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Kinship, Global and Local
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‘Invisible Boundaries, visible attributes’: Haitian Women in New York City

Now, I want to make one simple point here, and that is about what one might call the *power geometry* of it all; the power geometry of time-space compression. For different social groups, and different individuals, are placed in very distinct ways in relation to these flows and interconnections. This point concerns not merely the issue of who moves and who doesn't, although that is an important element of it; it is also about power in relation *to* the flows and the movement. Different social groups have distinct relationships to this anyway differentiated mobility: come people are more in charge of it than others; some initiate flows and movement, others don't; some are more on the receiving-end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it. (Massey 1994:149).

As the above quote discusses, the movement of people across boundaries is not isolated to movement across national boundaries. There are environmental boundaries, such as rivers and mountains that directly affect mobility. Likewise, there are social boundaries such as racial, gender and ethnicity roles and stereotypes that have great influence of who, how and where people are moving. Some of these boundaries, both environmental and social, may serve as 'restrictions' to mobility--at times, some of them may serve as 'aids' to certain peoples' mobility. Nonetheless, because of gender, race and ethnic boundaries Haitian women migrants are faced with many restrictions and much discrimination in the US. Women are confronted with—often not so subtle—statements, laws and ideologies that reflect upon how she sees herself as an intellectual, as a physical body, and as a capable member of society. In addition to gender issues, the complexities of race and of the stigmatization of the ‘foreigner’ in much of American society create a ‘bound’ environment for many Haitian women migrants.

As I began to think about topics related to women, Haiti and migration, I was drawn particularly to New York City--a place where millions of nationalities feel at home,

yet which remains strange and unfamiliar to most. I wanted to explore not only the issue of being deemed an “immigrant” in New York City, but also to explore the roles of the black woman in a city--and a country--that has a strict history of racial and gender divisions. Therefore, in this paper I explore the positions of these women in New York society. Particularly drawing on an interview with a Haitian migrant living in Brooklyn, I examine ways in which the many preexisting social boundaries and hierarchies—both in Haiti and in the US--are translating into questions of ‘assimilation’ or ‘differentiation’ in the woman’s everyday life. Likewise, I explore the distinctiveness and complexity of a Haitian heritage and present some ways in which Haitian 'cultural capital' is retained, transformed, and translated within the New York City landscape. In the first section of this paper, *Haiti, Women and New York City*, I discuss and overview of my reasons for choosing the topics of Haitian Women and Transmigration, as well as my reason for choosing the setting of New York City. Following, I use statistical data from the 1994 US Census, the 1992 World Development Report and other sources to explain which Haitians are moving, where and why. In the second section, *Sara's Story*, I introduce my primary source, Sara, a Haitian woman living in Brooklyn, NY. Here, I explain her personal situation as well as give some background as to her family history and touch on her own perceptions of identity in relation to issues of transmigration. In the third section, *Why New York: Kinship Ties*, I show how kinship ties are able to shape the pattern of Haitian migrants to the US through Sara's recollection of her own experience. In the fourth section *Roots and Perspective* I explore the ties Sara retains with her family in Haiti and how these ties are altering her perspective of her life in the US. In addition to this, this section explores how national identity has a direct relationship with kinship ties for the migrant. Following this discussion, the section *Stratification of Labor: Haiti and New York*, expands upon where Haitian women are ending up in the labor hierarchies of New York and how these positions are reflective of their positioning in their native Haiti. In the sixth section, *Invisible Boundaries, Visible Attributes*, I look at how race/class relations in Haiti are translated and transformed for the Haitian migrant in the US. This

remarks upon how these relations often contribute to and accentuate the difficulties a Haitian encounters within the boundaries of the US Racial System. In the final section, *Where is My Daughter Going?* I discuss briefly the role of Haitian courtship and ideas of who can marry whom in the personal life of the Haitian woman living in New York. In this section, I focus mainly on the interview I had with Sara and her own reflections upon the expectations of her mother and aunt in Haiti in regards to who she should date and in who she is ultimately interested.

As mentioned before, ‘boundaries’ or ‘borders’ are central to discussions of immigration and particularly in the situations of minorities and women in America. We are a country which both prides itself in its diversity and individuality, and which also struggles to create the collective “American Identity”. In this paper, I investigate some of my observations about where these boundaries are being placed through the analysis Haitian women’s roles in New York’s private and public spheres. I also point to some ways these ‘borders’ are--and may continue to be--redrawn to accommodate an ever-changing American population and ideology.

In my opinion, understanding the movement or mobility of women within and across national and ‘abstract’ boundaries is crucial to understanding how women are fighting for equality in the face of complex structures of discrimination. Mobility leads to freedom, freedom leads to voice, and voice leads to dialogue. I hope that through this dialogue, we continue to narrow the many narrow-minded gaps that we have created in our society.

Haiti, Women and New York City

For the past year-and-a half I have been researching various facets of Haitian culture. Throughout my research, I have been aching to ask, ‘What about in the U.S? How is it to be Haitian in this country? How are my ideas of ‘American’ translated to immigrants coming from Haiti?’ We live in a country that was founded upon immigration

and diversity yet, at the same time, our policies and ideologies have not always reflected the ‘open arms’ and freedom associated with our famous green woman planted brilliantly in the midst of Hudson River-- the Statue of Liberty.

Why did I chose *New York* and why Haitian *women* in particular? I chose New York as my site for two main reasons. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce 1990 national census, 87% of Haitians in the U.S. live in New York, Florida Massachusetts or New Jersey. Of the 292,036 people claiming Haiti as their primary ancestry in the 1990 census, 108,696 resided in New York and 104, 472 lived in Florida. Of the population in New York, 25% of Haitian Americans were naturalized citizens and 45% were not U.S. citizens. The remaining percentages were born in the U.S.

Although the initial rush of Haitian migration to the US was a result of Haitian's seeking political refuge during the Duvalier dictatorial regime, which spanned the 60's, 70's and 80's, today social and economic factors are the major factors contributing to the rural/urban and transnational migration of Haitians. Currently, there is a tremendous surplus of labor in Haiti, creating mass unemployment and subsequent poverty. Additionally, according to the World Development Indicators of the World Bank, nearly 40 percent of Haiti's population is under fifteen. The combination of a surplus in labor and a tremendously young native population, coupled with diminishing natural resources, large-scale corruption and increasingly violence, leads to a sense of hopelessness and pessimism which Sara, a Haitian woman living in Brooklyn, describes in the quote that follows:

Identity is something that is always fluid and is always a fiction. But for me what it means when I say I'm Haitian is that it's a place that I have allegiance to. It's probably the first place I have allegiance to, even though I'm not doing anything for Haiti right now. This is the place that's made me. This is the place that made me who I am and this is the place where my people come from. This is where my roots are. You know, before my mother's generation, people never left Haiti. In other words, people were born there and die there. I was not born in Haiti and I might not die there,

but before me, everyone, maybe for five or six generations never left Haiti. So, it means that I'm a kreyol speaker, it means that I have a certain sense of humor, increasingly in the past couple years, it means that I see the world with a certain amount of pessimism--Or at least with this notion that human nature is not always benevolent. It's always meant that socially I don't really get along, although I will not hesitate to call myself black and black American and I am willing to take on issues in the black-American community as my own, socially, with Black-America.

Undeniably, there is a very strong Haitian community in New York City, which not only combines the dynamic structures of one of the most complex cities in the world, but also indicates a strong solidarity among Haitians and Haitian-Americans in New York City. For these reasons, I hope to better understand where and why people are moving from Haiti to the U.S. and to try to find out where they are ending up the social, political and economic hierarchy of our own country. Understanding why certain nationalities, genders and races are being placed in specific roles may very well help understand issues such as these facing our country and our society.

Why I chose to look at the Haitian *women* specifically? The primary reason is that, according to the 1992 World Development Report, of the 234,757 emigrants from Haiti in 1990, 53% were women and of the 292,036 of Haitian Diaspora in the U.S., 51% are women. This means that women are not only the majority who leave Haiti, but Haitian women are also the majority of Haitian Americans. Although the difference in numbers is not overwhelming, the fact that Haitian women are the majority of emigrants is a very significant one. It is both reflective of the roles that Haitian women have in Haiti and the ones that they are assuming by moving across national borders. According to the 1990 U.S. Census, 70% of Haitian emigrants in the U.S. are 40 years of age or younger—which means that women are predominantly of child-bearing age—and 56% of Haitian immigrants have never been married. The remaining 44% of Haitian Americans are married, widowed, divorced or separated. The statistics on marriage are important in that this indicates women's social status and 'availability' to 'foreign' relationships abroad.

Another interesting aspect of Haitian immigration is that there were nearly 100,000 of the near 300,000 Haitian Americans reported were between the ages of 0 and 20. This indicates that not only women—who are 51% of migrants—are coming to the U.S., but that many of them are either bringing their children with them, or are having children once in the U.S. This is important in understanding how the Haitian woman is able to ‘fit’ into New York’s social and economic structures. Furthermore, only 25% of the Haitian population in the U.S. had more than a high school degree, with 60% having less than a high school degree (U.S. Census: 1990). Based on Catanese’s comparison of Haitian-American immigrants versus other immigrants, the ratio of Haitians to other immigrants with more than a high school degree was 0.57; this implies that Haitian-American immigrants are significantly less likely than other US immigrants to be exposed to levels of higher education. As I will discuss later in my section concerning the stratification of labor in New York, the fact that many Haitians are often not ‘formally educated’, directly influences the types of labor positions for which they are qualified. As we will see, this coupled with the pressures of immigration laws and racial/gender discrimination leads to extremely limited choices for the Haitian woman immigrant.

Sara’s Story ¹

I met Sara through a Haitian news discussion group that I have taken part in periodically. I was looking for Haitian women in New York City who would be willing to share their stories and their thoughts about being a Haitian woman in the U.S, and more specifically in New York. At the beginning of our interview, Sara told me that she thought her experiences in New York were probably different from those of most Haitian women. She explained to me that she had come for her college education and that New York had been a choice for her because that’s where her family already had made ties with the U.S. In this sense, Sara was right. This indicated that far fewer Haitian-Americans

¹ To begin with, upon the request of my interviewee, all names included in this paper are substitutions for their real names. This is to ensure the privacy of those with whom I spoke.

are gaining degrees of higher education than other U.S. immigrants. In regards to Sara's experience, she had already attended college in the U.S. and had now returned for law school. Although her educational background and close knit experiences may be outliers from the national statistics of Haitian women and their roles in New York, Sara's story is both informative and reflective of many aspects of female Haitianity in the City.

Right now I am a law student in New York, I came from Port-au-Prince. My mom still lives there and so does my little sister. But really, my family to me is not just my nuclear family. So, my aunt is also my family, my mom's sister, and they work together and they're both still living there. My mom calls me and we usually just talk about her personal situation. Really, I'm at a point where I'm a little fed up. I mean my sister is really into this stuff [Haitian politics and current situation], she's the one that really updates me. I guess it's just denial slash avoidance, I'm just really sad about it and I just don't want to deal with it a lot of the time.

I live in Brooklyn, but I don't live in a part of it that is terribly Haitian. I now know two other Haitian women here. I mean, I know my sister, I know my relatives; I think those are the Haitians that I interface with the most. It's not very many people-- my sister, she and I are very close, my cousin, my aunt's daughter, my aunt, and my other aunt on my dad's side are close too. And here and there, like in law school, there are two Haitian women that I know. I think that my experience is probably very different from most Haitian women who are in New York because I'm assuming that there are usually bigger Haitian networks. I've been here for eight years now. I went to college here, then took a break, then came back. Before that, I lived in Haiti since I was five. Before that, my parents had left Haiti and lived abroad and when they came back I was five years old.

My parents both studied in Europe. My mom didn't finish, but she studied medicine and my father was a pediatrician in Europe. My parents come from two very different backgrounds, not economically, but my mother is a very, very light skinned Haitian and my father is a very dark skinned Haitian. Now it's probably not a big issue now, but back then it was and that informed the fact that they chose to live abroad before coming back to Haiti. By the time we moved back to Haiti it was because my father had passed away. We lived in Africa before then, we lived in Congo. I'm finding out more and more about my dad's family now because I grew up mainly with my mother's family. I'm sure it's not just a Haitian monopoly,

but there's a lot of hiding in Haitian families and that's why I think I'm finding things out right now.

Sara's explanation of the 'different backgrounds' of her parents due to the darkness of their skin is a very interesting one. Although there are racial delineations in Haiti—a country deemed the 'First Black Republic'—in our discussion Sara clearly felt that race is today more of a defining characteristic for the Haitian in New York than for the Haitian in Haiti. This concept of racial boundaries is something I explore in a following section, *Invisible Boundaries, Visible attributes*.

In the following section, I will look at how Sara's comments concerning her decisions for moving to New York and her ties there to emphasize the importance of kinship ties in shaping the patterns of migration.

Why New York: Kinship Ties

Why I chose New York? Because that's where my link to the states was. I mean if my links had been in Florida, I would have probably gone to Florida, you know but most of my family came to New York. Actually, most of them [my family] came in the sixties...See how I use the word 'family', I don't mean the American family, my family is everyone of my relatives, so that gives you a sense of the Haitian family. Most of them came in the late fifties and early sixties and actually weren't able to get an education--to get degrees. Then, they came to work in union jobs or, not so unionized, jobs. Back then they came to work. Those of my relatives who are migrating now, in other words, my cousins, my brother, my sister, then me and then my younger cousin, then her brother and then my other cousin, all of the ones who are coming now are coming to get degrees. Some of them, their parents were here. Like my cousin, who's mother was here in the sixties, well she might have gotten a certificate, but no body got a college degree back then. Some left, some stayed on. Her mother went back to Haiti and ended up working with my mother and they're both educators. And now her daughter came back, but her daughter came back to get a degree.

Sara's experience of coming to New York due to family ties there is not an unusual one. According to Nina Schiller's analysis of Haitian transnational social fields,

The largest Haitian settlements in the United States are in south Florida and the New York metropolitan area. New York City was the initial location of settlement for most Haitian immigrants and in 1994, 30% of the newly arrived legal immigrants continued to settle there (US Immigration and Naturalization Service 1996). (Schiller 1999: 346).

The statistics mentioned in the previous section concerning the age of Haitian immigrants show that there exists a diversity of age groups throughout Haitian Americans in the U.S. This indicates that the migration patterns are not solely based on individual movement, but are part of a greater networking, familial movement of Haitians to 'hotspots' in the U.S., including New York City. Sara's example of her family and her reasons for choosing New York are reflective of this concept. Even though she was coming to the U.S. specifically for an education, she nevertheless chose New York City because of her kinship ties there.

Sara's comments in the previous section concerning what constitute 'family' for her are also insightful in regards to her decisions of moving to New York. She clearly distinguishes between what she sees as the 'American family' and her own sense of what the 'Haitian family' is; the former being composed of the mother, father, and siblings—otherwise known as the nuclear family and the latter being composed of all kin including aunts, cousins, second cousins, nieces, etc. Sara's concept of family is reflective of the strength of Haitian blood ties that Schiller talks of in her analysis of the Haitian population in New York. Schiller argues that it is the strong sense of Haitian 'blood ties' that sustain Haitian Diaspora and Haitian transnationals' strong ties to their friends and family in Haiti, to their Haitianity, and to their 'native country'. However, I would argue that these 'blood' or kinship ties influence more than Sara's ties to Haiti. By boldly stating that her reason for moving to New York City was because of kinship ties, Sara is

showing that these ‘blood relationships’ actually transformed her initial pattern of migration. The continuance of these ties not only maintain a sense of solidarity between Sara and Haiti, but also create a sense of solidarity for her within her place as a Haitian woman in New York. As we see in the following excerpt, Sara feels a sense of solidarity and ‘belonging’ in the perspectives and approaches of other Haitian and Caribbean women in her Brooklyn community. These feelings are thereby translating into social and political actions within the Haitian community.

I'm finding out that socially, the people I want to hang out with are women who are either Haitian or Caribbean. And I'm finding out that I have issues with the political perspective of fellow law students. I'm very political and I think that has to do with me having grown up in Haiti. I think that, sadly enough, having grown up in Haiti, I have a better perspective on politics and on how the world works than a lot of middle class black Americans. I'm getting really annoyed with what I consider to be their apolitical view of the world.

A lot of people I meet find me too political. In the 80's, there was a big anti-Haitian problem with an Aids scare. There was a time when essentially Haitians were accused of having originated AIDS and the FDA was going to ban Haitians from donating blood. Now there is a problem of AIDS in Haiti, I'm not denying that, but it was reaching problematic proportions. And there had to be a lot of protesting from the Haitian community for it to stop, and it did. So, what you're seeing is that even here in New York, Haitians are a very politicized group. They're becoming increasingly more politicized. Haitians are known for standing up for other Haitians. The way I explain it, is that it's a matter of life or death if you get involved in politics in Haiti. People come here and they want to participate because they can and you're not going to be gunned down. That's making for a very organized and politicized community, much more so than the other black and Caribbean immigrant communities. Socially, I think a lot of the color and class issues from Haiti do translate here, but at the same time, there's an interesting political solidarity there. I think that it makes sense and that being Haitian definitely impacts your political outlook on the world. The percentage of Haitians in any political organization I'm involved in is very high.

The sense of community in Sara's remarks is reminiscent of the types of ties created through kinship or 'blood' relationships. I believe that through Sara's experiences as a Haitian migrant, she has both maintained and reinforced kinship ties within Haiti and in New York, while realizing new ties that link her to her 'newfound' community. I would argue that the increasingly strong—in both solidarity and in numbers—Haitian population of New York and Brooklyn are serving as a means to extend the definition of kinship ties to expand beyond 'blood ties' and into close-knit familial relationships with neighbors and, particularly for Sara, with other Haitian women.

In the next section, I show an example of how national identity—and its continuity in a situation of transnational migration—has a lot to do with continued kinship ties back home. This section also shows some ways in which, for Sara, national identity is shaped by the existence of kinship ties.

Roots and Perspective

My ties to Haiti are very strong. Were all of my family living outside of Haiti, I'm trying to think of what my ties would be like. They wouldn't be probably as strong, but they would still be strong. Because no matter what, whenever I'm asked, even though I'm now a naturalized American, I say I'm Haitian. I don't even say Haitian-American; I say I'm Haitian. You know I lived there from five to eighteen, that's a long time. And my parents live there, and I keep on finding out a lot of stuff. I'm getting a lot of perspective on my family and I found out more and more stuff about my family, on both sides of my family, now that I'm here. It's two things, one I'm coming of age, I'm twenty-six, in a way, it's sort of like I'm coming into my own as a woman and I'm developing my personality and I'm finding my past. So, now more than ever, I appreciate their struggles. Now more than ever I appreciate where they came from; I think I understand a lot of things more. My ties are still strong. Being a Haitian defines me. I think the fact that I have family there keeps me in tune. My mother comes and visits me a lot and I go pretty much every year. And it's interesting too, because my mom's household is changing a lot too. For example, my grandmother used to live with us and she died. And there are ties as a family that we had to certain people that have severed for a variety of reasons, we had a maid that was there for all of my life and she left.

According to Schiller, Haitian Diaspora is very strong and closely knit to Haiti as a ‘homeland’. It is through the continuing kinship ties that involve migrants in Haiti, which connect individual life strategies and daily decisions with broad, international politics and relations across borders (Schiller, 341). Sara’s comments about her roots and her family show the intense identification that she maintains—despite her naturalization as an American—with both her family and her country and with her country through her family. At the same time, Sara acknowledges that her perspective of kinship relations and family have changed since she immigrated to the US.

I’ve also become more interested in Haiti because, when I was twelve, Baby Doc was in control. I was very young when there was a surge of hope and now, it’s over thirteen years and things have gotten worse. Things have gone back to how they were. So there’s the question, Why is it that things never change in Haiti? There’s really pessimism there. Any Haitian literature I’ve read, it always sounds harsh and pessimistic and now I understand why. That’s why I’m saying there’s a lot I’m understanding now, not just about my family, but about Haiti in general. I think it’s because I was in this little bubble. We grew up in a relatively middle-class family, we weren’t rich, but we were middle class. And those were the type of things I never understood--the broader realities of Haiti--like hunger. I mean just constant instability, constant insecurity--no safety. Compared to that, I was in a bubble. I never understood the pessimism, but now that I understand Haiti better, all of its complexities and all of its’ realities, I understand why the literature is so pessimistic. It’s actually fatalist, not all of it, but there were pieces I understood. And it’s [the pessimism/fatalism] because of the abject poverty, the abject hunger, because of the constant hunger, because of the denial of fundamental dignity. There is no concept of fundamental dignity. I think Aristede is the first one to actually have brought that about in the national language with the book that he wrote. Human rights aren’t understood in Haiti. Now human rights are a concept, ‘up in the air’, but individual dignity is not understood. [I am able to see this because] Now that I am outside, I have the opportunity to meet with Haitians from different class backgrounds, with whom I would never have mingled when I was in Haiti, and I see their anger.

Through Sara's experiences in the U.S., she claims that she has been able to reach a greater perspective of both her family and of Haiti as a whole. Interestingly, by being in New York, it is Sara's exposure to differing classes and to rural Haitians, which she would not have in Port-au-Prince, has allowed her to understand more about her own country. And in many ways, Sara's exposure across social boundaries has made her more curious about the boundaries within her own family. Sara comments on how, because of her physical separation from Haiti, she is better able to see the situation of her family and of Haiti overall. For her, as she is faced with pressures to assimilate into the 'Black-American' role, she finds herself more curious about her own Haitian history and is searching for ways to maintain and build upon her Haitianity. As Sara says, although being Haitian defines her and she maintains strong ties with Haiti, kinship ties make her ties with national identity significantly stronger. In this way, the spatial separation from the realities of Haiti and her life there, are allowing Sara to better understand the social structures of which she is a part. The pessimism that Sara talks about is not necessarily isolated to Haitians in Haiti. Although Sara lives a 'middle class life', the majority of Haitians in the United States have considerably lower than average incomes and are subject to intensive structures of labor stratification.

In the next section, while continuing my discussion of labor and the position of Haitian women in New York, I will discuss some of the connections being made and maintained between the immigrant, Haiti and their kin in both America and Haiti.

Stratification of Labor: Haiti and New York

By stratified reproduction I mean that physical and social reproductive tasks are accomplished differentially according to inequalities that are based on hierarchies of class, race, ethnicity, gender, place in a global economy, and migration status and that are structured by social, economic, and political forces. (Colen: 78).

'Stratified reproduction' according to Colen's argument is a means of separation and organization of the physical and social into hierarchies of set tasks. In this section, I use the concept of stratified reproduction to analyze the

current situation of the Haitian Woman Migrant in New York. In this section, I use the concepts associated with 'stratified reproduction' to both show what occupational roles Haitian women migrants are assuming in the US and why.

According to a gender and poverty report by Maria Correia, Haitian women have proven to be key to sustaining their families in times of economic hardships and decline (Correia 1998: 5). Additionally, much research indicates that women carry a heavier familial burden than men in regards to family maintenance. In Haiti, the domination of women in the 'informal' labor sector is reflective of these responsibilities. In addition to this, the family structures in Haiti--where there are many informal unions and some prevalence of polygamy—have created a situation where men are not legally or otherwise bound to their children. This results in a situation where Haitian women are paying a disproportionate share of child maintenance costs, a situation that is common in Haiti. In Haiti, women are the main providers of water and fuel to the family and they often play key roles in agriculture as well.

According to official data of the Haitian Ministry of Women (MOW), women's roles in marketing and trading have been steadily increasing from 20 to 30 percent in the past few decades (men are 2-6%). Women are also the predominant workers in factories in Haiti.

Factory owners and managers indicate a preference for female workers because of their perceived greater manual dexterity, their more docile and less militant nature and the labor supply of women in Port-au-Prince, where they outnumber men by 30 percent. (Correia 1998: 5).

However, these numbers are reflective of women in the "formal," or reported labor sector. In Haiti, much of commodity flow is attributed to the workings of the "informal" labor sector including markets, in which women are the predominant laborers. Labor stratification also plays a key role in the migration of women. According to Plotkin,

While little is known about the gender-specific push and pull factors of migration in Haiti, the predominance of women in rural-urban flows has been attributed to their limited rural employment opportunities and the

fact that available urban employment in small scale commerce and domestic service are activities typically associated with women. Also, women are preferred for assembly work in urban-based manufacturing. (Plotkin, 1984b).

In terms of labor stratification and the international migration of Haitian women, some women are faced with exasperated economic and racial exploitations abroad due to the fact that women have fewer rights than men. In the Dominican Republic, Haitian women are not allowed to work in the sugar-cane fields and are not eligible for health care, housing, or other social services. One question that I would like to ask is how these ideas of Haitian women and their role in Haiti are translating to stratified reproduction² and labor in New York City.

Although I was not able to find data reflecting the census statistics of Haitian women in the labor force in New York City, I would like to look at the national data for employment of Haitians in the U.S. According to the 1990 Census, of the Haitian Americans with jobs, 74% were making less than \$20,000 per year (see table 1). If one looks at this number, and figures in the fact that the majority of Haitians who are coming to the US are single women and that many of them have children, then this places the average Haitian woman in or below the poverty line. Just looking at the cost of housing in New York, or Brooklyn (much of the Haitian population in New York is in Brooklyn)—it's difficult to find a one bedroom efficiency for less than \$600/mo—shows how little a salary of \$20,000 provides for. In addition to this, many Haitians in New York send money and goods regularly to friends and family in Haiti (Schiller 1992).

Table 1. Earnings of Haitian Americans with Jobs

	Number	Percent
Less than \$10,000	49,019	33%
\$10,000-\$19,999	60,244	41%

\$20,000-\$29,999	24,129	16%
\$More than \$29,999	15,479	10%

(US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Decennial Census, 1990)

Where are women working in New York City? I wrote an email to a Haitian discussion group, Corbett list, and asked for some contacts of Haitian women in New York City. One of the responses I received was a woman who noticed that almost all of the locker room workers in her local YMCA were Haitian women. This response was not surprising in that, of the Haitians included in the 1990 census, 35% of them claimed to be in a service occupation (see table 2). Interestingly enough, the census data shows no specified section of “childcare provider,” which—according to Colen and many other Caribbean immigration authors—is a common position for both legal and illegal Caribbean immigrants. According to Shellee Collens analysis of English-speaking Caribbean women immigrants in childcare positions in New York, often women with children are not as desirable as ‘unattached’ women. The reasons she provided were due to their availability for working overtime, feelings of caring just for the employees’ children, and the lack of personal obligation (Rapp 1995: 80). Consequently, the role of these women in the labor force—as caretakers—is feeding to constraints and preconceived notions of gender-defined obligations. Accordingly, “childcare positions” are usually filled by women; this stratification of labor within the New York City gender hierarchy is, then, in cooperation with the gender-labor stereotypes Haitian women face within their ‘native’ Haiti.

Of the 33,784 “Operators, fabricators, and laborers,” it is easily assumed that a vast majority of the workers are women. Particularly in New York City, where there are a lot of industry and service-oriented positions available to low-wage workers, it is expected that many Haitian women end up filling these roles.

Table 2. Occupations of Haitian Americans, 1990

	Number	Percent
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Service	61,321	35
Technical, sales and administrative	36,582	21
Operators, fabricators, laborers	33,784	19
Managerial and professional specialty	22,221	13
Precision, production, craft, repair	11,311	7
Farming, forestry, fishing	6,714	4
Other	1,362	<1
Total	173,295	100

(US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Decennial Census, 1990)

In Haiti, the average literacy levels of women aged 25-34 are half of those for men of the same age category. Additionally, the incidence of illiteracy is three times greater in rural areas for men and two times greater for women (numbers from Haitian National Survey, EMMUS, 1994/1995). These statistics indicate that many of the Haitian women coming to the US may have low levels of reading comprehension and are, therefore, much less likely than immigrant men to be in managerial and technical occupations. Not only do Haitian women have to deal with the difficult prospects and discrimination/exploitation associated with low-wage immigrant labor, but they also have to deal with the realities of women's wages in the US. According to the US Council of Economic Advisor's National report concerning gender-based salary gaps in the US, women earn nationally 75% of what men earn. This statistic alone, coupled with the common single-woman headed household, is indicative of the economic hardships of women living with the exorbitant cost-of-living of New York. In addition to this, in 1996, African-American women earned 63 cents for each dollar earned by white men, which is indicative of racial/salary discrimination lines in the US ('Working Women', no author noted).

Although gender discrimination in hiring, pay, promotion and termination has been illegal in the US since the implementation of Civil Rights laws nearly 30 years ago, there

are many cases of “steering” women toward traditionally female occupations. So, it is evident that both the complex systems of American labor stratification and gender hierarchy and the social structures of Haiti that contribute to gender discrimination, place the Haitian immigrant women at a severe disadvantage in the New York job market. Needless to say, the wage differentiation coupled with the statistics of the 1990 census and the Haitian wage distribution (table 2), indicate that the Haitian woman in New York is generally placed in a very low income and social power bracket.

In this section I have looked at the position of the Haitian Woman in both Haitian and New York labor hierarchies. Following, I discuss some of the race-related issues that are contributing to the discrimination against black Haitian women in the US and also reexamine Sara’s distinction between what she considers is Haitian and what it means to be a ‘Black-American’.

Invisible Boundaries, Visible Attributes

According to a United Nations Human-development report, the gaps between the rich and the poor within and between countries are at an all-time high.

An emerging global elite, mostly urban-based and interconnected in a variety of ways, is amassing great wealth and power, while more than half of humanity is left out. (Ong 1999: 11).

Many of the structures and ideologies of Haitian society serve as primary example of some of the complex struggles between class, race, power and social structure. Although there have been many political and social changes in Haiti since the early 20th century—including the ‘noiriste’ regime of Papa Doc³--as is evident with Sara’s parents’ experience, racial tensions still remain in regards to marriage. According to Sara, there are

³ The 30-year dictatorship of Papa Doc, followed by Baby Doc, Duvalier’s son, was wrought with racial tensions and movements towards increasing the power of the black majority of Haiti. However, this period was also a time of great corruption and social and political oppression, as well as a period of gross human rights violations.

still many existing ideologies about race that continue to haunt Haitian migrants in the U.S. that she knows.

I dated a man who I probably wouldn't have dated in Haiti and it actually went sour. You know, a lot of people get over certain things. Even though he was living in Boston and is doing very well. His thing is, even though he's made it here, if he went back to Haiti, in his eyes, he could never be perceived as having made it because he doesn't speak French, because he's dark skinned. Actually, I think he's wrong, when he focuses on being dark-skinned. When I think it's a class issue, not race so much. Because there are plenty of dark-skinned males doing just fine, I mean Haiti is a black country. Worst of all, he obviously hadn't gotten over a lot of issues from childhood, where his dignity was never acknowledged. I mean when you have people telling children, of all classes, that 'you know, you're too dark-skinned you'll never make it. You're nothing'. But you look at the situation of these children that are taken in almost as slaves in these middle class families-- what happens is the abject poverty, the lack of resources makes it so that all that people have control over is other people and, all the people have power over other people. Maybe [I see] this because I grew up in an urban setting. Maybe if I had had more exposure to rural Haiti [I would have a different perspective]. Maybe if I start talking to Haitians who grew up in rural settings, where they were poor, but not hungry, or where nature is more prevalent, it would be different.

Sara's example here brings up many complex issues about class relations, relationships, and personal dignity in relation to race. Firstly, Sara's comment concerning dating a man that "she probably wouldn't have dated in Haiti," exemplifies some of the complex issues associated with whom a transnational can and does marry or date in the US. I will go into this issue in more depth in the later section *Where is My Daughter Going?* In addition to this, Sara comments on how she not only distinguishes between what she perceives as predominating class issues in Haiti and the racial tensions perceived by her friend in Boston, but also points out how *power* is the key to racial and class-related discrimination. I am particularly interested in what she has to say about 'resources' and--in turn--how race, a visibly obvious attribute, creates invisible social, political and economic boundaries and directly relates to issues of power and human capital.

According to Aiwa Ong's analysis of cultural capital within racial origin, kinship bonds, historical solidarity and economic relations create tremendous bonds both internal and external to the nation-state (Ong 1996: 66). As Sara's friend's example shows, these racial and historical ties of the wealthy, mulatto elite in Haiti are transforming and transferring to his sense of place and belonging in the US. However, as was mentioned in the previous section, many issues of class hierarchy within Haitian society (as Sara's friend experiences) dissipate upon arrival in the US. This may be due to the fact that in Haiti, the urban elite is predominantly mulatto in a country where the vast majority of the population is black. Therefore, there is an inherent link between racial hierarchy and class hierarchy in Haiti. Upon arrival in the US, even the mulatto Haitian immigrant is categorized as 'black' and, therefore, falls automatically to the bottom of the US racial system. This position 'at the bottom of the hierarchy' places the mulatto Haitian migrant at an obvious disadvantage as they are both faced with newfound discrimination based on their color and also lose the 'cultural capital' of being the 'upper class' of Haiti. In this way, these 'visible attributes' are being used and exploited, much like the 'resources' to which Sara refers.

The ties that Sara draws between poverty, power and racial/class divisions in Haiti are very important and insightful. As Aiwa Ong discusses the ties between cultural and social capital and racial identity, she makes an interesting point about the value given to certain cultural capitals in a country and the role of the immigrant.

Indeed, the reproduction of social power, especially for the newcomer deploying start-up symbolic capital, is never guaranteed or certain, especially when he or she embodies other signs—for example, skin color, foreign accent, and cultural taste—that may count as symbolic deficits in the host society. Thus, in transnational movements, newcomers may have acquired cultural capital that they have difficulty converting into social capital because there is a perceived mismatch between the distinction of their symbolic capital and their racial identity, which may be associated with low social value in the host group (Ong, 1999: 91).

The links that Sara makes between the lack of ‘natural resources’ and the subsequent substitution of ‘human resources’ is reflective of this lack of dignity and the inherent instability of being an immigrant. Interestingly enough, Sara’s friend believes that he would not be able to ‘reproduce the social power’ that he has obtained in the U.S.—which is due to his economic status, the education that he has received, etc—upon return to Haiti due to the already existing ‘invisible boundaries’ associated with race and class. In this way, it seems that the black Haitian immigrant is not only having to face questions of coming to the U.S. and overcoming the symbolic capital issues of our country, but at the same time has to worry if, upon return to Haiti, the accumulation of symbolic capital in the U.S. is transferable to the existing structures in Haiti. The example here was of a black Haitian male who is now in the U.S., however, Haitian women have not only these issues of class, race and social hierarchy to overcome, but they are also faced with the complexities of gender relations and roles. For the Haitian woman immigrant, she is not only victim to the ‘abstract’ boundaries of both Haitian and American society, but she is also subject to the greater cultural issues concerning womanhood.

According to Sara, it is the intense lack of dignity that is so crucial to the perspective of Haitians both in Haiti and abroad. By retaining the racial hierarchies that he perceives in Haiti, her Haitian American friend is, in many ways, adhering to the very ideas with which he disagrees. In other words, although society has created borders for him, Sara’s friend is continuing the anger and frustration associated with the Haitian social structure and translating it to his life in Boston. Therefore, Sara’s friend is not only confronted with his own ideas of racial stereotyping—which reflect upon his own sense of self-esteem—he is also faced with the racial tensions between ‘black’ and ‘white’ in the U.S.

Although Sara openly disagreed with her friend’s perspective concerning his life and capabilities in the US, it was evident in both what she said and how she spoke of her own personal experiences that she has struggled a lot with her own identity as Haitian, as

a student in an American university, and as a black woman in New York City. According to her, she had been in the position of ‘differentiating’ herself from the black American identity by accentuating her ‘Haitianity’ and of ‘assimilation’, or taking part in what she deems ‘black-American’ issues and society. Although she completely identifies herself as a Haitian, and not a Haitian American—in spite of her US naturalization—she still acknowledges that much of New York society automatically places her in a larger ‘black’ category and identity.

In terms of how I fit into New York, you know, I think I’m something of a young ‘buppie’-- It’s sort of like a black yuppie. The neighborhood where I live, it’s got its’ underclass world; it has its’ projects, like most black neighborhoods. Most black neighborhoods have a wider variety of incomes because of segregation or discrimination in housing. You’ll find a wide, wide range of incomes. When I go to school I’m one of a handful of blacks, and that comes as a hardship for me. I’ve had to develop my approach to all-white environments over the years. The minute I’ve walked into a room, I have come to realize that there are things people can’t do or say around me, and that’s something I’ve just had to develop. I think that whatever the hardships are for me, they’re not the worst type of hardships that blacks have to go through in this country, because I’m black middle class.

My world is my activities. I find as I’m maturing, I leave my bubble less and less. What I’m finding out also is that when I first moved to New York, I wanted to completely enter the world of the black American. But what I’m finding as I’m getting older I’m getting pickier about that. Those differences that I’m talking about, at least the fact that there are certain things I don’t like about black-American culture are things that I found out in the past couple of years.

I think what would have helped for me is if I had an accent. If I had an accent, then automatically, black-Americans would know that I’m not American and right away whites would know that I’m not black-American. I don’t have a Haitian accent. The thing about me is, when I’m asked who I am, I say I’m Haitian. But really, it doesn’t even make a difference because there are so few blacks at the law school in the first place. It’s not that I would want it to be a difference. It’s not like I’m trying to find a difference between me and a black-American--there a lot of Haitians who

do--They come here and see that there is a lot of bad press about black Americans. Precisely because I'm expected to subsume myself to the group, I'm having to ask myself a lot of questions. Oh, 'I thought I was just a black-American', but in fact there are a lot of things that really annoy me and I can't explain it in any other way but that I had a Haitian education and I grew up in Haiti. There are different sets of problems growing up in Haiti. They call for a more color-blind view of the world than black America does. There are a lot of things that I feel black Americans explain with race that they shouldn't explain with race. Everything is about race. I come across this incapability of looking beyond race. Most of the Haitians I know have a more complex analysis of politics. As I'm working in my neighborhood and organizing, I'm finding that most of the women I talk to are Haitian.

Contrary to Sara's friend's story, there are many examples of Haitian immigrants who feel that their cultural capital will increase, rather than decrease upon their return to Haiti. Nina Schiller brings up a primary example of a Haitian woman in New York who realizes her elevated significance in Haiti, as opposed to her situation in the U.S.

In the United States, Yvette may be just another ageing black woman, but in Haiti she is a somebody. In the United States her earning make no social mark, even if she were to hoard them or spend them on consumer goods. But to the extensive network of people she has been supporting in Haiti, Yvette is a person of substance. On her two trips back home, she was treated as a visiting dignitary. (Schiller 1999: 347).

The reason for the disparities between these two cases may, in fact, be due to what Sara had deemed as reasons of 'social class', or because of rural/urban differences in positioning within Haitian social hierarchies. Sara's friend was from Port-au-Prince, where racial and class boundaries are much more apparent. In Schiller's example, Yvette is from a rural area of Haiti where more of the population are of the same class background and are removed from the intense politics of Port-au-Prince.

In the following section, I explore how the heretofore-mentioned structural and cultural limitations that Haitian women encounter in the US racial

system are translated to issues of marriage and courtship. For Sara, ideas of 'race' are not only inherent parts of her newfound New York community, but there are many concepts of the role of men and women in relationships that transfer to her life in New York as a result of her kinship ties and her Haitianity.

Marriage: Where Is My Daughter Going?

If there's one thing that I've definitely inherited from my Haitianity and from the Haitian women in my family is traditional courtship. For Haitian women who come here, relationships with black American men are very important because it's about the data pool. There's a territoriality, an attachment to things. There's an attachment to things and that's a result of this culture being as materialistic as it is. People are defining themselves with what they own, which is totally not what I grew up with. For Haitian women in general, there's an initial shock with the dynamics about sharing space.

For example, I really don't like black-American men. I mean I don't really want to date black-American men. It means that as a woman I expect a certain amount of courtesy from men. I doubt if it is as true as it was when I was a teenager ten years ago, or if it was ever really true, but at least you have this notion in your head that women should act certain ways and men should do certain things for women. It's very much of a fiction, but at the same time interactions with Haitian men, especially Haitian men that are from Haiti and even some of the one's that are born here, in general it's just easier for me to communicate with them. You know, I really don't understand how black-American men communicate. I've found some to be, not so much rude, but there's a wall there all of the time.

If you speak with my mom though, she and my aunt always told me, never marry a Haitian man. Yeah, and they're older women in Haiti. Actually, they've told me not to marry Haitian men, not to marry African men, not to marry black-American men, which would really only leave not black men, which I find very interesting. I think it's a reflection of gender issues, you know, gender problems. But I think that the solution they end up seeing is, 'okay, well don't be with those men', but I think that there are gender problems everywhere now. But I think in their experiences, if they compare the women that they see married to Haitians and the women they see married to foreigners, I think that they assume that women who aren't married to Haitian men are going to be treated better.

My last relationship was with a black-American, but I have not dated that many Haitians or black-Americans either. Essentially, they [my mom and aunt] perceive Haitian women as being more productive than Haitian men, there's this crisis that they think there is in Haitian manhood. My mom will always talk about her dad as the provider, whereas my grandmother didn't work, and basically they see those values going away. They see that men would much rather live off of women than support them, that's what they're worried about. I know that there are gender relations problems everywhere. I know that, for the most part, maybe because I just like novelty--Haitian men are very predictable to me--for the most part, they're not the men I'm attracted to right now. We'll see. Right now I'm dating a Nigerian and I'm very much into it, and for three years I dated a Martiniquean in college. With him, we had a lot of common ground. He was from Martinique and, even though it's not independent-- it's still a part of France--it's also a Kreyol speaking Island. He was very much affectionate-- there was no wall there--and we had both just come to America for college, so it worked. He felt very much like a Haitian guy and had those values. When I broke up with him, I think I got a shock that his way of 'being a man' is, in New York, not 'the way'. That's probably because New York is what it is; it's very impersonal. Black-American men from New York, as far as I'm concerned, the ethic is that you have to look as tough as possible. And I have this relationship with this Nigerian and find that I'm having all of these interesting white admirers, and I'm feeling that I really like my interactions with them. Of course, they're a specific type of man. They tend to be very political men; they are very progressive men, they have a racial analysis. I'm not dating any of them, but I find my interactions with them to be very interesting. Maybe it's the novelty thing.

In the above excerpt, Sara's comments present many interesting aspects of how relationships of courtship and marriage are constructed, maintained and transformed for the Haitian women in New York. Sara not only feels that she has very "traditionally Haitian" views of gender roles in relationship interactions, but she seems to be expressing a desire and need for 'otherness'. She repeatedly refers back to the appeal of the 'novelty' of certain ethnicities and types of men; these novelties are ones that were not and are not readily available for her in Haiti and are, therefore, reflections of her situation as a migrant in the US. What I found most interesting was how Sara's mother and aunt respond to who they want their daughter/niece marrying. I find that their desire for Sara

to date a ‘white’ man is both reflective of deep-set class/race relations in Haiti and to false stereotypes of the rich, Western male provider. However, it is apparent—although Sara recognizes the faults in her Mother’s way of thinking—her dating patterns are certainly influenced by her relations with her kin in Haiti.

Throughout this paper I have discussed many of the dynamic properties of the Haitian woman in New York City. Through Sara’s stories, I have been able to not only relate personal experiences to gathered data and statistics, but have also been able to have a ‘bouncing-off point’ for relaying the diversity of roles and circumstances of Haitian women in the US. It is evident that the Haitian woman in New York is not only forced to deal with the complex issues of immigration and transnationality, but is also faced with issues of gender, racial, and economic-based discrimination. In addition to this, ideas of courtship and gendered relations are strongly influenced by kinship relations and are thereby brought into the Haitian woman migrant in the City. For the Haitian woman in New York, there is often a close-knit structure of kinship ties coupled with a strong Haitian community, however, there always remain very strong associations and literal connections with their family, friends and nation—Haiti.

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