

UCLA

UCLA Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

Haitian Migration to Tijuana, Mexico: Black Migrants and the Political Economy of Race and Migration

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/81j6q0hg>

Author

Julien, Joelle

Publication Date

2019

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Haitian Migration to Tijuana, Mexico:
Black Migrants and the Political Economy of Race and Migration

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in Anthropology

by

Joelle Julien

2019

© Copyright by

Joelle Julien

2019

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Haitian Migration to Tijuana, Mexico:
Black Migrants and the Political Economy of Race and Migration

by

Joelle Julien

Master of Arts in Anthropology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2019

Professor Jemima Pierre, Chair

While the U.S., other Caribbean islands, France, and Canada have been the primary destinations of Haitian migrants over the last half-century, and, though the U.S. is still perceived as the ultimate destination, since late 2016 Haitian migrants have had to make calculated decisions about settlement in Mexico—oftentimes perceiving Mexico as a temporary site before eventual travel to the U.S. As changing immigration policies in the Americas, in response to different processes of global movement generated by the contemporary neoliberal moment, restrict and stimulate movement, these migrants often have to navigate not only domestic, but also international politics as they are in simultaneous transit and settlement. This thesis explores how anti-Black and anti-immigrant sentiments against Haitian people in Tijuana was complicated by first, Mexico's fraught relationship with migrants from its southern neighbors en route to the U.S.; second, the form that anti-Blackness takes vis-à-vis the national racialized discourse and practice of *mestizaje*; and third, U.S. immigration policies. I argue that Mexican

legislative responses to Haitian migration are deployed as a tool to disrupt and affirm the interrelationship between Mexican and U.S. immigration policies; and that examining Haitian migrant experiences in Tijuana allows us to think through settler colonialism and anti-Black and anti-Indigenous formations in Mexico.

The thesis of Joelle Julien is approved.

Jessica Cattelino

Kyeyoung Park

Jemima Pierre, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2019

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

Abstract.....ii

Acknowledgements.....vi

Chapter I: Introduction.....1

Chapter II: A Nation of Immigrants?.....3

Chapter III: Migrants in Mexico and exceptionalizing discourse.....13

Chapter IV: Black Migrants and Afro-Mexico.....22

Chapter V: Mexico-U.S. Interstate Immigration Policies.....26

Chapter VI: Conclusion.....33

Bibliography.....35

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Preliminary fieldwork required for this thesis was made possible with funding from the UCLA Institute of American Cultures and Bunche Center for African American Studies.

I. Introduction:

In June 2018 I arrived in Tijuana, Mexico prepared to volunteer as the building manager of a non-profit organization serving migrant populations in the city. I was interested in the Haitian refugee population that had settled in the Mexican state of Baja California since 2016.¹ What could we learn about what it means for Black refugees to enter the particular racial landscapes of Mexico, which have typically not included large numbers of Black migrants and have historically attempted to erase its African descendant population (Darity et al 2005; Dill and Amador 2014; Moreno Figueroa 2010; Vinson 2005)? And more generally, I was interested in what this movement of Haitian people can reveal about not only new patterns of migration in this neoliberal age, but also the interrelationships of migration, race/ethnicity, and citizenship in Latin America, and the impact on shifting North-South as well as South-South political, economic, and social relations.

Before my arrival in Tijuana, Haitian and Mexican contacts recommended *Liga de Migrantes*² as one of the few organizations that had remained intimately involved with Haitian communities after the initial international media storm in late 2016 that sensationalized an “unlikely” harmony between Mexican and Haitian people, and a new “Mexican dream” for Haitian people stuck at the U.S./Mexico border (Editor 2016; Spagat 2017). Just a few months before my arrival, the Haitian and Mexican organizers of *Liga de Migrantes* had found a landlord willing to lease them a space near the Haitian hub in downtown Tijuana (*Centro*) and blocks away from a U.S./Mexico border crossing. The landlord was explicitly interested in supporting

¹ My curiosity was initially prompted upon learning of the Haitian asylum-seekers clandestinely detained in the for-profit Adelanto prison outside of Los Angeles since Haitian migration flows to the U.S. have not typically included the west coast. (Pierre 2017). I wondered how the Haitian migrants are negotiating the dynamics and politics of being Black migrants in Latin America and the American West/Southwest, as well as how receiving communities are being both shaped by and shaping these Black migrant experiences.

² League of Migrants, a pseudonym.

their efforts of providing a community/arts center for the primarily Haitian population that they served. Considering that most of the organizers had work obligations during the day, but still wanted to keep the center open as a community gathering space outside of organized events and meetings, they were enthusiastic about having me as a stable person at the center. However, just weeks before my arrival, *Liga de Migrantes* was unceremoniously asked to leave the space they were renting. Though the details are contested, what remains clear is that this dismissal occurred soon after *Liga de Migrantes* began providing support, including showers, food, and recreational activities, to members of the Central American migrant caravan who had arrived in Tijuana and had been camping outdoors at the nearby border crossing.³ Organizers were given a sort of ultimatum by the landlord: if they returned to serving only Haitian migrants they could stay, but if they chose to continue openly working with Central American migrants from the caravan they would no longer be welcomed. In solidarity, the Haitian and Mexican organizers decided to leave the coveted space. It would take them another six months to find a landlord willing to accept their stipulations regarding their work with all migrants.

That landlords in Tijuana were more willing to lease space to an organization that worked only with Haitian and not with Central American migrants was unexpected to me. The contradiction—that a dominant narrative about Haitian migrants was seemingly positive, despite how scholars have traced how global anti-Blackness tends to operate in processes of migration—immediately struck me as peculiar (Bashi 2004; Mayes et al 2013). This situation, along with several others I would encounter, revealed to me that Haitian migrants were exceptionalized and used as a foil to Central American migrants in dominant discourses (the media and elected officials). By foil here, I mean that Haitian migrants were characterized as “exceptional” to

³ Central American migrants from El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Guatemala often make the trek to the U.S./Mexico border in large groups to protect themselves from the frequent dangers and criminals found along the route including thieves, and human and drug traffickers (Vogt 2013).

differentiate Haitian and Central American migrants in Mexico as “good” and “bad” respectively, and to highlight negative stereotypes about Central American people. However, in practice (through immigration policies and everyday life), both Haitian and Central American migrants experience anti-migrant sentiments.

I am interested in exploring processes of racialization as a key part of the experiences of Haitian migrants and asylum seekers in Mexico. By racialization I mean, the construction and attribution of racial meaning and thus status to certain people or relationships (Omi and Winant 2014, 28). Understanding the experiences of Haitian (Black) migrants as racialized necessarily entails analyses of conceptions of race and nationality in Mexico, and in particular, an examination of not only anti-Blackness but also anti-Indigenous formations. It also requires exploration of the relationship between Mexican and U.S. immigration policies. This thesis examines how the sort of anti-Black and anti-immigrant sentiments I perceived against Haitian people in Tijuana was complicated by first, Mexico’s fraught relationship with migrants from its southern neighbors en route to the U.S.; second, the form that anti-Blackness takes vis-à-vis the national racialized discourse and practice of *mestizaje*; and third, U.S. immigration policies. I argue that (1) examining Haitian migrant experiences in Tijuana allows us to think through settler colonialism and anti-Black and anti-Indigenous formations in Mexico; and (2) Mexican legislative responses to Haitian migration seem to be used as a tool to disrupt and affirm the interrelationship between Mexican and U.S. immigration policies.

II. A Nation of Immigrants?

Although, from the U.S. perspective, Mexico is often thought of as a country of emigration, it has in fact been a country of significant immigration. In contemporary times, Mexico registers an average of more than 1 million documented entries and exits daily through

its northern border; around a million immigrants live in Mexico; and the country hosts 40,000 Guatemalan temporary workers a year (Gonzalez and Valeria 2013, 4). Historically, the border city of Tijuana has been a prominent crossing point for Mexican and Central American migrants seeking refuge in the U.S. Since 2016, Tijuana has seen unprecedented numbers of Haitian, African, Middle Eastern, and other migrants from around the world in transit to seek asylum in the U.S. Due to increasingly restrictive U.S. immigration policies, these migrants in transit have been forced to make their stay in Tijuana more permanent than expected.⁴

a. Contemporary Haitian migration to Latin America

While the U.S., other Caribbean islands, France, and Canada have been the primary destinations of Haitian migrants over the last half-century, and, though the U.S. is still perceived as the ultimate destination, Haitian migrants have had to make calculated decisions about settlement in Mexico—oftentimes perceiving Mexico as a temporary site before eventual travel to the U.S. However, as these migrants travel to, move between, or settle throughout the Americas, Latin American governments have been overhauling their immigration policies. This is in response not only to rising migrant populations, but also because of tremendous pressure from the U.S. government to stem migration flows to the U.S./Mexico border.

The year 2012 marked the first significant contemporary wave of Haitian people to Latin America as Brazil prepared to host the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Summer Olympics and cheap

⁴ In the case of Haitian migrants, after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, undocumented Haitian migrants fleeing the natural disaster to the U.S. could apply for Temporary Protected Status (TPS), and Haitian deportations were halted. In late 2016, as the number of Haitian people at the U.S./Mexico border swelled, the Obama administration began to detain Haitian migrants, while resuming Haitian deportations. In 2018 and 2019 the Trump administration threatened to exclude Haitian migrants from Temporary Protected Status, and prohibit Haitian people from applying for H-2A and H-2B visas for seasonal workers, which represents a concerted effort to exclude and deter Haitian people from settling in the U.S.

labor was in high demand (Pierre 2017).⁵ In 2013, the Brazilian government responded to this increased Haitian migration by creating a humanitarian visa status for these migrants, with about 50,000 Haitian people receiving this humanitarian visa within the span of three years (Audebert 2017). However, in 2015 and 2016, the economic recession in Brazil and rumors that the U.S. would revoke Temporary Protected Status from Haitian migrants in 2017 upon Donald Trump's inauguration, led approximately 40,000 Haitian migrants to make another perilous 7,000-mile, 3-month journey from Brazil across South and Central America to Mexico in the hopes of making it to the U.S., where many have family (Pierre 2017).

In late 2016, as the number of Haitian migrants attempting to enter the U.S. through the U.S./Mexico border increased dramatically, the Obama administration began to detain these migrants, while resuming Haitian deportations from the U.S.⁶ In response, the Mexican government began the regularization of Haitian migrants—a process that enabled Haitian migrants who were not able to make it to the U.S. before the door was effectively shut, to remain in Mexico. As changing immigration policies in the Americas, in response to Haitian migration, restrict and stimulate movement, these migrants often have to navigate not only domestic, but also international politics as they are in simultaneous transit and settlement. By 2018 about 5,000 Haitian refugees had received, or were in the process of receiving, temporary social security numbers and work permits in Mexico.⁷

⁵ The relationship between Haiti and Brazil began in 2004 with MINUSTAH, the controversial Brazilian army-led UN military mission, and assault to Haitian sovereignty, put into place by the United Nations Security Council to quell the possibility of conflict and political revolt.

⁶ Haitian deportations from the U.S. had been suspended following the 2010 earthquake and several subsequent catastrophic natural disasters that contributed to instability in the country.

⁷ The numbers have since grown.

b. Central American migration through and to Mexico

Central American migration through, and to, Mexico surged in the 1980s in response to a series of civil wars, crises exacerbated by U.S. and western meddling in Central American affairs that resulted in destabilization in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala.⁸ According to historian María Cristina García in *Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada* over two million refugees from these wars settled in Mexico, the U.S., and Canada. García argues that the Mexican, U.S., and Canadian responses to this refugee crisis reflected how each government created policies in their state's interests as opposed to crafting a cohesive, regional response. (This trend has continued in both the U.S.' and Mexico's response to Haitian migration.) Thus, in the case of Mexico, immigration policies towards Central American migrants were at times crafted in reaction to the consequences brought about by U.S. and Canadian immigration policies.

Passage of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) in the United States, for example, created a "border rush" of Salvadorans who sought refuge in Canada to avoid deportation, and then forced Canada to redesign its refugee determination system. Likewise, the Mexican government's very different responses to the illegal Guatemalans and Salvadorans in Mexico influenced the character of the migration to the United States and forced the United States to redefine its border policies. (Garcia 2006, 10)

Often times, these Mexican policies were ambiguous and unclear, in order to deter further migration. In fact, Mexico had no legal route towards refugee status for those already residing in Mexico until civil society organizations pressured the federal government to create these pathways in the migration reforms of the 2000s (Garcia 2006).

Scholarly literature on Central American migration experiences often investigate structural violence in Mexico against migrants seeking refuge, and the relationship between U.S.

⁸ U.S. imperialism and interference in Central American affairs, including CIA-backed coups in Guatemala and Nicaragua has led to destabilization and instability in the region since the 1950s.

and Mexican immigration policies and the securitization of borders. Scholars argue that larger historical processes like state violence and neoliberalism have produced the economic and general insecurity that have created a need for migration, as well as the commodification of migrant bodies as labor (Servan-Mori et al 2013; Vogt 2013). Less focus is on the transnational experience of Central American migrants (Abrego 2014; Yarris 2017). Even less focus is given to the criminalization and racialization of Central Americans, through the media and local governments, in Mexico as delinquents, violent, and a threat to national security (Abrego 2017; Vogt 2013).

During my time in Tijuana, repeated narratives by local officials and new Mexican and Haitian friends and acquaintances that suggested Central American migrants were unwanted and dangerous were heightened due to the arrival of recent migrant caravans. Though my Mexican interlocutors often could not pinpoint where this stigmatization was rooted in, literature on Mexico's adherence to ideologies of *mestizaje* has revealed to me that these migrants, who are often derogatorily referred to as *indio*, do not fit the *mestizo* ideal. Examining the dominant Mexican ideology of race, *mestizaje*, is integral to understanding the racialized hierarchization of Haitian and Central American migrants.

c. Settler Colonialism and Racial Projects in Mexico

“A settler colonial nation founded on dispossession is not a nation of immigrants”

(David Chang quoted in Speed 2019, 90).

Though Mexico has received a large number of migrants during its history, we must consider this quote by historian David Chang in Shannon Speed's ethnography of the effects of “neoliberal multicriminalism” on Central American and Mexican Indigenous women migrants. As evidenced in a special edition of the *American Quarterly* in 2017, scholars of Indigenous

studies are applying a settler colonial framework to Latin American contexts to examine how logics of settler colonialism like dispossession and elimination help us understand experiences of Indigenous peoples in Latin America (Castellanos 2017; Loprena 2017; Nájera and Maldonado 2017; Speed 2017). This same framework can be used to situate the experiences of differentially racialized migrants in Latin America. Understanding Mexico as a settler colonial state predicated on tenets like white supremacy, elimination and dispossession, and recent theorizations like absorption/whitening and labor expropriation, allows us to then examine the historical racial projects in Mexico that have influenced the experiences of migrants today (Castellanos 2017). Using a settler colonial framework to examine the contemporary experiences and racialization processes of migrants in Mexico, then, allows for a historically grounded analysis of anti-Black and anti-Indigenous formations.

Omi and Winant define racial formation as the sociohistorical process of giving racial categories meaning. They understand racial projects as the “building blocs” of racial formation—they are “simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines” —they are happening all of the time, from the individual level, to the structural level (28, 140). Though originally theorized in the U.S. context, racial formation theory provides an important lens for understanding how race is constructed in other geographical and temporal contexts. Within this theoretical model, it is important to understand race and racial formation as heterogenous and historically produced. The assignment of racial meaning and the racialization of Haitian migrants then, must be understood in relation to the changing notions of *mestizaje* that have upheld racialized hierarchies, stigmatized Indigeneity, and erased Blackness in Mexico in the name of

racial unity, despite the pervasive oppression that African descendent and Indigenous peoples in Mexico experience.

Settler colonialism in Mexico has been predicated on the elimination of Indigenous peoples. The racial projects that have served the settler colonial project have shifted from the colonial era, post-independence in 1821, and following the Mexican Revolution from 1910-1920. According to Najera and Maldonado, the settler colonial project in Mexico, in “coproduction with the transatlantic slave trade, indentured labor, and other forms of racial ordering enables particular racial logics and forms of exclusions integral to global capital and empire” (809-810).

Mestizaje, an ideology of race that encourages racial mixing as a part of national identity, informs the racial projects of Mexico and several other Latin American and Caribbean nations. Critical scholars of Latin America understand *mestizaje* as a “nationalist whitening project rooted in hierarchical colonial race relations [that] erases indigeneity by absorbing it into the body politic” (Castellanos 2017).

Post Mexican independence in 1821,

as Lomnitz (1992:276) notes, ‘the complex racial dynamics of the colonial period were simplified in the nineteenth century into a bipolar model (Indian/whites) with an intermediate class of ‘*mestizos*.’ In the more fluid racial classification system that emerged after Independence, skin color was an important signifier but individuals could often redefine themselves into a whiter category based on their level of education and wealth. Upwardly mobile mestizos sought to portray themselves as white, while *indigenas* became mestizos through migration to urban areas and by adopting the dominant culture and language (Villareal 2010, 654-655).

Mestizos and Indigenous peoples are centered in the case of Mexico’s conception of *mestizaje*. In the national imaginary following the Mexican Revolution from 1910-1920, notions of race in Mexico shifted to the idea of Mexico as a *mestizo* nation. Mexican statesmen encouraged the idea of Mexico as *mestizo*— this idea of a racially mixed nation would supposedly erase racial

distinctions and promote national unity (Villareal 2010). However, “as Knight (1990) argues, government ‘acculturation’ programs constituted an attempt to ‘mestizo-ize’ the indigenous population” (Villareal 2010, 655). This promotes racism, processes of racialization, and whitening which is the antithesis of erasing distinctions and encouraging unity. (Moreno Figueroa 2010, 388).

The concept of *mestizaje* is not static and at times contradictory, in that it “stresses Indian assimilation to a Westernized Mexican ideal, [and] at various times it has come into tension with a more romantic view of the Mexican character as deriving from Indian peoples” (Lewis 2000, 902). It is a national racial project that at once reflects and upholds racial hierarchies—with *mestizo* representing the “normalized” and white Mexican—and attempts to “disavow race and deny racial hierarchies” (Saldívar 2014, 91) in its presumption of a supposed harmony brought on through racial mixedness. Peter Wade, an anthropologist of Latin America, similarly argues that *mestizaje* in Latin America can be considered an ideology and practice that serves to uphold white superiority, symbolize racial harmony, and eliminate Indigeneity and Blackness (Wade 1993).

That an estimated 200,000 to 300,000 enslaved Africans were forced to Mexico through the trans-Atlantic slave trade is often silenced in Mexico’s colonial history. From 1580-1640 New Spain, as Mexico was called as a Spanish colony, “contained the second-largest population of enslaved Africans and the greatest number of free blacks” in the Americas (Bennett 2005, 1). Slavery endured for two centuries in Mexico, only ending with “the decreasing importance of chattel slavery toward the end of the 17th century, due to the exponential growth of the *mestizo* populations that represented an abundant provision of cheap labor” (Dill and Amado 2014, 90).

These enslaved Africans formed the backbone of several areas of economic and social life. For example, the woolen textile mills which were integral to New Spain's colonial industry functioned only through the labor of enslaved Africans. And like most modern slave societies, maroon communities of fugitive enslaved Africans actively resisted slavery.

One of the most famous rebellions occurred in the state of Veracruz, where the mountains of Orizaba created an ideal environment for runaway slaves, or cimarrones. It was within this region in the early 1600s that an escaped slave named Yanga established a maroon community and fought against the military campaign of the Spanish. After an intense battle and the loss of many soldiers, Spain surrendered to Yanga's demand that "the Spanish Crown establish a free town to be exclusively inhabited by black people who were fugitives before 1608" (Cruz Carretero 2005, 75). This demand was finally accepted and the free township of San Lorenzo de los Negros was created in 1630, a town that today has changed its name to Yanga in homage to its heroic founder (Dixon and Burdick 2012, 94).

There was indeed a large and significant African presence in colonial Mexico. By the end of the 16th century, African descendant people outnumbered Spanish settlers in urban areas of New Spain. (Bennett 2005) Their influence, by sheer numbers and battle for freedom, was enough for the Spanish sovereign power to officially recognize a population of maroons, as well as establish a town, San Lorenzo de los Negros, for their exclusive use even before official universal emancipation. This city still exists today, and yet, Blackness and Afro-Mexicans are to an extent still not a part of the Mexican national imaginary.⁹ In the Spanish power's recognition of towns of maroons, in order to quell their claims for full emancipation, Afro-Mexican towns like Yanga, and others in the Costa Chica region, continue to exist today. These colonial legacies and the isolation African descendant people in those areas encountered as a result of the ideology of

⁹ In 2015, the Intercensus Estimate, in preparation for the 2020 national census, allowed Afro-Mexicans to identify as such for the first time with the incorporation of the following question: "According to her/his culture, history and traditions, does (NAME) consider herself/himself black, that is, Afro-Mexican or Afro-descendant?" (Moreno Figueroa and Tanaka 2016, 529).

mestizaje that did not encourage the inclusion of Blackness, also contributed to the continued existence of Blackness in Mexico today.

After Mexican independence, and with *mestizaje* informing national ideologies of belonging, the nation entered a period described by Ben Vinson as “a conscious ‘historical forgetting’ of the black population” (Vinson 2005, 67). Although *mestizaje* attempts to imply racial unity, the concept is still foregrounded by “the racist expectation for Whiteness to outweigh the Indian and African” (Dill and Amador 2014, 92). Additionally, “given the debilitating effects of the colonial caste system, propagating *mestizaje* as the unifying ideology to create an egalitarian society is paradoxically contributing to the invisibility and marginalization of Black Mexican communities” (Dill and Amador 2014,90).

With *mestizaje* comes exclusion of those who do not fit this concept, and a silencing and denial of racism and discrimination in Mexico. Social hierarchies in Mexico are still based on color, with whiteness being the pinnacle; language, with Spanish valorized over Indigenous languages; and culture, with the stigmatization and erasure of both Indigeneity and Afro-Mexico—factors that influence how people are racialized in Mexico today. (Villareal 2010). Contemporary Mexico continues to uphold a complex social hierarchy, predicated on the privilege of *mestizaje* and whiteness. As *mestizaje* is perceived to be about language, color, and culture, Black migrants and Central American migrants experience multiple modalities of racialization, including linguistic and cultural racism, in very particular ways. These racisms have affected how Blackness and Indigeneity have been deployed in the racialization processes of Haitian and Central American migrants in Tijuana today.

III. Migrants in Mexico and exceptionalizing discourse

Haitian migrants seem to be deployed as a foil to differentially racialized migrants in Mexico. For example, in a KPBS report in late 2016 on the “unusual hospitality” of Tijuana residents towards Haitian and African migrants, there is a clear juxtaposition between the treatment of Haitian migrants and Central American migrants (Guerrero 2016). Tijuana locals seemed enthusiastic to help the newly arrived Haitian migrants by providing meals and other services, while migrants from Central American countries and other regions of Mexico were explicitly denied these resources. In the report, Mexican and Central American migrants plainly acknowledged that Haitian migrants seemed to be perceived as more deserving of aid despite the similar precarious situations all undocumented migrants face in Tijuana and other parts of Mexico.

Drawing from H. Samy Alim’s and Geneva Smitherman’s analysis of exceptionalizing discourse, I argue that the exceptionalizing of Haitian migrants works to (1) create and uphold racialized hierarchies and (2) obscure the fact that racism towards African descendant people and “othered” migrants is part and parcel of logics of *mestizaje* that inform racial projects in Mexico. In order to make sense of this exceptionalizing discourse, and placing migrants as foils for one another as a reproduction of logics of *mestizaje*, I draw from the work of Moreno Figueroa in my analysis of *mestizaje* as a racist logic that “distributes privilege and exclusion within [the] everyday life” of migrants in Mexico (2010, 388). This logic uses discourses of belonging and exceptionality to create racialized hierarchies; ignores the prevalence of racism under the guise of inclusion and unity; and silences the co-construction of racialization and migration.

Before the arrival of Haitian migrants in Mexico in late 2016, a prominent Black presence in contemporary Tijuana was unprecedented. Since then, Downtown Tijuana (*Centro*)

has become a hub for businesses catering to Haitian people. In the summer of 2018, in a one block radius from the intersection of Avenida Miguel Negrete and Calle Benito Juárez, less than a half a mile from the pedestrian border crossing *El Chaparral*, there were five Haitian restaurants (three owned by Haitian migrants, one Haitian American-owned, and the other Mexican-owned), and two hair salons (one owned by a Haitian migrant, and one African American-owned). I patronized the restaurants on an almost daily basis, and on any given day, I would hear Haitian Creole, Spanish, English, West African Pidgin English's, French, and Portuguese. Haitian migrants would be dining and getting their hair done amongst Haitian Americans, migrants from various African countries including Cameroon, Ghana, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Republic of Congo, and Nigeria, Americans, Brazilians, and Mexican nationals. During my time in Tijuana, *Centro* was also at the center of the volunteer work I took part in with *Liga de Migrantes*. Community social events, book clubs, language classes, dance classes, workshops, fundraisers, organizer meetings, and rallies occurred throughout *Centro*, despite the organization not having a central location to host their events.

During my first weekend in Tijuana in late June, I quickly came to learn that, like the name implies, *Liga de Migrantes* was a space for all types of migrants in Tijuana. That weekend, which coincided with international protest actions against the separation of migrant families seeking asylum in the U.S., as well as world refugee day, I volunteered at several events in support of migrants in Tijuana. In honor of world refugee day, *Liga de Migrantes* organized a poetry night that highlighted the stories and artistic endeavors of migrants they served. The audience was primarily Mexican supporters of *Liga de Migrantes* and families of newly arrived

Central American migrants. Salvadoran women prepared and sold pupusas.¹⁰ Ghanaian, Haitian, and Salvadoran migrants shared their migration stories in Spanish and English.

Later that weekend, I attended an action occurring at the *El Chaparral* pedestrian crossing led by organizers from *Liga de Migrantes*, a Mexican advocacy group of deported mothers, and a transnational organization that has led recent migrant caravans from Central America to the Mexican/U.S. border. The separated families we were marching in solidarity with were part of the same caravan of migrants that *Liga de Migrantes* had supported several months earlier, a decision that ultimately led to the loss of their community space. Though a small group of about 20 people, local news reporters filmed and conducted interviews with organizers. This is where I began to learn the geography of Mexican civil society organizations that have organized for migrants in Tijuana. *Liga de Migrantes*, unlike some other niche civil society organizations, provided support for all types of migrants in Tijuana including Haitian people, deportees, Central Americans, and people from various African and Middle Eastern countries.

Liga de Migrantes also provided social events for migrants as well as the Tijuana population at large. The most widely attended event of the summer, and the last event held at the community space, was the filming of Haitian cooks preparing *soup joumou*, a squash soup that is traditionally eaten on Haitian Independence Day, January 1st. About 100 attendees, again an assortment of Haitian migrants, Mexican supporters of *Liga de Migrantes* and neighbors who were sad to see the organization leave the area, and Central American migrants, crowded on the rooftop of the space to break bread over Haitian cuisine and socialize.

¹⁰ Breaking bread amongst migrants was a typical tool used by *Liga de Migrantes* to promote dialogue between migrants who hailed from different nations. At other events throughout the summer, alongside Haitian organizers, I would assist in preparing typical Haitian meals of rice and beans, fried plantains, chicken in creole sauce, and pumpkin soup.

On several occasions I asked organizers how Haitian migrants were welcomed in Tijuana. I was always told a version of this story: When Haitian people arrived in Tijuana, the population was hypervisible as Black people congregated in the *Centro* area awaiting their date to seek asylum in the U.S. There was an immediate perception of Haitian migrants as being well off since those who arrived in Tijuana from Brazil had “smart phones and nice clothes,” “were willing to work,” and “were not causing trouble”. Eventually, as Haitian people began settling in the city as the U.S. resumed Haitian deportations, Haitian people in Tijuana were considered “hardworking,” “intelligent, and “university-bound.” Describing Haitian migrants as being “welcomed” in Tijuana because they possessed symbols of prestige like expensive technology and clothing, a willingness to work menial jobs as they waited their turn to seek asylum in the U.S., and eventually enrolled as students at local universities did not index to me the inclusion that my interlocuters seemed to suggest. Rather, I understood these seemingly complimentary statements as perpetuating racist stereotypes— ie- Haitian migrants are an exception to the deeply held negative perceptions of Blackness and migrants as deficient and poor. Additionally, as Haitian people waited months at the border, exploitation of Haitian migrant labor was widely reported and young Haitian men were hypersexualized, fetishized and recruited to work in red light district clubs which seemed contradictory to this narrative of inclusion. And though no one I spoke with explicitly mentioned that this exceptionalizing of Haitian migrants was in contradistinction with Central American migrants, who had been described to me as “dangerous,” “not willing to work,” and “criminals”, I could not understand these two narratives as exclusive to one another. Exceptionalizing Haitian migrants upheld structural inequalities and was used to justify the continued marginalization of Central American migrants.

Centro also hosts Avenida Revolución, a main tourist thoroughfare with popular restaurants, nightclubs, souvenir shops, and pharmacies. For many people local to Tijuana, however, *Centro* is not considered a main attraction, and rather a part of the city to be wary of. New Mexican friends and acquaintances would often be intrigued about my work with Haitian migrants, but would warn me against spending time in *Centro*. During my first stay in Tijuana, my host family spoke favorably about what they had heard about Haitian people, though their personal interaction with Haitian migrants was limited to a one-day volunteer opportunity at a local shelter the year prior. Over our first dinner they shared: “We are happy to have them in our community. They are so happy, always smiling, despite their situation. They are such a hardworking people and are speaking our language too! I hear you can find their restaurants in *Centro*, and that the food is great. I can’t wait until we have fusion restaurants”; but cautioned me against spending time in *Centro*: “There’s lots of bad people in *Centro*—addicts and criminals.” These “criminals” I would often be warned against interacting with were Central American migrants, internal Mexican migrants, and Mexican nationals who had been deported from the U.S. and who were highly visible in *Centro* and living on the highways and streets within the city.

On days I had early morning or evening engagements in *Centro*, I would typically use ride sharing applications to get to and from my home several miles away. Upon seeing my destination, drivers would often advise me to stay away from *Centro* and double check that the address was correct. To my initial surprise, they were not warning me about Haitian migrants, but instead the aforementioned “criminals”.

One particular incident during the early morning, on my way to meet up with organizers who were assisting migrants at the immigration office, exemplified a sort of discrepancy in the

public perception of Central American migrants and Haitian migrants in Tijuana. As my driver approached my destination, a Haitian barbershop, and after he had spent most of the ride warning me of the “dangerous” people in *Centro*, there were a group of Haitian men standing outside, and a group of, what appeared to me, Mexican men in front of a nearby business. A cop car stopped in front of the other business and the two cops began to pat down and search the men. I joined the Haitian men and we attempted to ignore what was occurring only several feet away from us. Within five minutes the officers were done searching, entered their car, and drove off. I did not understand what had just transpired and turned to one of the Haitian men to ask if they knew what had just occurred. He told me that’s how the police treat *depòte*—a Haitian kreyol term I would learn some Haitian people use to signify house insecure repatriated Mexicans as well as Central Americans. He continued by stating that

we [Haitian people] do not have problems with the police here, because we are here to work and not cause trouble. There was a friend of mine whose cousin in San Diego came to visit him in a nice car and the police stopped him and accused him of stealing the car, but in general we do not have problems because we are not criminals or drug addicts like them.

Not only was this rhetoric that criminalized these migrants rampant in the Tijuana population at large, but also amongst Haitian migrants. Later on that day, I recounted the story to a new Mexican friend, and also asked what she thought might have happened. She would again warn me about the “bad people.”

They have a certain look that lets you know they are dangerous. You might not be able to tell yet, but they do look different from us Mexicans, so be careful around them.

When I was working with *Liga de Migrantes*, I repeatedly heard variations of narratives that both exceptionalized Haitian people and criminalized Central Americans from people living in Tijuana—from ride sharing drivers, academics, and new Mexican and Haitian friends and

acquaintances. This stigmatization of Central American migrants was not only a xenophobic response to this migration, but also tied to anti-Indigenous sentiments as I would learn that people from Central America are sometimes pejoratively referred to as *indio*—a term that, in this context, is used as an insult that indexes negative stereotypes and the undesirability of Indigeneity in Mexico.

The Haitian migrant figure, when understood as hard-working, intelligent, curious, and resilient during my time in Tijuana, was seemingly put in contrast to the supposed deviant Central American migrant. At first glance, the exceptionalizing of these Haitian migrants and using them as a foil for other marginalized groups might seem to work in favor of Black migrants. However, it served to maintain racialized hierarchies and silence the existence of racisms (both anti-Blackness and anti-Indigeneity) and anti-migrant sentiments. And since the exceptionalizing of Haitian migrants was strategically deployed as a tool to further stigmatize Central American migrants during the height of Central American caravans, I could not dismiss the sense that the seemingly positive response to Haitian migrants would not remain a constant.¹¹

Though I was aware that these seemingly positive sentiments about Haitian people that my Mexican acquaintances shared with me might have been due to the fact that I am Haitian American myself, that Haitian migrants were being used as a foil for Central American migrants became more explicit in the fall of 2018 when another large migrant caravan consisting of mostly Central Americans began arriving in Tijuana. The dominant, and most vocal response from Tijuana locals was one of distrust and fear. Xenophobic, and at times violent protests occurred throughout the city in objection to members of the caravan staying in Tijuana as they awaited their chance to seek asylum in the U.S. My conclusions about the relationship between

¹¹ Historically, Haitian migration has been the precipice of xenophobic, racist, and reactionary immigration legislation throughout the Western Hemisphere.

the exceptionalizing of Haitian migrants and the stigmatization of Central American migrants were further confirmed in headlines from the fall of 2018 like “Border Report: ‘Many People Are Using Haitian people to Discriminate Against Hondurans’”; “Migrants receiving different welcome than Haitian people 2 years-ago”; “In Mexico’s border city, Haitian people hailed as success story”; “Tijuana’s Haitian immigrants seen as a model for other newcomers” (AP Archive 2018; Solis 2018; Srikrishnan 2018; Watson 2018;).

Tijuana Mayor, Juan Manuel Gastelum, even went as far as to compare the caravan unfavorably in relation to the influx of Haitian migrants two years prior.

"Queremos que se les aplique el 33 constitucional, Tijuana es una ciudad de migrantes, pero no los queremos de esta manera, fue distinto con los haitianos, ellos llevaban papeles, estaban en orden, no era una horda, perdóname la expresión y Derechos Humanos se me va a echar encima, pero los derechos humanos son para los humanos derechos", el alcalde panista de Tijuana, Juan Manuel Gastélum Buenrostro.

“We want to apply article 33 of the constitution, Tijuana is a city of immigrants, but we do not want them this way. It was different with the Haitian people. They had papers; they were in order. It was not a horde, pardon my expression. And Human Rights is going to be thrown at me, but Human Rights is for humans who are right (*in order*)” he said in reaction to Central American migrant caravan (Heras 2018).

In this excerpt, the mayor of Tijuana makes a clear distinction between Haitian people who are in “order” and those from the caravan who are not. He derogatorily refers to how Central American migrants arrived in Mexico as a “horde”. However, this was a false narrative. Though not politicized similarly, Haitian migrants came to Mexico in a similar caravan manner and received similar transit or humanitarian visas. Additionally, the majority of Haitian people in Tijuana were regularized in 2017, after their arrival, and upon a special legislation that allowed them to apply for social services and work permits as refugees. They had in fact entered Mexican

territory in a similar fashion as Central Americans in the caravan, and yet the Tijuana mayor, exacerbating the sort of anti-Central American migrant sentiments rampant in the border city, exceptionalized Haitian migrants to further stigmatize Central American migrants.

Yet, Haitian migrants still face overt and covert racism in Mexico. A Haitian friend, Daniel¹², who had recently arrived directly from Haiti to join family who had settled in Tijuana, once asked me and a Brazilian *Liga de Migrantes* volunteer, Lila, over a beer “why do white people hate Black people so much?” This question prompted Lila to introduce him to Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* and led us to a conversation about the ongoing structure of colonialism, and tenets of white supremacy. Intrigued by the conversation, we all decided to gauge whether there would be interest within *Liga de Migrantes* to hold a Fanon reading group. There was enough curiosity that for the duration of the summer, about 5-8 folks would meet at a park in *Centro* once a week to read and discuss selections of *Black Skin, White Masks*. I found the text in French¹³, Spanish, English, and Portuguese for our multilingual group. During our meetings, Haitian group members would read the text in French aloud, while others in the group would follow along using their respective texts. The conversations were free flowing and had no explicit facilitator. Instead, Haitian group members, captivated by the evocative text written by a Black scholar from an island not too different from theirs, would riff off one another—with the conversation often leading to how they were experiencing their Blackness and racism in Mexico.

A thread that weaved itself into several conversations was the sentiment of Brazil being “more racist” than Mexico because of the prevalence of overt acts of violence and discrimination. However, this narrative about Brazil was undermined by numerous stories of receiving subpar treatment in medical facilities, the hypersexualization of young Haitian men,

¹² Pseudonym

¹³ Ideally, we would have had the text in Kreyol, the mother tongue of most Haitian people; however, at the time of our reading group, this translation did not exist.

receiving mis- and contradictory information in immigration offices, and labor exploitation in Mexico. Although not linear, for every example about the difficulty they faced finding Brazilian romantic partners due to anti-Black racism and the stigmatization of Haitian migrants, there were examples of young Haitian men being exploited by Mexican women; with stories of losing pregnancies due to backbreaking work in Brazil, came rumors that Haitian women were being sterilized without consent in Mexican hospitals. Though the specific forms anti-Blackness takes in the various Latin American locales Haitian migrants lived in seemed to differ in perceived intensity, racism existed nonetheless and intersected with various transnational ideologies about race like *mestizaje* (Moreno Figuero 2010).

As undocumented or temporarily regularized, precarity is the norm for both Haitian and Central American migrants in Mexico despite these discourses that attempted to portray the Haitian presence in Tijuana as desirable. And despite the discourses exceptionalizing Haitian migrants, discourses that I argue can be understood as racist, Haitian people in Tijuana still experience covert and overt anti-Blackness and racism. The exceptionalizing of Haitian migrants, then, was not indicative of an absence of anti-Blackness in Mexican responses to Haitian migration, but rather it was used during the height of the politicization of the Central American migrant caravans as a tool to further malign Central American migrants, who have historically been stigmatized in Mexico.

IV. Black Migrants and Afro-Mexico

The recent presence of Black migrants in Mexico is often understood as a radically new shift in the racial landscape of Mexico, unrelated to Afro-Mexico. However, this framing obscures the continuities of settler colonialism, the Mexican colonial legacy of enslaving Africans, and the subsequent erasure of Blackness from the body politic; as well as

contemporary Afro-Mexican people. As Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, a pioneer in the anthropology of Black Mexico, has taught us, we cannot understand Blackness in Mexico without considering its relationship to *mestizaje* (1946; 1958). The Haitian presence in Mexico brings to the fore a number of questions about the concept of *mestizaje* in relation to Blackness: what does it mean to consider Haitian migrants in Mexico in light of the country's known postcolonial discourse of *mestizaje* that has rendered Mexico's long-term Black community invisible?

Though the majority of scholarship on Afro-Mexico investigates the influence and experiences of African descendant people who were forced to Mexico as a part of the slave trade, scholars of Black Mexico have also examined the experiences of Black migrants to Mexico in the post-abolition years in Mexico (Mulroy 1993; Schwartz 1975). These works have underscored the ties between Blackness and labor in Mexico, as maroons from the U.S. were welcomed by the Mexican government to assist in territorial battles at the U.S./Mexico border. In turn, these African descendant people from the U.S. were given settlements throughout Mexico for their assistance.¹⁴ Historian Gerald Horne's *Black and Brown: African Americans and the Mexican Revolution: 1910-1920*, an important text about Black migrants in Mexico, investigates the Black American experience in Mexico during and after the Mexican Revolution. He particularly looks at Mexican and U.S. competing notions of race, and how Mexico had been constructed as a place of refuge for Black Americans during the Jim Crow era. These Black migrant experiences are always implicitly in juxtaposition to the Afro-Mexican presence that has always been systematically obscured by conceptualizations of *mestizaje* in the Mexican national imaginary. Mexico's seemingly positive response to these U.S. Black refugees was clearly tied to the ongoing disputes between the U.S. and Mexico, with this treatment

¹⁴ There were also American Indian escapees who assisted in these endeavors.

ending once the labor of Black migrants was no longer needed after the revolution. This same sort of dynamic, where Black migrants are conditionally included in Mexico, can be seen being played out with Haitian migrants today.

a. Contemporary Afro-Mexico

With state ideologies and practices of *mestizaje* that informed the creation of racial hierarchies under the guise of sameness and unity, also came a silencing and denial of racism and discrimination in contemporary Mexico. Beginning in the 1990s, and in response to the 1994 Zapatista uprising in which Indigenous peoples demanded for autonomy and political recognition, the Mexican state began to adopt ideas of multiculturalism. This was an attempt by the state to step away from the consequences of *mestizaje* that have promoted assimilation, racialized hierarchies, and erasure of non-mestizos.

Instead of the simplistic idea of the mestizo as half-Spaniard and half-Indian, the plurality that existed within the two words [was] highlighted by presenting other scenarios and the human face of the conquest, thus making other understandings of interethnic relations possible (Saldívar 2014, 100).

Under Mexico's neoliberal ideologies, celebrations of diversity and multiculturalism were promised alongside equal participation in social competition.

The Zapatista movement challenged these notions of multiculturalism by highlighting (through their demands) how it is social inequality and exclusionary tools that are the problems in Mexico, not necessarily issues of diversity and recognition. In *Degrees of Mixture, Degrees of Freedom: Genomics, Multiculturalism, and Race in Latin America* Peter Wade takes a comparative approach to understanding the role of multicultural ideologies. He writes,

the multiculturalist turn has had a rather lower profile in Mexico...; it has been a more top-down affair, and questions of race and racism have taken a back seat, with the focus predominantly on indigenous people's rights to land, and political

and cultural autonomy. Indigenismo, hand-in-hand with mestizaje, have remained powerful ideological influences, construing the nation as overwhelmingly mestizo—although a significant minority of people self-identity as ‘blanco’ (2017,146).

In effect, multiculturalism could not address the racism that pervaded the country. The dominant ideology of *mestizaje* continues to uphold which differences are acceptable, while demonizing and/or erasing the differences that do not serve it.

On the state-level from 1990-1998, a state-sponsored program worked to educate the public about Mexico’s ties to African heritage. This coincided with the state’s multicultural approaches that attempted to address the erasure of Blackness. However, this program was criticized for its depiction of Afro-Mexicans as of the past, and not modern. Similar to the critiques of multiculturalism, the program did not attempt to address contemporary racist ideologies and the program also “othered” African descendant Mexicans as foreign. (Dill and Amador 2014, 103).

Lewis argues that for some “blackness is not really useful to them at all because to them being Mexican means being white (and material power) or being Indian (and having symbolic power). One cannot therefore be black and also be Mexican” (Lewis 2000, 918). In a 2016 BBC News, Mexico article, Arlene Gregorius reported on “The Black people ‘erased from history’” and the systematic racism Afro-Mexican people face today. In the article, Chogo el Bandeno, an Afro-Mexican singer-song writer, recalled a time that “the police made [him] sing the national anthem three times, because they wouldn’t believe [he] was Mexican [...he] had to list the governors of five states too.” Clemente Jesus Lopez, the leader of a government office in Oaxaca state that is in charge of Afro-Mexicans, recalled two cases of African descendant Mexican women who were deported to Honduras and Haiti, despite having Mexican identification. According to Lopez, they were able to return with the help of the Mexican consulates in the

respective countries, however they did not receive an apology or compensation (Gregorius 2016). That African descendant Mexican people have been racialized as foreign since Black migration to Mexico has been on a rise, necessarily calls us to understand how historical Mexican racial formations relate to the contemporary racialization of African descendant people in Mexico as well as to questions of citizenship.

V. Mexico-U.S. Interstate immigration policies

I understand the Mexican response to Haitian migrants as both an extension of Mexican national ideologies about race that produce racialized hierarchies and denies the existence of racism, as well as a reflection of the lack of a cohesive regional response to movements of people that effect Central America, Mexico, and the U.S.—not the innocuous harmony that dominant discourses at the time attempted to portray. When examining the complex hierarchized otherness in the border city of Tijuana during the time of my fieldwork, I particularly consider anti-Indigenous formations, the historical erasure of African descendants in Mexico, and the relationship between Mexican and U.S. immigration policies in how Haitian migrants came to be racialized as a foil to other marginalized groups. Thus, responses to Haitian migration, and Haitian migrant experiences in Tijuana must be put into conversation with not only dominant Mexican discourses on race and nationality, but also trends in immigration policies.

Though I did not serve as a building manager for *Liga de Migrantes*, I was able to volunteer and shadow organizers as they assisted migrants at the central immigration office in Tijuana, organized cultural events, and sought out a new locale. As I witnessed Haitian and Central American migrants who were seeking legal status navigate the immigration process, I was struck by how complicated and contrasting the process was. From the moment we would approach the main entrance of the immigration office and the security guard would allow people

in under a seemingly arbitrary system that did not fit the customary logic of “first come, first serve,” to the struggle organizers faced with immigration officers to acquire access as language and cultural translators, to receiving contradictory information from immigration officers, it was clear to me that the regularization process was not in favor of certain racialized migrants—Haitian and Central American migrants in particular.

Throughout the summer, I visited a Mexican National Institute of Migration immigration office in Baja California six times with organizers as they assisted Daniel, a newly arrived Haitian man, and Elias, a Central American migrant, file their paperwork for regularization.¹⁵ I was initially invited to serve as a Kreyol-English translator since Daniel had recently arrived in the country directly from Haiti and had yet to learn Spanish. However, it was immediately clear to me that a language interpreter (what was expected from me) was much less valuable (almost unnecessary) as opposed to the cultural interpretation that the Mexican organizer provided. In fact, after my first visit, accompanying them to the immigration office was for participant-observation purposes rather than the volunteer work I typically participated in with *Liga de Migrantes*.

The first time I arrived with the group, the security guard, a contractor with no official authority or formal knowledge of the workings of the immigration office, would not let me enter and did not give a reason why. I had already been warned that this might happen as the office was known to function arbitrarily. As I waited outside for some time, a couple of Haitian people who had arrived alone waited outside as others accompanied by non-Haitian people were let in as they arrived. After some time, the organizers came to get me and I was allowed in without much protest from the security guard. I was not allowed to enter the room where discussions with immigration officers occurred, but I was able to assist in interpreting the necessary

¹⁵ Pseudonyms.

paperwork, paperwork that had only recently been made available in French. On my subsequent visits, the security guard allowed me in without question, though there were other instances where he would try to mislead us about whether the office was open and whether particular immigration officers were available. Elias once told me that without the help of *Liga de Migrantes*, as a native speaker of Spanish, he could not imagine navigating the system on his own because there were so many unwritten rules and regulations. One example is that migrants are, upon a recent rule change, entitled to having translators attend meetings with immigration officers. However, the immigration office did not provide translators, nor advertise the policy, and individual immigration officers might not allow translators present. He, and I, could not imagine navigating such a complex, seemingly unregulated, and almost secretive immigration process with no, or limited, Spanish. It almost seemed like the system was set up such that failure to meet all requirements was the desired outcome by the state for Haitian and Central American migrants seeking regularization alike.

In the following brief analysis of immigration policies targeting Central American and Haitian migrants in Mexico, I examine how issues of citizenship and migration in Mexico intersect with U.S. immigration policies. In *Culling the Masses* sociologists David Scott Fitzgerald and David Cook-Martin analyze race and ethnicity related policies and legal records of the Americas (1790-2010) to show how democracy and racism exist with one another, despite the dominant belief that they cannot. They use three distinct analytical tools (dimensions)—vertical, horizontal, and variation over time—to show how power struggles internal to a country and international relations influence national immigration policies, and how these relationships and power balances change over time. They examine a wide breadth of documents spanning several countries and centuries. I draw on their work about Mexican immigration policies, to

conclude that Mexico's response to Haitian migrants is a continuation of past migration policy trends that are in relationship with U.S. immigration policy.

Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin's analysis of Mexican immigration policy begins with Mexican independence in 1821. While this paper will not cover pre-1974 Mexican immigration policy, it is important to highlight four key points that they make about early immigration policy in Mexico, as these themes extend to contemporary immigration policies. First, "at the same time as overt discrimination against particular racial and national groups reached its apogee [...], the state loudly proclaimed the doctrine of anti-racism" (Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin 2015, 218). For example, Mexican immigration policies restricted Asian, Jewish, and Middle Eastern people from immigrating to Mexico because "these groups were unassimilable and failing to take part in the process of national *mestizaje*—assimilability remained a condition of immigrant admissions until 1974" (Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin 2015, 218). This form of nation-building in relation to immigration policies is a reflection of the racial project of *mestizaje* that both celebrates unity while in function is exclusionary. Second, "U.S. diplomatic pressure failed to shape Mexico's immigration policy despite the massive asymmetry of these neighboring countries" (Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin 2015, 219). I argue that in the case of contemporary Haitian and Central American migration, Mexican immigration policies have been shaped by U.S. responses to this migration. Third, "Mexico was an early mover in shaping the politics of anti-racism[...] Pushing an anti-racist position was a means to shame the United States on the international stage for its poor treatment of Mexican emigrants; and restrictive U.S. immigration policy deflected migrants to Mexico" (Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin 2015, 220, 232). From 2016-2018, the Mexican response to Haitian migration allowed Haitian migrants to apply for legal status, which was in reaction to the U.S. resuming Haitian deportations. The following sections, which will explore

the Restrictive 1974 General Law of Population, the 2011 Migration Law of Population, and the 2015 and 2016 Temporary migrant regularization programs, will highlight how these themes have extended, and shifted, into contemporary Mexican migration policy in regards to Haitian and Central American migration to Mexico.

a. Restrictive 1974 General Law of Population

Tenets of *mestizaje*, like whitening of the population, had been a focal and driving point in Mexican immigration policy pre-1974. Immigration policies (unsuccessfully) attempted to recruit Europeans, while secret government agendas (successfully) excluded African descendant people and other ‘undesirables’ (Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin 2015). With economic growth in the 1950s-1970s, and a significant population increase as the medical system improved, Mexican policies began to prioritize its population rather than looking to outsiders to whiten (and thus improve) the country. Instead of looking at immigration as a means towards advancing the country, foreign investment and the government’s capacity to provide adequate education and employment to its citizenry became the priority. It is under these circumstances that the General Law of Population (GLP) was birthed (Gonzalez and Valeria 2013).

The GLP is considered restrictive in that it only allowed “useful” immigrants to enter the country. “The new law gave great discretion to the Minister of the Interior to control the levels and types of migrants according to their ‘possibilities of contributing to national progress’ (Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin 2015, 254). Usefulness, unlike earlier policies, was not explicitly about race, but rather about financial contributions to the nation. Skilled professionals and those who were pre-determined to be less likely to rely on the state were welcomed, while others were shut out.

The restrictive nature of this law was “expressed not only in excluding those not useful, but in its resulting consequence: immigrants were generally issued only temporary visas. Obtaining permanent work authorization in Mexico became more difficult than receiving a ‘green card’ in the United States” (Gonzalez and Valeria 2013, 43). This restrictive policy was in sharp contrast to earlier legislation that was rather liberal (ie- Mexico’s immigration laws of the early 20th century which were the first in the Americas that were overtly anti-racist). The GLP was created upon the belief that Mexico’s economic development relied on a restriction of immigration. However, the GLP was highly criticized by Mexican civil society groups working on behalf of migrants, as well as Mexican nationals living abroad. An amendment in 2011 was the response to the overwhelming critique of the restrictive nature of the GLP.

b. Migration Law of Population (2011)

The Migration Law of Population (MLP) was an amendment and complete overhaul to the GLP in 2011. It was more liberal and included rights of migrants, encouraged family unity, and provided education and health services to immigrants. In some respects, the law was created in response to civil society groups who pushed for migration law that would “clearly specify migrants’ rights and privileges as well as processes for status regularization” (Basok 2018, 1280). However, the changes can also be understood in regards to U.S./Mexico interstate relations. In its relationship to the U.S. and emigration, Mexico has demanded fair treatment towards Mexican nationals, but in its own treatment of undocumented migrants, particularly Central American migrants seeking asylum under the GLP, Mexico had consistently been accused of human rights violations. Thus, in some ways, the MLP was also enacted due to the Mexican state’s advocacy for the rights of Mexican emigrants, particularly to the U.S. “The impetus for change came from an elite foreign policy project to use anti-racism as a diplomatic

tool to challenge the United States and increase Mexico's cultural influence in Latin America" (Fitzgerald and Cook-Martin 2015, 219).

The MLP was created to counteract the contradictions between what the Mexican state was asking for from the U.S. regarding Mexican migrants (more visas and fair treatment) and their own laws that failed to grant civil rights to Central American asylum seekers and made it significantly more difficult to receive Mexican visas than in the U.S. Though in name the MLP was supposed to rectify the precarity that migrants faced in Mexico, it did not provide any sort of legal pathway for regularization of undocumented migrants. Again, civil society groups working on behalf of migrants put pressure on the government, which resulted in temporary migrant regularization programs.

c. Temporary migrant regularization program (2015 and 2016; 2018)

Mexico is often considered a transit country for Central and other Latin American migrants seeking refuge in the U.S. Before the Temporary regularization programs of 2015 and 2016, however, Mexico's regularization process of undocumented migrants was not clearly defined. Even with the 2011 reforms, deportation as opposed to regularization was the norm. Prompted by the advocacy of civil society organizations that argued that the 2011 reforms did not provide a legitimate and explicit pathway for the regularization of undocumented people, most typically Central American migrants, the special status regularization programs in 2015 and 2016 created pathways to regularization. A total of 13,275 Central American migrants, about 70% of the total who applied, were able to become regularized and received an Individual Registration Number for social services (CURP) and a work permit (Basok 2018, 1281).

Upon the U.S.' effective closing of the border to Haitian migrants with the resuming of Haitian deportations in 2016, civil society organizations in Tijuana called for the Mexican

government to provide a pathway for Haitian migrations to receive legal status. In response, Haitian migrants who entered the country since 2016 have been eligible for this regularization program, with more than 5,000 Haitian people receiving temporary legal status since then. As such, the Mexican response to Haitian migration continues to reflect the interrelationship between Mexico and the U.S.' immigration policies. Though the special regularization programs seek to provide recourse for undocumented migrants, sociologists Tanya Basok and Martha L. Rojas Wiesner argue that regularizing Central American migrants in Mexico is not a pathway to a secure legal status, but instead leads to a precarious legality. This same analysis can be extended to Haitian migrants who have received temporary and conditional legal status in Mexico.

VI. Conclusion

Mexico, specifically the Baja state, has increasingly become a place of resettlement for the Haitian migrants who were not able to enter the U.S. after the Obama administration effectively closed the U.S. border to them. As temporary residents of Mexico, Haitian men and women are opening businesses, going to school, and starting families. These Black migrants are increasingly becoming settled in Mexico, yet we must not forget that

[race] has established who can be imported and who exported, who are immigrants and who are indigenous, who may be property and who are citizens; and among the latter who get to vote and who do not, who are protected by the law and who are its objects, who are employable and who are not, who have access and privilege and who are (to be) marginalized (Goldberg 1993:87).

The exceptionalizing of Haitian migrants, Mexican immigration policies that provide only temporary and conditional legal statuses, and shifting Mexican immigration policies due to U.S. responses to migration work together to reproduce logics of *mestizaje* that create racialized hierarchies amongst migrants.

Epilogue:

In the summer of 2019, as a new wave of Haitian and African migrants arrived at the southern border of Mexico, the Mexican government repatriated 81 Haitian migrants by flight; and detained Haitian and African, alongside Central American migrants, at Mexico's southern border. Mexico's shifting immigration policy, away from regularization and towards detainment and repatriation, is a direct response to U.S. pressures on Mexico to curb migration through its territory towards the U.S. border. With the U.S.' "Remain in Mexico" program and threats of tariffs by U.S. president Donald Trump, Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, has agreed to militarized tactics to reduce migration towards the U.S. (Brice 2019; Chishti 2019; U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2019). Mexican legislative responses to both Central American and Haitian migration seem to be used as a tool to disrupt and affirm the interrelationship between Mexican and U.S. immigration policies. The question still remains, what will this new inclusion and exclusion of Black migrants in Mexican society tell us about citizenship and belonging and processes of racialization in Mexico?

Bibliography

- Abrego, Leisy J. *Sacrificing families: Navigating laws, labor, and love across borders*. Stanford University Press, 2014.
- Abrego, Leisy, Mat Coleman, Daniel E. Martínez, Cecilia Menjívar, and Jeremy Slack. "Making immigrants into criminals: Legal processes of criminalization in the post-IIRIRA era." *Journal on Migration and Human Security* 5, no. 3 (2017): 694-715.
- Aguirre Beltrán, Gonzalo. "La población negra de México, 1519-1810." *Mexico: Ediciones Fuente Cultural* (1946).
- Aguirre Beltrán, Gonzalo. "Esbozo etnográfico de un pueblo negro." *Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica* (1958).
- Alim, H. Samy, and Geneva Smitherman. *Articulate while Black: Barack Obama, language, and race in the US*. Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Audebert, Cedric. "The recent geodynamics of Haitian migration in the Americas: refugees or economic migrants?." *Revista Brasileira de Estudos de População* 34, no. 1 (2017): 55-71.
- Bashi, Vilna. "Globalized anti-blackness: Transnationalizing Western immigration law, policy, and practice." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 27, no. 4 (2004): 584-606.
- Basok, Tanya, and Martha L. Rojas Wiesner. "Precarious legality: regularizing Central American migrants in Mexico." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41, no. 7 (2018): 1274-1293.
- Bennett, Herman L. *Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570-1640*. Indiana University Press, 2005.
- Brice, Makini. "Trump Threatens More Tariffs on Mexico over Part of Immigration Deal." Reuters. Thomson Reuters, June 10, 2019. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trade-mexico/trump-threatens-more-tariffs-on-mexico-over-part-of-immigration-deal-idUSKCN1TB182> (accessed December 11, 2019).
- Castellanos, M. Bianet. "Introduction: Settler Colonialism in Latin America." *American Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (2017): 777-781.
- Chishti, Muzaffar, Jessica Bolter Muzaffar Chishti, and Jessica Bolter. "Remain in Mexico Plan Echoes Earlier U.S. Policy to Deter Haitian Migration." migrationpolicy.org, August 2, 2019. <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/remain-mexico-plan-echoes-earlier-us-policy-deter-haitian-migration>.
- Darity, Jr, William A., Jason Dietrich, and Darrick Hamilton. "Bleach in the rainbow: Latin

- ethnicity and preference for whiteness." *Transforming Anthropology* 13, no. 2 (2005): 103-109.
- Dill, LaKai, and Louise Greathouse Amador. "El Pueblo Negro: Identity Politics in Mexico." *Latin American Policy* 5, no. 1 (2014): 87-114.
- Dixon, Kwame, and John Burdick. *Comparative Perspectives on Afro-Latin America*. University Press of Florida, 2012.
- Editor. "Tijuana Restaurant Revamps Menu To Give Haitian Refugees A Taste Of Home." WLRN, November 29, 2016. <https://www.wlrn.org/post/tijuana-restaurant-revamps-menu-give-haitian-refugees-taste-home> (accessed December 11, 2019).
- FitzGerald, David Scott, and David Cook-Martin. *Culling the masses*. Harvard University Press, 2014.
- García, María Cristina. *Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada*. Univ of California Press, 2006.
- Goldberg, David Theo. *Racist culture*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1993.
- González-Murphy, Laura Valeria. *Protecting immigrant rights in Mexico: Understanding the state-civil society nexus*. Routledge, 2013.
- Gregorius, Arlene. "The Black People 'Erased from History'." BBC News. BBC, April 10, 2016. <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35981727> (accessed December 11, 2019).
- Guerrero, Jean. "Mexicans Respond To Haitians, Africans With Unusual Hospitality." KPBS Public Media. KPBS, September 23, 2016. <https://www.kpbs.org/news/2016/sep/23/mexicans-respond-haitians-africans-unusual-hospita/> (accessed December 11, 2019).
- Heras, Antonio, and Irene Sánchez. "Que Les Apliquen El Artículo 33; No Los Queremos Así, Dice El Alcalde De Tijuana." *La Jornada*. La Jornada, November 16, 2018. <https://www.jornada.com.mx/2018/11/16/politica/014n1pol> (accessed December 11, 2019).
- Horne, Gerald. *Black and Brown: African Americans and the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1920*. NYU Press, 2005.
- Knight, Alan. "Racism, revolution, and indigenismo: Mexico, 1910-1940." *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870-1940* (1990): 71-113.
- Lewis, Laura A. "Blacks, black Indians, Afromexicans: The dynamics of race, nation, and identity in a Mexican Moreno community (Guerrero)." *American ethnologist* 27, no. 4 (2000): 898-926.

- Loperena, Christopher A. "Settler violence?: race and emergent frontiers of progress in Honduras." *American Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (2017): 801-807.
- Mayes, April, Yolanda C. Martín, Carlos Ulises Decena, Kiran Jayaram, and Yveline Alexis. "Transnational Hispaniola: Toward New Paradigms in Haitian and Dominican Studies." *Radical History Review* 2013, no. 115 (2013): 26-32.
- "Migrants receiving different welcome than Haitians 2 years-ago". Youtube video, 3:15, posted by "AP Archive," November 28, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=esuc7s4Rbgo>.
- "Migrant Protection Protocols." Department of Homeland Security, January 29, 2019. <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2019/01/24/migrant-protection-protocols> (accessed December 11, 2019).
- Moreno Figueroa, Mónica G. "Distributed intensities: Whiteness, mestizaje and the logics of Mexican racism." *Ethnicities* 10, no. 3 (2010): 387-401.
- Moreno Figueroa, Mónica G., and Emiko Saldívar Tanaka. "'We Are Not Racists, We Are Mexicans': Privilege, Nationalism and Post-Race Ideology in Mexico." *Critical Sociology* 42, no. 4-5 (2016): 515-533.
- Mulroy, Kevin. *Freedom on the border: The Seminole maroons in Florida, the Indian territory, Coahuila, and Texas*. Texas Tech University Press, 1993.
- Nájera, Lourdes Gutiérrez, and Korinta Maldonado. "Transnational settler colonial formations and global capital: A consideration of indigenous Mexican migrants." *American Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (2017): 809-821.
- Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant. *Racial formation in the United States*. Routledge, 2014.
- Pierre, Jemima. "Black Life in Adelanto." Boom California, December 25, 2017. <https://boomcalifornia.com/2017/12/25/black-life-in-adelanto/> (accessed December 11, 2019).
- Saldívar, Emiko. "'It's Not Race, It's Culture': Untangling Racial Politics in Mexico." *Latin American and Caribbean ethnic studies* 9, no. 1 (2014): 89-108.
- Schwartz, Rosalie. "Across the Rio to freedom." *US Negroes in Mexico. El Paso, TX: The University of Texas at El Paso* (1975).
- Servan-Mori, Edson, Rene Leyva-Flores, Cesar Infante Xibille, Pilar Torres-Pereda, and Rodrigo Garcia-Cerde. 2014. "Migrants Suffering Violence While in Transit Through Mexico: Factors Associated with the Decision to Continue or Turn Back." *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health* 16 (1): 53–59.

- Silva, Graziella Moraes, and Emiko Saldivar. "Comparing Ideologies of Racial Mixing in Latin America: Brazil and Mexico." *Sociologia & Antropologia* 8, no. 2 (2018): 427-456.
- Solis, Gustavo. "Tijuana's Haitian Immigrants Seen as a Model for Other Newcomers." *Los Angeles Times*, December 8, 2018. <https://www.latimes.com/world/mexico-americas/la-fg-haitians-tijuana-mexico-20181208-story.html> (accessed December 11, 2019).
- Spagat, Elliot. "Stopped at U.S. Border, Haitians Find 'Mexican Dream' Instead." *The Denver Post*. *The Denver Post*, September 20, 2017. <https://www.denverpost.com/2017/09/20/haitians-find-mexican-dream/%20> (accessed December 11, 2019).
- Speed, Shannon. "Structures of Settler Capitalism in Abya Yala." *American Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (2017): 783-790.
- Speed, Shannon. *Incarcerated Stories: Indigenous Women Migrants and Violence in the Settler-Capitalist State*. UNC Press Books, 2019.
- Srikrishnan, Maya. "Border Report: 'Many People Are Using Haitians to Discriminate Against Hondurans'." *Voice of San Diego*, December 10, 2018. <https://www.voiceofsandiego.org/topics/news/border-report-many-people-are-using-haitians-to-discriminate-against-hondurans/> (accessed December 11, 2019).
- Villarreal, Andrés. "Stratification by skin color in contemporary Mexico." *American Sociological Review* 75, no. 5 (2010): 652-678.
- Vinson III, Ben. "Afro-Mexican history: Trends and directions in scholarship." *History Compass* 3, no. 1 (2005).
- Vogt, Wendy A. "Crossing Mexico: Structural violence and the commodification of undocumented Central American migrants." *American Ethnologist* 40, no. 4 (2013): 764-780.
- Wade, Peter. *Blackness and race mixture: the dynamics of racial identity in Colombia*. JHU Press, 1993.
- Wade, Peter. *Degrees of mixture, degrees of freedom: Genomics, multiculturalism, and race in Latin America*. Duke University Press, 2017.
- Watson, Julie. "In Mexico's Border City, Haitians Hailed as Success Story." AP NEWS. Associated Press, November 22, 2018. <https://www.apnews.com/17b55a4da374462b836ffe4312769ec5> (accessed December 11, 2019).