

## MIGRATION TRAJECTORY OF HAITIAN WOMEN IN PORTO ALEGRE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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**ABSTRACT.** This article aimed to address the recent Haitian immigration in the state of Rio Grande do Sul, exploring the significance of the migratory phenomenon for Haitian women. The introduction outlines the feminization of migration, especially Haitian immigration. The objectives of this study are: (1) to know the different trajectories of migration of Haitian women and (2) to understand how gender relations in the migratory process occur. Narrative interviews were carried out with ten immigrants, whose questions were related to the migration trajectory. The analysis of the interviews sought to understand the migration trajectory of these women, what was found of similarities and differences with what has been published on the migration of Haitian women. Some issues, such as language, family and work, have been highlighted and deepened. Their speeches showed how being Haitian is linked to the experience of migration. Their trajectories are marked by protagonism when deciding to migrate alone to other countries. Our findings provide a still limited and defined panorama of the reality of Haitian women in Porto Alegre, but which can serve as a support for thinking about public policies and interventions aimed at raising awareness among the Brazilian population on this very emerging topic, and promoting human rights for the immigrant and refugee population.

**Keywords:** Migration; Haitian women; gender.

## TRAJETÓRIA DE MIGRAÇÃO DE MULHERES HAITIANAS EM PORTO ALEGRE: UM ESTUDO QUALITATIVO

**RESUMO.** O presente artigo visa abordar a recente imigração haitiana no estado do Rio Grande do Sul, explorando o significado do fenômeno migratório para mulheres haitianas. Na introdução é traçado um panorama sobre a feminização da migração, em especial da imigração haitiana. Os objetivos desta pesquisa são: (1) conhecer as diferentes trajetórias de migração de mulheres haitianas e (2) compreender como ocorrem as relações de gênero no processo migratório. Foram realizadas entrevistas narrativas com dez imigrantes, cujas perguntas se reportavam à trajetória de migração. A partir da análise das entrevistas busca-se compreender como é a trajetória de migração dessas mulheres e o que foi encontrado de semelhanças e diferenças com o que vem sendo publicado sobre migração de mulheres haitianas. Algumas questões, como idioma, família e trabalho, tiveram destaque e foram aprofundadas. Em suas falas foi observado como ser haitiana encontra-se vinculada

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vivência de migração. Também foi visto que suas trajetórias são marcadas por protagonismo ao decidirem migrar sozinhas para outros países. Os achados desta pesquisa oferecem um panorama ainda circunscrito e delimitado da realidade das mulheres haitianas em Porto Alegre, mas que pode servir de suporte para pensar políticas públicas e intervenções que visem tanto conscientizar a população brasileira sobre esse tema tão emergente, quanto apresentar possibilidades de acolhimento e fomentação de direitos humanos para a população migrante e refugiada.

**Palavras-chave:** Migração; mulheres haitianas; gênero.

## TRAYECTORIA DE MIGRACIÓN DE MUJERES HAITIANAS EN PORTO ALEGRE: UN ESTUDIO CUALITATIVO

**RESUMEN.** El presente artículo tiene por objeto abordar la reciente inmigración haitiana en el estado de Rio Grande do Sul, explorando el significado del fenómeno migratorio para las mujeres haitianas. En la introducción se traza un panorama sobre la feminización de la migración, en particular de la inmigración haitiana. Los objetivos de esta investigación son: (1) conocer las diferentes rutas de migración de las mujeres haitianas y (2) la comprensión de cómo se producen las relaciones de género en el proceso de migración. Se realizaron entrevistas narrativas con diez inmigrantes, cuyas preguntas se reportaban la trayectoria de migración. A partir del análisis de las entrevistas se busca comprender cómo es la trayectoria de migración de estas mujeres, lo que fue encontrado de semejanzas y diferencias con que viene siendo publicado sobre migración de mujeres haitianas. Algunas cuestiones, como el idioma, la familia y el trabajo, se destacaron y se profundizaron. En sus declaraciones fue observado cómo ser haitiana se encuentra vinculada a la vivencia de migración. También fue visto que sus trayectorias están marcadas por protagonismo al decidir migrar solas a otros países. Los hallazgos de esta investigación ofrecen un panorama aún circunscrito y delimitado de la realidad de las mujeres haitianas en Porto Alegre, pero que puede servir de soporte para pensar políticas públicas e intervenciones que visan tanto concientizar a la población brasileña en cuanto a este tema tan emergente, cuanto presentar posibilidades de acogida y fomento de derechos humanos para la población inmigrante y refugiada.

**Palabras clave:** Migración; mujeres haitianas; género.

### Introduction

In recent years, it has been emphasized that social and economic inequalities make certain groups more vulnerable in adverse situations such as natural disasters, migratory processes, etc. (Brunsma&Picou, 2008). Women represent one of these groups, which have disadvantages in the process of reconstruction and even recovery. These vulnerabilities are related to pre-existing social and economic inequalities such as their place in the global economy, their limited access to goods and wages, lack of state support, and gender-related roles, responsibilities and norms (Horton, 2012).

Since the 1990s, the phenomenon of feminization has been observed in most migratory flows (Benería, Deere, & Kabeer, 2012). In 2013, women represented 48% of all international migrants. Some data indicate that the highest percentage of migrant women

is found in regions where the migration process has been established for some time, such as Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, places where female migration represents 51% (United Nations, 2013).

The increase in the female migration flow is associated with some conditions experienced by women in their countries of origin: lack of work opportunities, divorce or separation, desire for more autonomy and the reduction of social restrictions on women's mobility, among others. These conditions, together with the possibility of better employment opportunities in the destination country, contributed to the participation of more women in migratory movements. As a result, there has been recognition of the importance of gender issues in international migration (Benería, et al., 2012).

Since the earthquake in 2010, Haitian migration has undergone a process of feminization, as there has been an increase in the number of immigrant women. In this process, many of these women have immigrated autonomously (Wooding & Petrozziello, 2013). In the state of Rio Grande do Sul, the participation of women in the Haitian migratory flow grew after the second generation of immigrants, which also incorporated a greater participation of children, adolescents and older immigrants (Uebel, 2015).

Even though their presence in the population composition of Haiti is greater than that of men, with representation in the migratory flow of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Haitians are still invisible in the labor market (Uebel, 2015). As with Haitian men, Haitian women struggle to recognize their Haitian diplomas or diplomas from courses taken in the Dominican Republic. This process, added to the greater difficulties in accessing schooling - contribute to increasing job insecurity, contributing to the reduction of work options, incidence of lower wages and economic marginalization, keeping them in the informal market or in jobs in the domestic work sector. In this type of activity, low wages, exploitation of labor and gender, class, race and ethnic discrimination make Haitian women have an even more unstable employment trajectory (Handerson, 2015b).

Peres and Baeninger (2017), through data collected by the National System of Registration of Foreigners (SINCRES), state that, even with a predominantly male migration process, the number of Haitian women is significant, however, such women have little visibility in this immigration. The authors point out precariousness at work as one of the possible reasons for this invisibility. They observe that, from the total of 4,425 Haitian immigrants residing in Brazil, 906 were without occupation and 759 were in non-classifiable occupation. The authors also describe that 71% Haitian women registered in the country were single and 25.3% were married. And based on these data, they understand that Haitian women do not come to Brazil only in the role of family reunification agents or spouses.

In a reflection on the situation of gender inequality in the Haitian society, Araújo (2016) states that in cultural aspects there are actions denying access to a series of facilities, as well as violations suffered by the female figure, which are the result of a sexist structure. At the same time, it is clear that the role of women is fundamental in breaking these power structures. Haitian women, not content with the reality imposed by the structure, find the possibility of action and change.

Since 1990, the Haitian diaspora has been the subject of several studies. The migratory flow has already been accentuated to the United States, France, Canada and the Caribbean. The Ministry of Haitians Living Abroad estimates that there were about 4 to 5 million Haitians on the move globally, representing half of the Haitian population, estimated at 10,413,211, in 2013 (Handerson, 2015a).

According to Handerson (2015a), the term ‘diaspora’ deserves further studies, due to the constant movement flows of the Haitian population. It is observed that the dream of most Haitians is ‘pati’ (to leave) or ‘vwayaje’ (to travel), which results in almost every family having a member in a foreign country. This fact still originates in the colonial period, as mobility was present in the coming of enslaved Africans, through transatlantic trade. Later, with the struggle for independence, and with the liberation of the enslaved, a new custom of mobility and immigration was established.

In the situation of diasporas, identities become multiple. Thinking about the closed concept of diaspora, supported by a binary conception of difference, does not help to understand these multiple identities. On the contrary, it is necessary to think about the Caribbean cultural identity in meanings that are positional and relational (Hall, 2009). Mejía and Cazarotto (2017, p. 172), in line with this theoretical perspective, observe that “[...] empirical research on the Haitian diaspora stands against binary thinking, as the local, national and global are mutually constituents [...]”.

In the theoretical and methodological scope of gender studies, international migration is a scientific challenge. It is understood that, by incorporating gender differences, as well as gender relations in the analysis of migratory flows, going beyond the description of differences between men and women, migration theories advance towards understanding the experiences of migrant women in specific spheres – family, home, labor market (Peres & Baeninger, 2017).

Current research shows the importance of women on the world stage of international migration. However, this objective panorama of female migration does not make it possible to understand the subjective trajectory of these women. What do they think about migration? What is it like to leave their countries and settle elsewhere? What are the difficulties and the meanings that permeate this process of migration? These and other questions were condensed into two objectives that guide this research: (1) knowing the different migration trajectories of Haitian women and (2) understanding how gender relations occur in the migration process.

## **Method**

A qualitative study was conducted for this research<sup>4</sup>. In qualitative research, the definition of the object of study is linked to its ontological nature. The study of the qualitative determinants of research, according to González Rey (2002, p. 47), is defined “[...] by the search and explanation of processes that are not accessible to experience, which exist in complex and dynamic interrelationships that, in order to be understood, require their integral study and not their fragmentation into variables”.

The object of study of this research is the migratory phenomenon of Haitian women. To understand this object, Haitian women who spoke from their subjective experience about this phenomenon were interviewed. To get in touch with these women, the researcher started a volunteer work at the Parish of Nossa Senhora do Rosário de Pompéia, which is responsible for the Italo-Brazilian Center for Immigrant Support (CIBAI).

CIBAI was created on April 16, 1958. After World War II, approximately 12,000 people moved to other countries and regions. During this period, the Catholic Church

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<sup>4</sup> This research follows the ethical considerations established in Resolution 466/12 of the National Health Council (CNS), and involves the submission of this project to the Scientific Committee of the School of Psychology and to the Ethics Committee in Research with Human Beings of the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio Grande do Sul.

created in Porto Alegre the Catholic Secretariat for Immigration, which is currently known by the name Pompéia CIBAI Migration Mission and works in the reception, regularization of documents and monitoring of immigrants. CIBAI has its own team composed of two social workers and the voluntary service of lawyers, psychologists, nurses, physicians, researchers, social workers, among others.

Some actions developed by the institution are: (a) Reception, legal, social and cultural promotion, guidance, support and follow-up and organization of resident migrants; (b) Information and referral to social services, programs and benefits; (c) Referral and financial assistance to search for personal documentation in the country of origin and official translation; (d) Home visits; (e) Donation of food, clothing for vulnerable migrants; (f) Professional training programs aimed at generating family income, among other activities aimed at the integration of immigrants.

CIBAI paid special attention to the large Italian community around the world. In the 70s and 80s, with the establishment of dictatorships in Latin American countries, Pompéia CIBAI Migration Mission was also dedicated to the Latin people who flocked here, fleeing persecution. In the 90's, it started to serve Orientals and then Africans. Currently, it has also turned to hundreds of international students who are in Porto Alegre and neighboring municipalities and to attend to the immigration flow of Haitians, Senegalese and immigrants from other African and Eastern countries.

My participation as a volunteer at CIBAI began in June 2016, through a colleague who was already doing volunteer work and collecting data for his research with Haitian immigrants. The combination made with the CIBAI social workers was that, in order to collect the research data, a volunteer work shift would be made available to assist immigrants who might need some kind of psychological assistance. In six months, there were few immigrants who sought some kind of assistance with us, although there were many immigrants who sought help at CIBAI.

CIBAI is open Monday to Friday from 8:30 am to 5:30 pm, closing for lunch from 11:30 am to 1:30 pm. The service is located in a building next to the Parish of Nossa Senhora do Rosário de Pompéia, known for being the parish of the immigrant. The gates surrounding the church are opened the moment the service opens, but the door that gives access to CIBAI is sometimes open and sometimes closed. When closed, people ring the bell to enter. The reception is a large room, with approximately 20 chairs arranged in a semi circle shape. The receptionist is in the room, where there is water, television, religious pamphlets, guidelines on Brazilian labor legislation and some books. There, people wait for care, which is carried out in order of arrival. The CIBAI building has many rooms. The social workers Rosana and Eliane work in the first rooms after the reception. The second-floor classrooms are used for Portuguese classes, which take place on Thursday mornings and Saturdays throughout the day.

We were in the last room, waiting, in case any immigrants arrived looking for some psychological help. After months of little contact with immigrants, we tried to talk to Eliane and Rosana to find out their views on the low demand. Eliane told us that few immigrants had contact with psychologists in their countries and, as they did not know this type of care, they did not seek it. She also told us that those immigrants with psychological suffering sometimes showed a certain distrust of the psychologist. She suggested to us that if we stayed in the front rooms with them, helping immigrants in other ways, then maybe it would be easier to overcome this initial barrier.

I started staying in the front rooms with the social workers, helping them with whatever they needed, doing résumés for the immigrants, filling out asylum applications, passport renewals, delivering food and clothing, among other activities. This change was fundamental because, from that moment on, I started to have more contact with immigrants and I was able to be aware of, as well as participate, in the institutional routine of CIBAI.

In some types of qualitative research, it is possible to say that there is no 'data collection' but field work. In this modality, the researcher actively participates in the institution, community or group of people who are researching, which helps in accessing important sources of informal information (González Rey, 2002).

Fieldwork enables interactive contact between researcher and researched within a context relevant to the researched subject. This favors the researcher to circulate naturally within the relationships and events that are part of the subject's daily life (González Rey, 2002). Working voluntarily at CIBAI contributed to my approach and interaction with Haitian women immigrants. But not only with them, I was able to get closer to other immigrants, people who work at CIBAI, other volunteers and all this information was important in building the knowledge of this research. This information was noted in the field diary.

During this period of volunteer work, every Haitian woman immigrant who sought the parish was invited to participate in the study. The criteria were to be a woman, to be a Haitian and to speak Portuguese. Thus, over a period of one year, all Haitian women immigrants who attended the Parish of Nossa Senhora do Rosário de Pompéia were invited to participate in the survey. In total, ten immigrants agreed to participate. Narrative interviews were carried out, whose question was related to the trajectory of migration. Such interviews aim to encourage the participant to tell a story about some important event in her life and social context, in addition to providing a detailed description of the migratory process (Matsudaira, 2006).

The interviews were recorded and later transcribed and analyzed. For the analysis, indicators were first developed. An indicator is an element or set of elements. With it, the researcher is able to establish relationships in the context of the studied subject, and then formulate a hypothesis. From the indicators, it was possible to develop the categories. This is an essential moment in qualitative research, as it cannot advance without these moments of integration that represent the creation of categories (González Rey, 2002).

In addition to analyzing the interviews, data were also built from observations and conversations carried out with Haitian men and Haitian women, which were recorded in a field diary. This interaction enabled the researcher to be closer to the everyday situations of these immigrants' lives. Information from the field diary also helped to map some life trajectories of Haitian men and Haitian women immigrants.

## **Discussion**

Through the interviews and field diaries, it was possible to perceive a network of aspects that circumscribe the migration experience of Haitian women in southern Brazil. Considering the different articulations of social markers involved, we could see the following dimensions in particular: 'haitian identity, migrating alone, accompanied migration and language barrier'.

One of the intersections arising from the narratives and field diaries concerns the dimension of nationality and the migration process as an identifying sphere. This aspect

proved to be intrinsically related to family and marital issues, however, it particularly marks a trajectory of identification of the 'haitian being'. For Eva, for example, this dimension of identity is demonstrated in statements with the effect of naturalizing the migration process:

Eva: I [...] ah [...] left Haiti to come here. I took a plane from Haiti and entering Panama [...] from Panama I [...] and [...] how to say? [...] Ecuador [...] from Ecuador I took a bus [...] to come here I pass by one [...] and [...] from [...] I took another plane to come here to Brazil [...]

Researcher: Hmm [...] and why did you decide to come here? Or [...] in this case [...] leaving Haiti [...]

Eva: Because everyone is traveling [...] and Haitians like to travel [...]

After rephrasing the question, a more subjective answer emerged, something about being Haitian man or Haitian woman, and identified the Haitian diaspora. When talking about the Caribbean diaspora, Hall (2009) points out that in this situation, identities become multiple, but there are links that connect them to their specific origin, their island. One of the aspects of being a Haitian man or Haitian woman seems to be linked to this migrant status.

According to Handerson (2015a, 2015b) the term 'diaspora' is an organizing category of the world, as it designates people, qualifies objects, money, houses and actions. This term is used to refer to compatriots living outside of Haiti. The semantic field of the term is articulated by three verbs associated with 'diaspora': 'live' abroad, 'return' to Haiti and 'return' abroad.

Eva's speech illustrates something that is present in the speech of all the interviewed immigrants, that not only Haitians like to travel, but travel, as this is the option they have left. The migrant status seems to be associated with their cultural identity. As pointed out by Handerson (2015a), the 'diaspora' is in the semantic field of Haitians and organizes their world.

Eva migrated alone from Haiti to Brazil and, like her, so did most of the Haitian women interviewed in this study. These data corroborate Peres and Baeninger (2017), who, based on the data already mentioned, describe Haitian women not only as agents of family reunification or spouses, but as people with autonomy over their decisions. I will bring here a brief summary of each trajectory of 'migrating alone'.

Luísa lived in Brazil for 4 years, she had two children, a girl (9 years old) who lived in Haiti with her grandmother and a boy (17 years old) who lived in Brazil with her and her sister. Luísa was the first of her family to migrate to Brazil. After getting a job, she bought a ticket for her son and sister to come. Now she wanted to bring her youngest daughter. She had an older sister who lived in France and who encouraged her to leave Haiti.

Carolina had been in Brazil for 2 and a half years. She decided to come to Brazil to 'search for a better life'. She had a son who stayed in Haiti. Upon arriving here, she met a Haitian man and they had a son, aged 11 months. Carolina had a lot of difficulty speaking Portuguese.

Felipa had been in Brazil for 2 years, she said that in Haiti "[...] there is no job [...] it's a lot of suffering, that's why we come here [...]". Her 7-year-old son lived in Haiti with his grandmother, he has a heart disease. Felipa worked as a general services assistant at a hospital.

Laudelina had been in Brazil for 5 months and came looking for work. In Haiti, she lived with her family and said that only her father worked, neither she nor her siblings could find work. When she arrived here, she went to Paraná, because a cousin of hers lived there, later she came to Porto Alegre in search of a job. She had a lot of difficulty with the language.

Through these five trajectories, we can observe the protagonism of these women as they leave their country alone in search of work and better living conditions for themselves and their families. In a recent survey with a population of Haitian migrants in the interior region of the state of Rio Grande do Sul, Mejía and Cazarotto (2017) found another type of migration, where women migrated with their families or with their husbands. The authors point out that, in this case, Haitian women did not show signs of autonomy, that is, they did not demonstrate the ability to make decisions independently of their partners. And they concluded that migration did not free them from family repressions.

The trajectories of the women participating in this research show a different type of migration from the one described by Mejía and Cazarotto. Women who make the decision to migrate and leave in this process alone, while participants from the interior region of the state of Rio Grande do Sul accompanied their family or husband in this decision.

During the period of interviews, trajectories emerged where women did not migrate alone, at least not at all stages of this process, 'they migrated accompanied'. Even so, it is possible to see a major role in these women's lives when making decisions related to migration. In the next few paragraphs, I will describe their trajectories.

Esperança had been in Brazil for 10 months. She came from Haiti with her sister looking for work. She was the mother of two children who stayed in Haiti with her family.

Teresa had been in Brazil for 3 years. When she was 15 years old, she migrated from Haiti to the Dominican Republic alone, she went to live with an aunt who already lived there. There she met her husband, also Haitian, he migrated to Ecuador and she migrated later. Later they migrated together to Brazil, as a cousin who already lived here said that they could earn a lot of money here.

Antonieta presented a different story from the trajectory of other Haitian women immigrants. Because, unlike them, Antonieta did not say that she left there because she was living poorly or because she did not have a job. She told that she left Haiti because she had problems with her husband's family. Together they migrated to Venezuela, there they began to find it difficult to get food, she said that this was because of the political situation in the country. So, four months pregnant, she decided to come to Brazil, while her husband and eldest daughter stayed in Venezuela to take care of their house. After a while, Antonieta managed to bring her daughter to live with her. Antonieta received financial help from her family who lived in Haiti. Another point that diverges from the trajectories presented so far. All other Haitian women, tried or sent money remittances to Haiti.

We realized that, in the case of Esperança, her migratory process took place together with her sister, and then we see the decision of two women to leave their country in search of work. Teresa migrated alone the first time she performed this process, when she was just 15 years old.

Teresa: I left because of the earthquake, then there was no job, there was no school either, I was studying [...] every school had collapsed, there was nothing. They came and said it would take a year to build everything, so I said: Mom, I have to leave [...] And my mother has nine children, she can't raise everyone, right. All lived with her and there was no way, and I said: Mom, I'm just going, I'm big, I can take care of myself, right. {Are you older than your brothers?} NO, I have an older one! But I told her not to be worried about us [...] Then she said: 'If you want to go, go'. Then I went to live in the Dominican Republic. {And you went there alone?} No, I went with my aunt. {Were you married at that time?} No [...] I was single, I was a girl too [...] {How old were you?} I was 15 years old {When you were 15 years old, you left Haiti to live in Dominican Republic?} Um [...] yeah, I was a girl [...] I was even a virgin [...] (autor's emphasis).

Following the interview, Tereza explained that in fact she went to the Dominican Republic alone, her aunt had lived there for three years and she worked at a restaurant to pay for school. In this speech, we see how Tereza, even at a very young age, made the decision to migrate in order to continue her studies.

When questioning the reason for leaving Haiti, almost all the women immigrants replied that it was because they were unable to find job in their country. Here these women have also been experiencing difficulties in finding work, of the eight interviewed, only two were working: Felipa and Teresa. About life and work in Haiti, Felipa said the following:

Researcher: And in Haiti, had you found job? What was life there like?

Felipa: I've never worked there [...] There's no job there [...] there's only work for the rich [...] poor people can't do anything [...]

Researcher: How do you see it? Only has work for the rich?

Felipa: It's just that the governor there [...] almost everything is private [...] the governor does not help the poor [...] And, if there is a job, some work, it is only for the rich [...]

We understand from Felipa's speech that, possibly, Haitian migrants are people who were in a situation of poverty and helplessness in Haiti. If they cannot count on the State to guarantee them rights, such as job and education, then migrating becomes a way out of this condition of life.

Other authors (Mejía & Cazarotto, 2017) describe the same reasons for migrating. Going to another country appears as a possibility to escape poverty and unemployment in their country of origin. By migrating, Haitian women can provide resources for their children and close family members, as well as for themselves. Being able, thus, to live with more comfort and quality.

Based on this idea of being able to help their families, even migrating alone, migration becomes a family project, as women need to send money to the family. And, if they are unable to do this, they suffer, as was the case with Luísa:

Luísa: I want to work, to forget about everything [...] If I'm at home, it's very complicated [...]

Researcher: And why is it complicated?

Luísa: It's complicated because there's my mother, she doesn't work, she's old [...] Then my daughter is with her [...] I'm the only one who has a daughter with her. My sister who is in France has four children and they're with her, I'm the only one who has to send them money. And the girl has to study, I have to pay her a taxi, send her money [...] for my mother to buy things [...] And there's no food at school, she has to take things [...] that's why my mother always call me saying there's nothing there and I have a daughter there with her, so [...]

Researcher: And her father doesn't help?

Luísa: In Haiti, it's like that, separated, sometimes, if I go through, it gives a little, like... something like that. And she's my daughter, that's how it is sometimes.

Researcher: Yes, so, that's why this responsibility is left to you [...] having to send the money so that your mother can buy things [...]

Luísa: Yes [...] my mother does not have a home. She had a house, and the earthquake destroyed it. The house is rented, we, the three of us, have to pay her a house. Each one has to share to pay for her house [...] we have to work [...] She is always sick and with high blood pressure and at the doctor, we have to send money to buy her medicine. And, for example, now it's worse for me, because she takes care of my daughter [...] she [...] how can I explain [...] she goes through a lot of misery for us [...] I don't want my mother to go hungry [...] (cry).

In Luísa's speech, it is clear how much suffering it was for her not to be able to send the money that helped to support her mother and daughter. Luísa's situation is in line with what Mejía and Cazarotto (2017) say about the obligation that Haitian women immigrants feel to help their families economically and that, when they have financial difficulties to

keep sending money, they become very saddened. This is the reality of many Haitian women I spoke with in the parish, they needed a job because there were children, or parents and siblings who counted on their help in Haiti.

As I mentioned earlier, only two participants were working at the time of the interviews. With other Haitian women I spoke with, I could see that most of the jobs they found were in the cleaning sectors of companies and hospitals. Handerson (2015b) understands that the limited choice of jobs is related to the difficulty that Haitian women face to recognize their diplomas or courses taken. During the data collection period, I saw some situations like the one described by the author. However, I realized that the biggest obstacle for Haitian women to enter the labor market is the difficulty with the Portuguese language. Here are two situations described from the field diary that may show what was perceived about the 'language barrier'.

Rosana attended a Haitian man who wanted to bring his children from Haiti. She saw with him the necessary documentation. From the conversation, I understood that his wife was already here and they were both working. I asked how long he had been here, he replied that he had been here for 3 years. I asked if he and his wife came together. He said no, he came first, got a job [,] and then she came. She had been here for 1 year and working for 1 month. Both worked as cleaning assistants in different locations. I asked if she spoke Portuguese, he laughed and said no. I asked why. He said she was shy. She also said that he learned to speak Portuguese because he asked people what he did not understand, he Googled it. He said that he had already talked to some Haitian women and noticed that, in general, they had difficulty speaking Portuguese, and I asked him why he thought this was the case. He replied that women are shy. I asked him if he meant that Haitian women are shy. He said that they all are, in Ecuador women were also shy and here in Brazil [...] (he stopped speaking for a moment) some are (Telmo-Romano, 2017).

Three Haitian women arrived accompanied by a Haitian man, they were looking for job. He was the one who spoke this for them. Rosana asked them some questions: What's your name? How long have you been in Brazil? The man started to translate, but Rosana asked him not to translate. Two of them had a hard time understanding and could barely communicate in Portuguese. The third understood a little better. Through the man, Rosana learned that they were all married and their husbands worked (therefore, they were not in a situation of extreme vulnerability, unable to support themselves). Rosana began to talk about the importance of first learning Portuguese, and then being able to look for a job (Telmo-Romano, 2017).

In the first situation, despite his sexist explanation, the Haitian man had the same perception that I had of Haitian women learning Portuguese, that they have more difficulty than men. He laughed when I asked if his wife spoke Portuguese, his speech raised the hypothesis that perhaps the language barrier is something very common among Haitian women. The second situation shows something that was very common at CIBAI: Haitian women who did not speak Portuguese looking for a job.

Such situations take on another meaning as we look at gender roles in Haitian society. There, Creole is the language spoken at home, while French is spoken in institutional settings, such as schools, companies, government agencies. Thus, everyone speaks Creole, but only those who live in institutions learn French. In the Haitian society, the education of boys is usually prioritized, and girls are limited to the domestic environment. In this way, "[...] girls are lagging behind boys in terms of school content,

making it increasingly difficult for them to later enter formal education [...]” (Araújo, 2016, p. 22).

This gap in formal education and in learning French seems to be directly related to the difficulty of Haitian women to learn Portuguese. Which, in consequence, diminishes their chances of getting a job, as we saw in the second situation in the field diary. Unlike most of the women I interviewed, the Haitian women looking for a job had husbands who could support them.

## Final considerations

The discussions raised in this study illustrate some important dimensions in understanding the migration trajectory of Haitian women. In the report of their migration trajectory, it is possible to see how their conception of ‘haitian identity’ is related to the condition of migrant. The ‘pati’ (to leave) or ‘vwayaje’ (to travel) are present in the speech of Haitian women and find in these verbs the possibility of combining a life in the present.

The ‘migration alone’ of Haitian women interviewed here showed something that differs from current research in this field. While some research shows us in numbers the significance of women in Haitian migration, little is known about their trajectories. With the speech of these women interviewed, it is possible to know a part of their trajectories and what we find are women who played a leading role in the migratory experience in their lives. And they did this by making the decision to migrate, by migrating alone, often becoming responsible for the support of the family that stayed in Haiti.

The interviews showed that, even in cases of ‘accompanied migration’, it is possible to see this role in women, as their migration, made up of stages, passing through different countries, sometimes included sections where they migrated and had to make decisions on their own.

The fieldwork made it possible to make contact with immigrants who would not be interviewed and this moment was essential to understand the language barrier. Many Haitian women express difficulty in learning the Portuguese language, which may be related to the limited access these women have to formal education in Haiti.

Through what has been exposed, it is possible to see that there are specificities in the Haitian female migration in Brazil. Although the lines evidenced in this study bring new information about this migratory flow, there are still aspects that need to be investigated. In this research, I sought to understand the migratory phenomenon of Haitian women immigrants, and their statements made it possible to see that this is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, in which issues such as identity, language, gender relations are intertwined in the subjectivation of the migratory process.

Upon completing the work, I realize that some steps could have been different. For example, in interviews, I always started by asking about the migration process. Today I think that, perhaps, if I had sought to know more about their lives, I could have found experiences prior to migration that would be significant for understanding the migration. Another important point to emphasize is that it was not possible to learn about the migration experience of women who spoke neither French nor Portuguese. At least not through them, but through observation I was able to get a little closer to their experience. Perhaps more time watching could have helped to know about the experience of these women.

The volunteer work I carried out at CIBAI was very enriching for the research, as I had contact with other immigrants than just Haitian women, and this enabled a broader vision of the migration and refugee experience. I often had the impression that I was doing an only 'manual' work, making résumés, filling out passport or refuge applications. Nevertheless, it was through this work that I was able to get closer to the immigrants I served, asking questions such as: 'How long have you been here?', 'What about your family?'. Some limited themselves to a few answers. Others soon started a conversation about life here, life in their home countries, sometimes seemed relieved to be able to talk. These exchanges showed me how much this work was not only 'manual' but also listening.

As it is still one of the pioneer studies in our context, the results discussed here indicate that they can be explored in future studies, which can further investigate the concepts explored here with other migratory groups, in other contexts. Thus, the findings of this research offer a still limited and defined panorama of the reality of Haitian women in Porto Alegre, but which can serve as support for thinking about public policies and interventions aimed at raising awareness among the Brazilian population about this very emerging topic, as well as presenting possibilities of reception and promotion of human rights for the immigrant and refugee population.

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