000 over 230,000 Haitians (160,000 foreign born) were living in the state of Florida, the majority of them in the counties Miami-Dade (approximately 100,000), Broward (approximately 63,000) and Palm Beach (approximately 30,000) (US CENSUS, 2000). Even though the city of Miami is home to a neighborhood called Little Haiti, census data do not suggest that Haitians reside in distinct ethnic enclaves. This partly has to do with the fact that more affluent Haitians reside in different cities in the tri-county area with generally higher income households regardless of ethnic markers. At the same time, lower income Haitians more often reside in areas made of generally lower income working class households. [20]

2.7 Historicizing the Haitian diaspora in South Florida

To understand the identity formation of Haitians in South Florida one must locate their experiences across a timeline and through generations of emigration waves in the twentieth-century and to the present day. Adding to this, Haitian identity construction in the Diaspora is largely dependent upon their socio-economic status and their position in Haiti. The following Haitian emigration stories below are juxtaposed with diverse experiences of transnational migration, class and processes of adapting to everyday life in the United States. Consequently, in order to re-produce the Haitian participants' construction of their own diasporic identity, we have placed our analyses of the interviews in a historical context, which explores the homeland, migration, and host reception narratives. [21]

3. Biographies of Haitian Interviewees

Understanding how participants of Haitian descent conceptualize being Haitian in America, their ontological formulations, and where they localize their sense of home and belonging are made evident through the biographical narratives of our Haitian-American informants. These are their stories. [22]

Pierre

Pierre, an attorney who was born in the United States in 1974 to Haitian parents, constructs his identity through hyphenation as a Haitian-American. As a Haitian-American his ideas about Haiti and Haitian identity are mainly assembled and pieced together from visits to Haiti. His skin tone is light and as a result he is perceived as upper class in Haitian society. Calling this a "box" created by "them," he does not embrace this perception of him. In the United States the perception is rather contrary. He is seen as Black like every other African-American, subject to the same negatively racialized-environment that exists for all Blacks in America. [23]

In Haiti, Pierre thinks he is viewed as the "oppressor" because he is from the elite class. This is confusing for him. According to him, while in the US he "knows the drill" and his place in society, whereas in Haiti he is unsure how to act. In Haiti, he is given a privileged status because of his family name and his family origins. In the United States, by contrast, there is no sense of this privileged entitlement. Pierre is uncomfortable with his elite status and the associations of those ideologies held by Haitian elites. As a result, he adopts a more American sensibility when he is in Haiti. He is deliberately non-elite. Instead, he eats on the street from street-food vendors to enjoy the "simple life." Through these actions Pierre consciously and deliberately rejects the identity ascribed to him by others. He goes even further to explain when visiting Haiti, he feels American because of his politics. Being Haitian in Haiti means for him an existential discomfort. And yet he feels more Haitian in America than he does in Haiti. [24]

Pierre's pride in being Haitian in the United States is noteworthy for his awareness of discrimination against Haitians in American society. By describing an encounter with some youths during childhood he says, "I guess they figured because I was Haitian they could take their liberties with me." He elaborates further:²

"... growing up Haitian-American here was you know it was a little funny you know we had ah the-the boat people the jokes and ah and all that you know so that was always tough but I was always proud of that so I just you know always identified myself as such I have cousins who didn't you know for a while they do now but um, I mean and they have for a long time but I have cousins who wouldn't identify themselves, because it was a negative thing you know, I mean you know hey you know this guy's Haitian you know there were guys they'd try to hide it say they were from all kinds of other places ..." [25]

Pierre's identity is one of confused alternation—full of pride as well as shame. For Pierre, being Haitian means to be the target of boat people jokes and to be conflicted about racial politics. But it also means to be proud of his Haitian identity and to celebrate material aspects of culture such as the food and music. Pierre is

2 We are aware our biographical subjects at times use language which may be unclear to the reader. To present and preserve the narratives in their original form and the exact words of the interviewees, we have not corrected for grammatical errors.

proud of his knowledge of Creole and the expressiveness of the Creole language. What is more, ontologically he is uncomfortable to self-describe himself as a Haitian in Haiti or in ascribing himself through this characterization. Pierre for the most part desires to distance himself from such a classification despite his being in a position of privilege. It is clear though Pierre wants to be proud of his Haitian identity, he is conflicted about the privilege and the racial politics associated with it. As he himself states he "loves his skin" but he really appears to be uncomfortable in it. [26]

Geographically, Pierre's home is South Florida, but in his imagination home is the countryside of Haiti. His American home is a three-bedroom townhouse which, according to him, merely serves the purpose of having a place to sleep. Pierre declares his South Florida townhouse is for his daughter. Otherwise he would not need it. The imagined countryside home in Haiti is an imagined emotional space and represents those special feelings set apart because he resides in South Florida. These are sentiments reserved for Haiti alone, exemplifying those utopic ideals of hope existing elsewhere from the loss of homeland. In spite of the fact he has not lived in Haiti for any longer than a year, the emotional Haiti whilst in his mind is very real to him. To this extent the countryside house in Haiti is more than nostalgia but acts as a social agent for living in an emotional place. The countryside house to Pierre therefore is a mnemonic device for remembering and being forced away from such a place. Pierre through his discourse glosses over his discomfort experienced in the real Haiti by selectively adopting feelings of a casual visitor and tourist. [27]

Sandra

Sandra, Pierre's mother, was born in Haiti in 1950 and migrated to the United States when she was 17 years old. She and her family fled Haiti to escape the socio-political oppression caused by the Duvalier ("Papa-Doc") regime in the 1960s. Though some members of her family actively fought against the Duvalier regime, others in her family benefited from his government. As she is Pierre's mother, she shares his features, and like him has very light colored skin. Sandra's upbringing in Haiti was one of privilege because of her name and skin color even though her family was not financially wealthy. She explains:

"I had no shower at my house I had no toilet in my house we had a living room with nice mosaic my bedroom was like dividers and my brother and my grandfather there it was not a fancy house ... But we had the name and then the color let's put it that way Haitians look at it that way once you had the color you're lighter skinned you're more accepted ..." [28]

Remembering the town where she grew up, she explained: "they called us bourgeois ... we were considered high-class." Sandra also describes other times where she experienced a sense of freedom from these racial and class labels. For example, she explained to us when she visited her grandmother in the countryside, it was more "open" to her. There, Sandra was not made to feel the burden of her bourgeois identity. [29]

Sandra accepts the negative way people view her in Haiti and by admitting to being part of the upper classes, knowing full well how the Haitian elites have oppressed the majority of Haitians. She accepts the label as a cross she must bear and as a brand she is unable to remove. In an effort to compensate, it appears, her life's mission is devoted to the improvement of the lives of all disadvantaged Haitians (in Haiti and the United States). Sandra works very hard to do good for the non-bourgeois. In so doing, she is seemingly appeasing the guilt of her privilege. Even though Sandra rails against the injustice of her privileged status, she is not averse to using it, especially when in Haiti. At one point in her narrative Sandra tells the story of needing a gun permit for protection in Haiti. As she explained, without affect, the army was "dark-skinned" and she was granted a gun permit based solely on the implication of the privilege associated with her "light skin". She unconsciously accepts her ascribed identity as a bourgeois Haitian. [30]

When Sandra migrated to the United States her living situation was similarly humble as in Haiti. At that time she lived with an aunt in a small apartment. She had expected the surroundings to be more opulent given she was living in America. She states:

"I came to the US and I remember the plane going down and I see Queens [New York] and see houses down there with swimming pool and I think my father is waiting for me in a house with a swimming pool because he was making so much money in America and then I said wow and then when I get down my grandmother, my aunt and me, my brother in the hallway and then there was the living room and I said this was something it was so cold and I thought I was barefoot it was like ice on the ground so this is crazy how can people live in a place like that I wanted to go home because it wasn't what I expected ..." [31]

Equally important to understanding Sandra's story and those of the other Haitian biographers is how the American education system regards immigrants. In school, as was the case with all our interviewees, she was assigned to a lower grade, resulting in her demonstrable need to prove her intellect. Another interesting aspect of Sandra's biography was her distance from any Haitian-American community during her first decade of living in the United States. She did, however, marry a Haitian doctor and moved to Texas. There her friends were Mexican. Yet it was her relocation to South Florida with its large Haitian community, which allowed her to make Haitian-American friends. Furthermore, it was also in South Florida where she was reintroduced to Vaudou, the Haitian religion. Sandra at this time decided to become initiated in the religion over the forceful objections of her husband. In brief, Vaudou is a religious product inherited from African slaves with syncretic attributes from French-Catholic beliefs.³ It is a combination of West African rituals and Catholic rites. Vaudou practices sometimes involve animal sacrifices, dances and invocations to gods and spirits called *lwas* who govern the universe and the incorporation of Catholic saints brought to the island by the French. The religion is focused on healing and

3 Common alternative spellings of Vaudou are *voodoo*, *vudou* or *vodon*.

protection through incantations, herb lotions, and rituals (ZEPHIR, 2004). Sandra explained to us how her father was a practicing Vaudou priest in Haiti even though he converted to Catholicism and as she stated how her grandmother had also been a practitioner. [32]

Sandra articulated in her narrative how her Haitian identity was wholly wrapped up in her identity as a Vaudou priestess. "Vaudou is who I am," she stated. Sandra explained how she experienced an emptiness, which was only filled after embracing the Vaudou religion. To her Vaudou was the real essence of Haiti. Even so, Sandra's aspirations for her newly found religion were a struggle, the Vaudou elders did not automatically accept Sandra because she did not "look Haitian." She elaborates:

"I went through a hard time there because the people in the Vaudou ceremony you are brother and sisters you are dancing everything but when the ceremony was over they would say Milat go home ... Milat is somebody of mixed blood and I said to myself my God I'm home and the Vaudou people were telling me that in the Vaudou Lakou, Lakou is the whole compound, and I felt very sad ..." [33]

It was only later after several pilgrimages to Haiti when she managed to convince them of her sincerity and to accept her as a Vaudou priestess. In all, she had to work hard to prove her Haitian-ness. Given Vaudou is practiced predominantly by the lower classes (OSWALD, 1999), it is interesting to note why Sandra has chosen this method to be an ontological definition of her Haitian-ness in contradiction to her self-description as an upper-class Haitian. This is further evidence toward proving why constructions of identity and belonging do not always have to be imposed values, meaning through varying forms of cultural transmission, but rather may reside in "the will of the individual" (HOLLINGER 2003, p.152). [34]

Another fascinating aspect of Sandra's story is her effort to demonstrate her true Haitian-self by aspiring to reshape the image of Haiti and Haitians in America. The majority of her responses ended in a description of the work she has done with anti-Haitian discrimination in America and with social and economic development in Haiti. Sandra was extremely concerned about portraying herself as someone who was actively participating in strengthening the Haitian community in South Florida. She ran for office on the School Board and volunteered for programs assisting Haitian youth in acclimating themselves to an American lifestyle. [35]

Sandra appears to be most at home in Haiti. Her first impression of America was: "it's so cold, people must be crazy to live here." She calls America "too individualistic." Moreover, Sandra expresses contempt for highly valued facets of American culture, for example, by rejecting apple pie, American football and the celebration of Thanksgiving. She criticizes the American education and healthcare systems saying only the wealthy have access to the best even though similar limitations of access obtain in Haiti. [36]

Despite these criticisms, Sandra likes the comfort of living in America as is evident through her descriptions of home and belonging:

"Yes, I remember when I went to Haiti when Jimmy Carter was the President and I saw photo of Jimmy Carter in the airport and I say this is America and this is my country, when I'm here I'm American when I'm in Haiti I'm Haitian, Americans say double consciousness that's a lot of crap I don't feel double consciousness when I came here I adapted to here and when I'm in Haiti it's like I never left ..." [37]

For Sandra such statements demonstrate the ambivalence and yet ease of the here and there-ness. As HANNERZ (1997, p.4) explains, "flows ... referring to things not staying in their places ... a territorial redistribution" creates a certain hybridization, a co-dependent intermingling of identity and culture. And while Sandra denies a "double consciousness," there is nonetheless an undeniable duality of ontological hybridity in her remarks. By "ontological hybridity" we wish to suggest there is a need for a reconceptualization of dichotomous-understandings of Haitian "and" American identities to a more fluid and interstitial construct of identity, or those cultural constructions of "interstices *between*" social spaces as between societies, and countries, and in specifically for individuals as here between Haiti and America among interviewees such as Sandra (HANNERZ, 1997, p.10). [38]

Josephine

Josephine was born in Haiti in 1976 and migrated to the United States when she was 15 years old, and in doing so escaped the economic hardship of Haiti along with her family. She frames her family background in Haiti as unprivileged and as one where the extended family belongs together. Her perceptions of America are utopic. Thus for her the USA is equated with the place one comes for a better life. Josephine explained to us:

"I thank to God because I'm here, I don't hate it because I'm here, hey you can't hate it, you are here, you get the opportunity if you can grab it you grab it to help yourself to become a better person, to help yourself become a better educator and to help other people too, other people will come because we will have other people coming every day, even Guatemala, Spanish, Haitian, Jamaican, they coming because they want a better life, it's not because it's not good at home but it's better here." [39]

Accordingly, and like many other immigrants, Josephine is desirous of the American dream, stating: "America is the land of opportunity if you make the most of it," though she herself is not American. In her view, America is the place where one can receive an education through hard work and to make a better life than in one's home country. Josephine herself is ambitious and believes in these educational ideals of self-betterment and working until being able to afford her university studies. Ultimately, Josephine's aim is to be able to help her parents through financial stability as a result of higher education. Also, she wants to be a Haitian who does "good things" and who does "better than others." She elaborates:

"I'm here and I see the opportunity and I can take it and I can help my family when I'm done, I think that's my life story, if anybody, any immigrant that come here, because if God take you from your place and bring you here, God have a purpose for you, God have a life you, your life could be different from others, not because we are different people, no, we all could do different good things, especially when they are talking about the Haitians, we are Haitians, we have good things in our heart in our way, we could do good things we could do better things than other people, I mean in fact if I see this one do this, I should do better, this is my goal to do better, because I came here at age 15, if I don't fall in that age there is no way that I'm gonna fall right now, because I know with God's help, with God in control I will do it, and this is my life and this didn't even give the whole thing but so far this is my life and I like the way my life is and I like the way where god put my life to be ended and I thank God for it, and anybody else who is listening, don't say because you're an immigrant you cannot do this, when you have your paper, your immigration paper, when you have everything legal, you have your green card you have everything, you will make it, you will have a good life, just like everybody else ..." [40]

In America, according to Josephine, anyone can "become somebody" but to be American is not desirable to her and she does not identify herself as American. In her narrative she refers to the "American way [of doing things]," and the "American people" but her self-image is "our people," meaning Haitians in general and Haitian-Americans. Hence, for her being American is being "Other." When Josephine discusses Haitian society and culture her references are "we"-plural for identity-making, or a collective notion of belongingness, and thereby, in her narrative such images of a "we-ness," the plurality of collective being, are often repeated again and again. So too is the continuous repetition of religious sentiment.

"... the Haitian culture, the Haitian people, we support one another, especially when one is sick, when one is in the hospital, when one cannot help themselves, we help them as we can, you know it's like we don't have any hate against nobody, I mean we are the same, even if you are not Haitian ... we help you, it doesn't have to be our culture, it doesn't have to be our people, we will help you if we can ..." [41]

Josephine's physical surroundings also define her biography. Her neighborhood and nearby neighborhoods are located in West Palm Beach of Palm Beach County, which is a community she has known since marriage with many of her neighbors attending the same church. As Josephine explains this Haitian community in West Palm Beach is considered to be a highly concentrated and unified Haitian network. To Josephine her Haitian identity is centered upon her large-extended family and the social life of her church. [42]

According to her story, to be American is to have great opportunities if one plays by the rules. For Josephine this also implies having to ward off dangers like drug abuse and generally loose morals. As such, she credits her church and faith in God as stabilizing factors and as protective forces against falling prey to such evils. While Josephine has no wish to be an American, she does want to take advantage of living in America and any opportunities presenting themselves to

her. To fulfill her desires and goals this, of course, signifies for Josephine accepting an American way of life. Even so, Josephine argues she will not adapt to American life because for her adaptation also represents assimilation and the loss of self. This is what she explains:

"I think I came here when I was 15, to be honest I did think that I can adapt the way the living but I don't adapt specifically to the way it is, because when you adapt something you must look overall, what are they doing, but me, cause the American, they don't, the one is it is not Christian, but us as a Haitian culture we care, do you understand, we care because let's say for example in our country you cannot look at older people in the eyes when you are talking to them, your head has to be down, you cannot, if they ask you to do something you cannot say no, OK, for example if my mother send me to go get water, if another lady, another person see me in the street with the water, the person is able to take the water, for me not to say anything then to go back and get the water, I cannot go home cry I cannot do anything, but will I do it here? NO, because everybody has different ways, but I don't like drop all those things, maybe if I would marry American people it would be different, I will be attached more to them, but yes I'm, I adapt kind of the way of living, the way it is, but I am not adapting, because to forget about my culture, I am still, some place I go and I don't want to speak English, I speak my language, you know this is what I'm more comfortable with, I don't put in my head when I was 15 years old that I don't wanna speak Creole, no, it's my mother's language, I have to, especially since my Mom doesn't speak English I have to speak Creole, any other way, she might know a few things, but not a conversations we are having right now, no, so I don't kind of adapt then, because when you adapt you have to do everything they are doing, I don't do everything they doing." [43]

In Josephine's worldview cultural traditions and habits must be ascribed to at all times such as not looking at an elder in the eyes when conversing. These examples of generational respect as well as other cultural norms are well supported by her church and her family. To Josephine she is most Haitian when she is interacting with her Haitian church community. The oft-quoted admonition to those of the Christian faith—to be in the world but not of the world—parallels Josephine's own sentiments of living in America and not feeling or believing to be American. In addition, to everyday qualities of belonging in relation to being a Haitian-American, there are also special rituals demarcating her hybridity of being Haitian-American. For example, holiday celebrations like Christmas and Independence Day create sense of community with other Haitians. Because the United States has similar holidays (though on different dates) these are parallels of familiarity. Moreover, these are special moments offsetting feelings of alienness and exile in America. To Josephine the similarities between the two countries indicate in cultural terms and belongingness, "we" [Haitians] are just like "they" are [Americans]—"they" give "us" [Haitians] the opportunity to celebrate like "them" [Americans].

"... in Haiti we have Noel called Christmas it's like here, we have Independence Day, their Independence, but when they have Fourth of July here we do it, in Haiti we do not have the Fourth of July, in Haiti I think they call it the Independence Day, the

Fourth of July, ours is on a different day, so when they have those kind of activities our church or everybody even if you're not in church you take the day off, to relax with your family if you don't have a church to go to with them, and so here every Fourth of July we go to the beach, Christmas we have talent show here for Christmas, the same thing that American people would do, the same thing we will do back home we will do here, so it gives us an entrance to do anything here, I mean we thank God again because they let us do it, they let us enjoy the holiday with them ..." [44]

For Josephine, there are separate but equal distinctions of belonging regarding Haiti and the United States. Being in the United States allows her the freedom to experience a sense of belonging to a Haitian community without benefit of physical presence in Haiti. Her sense of belonging in the United States is firmly anchored to a sense of belonging to a Haitian community. [45]

For Josephine home is also equivalent to the physical house. According to her it is the place where you are safe. The house for Josephine is also where children should stay inside with their parents to avoid the dangers of the street "out there," outside the familiar. Ironically though, neither Haiti nor the United States appears to constitute home for her. When returning to Haiti after 15 years, Josephine said it "felt different," meanwhile explaining why her concept of Haiti as home formed part of an idyllic image. Although she regularly sends money to her family in Haiti and even though she has an internet business there, it is the local Haitian church in West Palm Beach where the conceptualization of acceptance, comfort, and a sense of belonging are the most proximal to an idea of a home. [46]

Amelie

Amelie was born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti in 1981. At the age of 9 her parents sent her to the United States to live with her aunt so that she would be spared ongoing violence in Haiti while they remained behind. Her parents were owners of a business she likens to the American retail giant Wal-Mart. Through her narrative we find her to be someone of affluence as she speaks about having grown up in two homes with maids, nannies and tutors at her disposal. Beginning at age 5 she would spend her summer holidays in the United States and return to Haiti for school. Presently, Amelie resides with her siblings who followed her one by one to America for academic studies. At the time of the interview Amelie was in her final year of law school. [47]

In her narrative, she discusses the sense of isolation and alienation as a foreigner in high school. During the years she attended high school between 1991-92, as the discussion above explains, it was intensely unpopular to be Haitian in the United States. Amelie describes being ridiculed for her unfamiliarity with English and her style of dress. [48]

Amelie's experiences are quite similar to many of our Haitian interviewees who experienced ridicule from prejudices against their language awkwardness, accents, and dress habits. In spite of these humiliating experiences, there is no belief of inferiority on Amelie's part in comparison to others. On the contrary,

Amelie exudes a certain self-confidence when describing her abilities to accomplish any desired goal. Her stories also indicate a stubbornness and determination to have things her way. As a child of indulgent parents, Amelie is accustomed to having her whimsies met at all times. [49]

While she does not articulate any defined boundaries for her Haitian identity, her Haitian-ness is expressed through food cravings and Haitian music. To meet her needs in relation to Haitian culture, her father still enables her Haitian cultural-needs by bringing Haitian food to her through his frequent visits to the United States. Also, Amelie attends many HaHaitian cultural events on a regular basis. To Amelie, she feels American through her dress-style, and when she goes out and stays late at parties. These forms of expression both material and behavioral, apart from the constraints of familial control, bring her freedom while living in the United States, which would be impossible in Haiti. For Amelie both cultures are enjoyable for different reasons. Amelie remarked to us:

"... to me it's different people have different cultures different people have different cultures, so it's not like as being defined in Haitians I don't think I don't think it's not bad at all I think I think different people are raised differently and, and different cultures different foods different music and so on, at this point in time I like I like I enjoy my Haitian music and food and all the Haitian festivals and so on but at the same time I enjoy the same American dishes and so on so I'm kind of eclectic ... it's a mixture is not really a definition for me ..." [50]

Such views best exemplify Amelie's conceptualization of hybridity and belonging in two cultures without necessarily having to choose between them (HANCHARD, 1998). [51]

Through her self-descriptions we find her sense of home does not appear to be tied to any particular place, nor does American freedom increase any greater attachment to the United States. She is more likely to hold onto elements of Haitian cultural-values than American ones. And like her siblings, Amelie has come to the United States to acquire a university education and in doing so she embraces some American habits. However, her adopting some American ways has not meant wholehearted acceptance of American life. After all, Amelie still has ties to Haiti as her parents reside there and are generally successful. Yet despite such personal linkages, Haiti is not home either. In Amelie's case, it may be her youth is a factor in her ambivalence. For all of these reasons, Amelie's story is interesting because there are some contrasts and blurred boundaries without any overall yearning for inclusivity. [52]

In sum, her views may also reflect the ontological hybridity of living in exile for a variety of social and economic factors. There is besides, a casual transnational quality-of-being on the part of Amelie, neither here nor there, rather than identifying with a particular locality and place. As such Amelie's narrative describes the fluidity of accepting and rejecting multiple layers of cultural habits and as mental transgressions toward a confused illusion of selfhood. [53]

Dauphine

Dauphine was born in Haiti in 1984 and immigrated to the United States in 1989. She somewhat uniquely describes herself as "Northern Haitian" even though she was born in the south. Dauphine explains:

"I was only born there that night I was back in Cap Haitian which is in the north, um which is significant for me because just like in America you have your Northerners and your Southerners, um it's the same thing in Haiti you've got your Northerners and your Southerners, so although I was born in a southern hospital it's only because that where my mom was at the time, but I'm a Northern Haitian ... the ones up North are the ones with money and they're the intellectual ones." [54]

As discussed in the brief history, Haiti was divided between the Black North and the Mulatto South. This meant that in those respective regions, there was a significant elite class of Blacks and Mulattoes. Dauphine is highlighting her Northernness in order to highlight her lineage of privilege, which she would not be able to emphasize as a southerner. Placing her roots in the North affords her a privileged status that predates the *Noirisme Mouvement* during which the Southern Black middle class was born (BETHELL, 1990). Dauphine's origins are Colombian and Haitian and she has a privileged background with both parents from successful families in business and politics. According to Dauphine even though her family is wealthy, they are continually engaged in philanthropic activities for the less fortunate in Haiti. And among all the Haitian interviewees, Dauphine was the most affluent. She lived on an estate, which she refers to as a "compound" because of its bodyguards and sniper tower. What is more, Dauphine's great grandfather held a high political office in Haiti, her father also a politician, and in the family there have been judges, senators, and so on. Her extended family and the nanny raised her since childhood after her father left to the United States in pursuit of a degree at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) on a scholarship with her mother soon following him. The move not only meant her parents leaving Dauphine as a child but also why her mother gave up her education in architecture to follow her husband. While the scholarship was certainly prestigious, it also conveys other concerns and priorities for the young couple, namely, not physically caring for their daughter, Dauphine, and leaving her with family in the interest of scholarship. Not until Dauphine was five years old did she follow her parents to the United States. Dauphine describes her journey to the United States thus:

"May 18 1989, I boarded a plane and, I immigrated to Boston Massachusetts, one more thing and this is-this is me completely-completely generalizing which is not good to do but hey there's some truth in anything, um I would-I would say I would even go as far to say ninety, ninety percent of the Haitians who immigrate from Haiti and go to come to America namely Miami, ninety percent of them, I don't know what percentage of them I don't know what percentage of them came on boats but I know ninety percent of the ones who come to Miami were your working class um citizens in Haiti, they were I don't know struggling farmer struggling, I don't know, cow salesmen and, whatever like cow breeder what do you call them, farmers yeah um whereas

ninety percent of um your Haitians who emigrate to say New yeah, Boston, yeah I don't know about New York because I haven't lived there really but Miami and Boston I can speak of first hand I'd say ninety percent of those who came those who went to Boston they were your affluent businessmen in Haiti, they were your affluent doctors and attorneys and um you know professionals in Haiti." [55]

By emphasizing her arrival to the U.S. by plane to Boston, is a clear implication of her distinguishing between herself and those Haitian immigrants arriving by boat as well as the lower-class status of other Haitian-Americans in Haitian terms. As Dauphine freely admits, she is "a princess." In talking about her identity, she declares:

"I'm Haitian by nationality American by citizenship, or Haitian by birth American by citizenship, that's one group and then you have the second group who's like, eh, I'm American by citizenship but I'm Black by identity, and, I don't understand them because I you know that's not me you know, I don't associate with myself as a Black, I'm Black in terms of skin color but that's where the, that's where the similarity ends ..." [56]

In her mind, the Black appellation is reserved for African-Americans, an identity construction she assumes not to be true for her. To another extent, Dauphine's identity is wrapped up in her perceptions of her Haitian family's wealth and affluence. As an indicator of how important social status is to Dauphine in her self-descriptions she is incessantly making references to her chauffeur, the family's private jet, fur coats, extravagant parties, the opera, and a special-order piano from Italy—all underlining the elite aspects of the Haitian upper-echelons and Haitian class hierarchy and very much her own privileged background. Also, Dauphine emphasizes her language of choice is French, the *lingua franca* of the upper classes in Haiti. Furthermore, she explained to us when accompanying her grandmother on philanthropic excursions, her grandmother made certain Dauphine was aware of her status as an upper-class Haitian by pointing out differences of the lower-classes as being very much unlike them. In other words, she was raised with a keen sense of self-worth in relation to belonging to an elite class. [57]

Dauphine is dark-skinned, but she calls it a "fluke," because most of the members of her family are light-skinned. Perhaps, this is Dauphine's whimsical way of expressing irony where she diminishes her own genetic heritage because her father has a darker complexion according to her own descriptive narrative. Or, it may be Dauphine wanted to convey her elite status as other upper class Haitians do in association with complexion and thereby emphasize conformity to light-skinned status. Regardless, her father was unacceptable to her mother's family at first for reason of skin-tone. [58]

It is also interesting how Dauphine describes her family upbringing in relation to American society. For example, even though Dauphine recognized her family was the only Black family in a white neighborhood and she was the only Black student in her classes, growing up she did not identify herself as Black. Because her

social status made her comfortable among others of the same class, she was not cognizant of her race and therefore did not feel Black. It was only after moving to Jacksonville, Florida, she understood she was Black within the framework of American definitions. For census taking and other surveys, she fills in "Other" as a category for ethnicity rather than identifying as either Black or African-American. Dauphine tells us in her interview she is willing to say she is Black in terms of skin color, but this is the only connection she believes she has with other Black people in America. Dauphine traces her heritage to the Haitians who fought the French for independence rather than with the African-American civil rights movement and the history of the African-American struggle in the United States. Dauphine's characterization is indicative of the social construction of race. The One Drop Rule—any Black ancestor regardless of distance removed causes the descendant to be classified as Black—has long since been the determinant of racial classification in the United States (DAVIS, 2001). [59]

In fact, Dauphine views African-Americans in a negative light and she is upset when mistaken for an African-American woman. She says in her interview even the poorest Haitians regard African-Americans as lower to them in social status. Dauphine's negativism about African-Americans stems from her position and questioning why African-American slaves did not rise up and fight for independence as Haitian-slaves did against French colonial masters. Even so, such opinions are more likely than not, connected to her parents' negative views of African-Americans. Dauphine claims they would be appalled if she ever were to date and/or marry an African-American.

"... if I were to bring an affluent white guy home and an affluent black guy home, without even asking about the black guy they wouldn't even ask what does he do, what do his parents do they wouldn't even ask, ONE question they would ask, are you BLACK American because who knows maybe he's from like Trinidad maybe he's from Haiti maybe he's from Jamaica, and if said yes I'm Black American as in American black, he's out the door, he is so crossed off the list, they'd welcome the white guy into the family with open arms...they've made it clear to me pick whatever race you want except black except black American pick any nationality you want except black American (they said if I) they don't care, my mom even told me she said if you feel the need to marry a black man just make it a European black man just make it he's born he can't help his color but he just happened to be born and raised in Europe, don't bring home a Black American and that is how I was raised ..." [60]

Though Dauphine tries to distance herself from such prejudicial views, she appears to have difficulty in doing so. From her standpoint African-Americans are still waiting for the government to give reparations to them instead of working to improve themselves. She elaborates:

"... no matter how poor they are in Haiti they look down at Blacks in America because they see blacks in America as first of all as weak, you know they didn't fight, they didn't get down and get dirty to gain their independence they had to have some man, who wasn't even black, to sign some paperwork to set them free and so um they see it as again as even though they're free, you know they're trying still to, live in the past

you know asking for reparations instead of making themselves better and it's just [us] Haitians and how we view [them] ... we don't look for American Blacks for a sense of unity no not us, not us Haitians, which was very interesting to me and I guess um with reason I guess that's why blacks don't like Haitians because you can be the poorest person who just stepped off of a boat from Haiti dying of pneumonia and having to scrub toilets for a living and still look better than blacks in America." [61]

To this extent, Dauphine does not want to be associated with an American concept of Blackness as such a view does not equate to her overall ontological awareness and life goals and most of all, her elitist outlook. For Dauphine success is everything, which coincides with her privileged status and sentiments of being better than others. [62]

Overall during the interview, Dauphine expressed an inordinate amount of pride for her Haitian heritage and a strong desire for positive self-representation, which was instilled through parental tutelage. She explains:

"... my mom always used to tell me whatever you do in your life, you are Haitian and I kind of see it as true, she said let me tell you something if you were to commit a crime right now, the, the way life is they're not going to say okay a black girl today just got caught stealing no-no, they're going to say a Haitian girl got caught stealing yeah and she said whatever you do you are an ambassador to Haiti and she pumped that into my mind ever since I was little, and being Haitian to her, was being the best at everything you could be because you know Haitians are hardworking people and they're very competitive, very competitive and just continuing that whole competitive nature and being a perfectionist and always being on point and to top it off being, being Haitian royalty it's like always being well not always but acting as classy as you can, at least in public you know that to me is being Haitian." [63]

Part of this self-projection is derived from her career as a professional violinist. As a violinist she has performed at several important venues, Haitian radio and American television and even once for former U.S. President Jimmy Carter. Dauphine has great ambitions to excel as a musician and to be an international entrepreneur as well. [64]

The fulfillment of such career goals she hopes will continue the philanthropic work of her Haitian family, especially her grandmother. This view of returning to Haiti triumphant, and helping Haitian people, and to rebuild the country is a recurring theme throughout all of our interviews with Haitian-Americans. [65]

Dauphine does not have a clearly defined sense of home. Geographically, she resides in South Florida and is desirous of moving to California to pursue her artistic career. She explains why she would like to have dual citizenship as a Haitian and as an American. Dauphine also tells us why she feels "truly Haitian" after visiting the poor children in Haiti. At times she believes she is more American, particularly when at age 5 she performed before President Carter. In essence, Dauphine is a person living in exile, away from her family's affluence and the accompanying elitist belonging afforded by a luxurious lifestyle. In the

United States Dauphine is therefore denied a lifestyle which is very much part of her social identity. While she was not active in Haitian associations at university, finding them derivative and not serious enough because they focused only on organizing parties. To this degree Dauphine's elitist sensibilities prevented her from truly embracing the local Haitian community in Florida. Yet this social distancing from other Haitians has to do with her class identity against those from different "pedigrees" and overall her personal contempt for African-Americans. As for friendships with other Americans, she appears to have few friends. When living in Boston, she loved being the center of attention in the Haitian community in Boston for her concert performances on the radio and television. Her narratives about herself described a lonely person, one isolated from the rest of society; even though she talked about how much they "loved" her. [66]

In spite of her social gaucheness, Dauphine is quite knowledgeable about Haitian society, its history, and its system of social stratification. She explains:

"... it's kind of not talked about but there's truly a sort of um, hmm, social-social-structure, social class, almost like a class system in Haiti um first and foremost you got your rich, well, yeah, you got your rich, the rich are divided into I'd say three categories, you got your rich who are light skinned you got your rich who are dark skinned and you've got your foreign rich like the white men the Europeans who come over to Haiti and they were already rich and they live there now, but as for your first two your light skinned and your dark skinned ones it's always been an issue because it's always been a thing where the light skinned ones are known to be the mulattos the bourgeoisie which in my family although I'm not light skinned, mmm I was just a fluke, mostly everyone on my mother's side of the family they're Colombian by birthright, um although they're Haitian by nationality um, they fit right in with the Haitians they speak the languages and they fit right in so they're known as the mulattos the bourgeoisie, my father's side of the family they're known as the dark skinned ones, and in Haiti if you're a bourgeoisie you probably made your money, um, because daddy had a trust fund for you, and if you're dark skinned you probably made your money because you worked really hard and you went to university and you got a PhD in South Africa and then you came back and now you're a successful businessman or a professor at you know some overseas school." [67]

The utopic home she refers to as the place with estates and jets, is really a fantasy, which appears to be no longer accessible to her. Her identity is so firmly rooted in the trappings of her erstwhile social class and as such, hers is a Haitian identity without a Haitian home. That said, however, Dauphine appears to struggle to find a genuine sense of home in America:

"I didn't have a say in becoming a [US] citizen, I just became a citizen because my mom was a citizen and I was her kid and I was under eighteen I was automatically given a citizenship um, but yeah I would love, I would love to get a dual citizenship but unfortunately you know I can't, I can't get a dual citizenship with Haiti and America, it's like wow you know I can't, ever become president of Haiti I mean of America, because I wasn't born here but I can, in fact, become president of Haiti, and um, everybody in my family thought I would be because of my family's background AND

we have actually had a female president so, the fact that I'm female doesn't mean anything it's like been there done that you know, for Haiti unlike America but, you know, I don't ever plan on being president of Haiti, ... so... that's not a problem for me and, and, as soon, as I can I'll go ahead and sign the papers to officially now be an American citizen by my own statement not by my mother's statement, yeah, um moving to America, it was, it was, it was nice, it was nice I mean, I heard a lot of hype about it you know so you know what I heard two things about it you know, half the family in Haiti they were like I don't know why your parents are moving there, now keep in mind my, my family in Haiti is so wealthy that they considered coming to America to be a step down ... the other half of the family is like it is America and they're progressing, they say it's the land of opportunity so yeah they might start off , they're not ever gonna be poor because they've got money, they might start off with the crazy jobs like well they never had to clean bathrooms but you know security work and you know and whatever and they'll work their way up and they'll be just as affluent there as they were here so I heard both sides but when I came to America that all went out the window so it was so nice, everybody was just so nice, everybody was just so, so nice I loved it, I love it I love it, I loved it yeah ..." [68]

In sum, Dauphine is as conflicted about her identity as she is ascribing to herself a particular category of personhood. She disdains any association with an ontological awareness of being African-American in relation to their concept of Blackness by steadfastly clinging to her Haitian pedigree. At the same time, she has ambivalent feelings about becoming an American citizen. Dauphine rests on her former elite status and attempts to recapture a similar sense of privilege by setting high creative, entrepreneurial, and philanthropic ambitions. She appears to be searching to find a niche in the United States even as the ghosts of her privileged past ceaselessly haunt her. [69]

Jean

Jean was born in Haiti in 1968 and migrated to the United States at the age of two. According to his life story his father was a doctor and his mother was a nurse in Haiti. His parents sought refuge in the United States during the regime of Jean Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier for economic and political reasons. Upon arrival in the United States, the family settled in the New Jersey suburbs, eventually moving to Washington, D.C. In 1992 Jean moved to South Florida when he was 22 years old. While living in Florida Jean became heavily engaged in political activism such as movements to protect against discrimination and those in support of African-Americans, immigrants, and gays and lesbians, among others. While Jean grew up in the United States, he was always identified with being Haitian, stating: "in the way I was raised." When asked directly about what it means to be Haitian and not American, he remarks it means to be raised in a different manner, more polite to your parents. According to Jean, it also means having a different notion of race than most Americans:

"... some of the earliest things I recall was how in the second grade, on going to the playing ground, children were playing and screaming and most of the black children were here and most of the white kids were there ... without any planning, the school

didn't plan it that way but it seemed that was a natural social order and it struck me so much because I had never heard race discussions in my home and I think that is one of the big difference between people who are raised in the United States and people who are raised in other countries or raised by parents who were born in other countries is that every black family, every white family had discussion about race in their homes and I can't remember in my childhood having any of such discussion in our home because it wasn't really an issue because my parents were from a country where virtually every one was a black, so having a discussion about black and white never made sense to them ... and so for me, a lot of race issues and race things that happened, that had to do with race relations took me by surprise ..." [70]

Jean's ontology or Haitian-ness is displayed through material culture such as food and music. When asked for a definition of his Haitian-ness, Jean responds:

"I think it's things, one is the culture, the food, that I eat and the music that I listen to, but culture is just the way that I look at family, and just home habits and that is one thing and secondly, the things that interest me politically and the way I approach them, I'm very interested in what goes on in Haiti and to what happens to Haitians who arrive here ... so, it is both cultural and political that I see myself as being Haitian." [71]

Even so, Jean does not identify himself as Haitian or American. Instead he identifies with all Blacks as a result of his exposure to African-Americans from different socio-economic and educational backgrounds during while he lived in Washington, D.C. He elaborated:

"... one of the things that ended up informing me in Washington D. C was that there was such a broad range of black people there which is not the case in any other part of the country, first of all black people were in poverty like they were in all other parts of the United States, but also, there was a pretty significant middle class blacks there which doctors and lawyers and the like and most of the black people were very politically active and critical of the political system here in the United States." [72]

He forged strong ties with other Blacks even after moving to a predominantly white, middle-class neighborhood in which he grew up. Jean has constructed his identity as a Black Pan-African. Although he was born in Haiti, his Haitian identity is not as meaningful for him than his Pan-Africanist views. When Jean did visit Haiti he encountered extreme poverty for the first time, prompting him toward social justice work, as did influences from Black Power movements at university. According to his own biographical account, he explained to us how he identified more with his African heritage than being Haitian or American. In this manner he seemed to wish to transcend his identity for a utopic one. For example, Jean does not see himself as American and views America as a place to live. From his perspective Jean believes he is unable to enjoy being American as a Black person as whites are able to do so. He explains:

"... other than living here, I really don't define myself as American ... I don't think because I was raised in the United States it does make me less Haitian, or black or

African if I was born and raised in China, would be the same ... the second thing is that if someone is having a dinner and you are sitting at the table, it doesn't make you a diner, the thing that makes you a diner is when you eat like anyone else, when you enjoy the benefits like anyone else and I don't think that I enjoy the benefits in America in the same way like other Americans do and that makes me not to think of myself an American." [73]

Geographically speaking, Jean's home is Miami. It is likewise in Miami where he works arduously as an activist on human rights issues. He appears to adopt the notion that his Haitian ancestry grants him a Haitian identity, but the American hyphenation is rarely self-accorded and acceptable as an appellation only in limited circumstances. He declares:

"the thing that relates me as Haitian-American is my political work ... the only time I feel I am American is when ... I recognize what I see or do as similar to what Americans see or do, other than that I don't see myself as American." [74]

In sum, Jean rejects American identity as ontologically necessary to his conceptualization of personhood. He seeks to be defined more by his social activism than by any limiting ethnic classification. This attempt to transcend notions of race and identity, however, is more a reaction to his self-described perception of not possessing all the advantages of being American, specifically White American. Though he is not as averse to embracing a Haitian identity, he views it as more of an incentive for social activism rather than his quintessential being. [75]

Celestine

Celestine was born in New Jersey in the United States around 1970 to Haitians parents and was sent back to Haiti to be raised by her grandparents. She returned to the United States during her high school years and in the wake of the violence in the post-Duvalier ("Baby Doc") Haiti following her mother's death. After high school, she attended university where she studied law, and now has her own practice. Celestine had a privileged upbringing with personal servants while growing up. She elaborates on her adjustment to not having this luxury after moving to the United States:

"... in Haiti I had a total different life style than here I had maids and I had a personal nanny and I had-I hardly did anything kid growing up when I moved here it was a different story because in my aunt's house I had to do my own laundry and I had to clean and to do there I had to do different things for myself basically so I didn't like that too much ..." [76]

A further indicator of her privileged status is she speaks French and not Creole. As she explained to us:

"... she [her Mother] didn't want me to be corrupted so basically if she didn't like the family I couldn't be friends with-with the children ok so I had very limited friends and

growing up in Haiti also I wasn't allowed to speak Creole because they saw it as a lower class spoke Creole the upper class spoke French so I wasn't really allowed actually I used to get spanked for it when they heard me speak Creole because I was only allowed to speak French." [77]

Celestine told us her privileged status extended to her school life,

"I got favoritism because my parents were here [in the United States] and because I was coming here every-sum every summer I had all the cool clothes I had all the, I knew the latest music I had all those things so of course you know I had more friends down there [Haiti] than you know anybody else there and then when I started picking up a little bit of English even you know with my English courses they would always you know make me do the presentations ..." [78]

Her changed circumstances highlight the difference in her life in Haiti and her life in America. She conveniently forgets the negative aspects of her Haitian home—the violence which forced her move to the United States choosing instead to idealize her pre-American life. Such conceptualizations contribute to her sense of loss of privilege, which an American life can never provide in quite the same way. [79]

Yet, despite her popularity, she was raised to be a "young lady," meaning no boys and no parties while growing up. The status of being a "young lady" was further forced upon Celestine as she was disallowed from taking the bus. Once or twice she decided to rebel and took the bus with her friends and classmates. [80]

Her parents and grandparents emphasized academic study and forbade her to deviate from this path. Going to school and acquiring an education meant, eventually, to have a profession, a career and a good life. [81]

This molding from living in Haiti during her formative years was difficult to overcome after migrating to the United States. The elite status Celestine had in Haiti was not transferable to America but her sense of elitism remained with her. Likewise her family upheld their upper-class status. As a young adult she was told there are behaviors in which Americans engage but she being Haitian must not. This particular view stems from those culturally-prescribed transmissions passed on to Celestine by her parents, namely, Haitians are also superior to all Americans. Celestine explained why her family would not stand for her being Americanized. It is also unclear whether American here refers to African-American or just Americans in general. [82]

Celestine did not enjoy the social life of her peers while growing up. In Haiti she was considered by her peers as being different because of her summer trips to America. While living in America she was supposed to be immersed in studies and not allowed to date. As a result, her identity is primarily constructed around her educational achievements and her class status even when in the United States. She did not have Haitian friends while in high school but later joined a Haitian association where she attended Haitian parties. When she moved to Florida, she did not associate with the Haitians there because they were from the

lower social classes. Twice a year she returned to Haiti until 1998 but now does not visit because she feels restricted there. Celestine believes herself to be caged because her privileged status as a potential target for kidnappers and because of her strict grandmother who discourages unladylike behavior. To this day Celestine has maintained one childhood friend. As she explained to us most of her family now resides in the United States with only a few remaining in Haiti. Even though Celestine does not identify herself as Haitian, while living in South Florida and free of her parents' influence, she attends Haitian cultural events. Further adding to the shifting ontology of Celestine's identity is her developing a greater desire to help the Haitian community because she represents so many Haitian clients in her law practice. And despite her upbringing, she may have become "Americanized" after all. In this sense Celestine is more defined by her accomplishments than by her ethnicity. [83]

During her interview, and like Jean, Celestine does not express a notion of belonging. At the time of the interview she lived in South Florida. She believes present-day Haiti is not the "same Haiti" she knew as a child. Furthermore, Celestine has ceased to visit her place of birth, as in her mind it is no longer home. Ironically though she has created a successful life in America, she does not identify with being American. Only now, at the age of 33, and after having lived in the United States for approximately half her life, has she begun creating a sense of belonging to the Haitian community in South Florida. Even so, it is unclear whether or not this is an effort directed at social responsibility more than it is to belong to the Haitian community. [84]

4. Discussion

This research suggests how Haitian identity is constructed from the stories of life-history interviews of Haitian informants. Social class may differentiate Haitian belonging and the distinctiveness held by first and second-generation Haitian immigrants. In this respect the interviewees are placed into the following categories: upper class (bourgeois), middle class (educated professionals), lower class (blue collar workers); first generation (those who came directly from Haiti) and second generation (generally, those born in the United States). The narratives of our upper and middle class Haitian interviewees suggest pride in their Haitian heritage. There is no attempt to hide their Haitian-ness or to pass for American. Even those interviewees with a working class upbringing did not deny their Haitian roots. This may also be explained by the relative age of our interviewees. Younger Haitians, those in high school, are inclined to succumb to peer pressure and engage in this repudiation of their heritage (GIBNEY & HANSEN, 2005; STEPICK et al., 2001). Moreover, many working-class Haitians living in America, as described by these authors, attempt to forge a better life for themselves and their families. [85]

For Celestine and Amelie, who were born and raised in Haiti, notions of identity, home, and belonging appear to be more fluid and selective factors. According to their biographical accounts there is no real attachment to country but such narratives do support why some of them are recently identifying with local Haitian-

communities. For example, the life stories of Pierre and Jean clearly illustrate these contrasts of identity attachments. Pierre who was born and raised in the United States, and Jean born in Haiti but grew up in the United States are cases of two individuals with different backgrounds but both have clear ideas of belonging to Haiti. This suggests why notions of identity, particularly those ideas surrounding home and belonging, are utopic and idealized and less derived from experiences than formed from cerebral constructs. This reminds us of BANKS' (1996, p.186) locations of ethnicity, specifically how ethnicity is "in the head" of the subject. According to the author, this stance is used to achieve a specific end or a concept derived from specific historical socioeconomic development. Aware of the outdated underlying theory of structural functionalism, BANKS asserts that "it is difficult not to see some kind of gain or advantage that is linked to the expression of ethnicity" (1996, p.186). [86]

Much of Haitian identity construction among these interviewees appears to be about defining ethnicity in contrast to others, for example in realizing the potential of the Haitian historical-legacy in contrast to African-American culture and history. Such views remind us of BARTH's (1969) boundary-defined notions of ethnic identities. This perspective holds that ethnic groups are socially constructed without prior existence or stability and that the physical and ideological contents of ethnic identity are not to be sought in isolation. The focus rather lies on boundaries of the group that mark the limits of ethnic markers (BANKS, 1996). [87]

What is more, historical factors as Haiti being the first independent country of Afro-descendants in the Western Hemisphere and the second independent nation in the Americas after the United States contribute to Haitian self-awareness as a significant cultural group within the circum Caribbean region. Haitians in the Diaspora have constructed one of the main contents of their group identity around this "chosen glory," a concept developed in the works by Vamik VOLKAN (cf. 1997, 2004, 2006). The desire to return to Haiti was commonly articulated by our interviewees. These ideals often were expressed in humanitarian aims to build the social and economic infrastructure of the country by opening businesses, hospitals, orphanages or through other philanthropic endeavors in the under-developed nation. To most of the Haitian informants a Haitian concept of "home" may not be encompassed by the same ideals about social space within Haiti proper. Rather notions of belonging are realized through the utopic dreams and desires as well as conflicts of living in two worlds, Haiti and the United States. These Haitian immigrants are like many other Haitians who have migrated to cities throughout the United States. GLICK SCHILLER, BASCH and BLANC-SZANTON (1992) describe the story of a successful Haitian doctor who unfailingly returns to Haiti every year. While in Haiti, the Haitian doctor's goal was to build a sports complex for the children of his hometown and through his efforts he charmingly solicited donations from his circle of wealthy, Haitian-American friends. The authors explain this is not a phenomenon specific to this doctor and his compatriots. Significantly, well-to-do Haitians have undertaken many large-scale development projects. These projects, they argue, have often been "grand rather than practical"—citing the example of a donation of an ambulance to a town without a petrol supply and/or hospital (p.2). GLICK

SCHILLER et al. (1992) opine such projects create status for Haitian-Americans both in Haiti and in their Haitian community in the United States, and parallel to the Kwakiutl potlatch whereby one's power is judged by how much one gives away (see DAVIS, 1992).⁴ An equally conceivable supposition is the expressed desire of most of our interviewees to return or at least maintain some kind of home in Haiti. As SAFRAN (1991) asserts:

"they maintain a memory or myth about their original homeland; they believe they are not, and perhaps cannot, be fully accepted by their host country; and they see the ancestral home as a place of eventual return and a place to maintain or restore" (p.85). [88]

Furthermore, a hegemonic construction of class and status in Haiti as many interviewees explained to us brings equal responsibility among them to be successful abroad and thereby maintain their elite status whilst contributing to the development of the economically deprived nation. [89]

Another reason for this seemingly atavistic obligation may come from the official recognition of the "10th Department" or the Haitian Diaspora as an extension of Haiti's physical boundaries by former Haitian president, Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide. The concept of the "10th Department" predates President Aristide's utilization of the notion. In fact, Georges ANGLADE (1990) introduced this terminology. ANGLADE discussed how the mass exodus of Haitians, which began during the Duvalierist takeover, gave way to a transnational understanding of Haitian identity. The intellectuals and other political refugees who had fled Haiti during the dictatorship still remained connected to the homeland and participated in movements to reshape Haiti's political sphere from their new host land. However, it was not until the election of President Aristide in 1991 that the concept was reinforced. He invited all Haitians to have a role in reshaping Haiti, regardless of where they resided. Haiti was to be a nation-state not delimited by its physical borders (LABELLE, 1999). The Haitians in the Diaspora, under Aristide's plan, were the 10th Department for a country with only nine actual departments.⁵ Haitian diasporic identity highlights the disjoining of the link between citizenship and nationality. While Haiti does not permit dual legal citizenship, it does acknowledge the Haitian Diaspora as an integral part of the nation. While Haitian diasporic subjects are not capable of navigating through multiple sites of citizenship, they are nevertheless what ONG (1999) calls "flexible" citizens or transnational Haitians. [90]

WADE (1997) argues that "ethnicity ... tends to use a language of place (rather than wealth, sex, or inherited phenotype)" (p.18). Ethnicity is tied to a geographical space that provides its delimitations. However, Haitian identity was

4 The Kwakiutl potlatch is one of the most famous cultural examples in anthropology. It actually refers to Marcel MAUSS' (2000, orig. 1922) example in his renowned book *The Gift*. Briefly stated, the idea amongst the Kwakiutl is the following: the more you give away, especially among chiefs, the more powerful you are. In other words, beneficence is equal to power.

5 Haiti is currently divided into 10 geographical departments. The Department of Nippes was created in 2003. Consequently, the Haitian Diaspora constitutes the 11th Department.

de-lodged from the nation-state borders and the Haitian Diaspora was included in the national imagination of Haiti. LAGUERRE (2005) argues how such a declaration rendered Haitian identity transnational regardless of the site of legal citizenship. Such de-territorialization is further enhanced by the ease of global travel and communication, especially for elite Haitians. The facility of being able to move on impulse or travel back and forth between Haiti and the United States is underlined by wealth, and is most decidedly not the same for Haitians of the lower classes. De-territorialization is exacerbated by the duality pervading Haitian identity from the effortless movement between Haiti and the U.S. Many Haitians in fact travel back and forth between the two countries with great frequency and our interviews are no exception to this. All of our subjects have returned to Haiti at least once since migrating to the United States. For some, traveling to Haiti is an annual event. This makes the Haitian group unique in our study because the Cubans and Guatemalans have a limited if nonexistent right of return to their country of origin. [91]

Ethnic identity is not formed in a vacuum. Instead, it is created and assumed from the appropriation or rejection of available categories and conceptualization of both race and ethnicity in the new country of residence coupled with old understandings of the original homeland. BRODWIN (2003) asserts that there are two analytics that serve to explain the development of diasporic enclaves. He highlights the agency of the Haitian Diaspora in Guadeloupe in defining themselves but also notes how this definition is a response to the host land. Similarly, Haitian immigrants in South Florida have produced an identity reflecting both their social position in the homeland, Haiti, and their experiences and knowledge of racial history and relations in the host land, the United States, specifically in South Florida. Haitians have to define themselves against the available binary of race: White and Black. [92]

As CANDELARIO (2007) explains:

"Identity is a process of both internalization and externalization; it is at once structured through institutions and left open to interpretive practices of its subjects; and it relies on the expressive and perceptive practices and paradigms of both the self and the other who reflects back the existence of the identified self" (p.8). [93]

Some Haitian immigrants, like Dauphine, have rejected an affiliation with the African-American community which they deem a subaltern group in American society. They seek to dis-identify themselves with a group they perceive to be powerless. The first big wave of Haitian migration occurred in the late 1950s before the height of the Civil Rights Movement. Only one of our interviewees was present during that era. The others of our interviews had not been born yet, most of them migrated during 1960's and 70's and afterwards. Perhaps the lack of exposure to a more positive Black presence served to create a dissonance between Haitian-ness and Black American-ness. [94]

The identification process for Haitians in South Florida differs vastly from that of Haitians in New York or Texas (ZEPHIR, 1996). STEPICK, GRENIER, CASTRO

and DUNN (2003) explain the proportion of African-Americans to black immigrants has declined. "Since the 1980s, at least 25 percent of Miami's black population has been foreign-born and of the 75 percent who are U.S.-born, a significant number still recognize a Caribbean heritage" (p.24). South Florida, and more particularly the city of Miami, is dominated by immigrants where the traditional Black and White race binary is extended along a different racial and ethnic continuum allowing for Haitian ethnic identity to be distinct from other Black ethnic identities. HANCHARD (1998) argues race cannot have any meaning by itself without a context. He writes, "race operates as a shuttle between socially constructed meanings and practices, between subjective interpretation and lived, material reality. It has a paradoxical, simultaneous importance, for it is and is not about skin color" (p.4). Haitians immigrants in South Florida are able to construct an ethnic identity as highlighting Haitian-ness and not African-American-ness. While Haitians share phenotypical attributes with African-Americans, they are able in the socio-political context of South Florida, to emphasize their distinctiveness. [95]

While our research revealed our participants conceptualized their identity as separate from African-Americans, STEPICK et al. (2003) argue "the combined prejudices from the broader American society and those specifically within the high school urge Miami Haitian adolescents to assimilate rapidly and to simultaneously engage in ethnic suicide, to cover up their Haitian origins" (p.121). The difference in our results is a consequence of our study's limitations. 8 out of 9 of our participants were of more privileged socio-economic backgrounds in Haiti and have continued to enjoy privileges in the United States. Consequently, the interviewees' attachment to the distinctiveness of their ethnic identity is not shared with Haitians from less fortunate circumstances. Furthermore, STEPICK et al. (2003) argue how Haitians immigrants in his study assimilated into a particular segment of American culture, explicitly with African-American youth from poor urban-areas. While STEPICK et al.'s (2003) work reveals how Haitian youth often participated in what he calls segmentary assimilation, our research revealed a staunch refusal of Haitians immigrants to be engulfed by such identifications in American society. Instead we found an insistence upon creating a distinct hyphenated identity without necessarily denying similarities between the phenomenological experiences of Haitian- and African-Americans in relation to structural violence and prejudices. This difference in our results could stem from the class makeup of our interviewees. [96]

STEPICK et al. (2003, p.8) argue, "immigrant assimilation is not just about the immigrants changing themselves and becoming American. Rather, assimilation also entails a reciprocal effect: immigrants are not assimilated until the rest of America accepts them as part of America." Tactics of exclusion, or those practices of symbolic violence, used against newly migrated Haitians such as placing them in lower grades in school than they deserve to be and ridiculing them because of their poor English communication skills serves to further distance Haitians from embracing an American identity (see BOURDIEU, 1977). Rather than assimilate they have sought to hybridize their identities as displaced immigrant-persons and in association with values in the host country. However, in

a truly post-modernist sense, this hybridization is a two-way street as Haitians adopt elements of American cultural identity and Americans are beginning to incorporate aspects of Haitian culture like food and music (OSWALD, 1999). [97]

As a corollary to the hybridization as described by HOROWITZ's (1975) concept of ascriptive identity, signifying a transformative identity according to social context, is a notion aiding our alternative explanation why the interviewees have ambivalent sentiments about American identity. Sometimes our participants provided harsh commentaries for rejecting aspects of American identity, and at other times had no problems with feelings of being American. As one interviewee, Sandra, explained, she feels Haitian in Haiti and American in America. These apparent conflicts of identity only emphasize further the mutability occasioned by transnationalism and the attendant freedom and frequency of movement between the two countries. [98]

5. Conclusion

In this article we presented the biographies of seven Haitian Americans living in South Florida to further the discussion on constructs of identity, home and sense of belonging among immigrants in the United States. We conclude that terms such as salad bowl and melting pot have become passé and inadequate to describe immigrant experiences. So too notions of assimilation and acculturation (GORDON, 1964; GLAZER & MOYNIHAN, 1963) are commensurably insufficient. Instead, we posit that immigrant identity construction is hybridized and as such continues to evolve unfettered by static definitions of being and unidirectional socio-cultural transfer. [99]

Haitian classifications of race define social status and class and are unique to Haiti as physical alterities of being, whilst descriptors by others (non-Haitians) are denied as stigmatizing labels. What makes Haiti exceptional is that Afro-descendants themselves are defining these classifications and not Whites or European descendants. This race-oriented status is denied Haitians in the United States since many of them are classified as African-American in U.S. society. According to our informants themselves and their recorded narratives such lumping together of diverse ethnic-identities, Haitians with African-Americans, is a viscerally abhorrent appellation. And yet this inversion of ethnic grouping by the society-at-large has a stimulating effect for Haitians by reinforcing pride in Haitian culture and its origins. [100]

For Haitians, there is an elision between race and ethnicity, which makes them unique among immigrant populations. Further, meanings and constructions of race among Haitians are different than those of African-Americans.

"Pride in the Haitian Revolution is part of the cultural and ideological make-up of the Haitian social fabric ... The Haitian revolution of 1791-1804 is the basis on which Haitians define themselves, perceive and evaluate others, and create their identities" (CHARLES, 1992, p.106). [101]

For African Americans, Black locates them in the lower ranks of the social order and a perception of self not shared by Haitians. Identity construction among Haitian immigrants in South Florida is an identity rooted in negation of the American conceptualization of Black and the affirmative adaptation of Haitian social, racial and cultural constructs to their new locale. Plagued by almost certain ridicule in spaces outside a tight Haitian community, Haitians nevertheless remain unbowed and are generally buoyed by their history. [102]

There exists a love/hate relationship with America similar to the love/hate relationship with Haiti. There is love for America as it is the land of opportunity yet hatred of many American cultural values. There is love for an idealized mythical Haitian homeland and hatred for the political and economic circumstances which consign them to live elsewhere. This emotional fence straddling thwarts the construction of a clearly defined sense of identity, home and belonging. Our research leads us to conclude ontological definitions of identity, home, and belonging are grounded in alterities and juxtapositions. Hybridization creates a multiplier-effect where we no longer speak of an identity, home, and belonging as singular concepts but identities, homes, and belongings with polyvalent and conflictive meanings. [103]

In sum, our interviews with Haitian-Americans have suggested an ontological awareness associated with a conflicting duality of living "here" in the host country, the United States, and yet harking back to sentiments of "there," the homeland, Haiti. Yet perceptions of place and space varied amongst our Haitian-American informants. For most of them class was a defining factor and so too were stereotyping definitions of race according to divergent gradations of skin color. For our research purposes the concept of social hybridity was important in so far as understanding the push and pull of social factors such as living in the United States and having sentiments toward Haiti but also the redefining of identity constructs against other ethnic groups such as African-Americans. The mental maps associated with our Haitian-American interviewees describe a group of Haitians, a subset of the larger Haitian-population, as having transnational experiences of migrating to the United States and yet having the means to return at least once a year. Problems associated with defining what it means to be both Haitian and American for our Haitian interviewees and their ideas of hybridity suggest not so much a layering or mixing of diverse racial-heritages, even though some may claim a direct link to a French-European ancestry, but as a negotiated process for defining the conflicting aspects of place and experience in relation to self-defined meanings of ethnicity. To the Haitian-American participants, their claims of identity mean reasserting privilege whilst maintaining the essence of ethnic difference because of historical legacy and notions of Blackness within a broader framework of Haiti and the Caribbean and beyond those definitions of African-American experiences in the United States. Amongst our Haitian-American interviewees there is an assertive ambivalence of forging new identities, not only by situating ethnicity within the United States and South Florida, but in maintaining close ties to the country of Haiti in order perhaps to emphasize the temporality of settlement and/or the permanence of the idyllic homeland in the ideals of these Haitian-American minds. [104]

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