



**Transnational Social Field:
A framework to Analyze National Identity and the Haitian State's
Cultural Politics of Belonging in the Haitian Diaspora**

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by

Carlo Handy Charles

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CERLAC
8th floor, YRT
4700 Keele Street
York University Toronto, Ontario
Canada M3J 1P3
Phone: (416) 736-5237
Email: cerlac@yorku.ca

Introduction

For decades, Haiti has been considered as one of the major sending countries when it comes to international migrations. The 2010 Haitian government census affirms that Haiti has over 1.5 millions of émigrés. Most of them live in the United States, Canada, France, Dominican Republic and the Bahamas. Such massive waves of Haitian immigrants in North America, especially, have been caused by internal factors such as the U.S. occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934 and the Duvalier dictatorship from 1957 to 1986. The vicious repression of the Duvalier political regime and the US occupation of Haiti provoked drastic changes in Haitians' life by mainly shaking up the economy. Also, external factors like the neoliberal global economic restructuring from 1970s spurred first rural to urban migration, and then international migration in a number of countries around the world including Haiti. Shaped by devastating and exploitative historical events such as colonization, a chaotic post-independence and a long term political instability, Zéphir (1996:26) argues that “the Haitian people, through emigration, are self-determined to come out of poverty and experience the basic commodities of the Global North, which are employment, shelter, food, clothing, education and health care.”

According to World Bank (2009), “Haiti is estimated to be the world’s most remittance-dependent country as measured by remittances’ share of household income. Migration has been an important political and economic survival strategy for Haiti. Reportedly, close to a quarter of officially recognized Haitians live outside of the country. The remittances sent to Haiti by migrants of all social classes have been fundamental to family survival across the country, as the lead of an Haitian newspaper put it in March 2008, ‘*when the diaspora coughs, Haiti has a fever*’”. Recognizing the important economic support provided by Haitians overseas, the Haitian state has created the Ministry for Haitians Living Abroad to identify all nationals or descendants as Haitians under the protection of a formal ministry. This move aims not only to legitimize their socio-economic support to the country, but also to increase their sense of duty towards Haiti as a nation-state.

The sense of duty to Haiti is expressed through family values of obligation in a form of morality that links individuals not only to their families but also to the nation. Haitian people tend to speak more readily about love of Haiti than love of family, although the two are intimately connected. (Shiller and Fouron 2001:77). Those strong ties to Haiti as a nation through family connections are grounded in the Haitian national identity, which Schiller and Fouron (1999:342) describe as a terrain of blood and descent so as to qualify the types of ongoing connections that Haitian immigrants

maintain to their homeland. In Haiti, the theme of family ties and obligations are strong enough to span national borders in different social classes, gender and generation. From this perspective, Shiller and Fouron (1999:346) argue: “From the very beginning of the migration, a large number of Haitian immigrants lived their lives across borders making decisions about expenditures and consumption, child-rearing, employment, and interpersonal relationships within a network of family members and friends that included persons in Haiti, Canada and in the United States.” Given the transnationality of Haitian families, it seems more adequate to use the term ‘transnational migration’, which Glick Schiller, Basch, and Szanton Blanc (1995:48-49) define as “a pattern of migration in which persons, best identified as ‘transmigrants’, migrate and yet maintain or establish ongoing connections such as familial, economic, religious, political or social relations in the state from which they moved, even as they also forge such relationships in the new state or states in which they settled... They live within a ‘transnational social field’ that includes the state from which they originated and the ones in which they settled (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1994).”

Benedict Anderson: Nation as imagined community.

Recognizing the transnational ties of Haitian families, the Haitian State has undertaken the construction of a long-distance nationalism, through cultural politics of belonging, to claim the membership of the Haitian Diaspora scattered throughout the world. Glick Schiller and Fouron (2001:60-63) assert that “family ties extending across national boundaries is a critical aspect of the ways many Haitians experience long-distance nationalism. This is because for both Haitians in Haiti and the Haitian diaspora, the fates of family and nation are directly and intimately related.” The Haitian national identity is thus mobilized by the government through the ‘rhetoric of family ties and descent’ to frame the Haitian immigrants’ ongoing connections to Haiti. The cultural politics of belonging – family ties and descent – implemented by the Haitian state takes the form of actions, words and pride that signal a commitment to the current day survival, prosperity, independence and reputation of Haiti. The pride expressed through the Haitian national identity serves as a glue that unites Haitians in Haiti with those in the diaspora. In this vein, Shiller and Fouron (2001:93) affirm: “long-distance nationalism is the complex relationship that Haitian immigrants maintain to Haiti – one in which family obligation, memory, pride, and despair are intertwined. In the diaspora, the connection to Haiti is made through transnational ties of family, the Haitian media – radio and television broadcasts with Haitian voices many directly from Haiti – and periodic visits that place them once again on Haitian soil.”

This paper explores as to how the Haitian's state cultural politics of belonging plays out amongst Haitian immigrants in Canada in light of transnational migration. Given the impact of globalization and the North-South divide, this paper also analyzes the ways in which national identity underlies the Haitian diaspora's ongoing social, economic and political connections to the politics of Haiti. This paper aims to answer the following questions: to what extent does the Haitian national identity serve the political interests of the Haitian government? What are the strategies used by the government throughout the recent Haitian history to construct their cultural politics of belonging? How do Haitians in Canada respond to and renegotiate the Haitian state's cultural politics of belonging? First, I argue that the symbolism of national identity – family ties and descent – is used by the Haitian state as cultural politics of belonging in the Haitian diasporic community in Canada to serve its interests and to assure Haiti's economic and political survival as a nation-state among the world of nations. Second, I sustain that significant tensions take place between the transnational social field/relationship/network and the state. That is agency of individuals and family, and their relation with the host society that renders the home's state vision unpredictable. Finally, from a theoretical perspective, I argue that to a greater and finer understanding of long-distance nationalism promoted by sending states in the form of cultural politics of belonging within some transnational social fields, it is important to analyze the socio-historical, economic and political context underlying such strategies from a global perspective.

Impact of Globalization and the North-South divide on the Haitian migration

From 1970s, one common goal that neoliberal globalization and transnationalism as phenomena have both achieved is the constant flow of humans, goods, materials and all kinds of resources across international borders. Globalization relies on deregulation and improved communications to expand capitalist economy from a local, national or regional locality to all parts of the world. The expansion of the global capitalism and the borderless flow of capital have considerably impacted the world (John W. Meyer 2000:233). Brutal changes have particularly taken place in developing countries called the “third world”, like Haiti, since they have become the perfect place for multinationals to operate due to their cheap labour and very low taxation while exporting their products to developed countries (Guy Standing 1999:584). The restructuring of global economy has had a profound impact on international migration especially on massive flows of people leaving countries of the South to come to countries of the North or within the Global South for many reasons and Haiti is no exception to those flows (Stephen Castles 2004:210).

According to Knight (2002:6-10), a wide range of social scientists explain the reasons that underlie international migration with theories such as dual labour market which posits that international migration results from an increasing demand for foreign labour in developed countries (Piore, 1979). Other models like rational actor decision-making emphasise on the agency of migrants in deciding where to live based on their cost-interest calculations, also economic push-pull factors models (Castles & Miller, 1993: 21-22) provide a theoretical framework to contextualize international migration. The flow of immigrants is explained as well by a “self-sustaining diffusion process” that ensures the expansion of migration trends overtime through “Migrant Networks” (Massey, et. al, 1997: 264; Bagchi, 2001: 9-31). Beyond the debate on the role of structural or agency explanations in the analysis of international migration, in the case of Haitian immigrants, it is worth analyzing two important socioeconomic factors that have generated important waves of immigrants from Haiti in the era of globalization and transnationalism. The first one is the U.S. occupation of Haiti and the second one is the Duvalier dictatorship.

As a result of the restructuring of the global economy, the United States of America, interested in expanding its economy and developing the capitalist system in the world, invaded and occupied Haiti from 1915 to 1934 (Donald B. Cooper, 1963). As Massey (1994:183) explains, “Economic development destroys a previously stable economic and social system, peasant agriculture, by substituting capital for labor, privatizing landholding and creating markets. The destruction of the peasant economic system creates a pool of socially and economically displaced people, who provide the source for both internal and international migration.” In Haiti, the main impact of the US economic development through its occupation is the launch of its capitalist system in a country which was dependent on a subsistence-oriented agriculture system. The United States operated by forcing Haitian peasants, who were the vast majority of the population, to stop producing crops and to rather become labourers in relocated U.S. multinationals in Haiti while being completely dependent on a minimum wage to survive. Such minimum wage of less than \$ 2 US per day could not even help them take care of themselves and their families not to mention the absence of enough resources to send their children to school. The consequence of this capitalist system in Haiti results in a massive emigration of former Haitian peasants towards Cuba and the United States with the unique goal to have a better life. Although the U.S. occupation is not the only push factor and neither explains the Haitian multi-class emigration, by re-contextualizing the beginning of the massive flow of Haitian migrants during the U.S. occupation of Haiti, I argue that we can better understand the ways in which the restructuring of the global economy profoundly impacted countries of the South like Haiti. In this frame of mind,

Massey (1994:183) asserts that “economic conditions in developing countries are volatile, and families face serious risks to their well-being from many sources – natural disasters, political upheavals, economic recessions. Sending different family members to geographically distinct labor markets represents a strategy to diversify and reduce risks to household income.”

The second socioeconomic push factor of the Haitian migration, which is also linked to changes in the global economy and the expansion of global capitalism, is the Duvalier dictatorship from 1957 to 1986. Although the beginning of Duvalier political regime seemed to put a momentary end to the US control of the Haitian market by re-establishing the Haitian sovereignty, the Duvalier government ended up resorting to the US power to face the internal resistance. In doing so, they reopened the Haitian market to the US investment which entails the depletion of the Haitian population and its complete dependency on the US big factories. There were no restrictions on repatriation of capitals from the US companies, there was a totally free circulation of dollars and the unemployment problem they were supposed to solve remained unsolved. The Haitian government facilitated all the conditions for foreign companies to come and to stay in the country to ensure their economic and political survival. Also, it is important to point out the active role of the United States in protecting US investments in Haiti by sustaining political repressions during the protests against the Duvalier dictatorship.

In this vein, Fouron and Schiller (1994 :341) argue: “Although Haitian immigrants often link the beginnings of their massive migration to the United States to the arrival in New York of political exiles from the Haitian upper class who fled when François Duvalier came to power in 1957, the immigration statistics beginning in the 1950s document a multi-class migration of both men and women. The migration was precipitated not only by the vicious repression of all political dissent but also by global economic changes that spurred first rural to urban migration, and then international migration in several countries around the world including Haiti”. The global capitalist expansion of the United States through relocation of US companies added to political repression under Duvalier dictatorship constitute two push-factors of the Haitian massive international migration. Since then, Haitian diasporic communities have been formed in various receiving nations such as the United States and Canada specifically.

Presence of Haitian immigrants in Canada

Since the 1960s significant numbers of Haitians have settled in the United States, Canada, France, Dominican Republic and the Bahamas. An estimated 1.5 million persons from Haiti or of

Haitian descent live outside of Haiti, while Haiti itself has a population of approximately 10,320,000 inhabitants (Jean-Pierre 1994:56; World Bank 2013). According to Stats Canada (2007): “Canadians of Haitian origin make up one of the largest non-European ethnic groups in Canada. In 2001, there were just over 82,000 people of Haitian origin living in Canada making them the 10th largest non-European community in the country, after Chinese, East Indian, Filipino, Jamaican, Vietnamese, Lebanese, Korean, Iranian and Japanese. For Lindsay (2007), the Haitian population is estimated as 102,000 and represented 0.3 percent of Canada’s total population. Canada’s International development Agency (CIDA), however, differs with this number, and estimates the size of the Haitian presence as about 150,000, whereas the Haitian Consulate in Montreal puts the number at around 120,000. Though there is no exact number of Haitians living in Canada, we can assume that there are more than 100,000 Haitian immigrants.

Most immigrants of Haitian origin living in Canada arrived in the country within the past three decades, from 1970s to 2000s, which also explains the effect of global economic restructuring on the Haitian migration. Of foreign-born Haitians living in Canada in 2001, 33% had arrived in the previous decade, while 63% immigrated between 1971 and 1991. In 2001, 90% of people who reported Haitian origins lived in Quebec, while Ontario was home to 8% and 1% lived in each of British Columbia and Alberta. That year, there were almost 75,000 people of Haitian origin living in Quebec, where they made up about 1% of the total provincial population. In fact, the large majority of Canadians of Haitian origin live in Montreal. This data makes it possible to account for the presence of a considerable Haitian diasporic community in Canada, especially in Montreal due to their fluency in the French language.

National Identity at the origin of the Haitian Diasporic Identity Formation in Canada

“Diaspora”, originally used in reference to the Jewish dispersal from Jerusalem, has connotations of exile, displacement, loss, alienation and a yearning for the homeland. However, there has since been an expansion of interpretations beyond its original context. “Diaspora” has been used to refer to a group, an identity, a process, a movement across space or border, and a state of mind. In reference to a group, it has been used to describe practically any “deterritorialised” or “transnational” community (Vertovec, 1997), even those uprooted for political or economic reasons (Knight, 2002:8). In the case of Haitian immigrants in Canada, the formation of their diasporic identity has been grounded on their family value of obligation intimately linked to the Haitian national identity. Glick Shiller and Fouron (2001:60) argue that “Haitian men and women speak of family obligations in a

tone of **moral judgment** that resonated with Georges's belief that who he is as a person is expressed through his ties to family in Haiti and to Haiti as a nation." In this sense, Georges E. Fouron (2001:60) while reflecting on his life as an Haitian immigrant in the United States declares:

"I represent the whole nation, not just my family. So, whatever I achieve, good or bad, will mark the nation. If I succeed, the nation will be proud of me; if I fail, I will bring disgrace to the nation. Your obligation to the nation begins with the obligation to improve yourself and your family. As you improve yourself and your family, you are contributing to Haiti. If you abandon your family and it is known, then you bring shame to your nation."

Shiller and Fouron (2001:69) argue: "the Haitian experience of family is certainly shaped by the economic situation in Haiti. In their search for the few resources available for survival, people locate any possible ties of family that might yield some assistance. A person might reach out and reclaim family members they have never met, renewing bonds that have been dormant for decades or even generations. Georges's mother, looking for a second cousin who had a household in the Capital city, aided by her other second cousins living in New York. Rediscovering and revitalizing family connections is a transnational strategy. The conception of family as a resource must be understood in the context of the Haitian economy. The gross national product per capita was reported to be U.S. \$400 a year in 1998, and the life expectancy was 55 years."

Haitians' strong ties to their family members constitute a central aspect of the Haitian national identity grounded in the first Haitian constitution. The notion of family in Haiti encompasses members from nuclear and extended family, and even close friends considered as family as well. Carolyn Fick (2007:412-414) confirms that statement by arguing: "It was with the imagery of family, authoritarian paternalism and racial equality that the constitution of 1805, promulgated by Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Haiti's first independence ruler, attempted to define the Haitian national identity and to establish the basis of Haitian citizenship... masculine military values, authoritarian paternalism and the institution of the family informed the virtues of citizenship. No one is worthy of being a Haitian if he is not a good father, a good son, a good husband, and above all a good soldier."

Although values attached to the first Haitian constitution have changed throughout the history, the Haitian national identity seems to transcend history, social class, gender, race, and parenting norms for Haitian immigrants in North America. Indeed, national identity defines every Haitian's sense of belonging regardless their skin colour, family background, educational level, language preference (French versus Creole), socio-economic class, political affiliation and country of residence. In creole, the most spoken language in Haiti, it is usual to listen to slogans such as, "*se ayisyen ou ye, se ayisyen*

wap mouri". (You're born Haitian and you will die as Haitian). Thus, national identity for Haitians means more than just a citizenship or a racial ethnic. As Haitians, they are part of a history, a collective memory and legacy of ancestors who died for them to make them free. The Haitian national identity, for most of them, represents the Haitian flag that symbolizes victory over French military forces, which were the most powerful army at the end of the nineteenth century. It also signifies a pride at expense of sacrifices and pain. National identity in the Haitian case means human dignity, which is the rejection of slavery and racism and the embrace of freedom during Haitian independence war. It is a legacy that Haitians carry and protect no matter what happens in Haiti or no matter what situation they face outside of Haiti.

That is the original meaning of the Haitian national identity that has been taught in Haitian families across the world from generation to generation. Also, it has been taught in the formal education system, in social clubs, in associations of citizens, NGOs and it has been kept alive in the Haitian Art such as painting, theater, music, movies and so on. Nina Glick Schiller and Georges E. Fouron (1999:342) describe the Haitian national identity as a terrain of blood and descent so as to qualify the types of ongoing connections that Haitian immigrants maintain to their homeland. Flore Zéphir (1996:45) argues that: "Remaining Haitian in North America is a multifaceted phenomenon comprising an unwavering sense of belonging to a nation, a sense of racial (national) pride, a sense of self-worth, a sense of purpose as immigrants, and a shared language. It is my contention that these elements of Haitian ethnicity transcend any social, economic, and political barriers that existed among Haitians prior to migration and that still exist in the homeland." Therefore, I argue that the strong national identity is a key element that defines and frame the Haitian diaspora's sense of belonging to Haiti as a nation.

Haitian Family ties in the Diaspora as a transnational social field

'Diaspora' as type of consciousness includes an "awareness of multi-locality" (Vertovec, 1997:282) and paradoxical duality. Thus, diasporas are constantly aware of a state of being "here" and "there", and of not fully belonging to either contexts. It is here that "diaspora" overlaps with "transnational migrant" – members of both groups live a life of dual or multiple belonging – although these can be of different degrees. Being in a diaspora entails a struggle of being physically in one place, yet psychologically yearning for another (Safran, 2004 in Kim D. Butler, 2001). Transnational migrants, on the other hand, may maintain "multi-stranded social relations" (Glick-Schiller et al., 1995:48) across host and origin societies without necessarily yearning for either. Given multi-stranded

social relations that Haitian immigrants in North America maintain to both the home and the host land, we rather talk about Haitian transmigrant identity than just a diasporic identity. Shiller and Fouron (1999:346) sustain this argument by stating: “From the very beginning of the migration, a large number of Haitian immigrants lived their lives across borders making decisions about expenditures and consumption, child-rearing, employment, and interpersonal relationships within a network of family members and friends that included persons in Haiti, Canada and in the United States (Laguette 1984, 1994; Stepick 1998).” With this regard, Haitian immigrants are not just uprooted from their homeland and re-rooted in their host country without any connections with those left behind, they rather became transmigrants and their identity is constantly shaped by the reality of the home and the host countries. Glick Schiller, Basch, and Szanton Blanc (1994:48-49) define transnational migration as “a pattern of migration in which persons, best identified as ‘transmigrants’, migrate and yet maintain or establish ongoing connections such as familial, economic, religious, political or social relations in the state from which they moved, even as they also forge such relationships in the new state or states in which they settled... They live within a ‘transnational social field’ that includes the state from which they originated and the one in which they settled.” The Haitian migration is an epitome of transnational migration through family ties that frame their connections to Haiti as their homeland. It is important, thereby, to conceptualize Haitian family ties as a social field.

Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc (1994:49) define a social field as “an unbounded terrain of interlocking egocentric networks.” In this aspect, Haitian family ties as a social field is a more encompassing term than that of network which is best applied to chains of social relationship – related to work, religion, culture or education – specific to each person (Barnes 1954; Epstein 1969; Mitchell 1969; Noble 1973). The Haitian social field is based not only on specific personal or professional relations, but also on social, economic, and political relations with persons living in Haiti as a home state and in several other host states such as the US and Canada. Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc (1994) argue: “because it focuses our attention on human interaction and situations of personal social relationship, the concept of social field facilitates an analysis of the processes by which immigrants continue to be part of the fabric of the daily life in their home state including its political processes, while they simultaneously become part of the work force, contribute to neighbourhood activities, serve as members of school and community boards.” For Haitian immigrants in Canada whose family members live in the transnational social field that includes Canada, Haiti, and the United States, their daily life and decisions-making processes are constantly influenced by the socioeconomic and political situation of their home and the host societies.

The 2001 Canadian national survey highlights the dual sense of belonging existing in the Haitian Diaspora in Canada by stating: “A large majority of Canadians of Haitian origin feel a strong sense of belonging in Canada. In 2002, 70% of Canadians of Haitian origin said they had a strong sense of belonging in Canada. At the same time, 82% said that they had a strong sense of belonging to their ethnic or cultural group.” Here, by ethnic or cultural group, we can undertake that Haitian immigrants referred to their diasporic community, to which they are linked through the symbolism of national identity. The expression of their sense of belonging can be understood as a result of Canadian multicultural policies which promote the recognition of cultural or ethnic identities. It can also be understood as the revitalizing of a long-distance nationalism from the polity of Haiti as a migrant-sending country. Either way, what is interesting to analyze about those numbers, is the expression of the Haitian dual belonging and particularly their strong ties to their homeland. Given those strong ties to the homeland, it is useful to explore as to how, why and which factors are involved in the state’s construction of the sense of belonging in the Haitian diaspora. The analysis of those ongoing connections with both the homeland and the host country is important to understand how national identity plays out amongst Haitian immigrants in Canada. Which role does the Haitian state play in constructing and channeling cultural politics of belonging among those transmigrants?

Conceptualizing sense and cultural politics of belonging

Most scholars consider the notion of belonging as a central aspect to our understanding of how people give meaning to their lives and orientate their actions while pertaining or affiliating to particular communities or nation-states. In the era of intensified movements of humans, funds, ideas and goods across international borders, it is sociologically relevant to analyze the construction of sense of belonging in diasporic communities. Due to tensions it creates in migrants’ lives, some sociologists have analyzed the sense of belonging in terms of the emigrants’ involvement in social transformations in their homeland or regarding their decision to return to their home country (Ulrike Schuerkens 2005; Christou, Anastasia. 2006; Sin Yih Teo 2011). Due to its intersection between the public and the private aspects of migrants’ lives, a wide range of social scientists have examined the sense of belonging in terms of loyalty to, membership or citizenship in a particular state (Labelle and Midy 1999; Steven Vertovec 2001; Bloemraad 2006).

In this vein, Brubaker (2010) argues: “The nation-state remains the decisive locus of membership even in a globalizing world; struggles over belonging in and to the nation-state remain the most consequential forms of membership politics. By disturbing the congruencies – between residence

and citizenship, between nation-membership and state-membership, and between culture and polity – central to the idealized model of the nation-state, migration has long generated, and continues to generate, both an internal and an external politics of belonging. The former concerns those who are long-term residents but not full members of a state, the latter those who are long-term residents (and perhaps citizens) of other states, yet who can be represented as belonging, in some sense, to a “homeland” or “kin” state or to “its” eponymous nation.” Either we analyze the sense of belonging in the Haitian diaspora in terms of their engagement in the homeland or in terms of their membership to host country, Haitians’ identification and sense of belonging to Haiti remain strong regardless their country of residence.

Hence, cultural politics of belonging constructed by the Haitian state encompasses, from Schiller and Fouron’s perspective (1999: 343-356), “declarations of identity that take the form of actions and words that signal a commitment to the current day survival, prosperity, independence and reputation of Haiti. Such commitments include following political developments in Haiti through the media, defending Haiti in conversations with co-workers and friends, participating in activities organized to provide resources for the development of Haiti, or campaigning for candidates for public office in Haiti... Haitian transnational politics are being built on a concept of national identity rooted in concepts of blood and descent. The basis for such politics is embedded within the daily life of Haitian immigrants and of persons living in Haiti. However, people in the Haitian transnational social fields Canada and Haiti live daily lives within different local contexts, although they share a transnational social field. Haitian immigrants living in Canada, who face the racial barriers of daily life in an unwelcoming country, claim continuing participation in the Haitian nation to which they are connected through blood and descent, even while acknowledging that they have permanently settled in Canada. They claim membership in the Haitian nation through heroic ancestors as well as through strong family ties. The ties of blood provide them with a living bridge that can connect them to a space of greater opportunity. Haiti itself becomes a transnational polity that extends beyond its territorial boundaries, encompassing persons of Haitian ancestry wherever they are located and whatever legal citizenship they may hold. They told us in more or less the same words that ‘the blood remains Haitian’”. The Haitian state constructs cultural politics of belonging using the “Haitian blood and descent” rhetoric to mobilize the Haitian diaspora’s contribution to the country by claiming their emigrant citizenship.

Creation of Ministry for Haitians Living Abroad to frame cultural politics of belonging

Recognizing the important economic support provided by Haitians overseas, at the beginning of 1991, on the day of the inauguration of Jean-Bertrand Aristide as President of Haiti, “he welcomed Haitians living abroad as the 10th department, speaking as if they were an equivalent of France’s overseas departments. This gesture is important to consider, because Aristide took that initiative even though the Haitian Constitution had not been amended to extend to the overseas Haitian populations the benefits and privileges of double nationality as enjoyed by many Latin Americans and Caribbean expatriates (Richman 1992b). Through this rhetoric, Aristide, acting as Haiti’s head of state, was reclaiming all Haitian immigrants and all persons of Haitian descent living abroad, no matter what their legal citizenship or place of birth, as part and parcel of the Haitian nation-state (Aristide 1991). Since that time, aspiring political leaders in the diaspora and some major political figures in Haiti have begun to speak as if Haiti were a transnational polity that incorporates all persons of Haitian descent wherever they have settled. Yet, the concept still has no standing in Haitian law, although pressures emanating from both the diaspora and Haiti are being exerted upon the Haitian legislature to address the topic. However, the Haitian government has set up institutions such as the Ministry of Haitians Living Abroad specifically to mobilize those of Haitian descent who live abroad to contribute politically and economically to Haiti.” Nina Glick Schiller and Georges E. Fouron (1999:354).

The recognition and the inclusion of Haitians abroad, through such ministry, as critical actors in the state’s political, legal, and economic arenas has been an attempt by the Haitian State, as a sending country, to embrace emigrants unbundle the territoriality of its polity. From this standpoint, David FitzGerald (2008:4-5) argues that: “The territoriality of political power is being reconfigured through the embrace of citizens abroad – a condition I have *emigrant citizenship* (or extra-territorial citizenship when extended more broadly to include the ancestral citizenship or emigrants’ descendants.” He further states that: “the ultimate triumph of the state’s ideological power is when citizens not only accept taxation, conscription, and constant regulation, but even grow to see these activities as moral obligations.” In the Haitian case, moral obligations to the state are mobilized through values, traditions, and collective memory linked to the symbolism of the Haitian national identity. As part of the polity of Haiti, Haitian immigrants feel compelled to participate in the “rebuilding” and development of their homeland. By creating the Ministry for Haitians Living Abroad, the Haitian state reconfigures its politics by legitimizing the duality of Haitians’ diasporic identity and the multi-locality of Haitian citizens. Also, it offers a frame for Haitians living abroad to implement transnational activities by recognizing Haitians abroad as long-distance nationalists. This move challenges some national integration policies such as assimilation in the host country in the sense that

those transmigrants have a dual belonging or loyalty. It also contributes to the debate about social membership by reconfiguring the role of the state in defining which citizens belong to which unbounded nation-state through the construction of cultural politics of belonging.

The Haitian diaspora in Canada, especially in Quebec, renegotiates the Haitian state's cultural politics of belonging by advertising a Haitian identity through the display of bumper stickers, flags and buttons may be signally various, different and sometimes overlapping types of identification. The display of Haitian flags during important Haitian cultural events in Montreal such as Festival Haiti en Folie (A literary and book Festival), Haitian Music Festival, Haitian Film Festival, for instance can be an indication of ethnic pride, or a display of traditional Haitian nationalism that sees Haiti as territorially bounded, or an emerging transnational view of Haiti. Haitian state's cultural politics of belonging can also be appreciated through the active role of the embassy of Haiti in Canada by organizing or at least supporting cultural, and socio-political events about Haiti, either by providing logistic means to collect funds or by organizing conferences or colloquium to better inform the Haitian Diaspora and other participants about a current crisis or the passage of a natural disaster in the home country. In addition, the considerable presence of ethnic associations and NGOs of Haitian immigrants in Montreal, the significant number of Haitian-Canadian professionals in the realm of health care, social services and education in Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia, also the vast mobilization of Haitians in churches, especially to celebrate the Haitian Independence Day on January first, testify to their affiliation to Haiti through cultural politics of belonging.

From this outlook, the neoliberal economic restructuring has forced the states to find creative ways to embrace emigrants outside their territory. Fitzgerald (2008:8) argues: "The result has been to create a much more voluntaristic and limited form of citizenship tying emigrants to their home countries, where the government seeks remittances in exchange for the mostly ideological rewards of proclaiming emigrants their heroic absent sons and daughters. New forms of citizenship and strategies for embracing emigrants are the product of an international system that limits the reach of states outside their territory to the politics of symbolism and soft cultural nationalism". This soft culturalism and the sending states' strategies to embrace their emigrants described by Fitzgerald (2008:8) can match the thesis developed by Torpey (1998) in which he argues that the modern state's embracing power is used to regulate national membership. In this mood, Torpey (1998) states that the very concept of citizenship is embedded to the idea of belonging. In the Haitian situation, with the recent recognition of dual citizenship in 2012, rhetoric like "*se avisyen ou ye, se avisyen*" (You're born

Haitian and you'll die as Haitian), serves the Haitian state as an ideal cultural politics to control Haitian transnationals activities.

Transnational patterns of obligation reveal tensions between the social field and the state

Schiller and Fouron (2001) address significant conflicts behind the Haitian family ties ideology promoted by the Haitian state. Also, the authors provide a framework to analyze the ways in which family ties – as the ideology that underlies the Haitian state's cultural politics of belonging in the Diaspora – aren't smoothly functional. Instead, this ideology creates a transnational pattern of obligation as Haitians stake their claims on family settled in the United States and Canada. In this sense, Schiller and Fouron (2001:77) argue: "Haitian family ties express, re-create, legitimate, and are sanctioned by a morality that stands outside the profit motive, yet nonetheless has its own dynamic of calculation. There may well be love, warmth, and mutual respect, but whatever the degree of affirming emotion, there is accountability. Because the central family value is one of obligation, family can be experienced as a series of "debts" that must be paid and can be collected. The debts to the family cannot be reduced to a sum of money borrowed or lent. Instead, there is a sense that family ties come with a set of claims that those in need can make on those who have more. A refusal to acknowledge those debts will never be forgotten." Furthermore, Schiller and Fouron (2001:84) add: "Transnational family ties continue the lines of connection and division that exist within families in Haiti. On the one hand, to understand the foundations of long-distance nationalism, it is important to remember that family obligation extends between Haiti, Canada and the United States, a transnational terrain on which shared identities and divisions can be inscribed is constantly being planted, nurtured and harvested. On the other hand, a crop of bitterness is sown and reaped because the obligations and dependencies engendered by the morality system just explored can leave a bad taste."

Towards a reflection on the impact of cultural politics of belonging on the polity of Haiti

I argue that the Haitian state's long-distance nationalism through cultural politics of belonging in the Haitian diasporic community serve the interests of the Haitian State. Also, such politics permit to ensure Haiti's economic and political survival as a nation-state among the world of nations. Portes (1999:474-475), by analyzing the effects of transnationalism on sending countries, concludes: "First, most migrants are of modest origin and, hence, not sympathetic to traditional élites in their places of origin; second, they live abroad and, hence, are not subject to the repressive and co-optive mechanisms used by these élites to keep themselves in power; third, by virtue of their growing economic clout and freedom to organize abroad, migrants can wield much greater influence than comparable sectors of the

sending country's population (Itzigsohn et al., Guarnizo et al., this issue). In general, the overall bearing of transnational activities on sending countries is positive, in both an economic and political sense, even though they do not necessarily bolster the existing social and political order." This Portes' conclusion has a considerable relevance to the Haitian nation-state. Indeed, by inviting the Haitian Diaspora in Canada or elsewhere to contribute to Haiti's survival through the promotion of cultural identity and the mobilization of a symbolic national identity, the Haitian state ensures its own survival and finds a way to maintain its power.

Historically, Haiti has been known for its constant political instability, which is the resultant of the historical inability of Haitian rulers to take the long-term view because of material constraints, international pressures and domestic zero-sum game circumstances, explains past crises and current predicaments. Hence, Robert Fatton Jr (2006:115-117) argues that: "Haiti's predicament is not rooted in the absence of a nation, but rather in the ruling class's incapacity to construct an 'integral' state, which should be embedded in processes of class formation, struggles and compromises. The absence of an 'integral state' undermined Haiti's saturnalia of emancipation and gave way to patterns of despotic rule that in turn contributed to a descent into underdevelopment and acute poverty. Indeed, since independence over 200 years ago, Haiti's integral state-building has always been a project in the making – an unending and ever more difficult task."

In those particular conditions, the complete reliance on remittances and other forms of contributions from the Haitian diaspora can be understood and interpreted as a way for the ruling class and polity of Haiti to mask their incapacity to develop the country for more than two centuries. Instead, they constantly fight against each other for public offices. From this perspective, Robert Fatton Jr (2006:121) asserts: "Controlling the state turned into a fight to the death to monopolize the sinecures of political power. The dominant classes are simply determined to preserve their status, wealth and privilege. Within the political class there is only cynicism and opportunism, among the masses there is, as there had always been, the permanent and harsh struggle for daily survival."

Hence, by using, channeling and even manipulating the symbolic sense of national identity through cultural politics of belonging, the ruling class, best known as the political elite has ensured its own survival and continuity in power in Haiti. In this sense, the socio-economic ongoing connections from the diaspora to Haiti provide the Haitian political elite with means to generate widespread patterns of corruption. Indeed, as Robert Fatton Jr (2006:122-123) points it out: "Powerful public officials have historically tended to transform themselves into an embezzling class of *grands mangeurs* – big eaters – a rapacious species of office holders who devour public resources for their exclusive

private gain. Since 1804 politicians have legitimated their illicit behaviour by claiming that they are ‘plucking the chicken without making it cry’. Such practices reflect *la politique du ventre*, the politics of the belly, whereby different factions of the Haitian political class have traditionally vied with each other to ‘eat’ the limited fruits of power. *La politique du ventre* represents a form of government based on the acquisition of personal wealth through the conquest of state offices. It is a logical consequence of the material scarcity and unproductive economy that have marked the history of Haiti. Given that poverty and destitution have always been the norm, and that private avenues to wealth have always been rare, politics became an entrepreneurial vocation, virtually the sole means of material and social advancement for those not born into wealth and privilege.”

Conclusion

This paper has explored the different ways in which the Haitian state has promoted national identity – through family ties and descent ideology – as cultural politics of belonging in the Haitian diaspora in North America, especially in Canada. In doing so, the state has claimed the Haitian diaspora through what Shiller and Fouron (1994) call “terrain of blood and descent”. The creation of the Ministry for Haitians Living Abroad as well as the constant reference to ancestors, collective memory, and familial and traditional values, by the Haitian State, have resulted in a greater contribution, not without conflicts, from the diaspora to the polity of Haiti through social, economic and political ongoing connections with their relatives and friends in Haiti. Rather than being part of an explicitly political activity, Haitian long-distance nationalists, mobilized by the state through cultural politics of belonging, engage in impassioned politics within the domain of domestic activities and family rites of passage such as remittances sent to family members for different purposes.

Therefore, it is of the Haitian state’s interests to actively continue promoting and reinforcing such nationalist rhetoric as Haitian identity via cultural politics of belonging in the Haitian Diaspora. Without undermining the impact of globalization on strengthening ethnic nationalism by increasing the scale and scope of ethnic groups, or the role of the Canadian multiculturalism in providing the impetus, legitimacy, and space for the development of ethnic mobilization around home country culture and interests (Prima Kurien 2004: 366-368), I argue that to a better and rich understanding of transnational activities undertaken by sending states such as cultural politics of belonging and the promotion of national identity through family ties and descent, it is important to analyze the socio-historical, economic and political context underlying such activities. To conclude, the soft culturalism promoted by some sending states can be perceived as a new configuration of their embracing power in the era of the global neoliberal economic restructuring.

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