

Integration of Haitian Immigrants from the 2016 Wave to Mexico**Integración de los inmigrantes haitianos de la oleada a México del 2016**

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the nascent process of incorporation of Haitian immigrants of the 2016 wave in Mexico, especially in Tijuana, Mexicali, and Mexico City. We are interested in integration into two key social spaces: the labor market and socio-affective relationships. Through a qualitative methodology, we document the existence of notable differences in labor insertion in the three cities, with a clear “advantage” for those who live in Tijuana and Mexicali. On the other hand, despite the recent settlement of Haitians and their sociocultural differences with the Mexican society, there are already mixed marriages and families. Although there is still a lot to achieve, there is no doubt that an integration process is underway, but mostly supported by civil society organizations and the ingenuity of Haitian migrants.

Keywords: 1. Haitian migrants, 2. labor integration, 3. socio-affective relationships, 4. northern border, 5. Mexico.

RESUMEN

Este artículo analiza el incipiente proceso de integración de los inmigrantes haitianos de la oleada del 2016, que llegaron a México y se asentaron en Tijuana y Mexicali, en Baja California, y en la Ciudad de México. Nos interesa la integración en dos espacios sociales claves: el mercado de trabajo y el campo de las relaciones socioafectivas. Mediante una metodología cualitativa, se evidenció la existencia de diferencias notables en la inserción laboral de los migrantes en las tres ciudades mencionadas, con una clara “ventaja” para los que viven en Tijuana y en Mexicali. Por otro lado, pese al carácter reciente del colectivo haitiano y sus diferencias socioculturales con la comunidad nacional, existen uniones y familias mixtas. Aunque queda un largo camino por recorrer, no cabe duda de que está en marcha un proceso de integración de los haitianos en el país, proceso que se ha apoyado ampliamente en las organizaciones de la sociedad civil, y en el ingenio de esos migrantes.

Palabras clave: 1. inmigrantes haitianos, 2. integración laboral, 3. relaciones socioafectivas, 4. frontera norte, 5. México.

Reception date: February 26, 2019

Acceptance date: September 30, 2019

Publication online: August 10, 2020

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INTRODUCTION

In 2016, Mexico saw the arrival of a group of Haitian nationals who had previously migrated through South American countries, intending to transit through the country. The wave of Haitian migrants caused shelters in Tijuana and Mexicali to overflow, and, to a lesser degree, filled shelters in Mexico City and Tapachula, Chiapas. Like other migrants in transit through Mexico, these Haitians hoped to cross the northern border of Mexico and enter the United States, but the tightening of the latter country's immigration policy and Donald Trump's win in the 2016 presidential election forced the majority to settle in Mexico. We explored Haitians settling in Mexico in a previous study, in which we warned that there are signs that Mexico was becoming the new destination of the majority of these migrants (Méroné & Castillo, 2018).

Most of the immigrant population in Mexico is composed of people born in the United States, but of Mexican parents or people from elsewhere in Latin America; that is, people with a stable family, cultural and historical ties with Mexico (CONAPO, BBVA Bancomer Foundation, & BBVA Research, 2018). This is not the case of the Haitians, whose cultural identity of origin is different and who, before the 2016 wave, had limited networks of compatriots in Mexico. This being so, the incorporation of Haitian immigrants into Mexican society poses a greater challenge, and their arrival offers an unusual opportunity to analyze the integration of people with cultural backgrounds dissimilar to those currently prevalent in Mexico.

This article analyzes the integration of these Haitian immigrants into two areas; the labor market and socio-affective relationships. We are interested in these areas because they are well known to be significant for the broader integration of populations of migrant origin into their host societies. For immigrants, entering the labor market opens the way to establishing the necessary connections for fuller participation in society.

More than just a regular source of income, “a job confers social status, constructs opportunities for influence, sets the rhythms of life, defines interpersonal relationships, [and] offers the possibility of integrating into society” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 88). Furthermore, in this paper, we support the idea that the establishment of socio-affective ties between migrants and members of the receiving society expresses a certain will of the former to be part of their new social context, as well as the latter’s opening to the *other*, and their willingness to expand the borders of “*us*.”

The analysis is based mainly on a corpus of information collected during a field study carried out between September and December of 2017 in the cities of Tijuana, Mexicali, and Mexico City. In addition to field notes, 56 semi-structured interviews were conducted with Haitians from South America, and with a group of Mexicans who had interacted with them. Another source of information was administrative records from the National Migration Institute, which enabled us to outline a profile of the Haitian population that arrived in Mexico in 2016.

The article is divided into four sections. In the first section, some theoretical approaches that deal with labor integration and inter-ethnic socio-affective relationships are reviewed; the second section presents some contextual elements of the wave of Haitians that arrived in Mexico in 2016. The third section analyzes the sociodemographic profile of the immigrants, and the last section analyzes the integration of this population in the study cities.

THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO LABOR INTEGRATION AND MIXED RELATIONSHIPS

The main theoretical approaches to studying labor integration of immigrants —and of the population in general— highlight, on the one hand, the role the level of human capital they can provide, and on the other, their social capital (Becker, 1964; Bourdieu, 2000). The theory of human capital maintains that the body of knowledge, skills, or work experience possessed by individuals determines their insertion, as well as their success or failure in the labor market (DeTienne & Chandler, 2007).

For immigrants, aspects such as proficiency in the language of the host country and the length of their stay are also considered part of human capital (Cornelius, Tsuda, & Valdez, 2003; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; De la Rica & Ugídos, 1995). From this perspective, the insertion and subsequent integration of immigrants into the labor market, as well as the differences in this regard between ethnic groups, men and women, migrants and non-migrants, and other social categories, would fundamentally be explained by differences in human capital endowment.

However, from credentialism (Collins, 1979), correspondence theory (Bowles & Gintis, 1976), theories of discrimination (Boumahdi, Lattes, & Plassard, 2002; Anker, 1997), the gender perspective (García & De Oliveira, 1994), or the spatial approach (Peláez, González, & Pinto da Cunha, 2008; Massey & Denton, 1987), it can be noted that beyond human capital, factors such as race, ethnic group, gender, family dynamics, and residential pattern, among others, can promote or hinder labor integration.

Among populations of migrant origin, these factors may be extended to include national origin, generation —the immigrants themselves being the first generation, their children born in the country of arrival the second generation, and their grandchildren and those affiliated with them the third generation— one's immigration status or that of one's parents, native heritage or not, as well as others (Méroné, 2019; Bean, Leach, Brown, Bachmeier, & Hipp, 2011). It is also common for the deficiency or impossibility of transferring certain components of human capital acquired in other countries to result in an inconsistency between migrants' human capital endowment and their employment (Chiswick, Lee, & Miller, 2005; Frijters, Shields, & Wheatley Price, 2005). Thus, people with similar levels of human capital but differing social characteristics can find themselves in very different positions in the labor market.

More specifically, a focus on social capital rather than human capital highlights the importance of social mechanisms in the acquisition of different types of resources, such as insertion and mobility in the labor market, among others (Portes, 1998). Bourdieu (2000) argues that *social capital* groups together the set of potential and actual resources associated with belonging to a long-term network of relationships. Thus, regardless of the level of human capital available, belonging to socially favored or disadvantaged structures can influence labor integration positively or negatively (Marrero, 2006; Vaillant, Fernández, & Kastman, 2001). Consistent with this perspective, it has been shown that networks of family, friends and fellow citizens, or the existence of an ethnic economy, make a relatively rapid labor insertion of immigrants possible (Elliott & Sims, 2001), although these structures can end up locking them into segregated sectors with little prospect for occupational mobility (Kalter & Kogan, 2014).

On the other hand, socio-affective relationships, especially mixed marriages, have been considered a key indicator in theoretical measures of the integration of immigrants into their receiving societies. For example, the assimilation theory holds that inter-ethnic unions represent the last stage of the assimilation of migrants, insofar as they reduce the barriers that hinder social acceptance (Gordon, 1964). Mixed marriages would be an indicator that at least the direct participants are accepted as equal social subjects, up to gender inequalities (Telles & Esteve, 2019; Qian & Lichter, 2007).

In the same vein, Kalmijn (1998) states that mixed marriages can reduce cultural differences in future generations since the children of mixed families are less likely to identify with only one group. Moreover, according to the same author, by marrying outside their ethnic group, individuals may lose negative attitudes they could have towards other groups. Mixed marriages would bring both spouses and their respective ethnic groups closer together since their social networks often become closer and more connected as a result of marriage. And although interaction increases the possibility of inter-ethnic conflicts, it also allows people to learn how members of the other group vary among individuals, which can undermine and even eradicate their prejudices and stereotypes.

Context of the Arrival of the 2016 Wave of Haitians in Mexico

Although the exodus of Haitians can be largely explained by the unfavorable structural and situational conditions afflicting the country (Lundahl, 2011), in order to understand the wave that arrived in Mexico in 2016, the migration policies of some other countries in the region must be taken into account. As a result of the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti, several South American countries began to implement “open door” policies towards Haitians, by means of several measures that included facilitating their entry, regularizing the migrant status of those who did not have legal status in their countries, and facilitating family reunification, among

others (Duffard Evangelista, 2016). A significant number of Haitians took advantage of these accommodations to emigrate to these countries.³

Brazil served as the main attraction pole of this migration due to the perception that job opportunities associated with hopeful news about the Brazilian economy at the time, as well as the prospect of the 2014 Soccer World Cup and 2016 Olympics hosted by Brazil (Fernandes & Gomes de Castro, 2014). Moreover, even before the 2010 earthquake, Brazil enjoyed a favorable opinion in Haiti due to its soccer reputation and the considerable proportion of Afro-descendants in its population, giving many Haitians the hope that this country did not suffer from racism. On the other hand, since 2004, Brazil had had a presence in the daily life of Haitians through its strong participation in the now-defunct United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). Brazil had military command of the program, as well as the implementation of a series of cooperation programs and running construction companies, civil organizations, and cultural institutions in Haiti (Milani, Lazo Vergara, Alba Vega, & Charles, 2016). These contributed to projecting an attractive image of the South American country in Haiti.

Thus, many Haitians considered Brazil an accessible country and an attractive alternative to traditional destinations —such as the United States, Canada, or France— whose migration and labor insertion policies are known for their more restrictive nature. However, by the end of the two major sporting events and with the outbreak of an economic and political crisis in Brazil, Haitians who settled there found themselves in a context marked by the loss of thousands of jobs and by recurrent socio-political upheaval. Faced with this situation, they began to look for new migratory options within the region —mainly Chile— and outside of it.

Like the South American countries, the United States government also relaxed its migration policy towards Haitians following the 2010 earthquake and other disasters in Haiti, granting Temporary Protected Status to those who were undocumented or in an irregular immigration situation in the U.S. The U.S. government also decided not to deport Haitians who had entered the country without the required documentation, except for those who were considered a threat to national security (Paris Pombo, 2018). Thus, faced with disappointment over Brazil as a permanent destination, some of the Haitians sought a new destination; the United States. Others, who were in Chile, Peru, Ecuador, or Venezuela, also joined the “caravan” heading north.

The route began in Brazil or Chile, then crossing in order Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, and Mexico, and ended in the United States, or some cases, in Canada (Paris Pombo, 2018). Very few traveled by plane, and if they did, it was mainly within Brazil, to get closer to the border with Peru. Due to restrictive

³Da Silva (2013) and Fernandes and Gomes de Castro (2014) estimated that by 2013 more than 20,000 Haitians had entered Brazil. By 2014, this figure increased to 50,000.

policies on irregular transit migration in some of the countries they passed through, the migrants had to undertake most of the journey by land, combining different means of transport —bus, taxi, motorcycles, boats, even on foot in some sections, with the help of *polleros* (people smugglers)— and trying to move unnoticed through some countries. This exposed them to high risks to their safety and physical well-being. Nevertheless, many reached their goal and entered the United States through the northern border of Mexico, particularly through the cities of Tijuana and Mexicali (Yee Quintero, 2017).

However, the United States changed its immigration policy towards Haitians in September 2016 and began to deport migrants who had entered the U.S. irregularly back to Haiti, except for pregnant women and people accompanying minors (Paris Pombo, 2018). The deportations were resumed because the situation had improved in Haiti. This meant that the Haitians in Mexico stayed longer, since those who arrived in Mexico after that date did not try to continue to the United States.

As might be expected, this led to a considerable number of Haitians staying in these cities (Montoya-Ortiz & Sandoval-Forero, 2018). Civil society organizations estimated that more than 4,000 Haitians were stranded in Mexico during the migratory emergency (Yee Quintero, 2017). Most were helped and hosted by civil institutions, or simply by individuals and families motivated by their willingness to help, since after the long journey to reach the United States–Mexico border, many of the Haitians had exhausted their financial resources and the support capacity of their networks. A portion of those who were still in southern Mexico chose to head towards Mexico City to avoid the hardship now affecting their countrymen in the north. It was these circumstances and dynamics that were responsible for the Haitian populations now accumulating in Tijuana and Mexicali, as well as a good portion of those in Mexico City.

It should be noted that Haitians were not the only migrants to make the journey from Brazil to Mexico, but they did make up the largest contingent among the Cubans, Congolese, Indians, Bangladeshis, and Nepalese who also sought to enter the United States. In the case of the Cubans, they sought to enter Mexico by land in anticipation, among other reasons, of the potential termination of the privileges granted to them by the law known as “dry feet, wet feet,” implemented after normalization of the relations between Cuba and the United States, which began in 2014. The Obama administration canceled the privileges granted by this law in January 2017, which meant that Cubans have the same difficulties entering the United States as other nationalities do (Clot & Martínez Velasco, 2018). Thus, the journey from South America to Mexico by land was not “Haitian foolhardiness” but, as is often the case in contexts of diverse flows, part of a broader dynamic of migratory movements shaped by volatile policies and circumstances.

In any case, the 2016 wave marked a watershed in the story of Haitians in Mexico. Before that year, the small Haitian community in Mexico was made up of exiles from the Duvalier dictatorship; artists, students, and professionals who had arrived together with their families

(Vega Cánovas & Alba Vega, 2012) and who were rather dispersed within Mexico City. Although the Haitian population in Mexico is still relatively small, in Tijuana and Mexicali, they now make up a noticeably visible minority. A part of the social and ethnic landscape that cannot be overlooked.

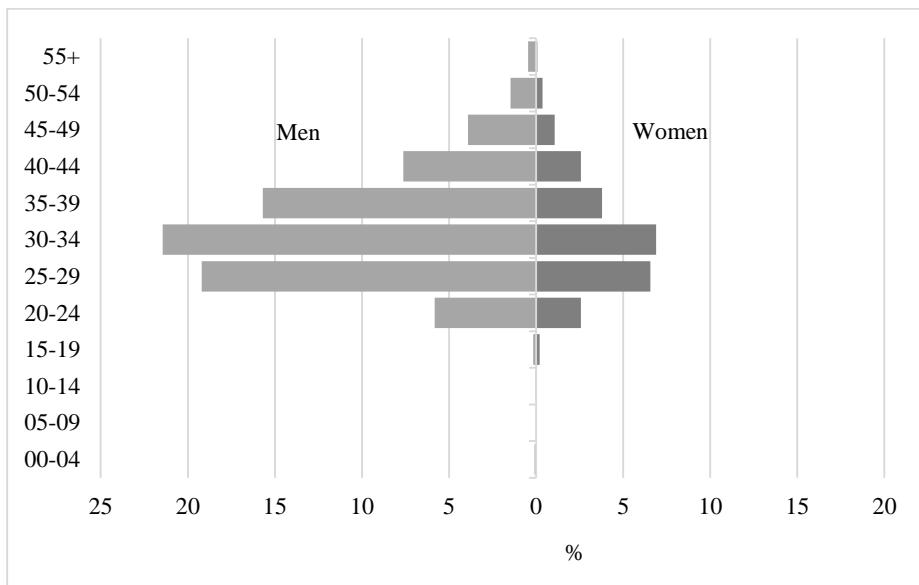
Sociodemographic Characteristics of Haitians in the 2016 Wave to Mexico

Two criteria were used to identify members of the wave that arrived in Mexico in 2016. It is known that the National Migration Institute (INM, for its acronym in Spanish) granted a visa or card known as “*visitor for humanitarian reasons*” to the majority of the Haitians who entered the country through the southern border in 2016; moreover, we know that most of them obtained the document in 2017. So we consider those who received a humanitarian visitor card in 2017 as members of that wave, discarding those who had another status in Mexico at the time since most do not belong to the population of interest. Using this criterion, we identified 2,552 members of the wave in INM records maintained by the Migration Policy Unit (UPM, for its acronym in Spanish) (SEGOB, 2017). These records made up the sample analyzed in this section.

It should be noted that the available data have certain limitations; for example, they do not have information on persons who did not, for whatever reason, submit an application for regularization to the INM. In addition, we only have information on those who received a positive reply from the Institute. Moreover, those who could not prove their Haitian nationality and whom the INM thus considered stateless do not appear in the database, either. However, the available information is sufficient to present a general outline of sociodemographic characteristics of the 2016 wave of Haitian immigration to Mexico.

As can be seen in Figure 1 and Table 1, the composition of the 2016 Haitian wave to Mexico shows a pronounced bias by sex. Eight of every ten members of this population were male. As mentioned in the previous section, for most of these migrants, reaching Mexico meant crossing up to ten countries; the difficult conditions and risks of the journey may have discouraged many women from undertaking it. Moreover, previous migration —to Brazil and other South American destinations— already had a greater male component (Baeninger & Peres, 2017). In addition, the U.S. immigration authorities’ greater leniency towards pregnant women and migrants traveling with minors undoubtedly affected the sex bias of the population that stayed in Mexico.

Figure 1. Population Pyramid of 2016 Wave of Haitian Migrants to Mexico



Source: Authors, with data from the UPM (SEGOB, 2017).

The data on age composition of the population show that the Haitians are concentrated in economically active ages, with an average age of 33 (Table 1). These data show the employable age of the migrant flow and the almost total absence of minors, which may be due to the difficulty of the trip from South America and the higher admission rate of minors to the United States. Most of the Haitian migrants have middle school education or higher, although one third did not specify their level of education. If these levels of education do not give them access to labor market segments demanding qualified labor and granting the best working and salary conditions, they could at least keep them out of the lowest levels of the market. In addition, these levels of education offer better possibilities for those who wish to study at technical or higher educational institutions, which would improve their future job prospects.

Six out of 10 Haitians in the 2016 wave are single (Table 1). Although we do not have information about their possible non-marital commitments —partners or other— it can be concluded that a good portion of the wave is available for matrimony. It would be interesting to analyze their behavior in terms of homogeneous or mixed marriages in the future. In the next section, we analyze their initial socio-affective ties with Mexicans, but, as we will see, we hope that future studies will investigate this aspect more thoroughly. On the other hand, almost half of the Haitians have at least one child, whether in Haiti or in countries of previous migration (Table 1), which speaks both of possible previous relationships and current responsibilities that may motivate labor participation.

Table 1. Selected Characteristics of Haitians in the 2016 Wave to Mexico by Sex (Percentage)

Characteristic	Men	Women	Total
Sex	75.9	24.1	100
Average age	33.3	32.4	33.1
N	1,937	615	2,552
Education (25+)			
<i>None</i>	0.6	0.3	0.5
<i>Elementary school</i>	8.0	5.6	7.4
<i>Middle school</i>	36.9	41.0	37.9
<i>High school</i>	14.3	14.0	14.3
<i>Post-secondary (technical, commercial, or university)</i>	7.1	4.8	6.5
<i>Not specified</i>	31.1	34.3	33.4
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100
N	1,855	586	2,441
Marital status (15+)			
<i>Single</i>	63.3	58.9	62.2
<i>Partnered</i>	31.4	37.1	32.8
<i>Other</i>	5.3	4.0	5.0
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100
N	1,859	591	2,450
Has children (15 years and older)			
<i>Yes (at least one)</i>	46.9	42.8	45.9
<i>No</i>	20.0	22.3	20.5
<i>Not specified</i>	33.1	34.9	33.6
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100
N	1,859	591	2,450

Source: Authors' calculations with data from INM organized and published online by the UPM (SEGOB, 2017).

FIELDWORK: METHODS AND INTERVIEWEE CHARACTERISTICS

The fieldwork was carried out between September and December of 2017 in Tijuana and Mexicali, in Baja California, as well as in Mexico City. We collected information through indirect observations and semi-structured interviews with Haitians and Mexicans close to them. Interviewees were selected using a combination of intentional selection and snowball methods. In total, we interviewd 56 people, of whom 43 were Haitians and 13 Mexicans. The Mexicans interviewed are people who had close interaction with the Haitian population, either because of their work in migrant support organizations or by having them as regular clients, having friends, or being their partners.

One interview script was used for Haitian respondents and a different one for Mexican respondents. In both cases, it was flexible enough to include any follow-up questions and

reformulations that might arise, as well as to make adjustments for specific characteristics of the people interviewed. It should be noted that the interviews with the Haitians were originally conducted in Haitian Creole, so the quotes cited in this article are translations.

In Table 2, we present some of the characteristics of the interviewees. As can be seen, they are mostly men of working age, with high school education or higher, and most are not married, whether formally or common-law. Although the percentages are different, the distribution of these characteristics is broadly quite similar to those analyzed with the INM data in the previous section.

Table 2. Characteristics of the Interviewees, by City and Origin

Characteristic	Tijuana		Mexicali		Mexico City		Total
	Haitians	Mexicans	Haitians	Mexicans	Haitians	Mexicans	
<i>Sex (percentage)</i>							
Men	68.2	40.0	72.7	50.0	80.0	50.0	66.1
Women	31.8	60.0	27.3	50.0	20.0	50.0	33.9
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Age group (percentage)</i>							
20–34	36.4	40.0	36.4	33.3	70.0	50.0	42.9
35–49	50.0	60.0	63.6	50.0	20.0	50.0	48.2
50 and older	13.6	0.0	0.0	16.7	10.0	0.0	8.9
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Marital status (percentage)</i>							
Single	40.9	20.0	36.4	16.7	70.0	100.0	42.9
Partnered	36.4	80.0	63.6	83.3	30.0	0.0	48.2
Other*	22.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.9
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
<i>Education (percentage)</i>							
None	9.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	3.6
Primary	22.7	0.0	18.2	0.0	10.0	0.0	14.3
Middle school and higher	68.2	100.0	81.8	100.0	90.0	100.0	82.1
<i>Total</i>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
N	22	5	11	6	10	2	56

Source: Authors, using data collected in field work carried out from September to December 2017.

INTEGRATION INTO THE LABOR MARKET: FROM DISAPPOINTMENT TO RESIGNATION

As mentioned above, the labor market, while not a panacea, can become a driving force for the integration of migrants as it helps bring them into relationships with other spheres of the

host society. In this sense, the market can function as a platform that encourages interactions and exchanges between migrants and the host society. In the following section, we present a qualitative analysis of the labor insertion of the Haitians in the 2016 wave of migration to Mexico.

The channels through which the Haitians entered the market in the three sites studied are very similar to each other, although with some differences between the two northern cities and Mexico City. In Tijuana and Mexicali, the data suggest that at first, it was maquila employers who approached the shelters to solicit Haitian workers. Early on, people in charge of shelters also contacted different companies to ask them to hire Haitians. Later, it was the Haitians who, upon discovering this opportunity, actively applied for jobs in the factories. Subsequently, the insertion of the Haitian workforce in maquilas increased through the classic method of compatriot and friend networks; that is, those already working in these companies brought in people close to them when the company called for more workers.

Most of the interviewees living in Mexico City who were living in migrant shelters benefited from counseling to obtain employment of some sort. In Mexico City, as in the border cities, many found their first paying jobs through their reception centers. However, due to several barriers, these jobs were temporary and restricted to socially unprotected and undervalued labor segments. Nonetheless, these first forays into the market opened channels that brought them some financial independence, enabling them to leave the shelters and survive on their own.

However, their entry into the labor market created high job expectations with respect to living in Mexico; some came to think that they would have opportunities similar to those they had enjoyed in Brazil, particularly relatively simple access to permanent resident status and early access to relatively high income and social benefits. To some, “Mexico was America’s little brother” in terms of job opportunities. Disenchantment began to build when they discovered that *humanitarian visitor* status did not allow them to obtain the benefits they expected. To access the labor market formally and receive legal benefits, it is necessary to have a Unique Population Registry Code number (CURP, for its acronym in Spanish), which is not issued to persons with the status of *visitor for humanitarian reasons*. This barrier reduced their job options to the maquiladora industry, informal employment, or jobs in the lowest levels of the job hierarchy, regardless of their level of human capital endowment.

Jacob’s case (all interviewee names are fictitious) is an example. He settled in Mexico City after having given up on attempts to enter the United States. Despite the feeling of “failure” he experienced in relinquishing the “American dream,” he built up new hope in Mexico.

We interviewed Jacob for the first time in September of 2017 in Mexico City, and the second time in Tijuana in December of the same year. The first time he had been working at a company north of Mexico City for four months. The company had hired him even though he did not have the documents required for migrants to work legally. Instead, he had to work

ten hours a day for a salary that he describes as a pittance. Jacob had taken the job after having repeatedly failed in his attempts to find jobs at other companies. He stated:

I have the [*visitor for humanitarian reasons*] card, but it's no good. Every time I applied for a job anywhere, the first thing I was asked for was my CURP, but they don't want to give me one [...]. That company didn't ask for my CURP, but they didn't give me a job with dignity. They don't value me. If I had known it would end up like this, I would never have left Brazil, in spite of everything (Jacob, 36 years old, university not completed, single, two years of experience in Brazil, personal communication, September 20, 2017).

Jacob's frustration is not an isolated case; most of the interviewees, mainly those who have settled in Mexico City, express a similar disappointment when they find that the job opportunities available to them are below their expectations. Another example is Marie-Line, who lived in Mexico City for 11 months before moving to Tijuana. She migrated to Brazil in 2014 "in search of a better life for [her] family." In Caxias do Sul, Brazil, she lived and worked in a restaurant until October 2016. After losing her job and multiple failed attempts to re-enter the job market, she decided to join the Haitian wave heading for the United States. After receiving the news of Donald Trump's election win while she was in Panama, she chose to continue to Mexico because she "had heard that Mexico is a great country, a country of opportunities [...] and because it has a border with the United States." However, after 10 months in Mexico City without being able to get a job, she says,

It's very difficult in Mexico. Everywhere they ask for my social security number, but they don't want to give me one because I have a visitor's card. [...] I don't see the benefit of coming to Mexico; (Marie-Line, 35 years old, high school not completed, single, two years of experience in Brazil, Mexico City; personal communication, September 20, 2017).

In addition to the lack of documents, the majority of Haitians lack knowledge about the Mexican labor market. Moreover, at first, they did not have a consolidated community of compatriots; that is, social networks of their own that could have guided them. What is more, the majority do not speak much Spanish, which constitutes another disadvantage for finding employment. Given these factors, at first, they turned to migrant support organizations, which gave some of them advice on how to enter the labor market.

But, even with institutional support, jobs in better-paid formal segments and with social benefits are not guaranteed. Low Spanish proficiency, lack of networks, low level of education, and difficulty in having recognized the experience they acquired in other labor markets continue to act as barriers to labor market insertion. Étienne's case is typical. When he came to Mexico in November of 2016 —after leaving Curitiba, Brazil— he felt as though he was on the doorstep of the United States. But, like several of his compatriots, the immigration authorities considered him stateless because he did not have documents proving his Haitian nationality. Because of this, the authorities granted him permanent residence with authorization to work legally in Mexico. Even so, it was "not easy" to find employment since

he did not speak Spanish and had no acquaintances or anyone who could help him get a job. Étienne states:

One day a fellow told me that they were recruiting at his job. It was in [the construction of] a building. I went with him and they accepted me. I couldn't understand the instructions at work; I got fired after four days (Étienne, 54 years old, elementary school not completed, married, four years of experience in Brazil, Mexico City; personal communication, October 20, 2017).

Another Haitian citizen who experienced a similar situation to Etienne's is Jonas, a 28-year-old mechanic. He had lived for two years in São Paulo, where he worked mainly at a company that provided cleaning services to hotels. When he entered Mexico in December 2016, the authorities granted him permanent residence since he was considered stateless. When addressing the issue of his finding a job, he says:

I haven't seen the benefit of the [permanent residency] card. I haven't been able to get a job in my trade. They ask me for my diploma, translated and legalized. Where am I going to get the money to have it done in Haiti? [...] With or without the card we're all in the same boat, there's no difference (Jonas, 28 years old, high school not completed, single, two years of experience in Brazil, Mexico City; personal communication, October 15, 2017).

Unlike the Haitians who stayed in Mexico City, most of those who settled in Tijuana and Mexicali did not have difficulty entering the job market. The informants from the latter cities told notably different stories about their labor insertion. As mentioned above, it was initially the employers who approached the shelters or the Haitians themselves directly to offer them work.

Constantin remembers that "every morning [people] came to the shelter to offer work [to the Haitians]" (Constantin, 46 years old, Tijuana, elementary school not completed, married, three years of experience in Brazil, personal communication, December 18, 2017). Kenia, 42, confirms this and adds, "there were different job options [...] they offered work in factories, in restaurants, in private homes, in the countryside outside the city" (Kenia, Tijuana, elementary school completed, married, one year of experience in Brazil and one year in Chile; personal communication, December 11, 2017).

In the same vein, Magofi, a former journalist and language teacher, says:

The people [of Mexicali] are used to seeing migrants [...]. They came to offer help, [...] to offer jobs. It helped us to have some money, [...] those jobs were like therapy after that exhausting journey (Magofi, 35 years old, Mexicali, university not completed, single, three years of experience in Brazil; personal communication, December 22, 2017).

Unlike what happened in Mexico City, in both Mexicali and Tijuana, some immigrants initially turned down job offers in the hope that they would be able to cross the border. For example, Thermilus explains that he and his friends strongly refused a job offer in a factory in Mexicali, arguing that "we did not come to Mexico to work [...]. It was like accepting a

defeat. All this way, the suffering, the effort, all in vain. I didn't want to, I convinced my friends not to go [to that job]" (Thermilus, 26, Mexicali, university not completed, single, two years of experience in Brazil, personal communication, December 27, 2017). As for Senat, he says regretfully:

Now I laugh to see how meekly I work. I was a revolutionary [...] I opposed working in Mexico. [...] Until the last moment I thought they were going to let us cross [the border]. I couldn't believe we had come all that way and failed here at the doorstep of the United States (Senat, 54 years old, university not completed, Tijuana, separated, four years of experience in French Guiana; personal communication, December 14, 2017).

Like Senat, most of the people we interviewed in Tijuana and Mexicali had jobs when we talked to them. A large proportion said they had obtained employment in maquilas, restaurants, or private companies. Others entered the informal economy, selling items of all kinds on street corners or at strategic intersections, and even at crossing points on the United States border. Some also reported that they had set up micro-businesses —whether full-time or while working at other jobs— such as barbershops, beauty salons, internet cafés, Haitian food restaurants, or traditional Haitian medicine “clinics.”

In all cases, the information collected in the field shows that the labor market is more open in the border cities studied than in Mexico City. In addition, the higher concentration of Haitian immigrants in Tijuana and Mexicali favors businesses aimed at this community and headed —although not always— by its members. It favors the organization of *tandas* (informal rotating credit clubs), which often function as a way for them to capitalize businesses on their own.

These factors have caused a number of Haitians who first settled in Mexico City to move to Tijuana or Mexicali. In fact, four of our informants in Tijuana were first interviewed in Mexico City; all four stated that they could confirm this difference in their experience of the two different cities. For example, when we asked Marie-Line for her opinion on the differences between Mexico City and Tijuana in terms of job opportunities, she replied:

I arrived [in Tijuana] and three days later I went to work in a factory. They don't require the papers that they asked me for back there. [...] Most Haitians in Tijuana work; here, if they don't work, it's because they don't want to (Marie-Line, 35 years old, Tijuana, high school not completed, single, two years of experience in Brazil; personal communication, December 11, 2017).

Marie-Line's account is echoed by most of the Haitians we interviewed in Tijuana and Mexicali; they express essentially the same opinion about the greater openness of the market in these cities. They had been able to benefit from this openness since, at the time of the interview, the majority of them had jobs. This attracted a certain admiration from the residents of these cities.

The Mexicans we interviewed spoke highly of the Haitians' work. Expressions such as "they are very hardworking," "they are strivers" or "I have never seen them begging" are among those used to express their opinions about the Haitian migrants. In Mexicali, Alicia says: "You know, at first I didn't like the idea of them coming here, I was upset about it. But when I saw how they work, how hard they work, they are not asking for money, I changed my mind completely. I congratulate them" (Alicia, Mexican, 32 years old, Mexicali, high school completed, taxi driver, personal communication, December 28, 2017).

As is well known, insertion into the job market is not synonymous with job satisfaction. This was observed among the Haitians interviewed both in Mexico City and in the border cities. The main factor of dissatisfaction is wages. Most of those interviewed consider that the salaries paid in Mexico are "insufficient to meet [their] needs" or that they receive "a pittance." In addition to making a living in Mexico, many have responsibilities in Haiti or other countries (Brazil, Chile, Dominican Republic). Thus, the money they earn in Mexico does not leave enough to send remittances (in dollars) to relatives.

However, the tenor of the comments in this regard seemed to be associated with the length of their work experience in South America. Those who had worked two or more years in a South American country made comments such as, "Brazil was better," "I preferred the job I had there, it paid better," or "the Brazilian real is stronger than the [Mexican] peso." Others said, "it pays little, but if you save up, you can do some things." The latter comment was heard more frequently from those who had a shorter experience of working in South American countries. Their point of reference is the Haitian labor market, which is characterized by high unemployment rates.

Some of the Mexicans interviewed considered the negative comments about wages in Mexico "unfortunate," "out of place," and even "typical of ungrateful people." However, others agree that "in Mexico [...] depending on the type of work one does, the pay can be disappointing" (Israel, Mexican, 34 years old, Mexicali, university degree, civil society organization leader, personal communication, December 20, 2017), or that "many Mexicans earn very little, too [...] it's not a question of discrimination against foreigners" (José, Mexican, 36 years old, Mexico City, high school completed, taxi driver, personal communication, December 31, 2017).

Interviewees' perceptions of the workplace environment differed depending on whether they were in Mexico City or one of the border cities. Most of those interviewed in Mexico City said that they were "exploited excessively." In addition, a significant proportion felt that they were "treated differently than their Mexican colleagues." For example, Jacob says:

My [Haitian] colleagues and I are working at a very dangerous job. [...] We were told that we would be changed to another less dangerous job every time a new employee came in. Some Mexicans were hired, and they were sent directly to the less dangerous jobs (Jacob, 36 years old, Mexico City,

university not completed, single, two years of experience in Brazil; personal communication, September 20, 2017).

Like Jacob, Pierre, who worked as a helper at a restaurant in the north of Mexico City, says: “I don’t know if it’s because we’re foreigners, or because we don’t have papers, but they leave the hardest jobs for us. They think we don’t realize it” (Pierre, 26, Mexico City, high school not completed, single, two years of experience in Brazil; personal communication, October 20, 2017). Inot, who worked at another restaurant, said:

[...] I thought that all us cleaners earned the same. I recently learned that the Mexicans are paid more. [...] A [Mexican] colleague told me that it’s not fair, that I should quit and go work somewhere else. He’s right, but it’s going to be hard, [because] I don’t have papers (Inot, 24 years old, Mexico City, high school not completed, single, three years of experience in Brazil; personal communication, October 20, 2017).

Haitians in Tijuana and Mexicali considered that “the workdays [were] long,” but the majority appreciated that their “treatment [by the bosses] is respectful,” and that “there is no difference between the Haitians and the Mexicans.”

As for their relationship with their fellow Mexican workers, the majority think that the “atmosphere is quite friendly.” Marie-Line says that she is “a star at work. Everyone wants to be on my team” (Marie-Line, 35 years old, Tijuana, high school not completed, single, two years of experience in Brazil; personal communication, December 11, 2017).

Renaud says: “I worked in a candy store, it seemed that one of my colleagues didn’t like me. One time he used a racist word at me. Outside of that, they have always treated me well” (Renaud, 22 years old, Mexicali, university not completed, one year of work experience in Chile; personal communication, December 20, 2017).

In the same vein, Boulot says: “[...] In all my jobs my relationships with everyone have always been good. [...] You know how it is, there’s always someone who doesn’t get along with you as well as you’d like, [...] but no one has made me feel that I’m an outsider” (Boulot, 36 years old, Mexicali, university not completed, married, six years of experience in Venezuela; personal communication, December 21, 2017). Similarly, Kenia says: “If everything depended on how I get along with my fellow workers, I wouldn’t move away from Tijuana” (Kenia, Tijuana, elementary school completed, married, one year of experience in Brazil and one year in Chile; personal communication, December 11, 2017).

In short, the Haitians in the 2016 wave to Mexico find themselves in different types of jobs both from those they had in South America, and those in the U.S. market that they had intended to enter. Most came to Mexico after experiencing Brazil, whose open-arms policy made it easier for them to quickly enter the formal labor market. As already noted, the circumstances of their coming to Mexico were quite different.

This led to disappointment among the members of the group, which was evident in the majority of those interviewed. The situation seems particularly difficult in Mexico City, where fewer companies are working under special labor regimes such as maquilas. In a context such as this, the labor market is quite polarized between a segment with strict demands in terms of immigration documents and work permits and a more flexible but unprotected and exploitative segment. These disparities speak of differences in the contexts of the Haitians' reception and may shape stark differences in the pace of their integration in Mexico, perhaps even leading to their marginalization in the society where they settle.

MIXED SOCIO-AFFECTIVE BONDS

In examining socio-affective ties in this work, we are interested in mixed Haitian—Mexican couples in the three study cities. Although there are other different types of relationships between the two groups, we focus on couple relationships since they express a great degree of openness towards the other. The analysis presented here is an initial examination of the subject, but we believe that it should be deepened in future studies.

In mid-2017, when the hope of crossing into the United States was waning, Haitians began to leave the migrant shelters to rent places to live and rebuild their lives. Leaving the shelters implied that the Haitians went to live in Mexican neighborhoods, sharing daily life with Mexicans. It meant the development of friendships, relationships with neighbors, and emotional ties with members of the receiving communities. We collected testimonies on affective relationships between Haitian immigrants and Mexicans in the three cities, ranging from courtships to families created through common-law or formal marriages. We have even found pregnant women and children born as a result of these unions. Often these relationships develop in a relatively short time, as described by Renaud, who is in a common-law relationship with a Mexican woman:

We met when I was in the migrant shelter. I didn't think it could lead to anything because I didn't think I was going to stay in Mexico. When I left the shelter, we continued to see each other more often. She helped me improve my Spanish and I was helping her with French. When we realized, we were already dating (Renaud, 22 years old, Mexicali, university not completed, in a common-law relationship with a Mexican woman, one year of work experience in Chile; personal communication, December 20, 2017).

Like Renaud, Daniel met his wife while he was staying at a church on the outskirts of Tijuana. When we interviewed him, they were expecting a baby that would be born in three months. Daniel says:

It all happened very quickly, at first it was just a fling. I didn't expect it would amount to much [because] my goal was to go to the United States. But then [Donald] Trump came on the scene and I began to see things differently. When we found out about the pregnancy, we decided to get married [...]. Now the

baby is coming in three months (Daniel, 25, Tijuana, high school not completed, married to a Mexican woman, with two years of work experience in Brazil; personal communication, December 16, 2017).

However, not all mixed couples involve people without other commitments. There are cases where, given the uncertainty about the wait, a migrant whose partner is in another country decides to enter into a “parallel relationship,” either living with the new partner or not. Among our interviewees who were in this situation, in most cases, the Mexican half of the couple does not know about the previous relationship, but there are also some who do. Chouloute, who is in a common-law relationship with a Mexican woman, comments:

[...] Look, I think most [Haitian men] will end up getting together with someone here. Their girlfriends or wives are in Haiti, Brazil, the United States. [...] Over time they will get involved with Mexican women (Chouloute, 29 years old, Tijuana, university not completed, in a common-law relationship with a Mexican woman, two years of experience in Brazil; personal communication, December 27, 2017).

Chouloute’s account echoes that of Fleurjuste, 36. The Port-au-Prince native traveled from Brazil with his wife and their 8-year-old son. They arrived in Mexicali in October of 2016 and found that crossing to the United States could lead to deportation to Haiti. Fleurjuste decided that he would stay in Mexico, while his wife and son crossed illegally to the United States in November. At the time that we interviewed Fleurjuste, the immigration status of his wife and son in the United States was yet to be determined. Uncertain how long it would be before he saw his family again, Fleurjuste entered into a relationship with a Mexican woman. He explained:

My wife is on the other side, she’s in Miami. I don’t know when I’ll see her again. Maybe in 10 or 15 years, or maybe never, because I don’t know if I’ll be able to cross over. In the meantime, what else can I do? If I was able to live alone, I wouldn’t have gotten married (Fleurjuste, 36, Mexicali, high school completed, in a common-law marriage with a Mexican woman, three years of work experience in Brazil; personal communication, December 27, 2017).

Fleurjuste is not the only one; Étienne, whose wife is in Haiti, said:

I’ve been living outside [of Haiti] for five years, I don’t know when we’re going to see each other again. Out of respect for my family, I haven’t taken up with another woman. But I have needs [...]. At my age, I’m not looking for casual sex. I just have a girlfriend, she’s not even a girlfriend, she’s a friend [...]. She’s Mexican [...] she’s forty-five (Etienne, 54 years old, Mexico City, elementary school not completed, married, four years of work experience in Brazil; personal communication, October 20, 2017).

It should be noted that our observations suggest that most of these relationships are between Haitian men and Mexican women. In addition to marital separation, a possible explanation for this observation is the low proportion of women in the Haitian community in

Mexico, as we saw previously. Also, most of the women traveled with their partner, which lowers the likelihood of seeking potential new affective relationships within the community.

However, mixed relationships are not approved of by everyone in the Haitian community; for some, they are “a betrayal” or “don’t have a secure foundation.” For example, Dieuseul says:

To me, [Haitians] who marry [Mexican women] are crazy. Imagine if I had married a Brazilian woman in Brazil. What would be happening now? [...] Probably I’ll end up marrying a Mexican woman too, but I need time to be sure that I’m going to stay in Mexico permanently (Dieuseul, 28 years old, Mexico City, high school not completed, two years of experience in Brazil; personal communication, October 20, 2017).

Adèle adds:

They see the Mexican women, and suddenly, we Haitian women don’t count anymore. [...] They go crazy, and in the blink of an eye, they’re already married, they even have children. I don’t have any confidence in those marriages (Adèle, 32 years old, Tijuana, university not completed, single, two years of experience in Brazil; personal communication, December 16, 2017).

Nevertheless, the formation of mixed marriages between Haitians and members of the receiving communities in Mexico constitutes signs of openness between the two groups. In other words, there are people in both groups who are willing to enter into intimate relationships that involve frequent interactions and promote greater cultural interpenetration and mutual understanding, not only between the direct protagonists of these relationships but also at the community level. However, when these unions are “parallel relationships,” they can have harmful consequences for the participants and the rest of the Haitian community.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we analyze the labor and socio-affective incorporation of Haitian immigrants in the 2016 wave into their three main cities of reception in Mexico: Tijuana and Mexicali, in the state of Baja California; and Mexico City. It was shown that it was not the traditional factors of human capital (education and work experience) that determined their insertion into the labor market. They experienced difficulties in transferring their human capital to the Mexican labor market; moreover, the factors associated with the circumstances of their immigration, such as their immigration status, little command of Spanish, and the limited availability of networks in Mexico, restricted their job options. Specific factors of the local reception contexts influenced the patterns of the migrants’ insertion into the labor market. In the two northern cities studied, the Haitians work mainly in the maquiladora industry and small independent businesses, while in Mexico City they have jobs in the lowest links of the labor hierarchy.

With regard to emotional ties, mixed marriages and partnerships between Haitians and members of the receiving cities were explored. Despite the recency of the Haitian community in Mexico and its sociocultural differences with Mexican society, mixed relationships and families did not take long to emerge. Beyond demographic reasons, the pairings between Mexicans and Haitians reflect a certain openness between the two groups to a broader mingling. As Kalmijn (1998) points out, these unions bring the networks of their protagonists closer together and build links between them, enabling the two groups to get to know each other and thus to weaken potential mutual prejudices. However, “parallel relationships” can generate other prejudices that could negatively impact the Haitians’ integration into Mexico.

The advances made in the labor market and socio-affective relationships, although limited and imperfect, are indicators of the Haitians’ insertion into particular spheres in the places where they settle and of the implementation of a process of integration into Mexico. In the absence of a clear public strategy on the issue, this integration has depended heavily on civil society organizations, members of the host communities, and the resourcefulness of the Haitians themselves. Mexico occupies a unique position in the world because of its geographical location and its stance on the migratory phenomenon at the global and regional levels, as well as its international commitments related to migration.

It is no surprise that migrants from various parts of the Americas and the rest of the world continue to arrive in this nation, either in transit or to settle permanently. Consequently, Mexico must increase its readiness to anticipate and respond to future waves of migrants. Moreover, Mexico must develop integration policies for those who, for various reasons, choose it as their home, especially for groups and people that are not part of traditional immigrant flows to the country, as is the case of the Haitians.

Translation: Miguel Ángel Ríos Flores

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