

Race and Ethnicity across Borders: An Ethnographic Study of Haitian Women in Diaspora

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ABSTRACT

Using a transnational approach grounded in ethnographic research with Haitian women, this paper augments existing U.S.-based literature on race and gender to examine the construction of race and ethnicity as transnational processes rooted in local historical contexts. Focusing on the workplace as a crucial site where race is reproduced, this article draws from the experiences of Haitian women in Boston, Montreal, and Paris regarding race and ethnicity to shed light on the ways in which race is constructed transnationally while remaining locally grounded. Haitian women experience race in each context, but the ways in which race manifests in Boston differs from the ways in which race manifests in Montreal or Paris, due to the specifics of each locale's historical relationship to race, labor, and migration.

INTRODUCTION

Categories of race and ethnicity exist globally and immigrants are perhaps especially well-positioned to reveal the complexities of race and ethnicity across place. The purpose of this article is twofold: 1) to uncover the ways in which race is created and recreated in three geographic contexts, particularly concentrating on the role of paid labor and the workplace; and 2) to make the argument that U.S.-based race theory can be augmented to study race transnationally. Drawing from ethnographic research with Haitian women in Boston, Montreal, and Paris, I employ a transnational approach to uncover the historical contexts that shape

understandings of race and ethnicity as modalities in which social membership and cultural citizenship are experienced, and to illuminate the ways in which national ideologies, combined with relationships to the paid work force, function as powerful influences in the daily lives of Haitian women. I investigate shifts in racial and ethnic identity for Haitian women as they participate in multiple national contexts.

This article takes paid labor as its site of inquiry, examining the ways in which race, class, and labor intersect in the lives of Haitian transmigrants and influence constructions of racial and ethnic identity for migrants and the greater community. Looking specifically at paid labor ties experiences of race and ethnicity to larger structures of the global political economy. Neoliberalism, like race and ethnicity, transcends national borders, but unfolds in particular ways in particular places as it is shaped by the local historical context. Simultaneously, this multi-sited study illuminates ways in which the relationships between and among sites shape expressions of race and ethnicity for Haitian women.

I examine existing literature on women of color and work, especially the scholarship of Rose Brewer, and establish to what extent that research illuminates this transnational population. I also highlight what knowledge about Haitian women in diaspora might add to Brewer's theories of race, gender, and employment. Haitian women's diverse experiences highlight ways in which categories of race and ethnicity are established and maintained through daily interactions in the workplace. These categories of race and ethnicity situate Haitian women within the context of the nation of arrival,¹ indicating varying levels of belonging within the nation in relation to people of other racial and ethnic groups. While focused on expanding Brewer's theory of race, gender, and labor to illustrate how Brewer's scholarship can apply transnationally, this article also adds to existing literature on Black identity formation pertaining to West Indian youth in the United States (Butterfield 2004; Richards 2014) and Algerian women in France (Killian & Johnson 2006) by adding the voices

and experiences of first-generation Haitian women as they navigate migration, work, and race in diaspora.

EXPANDING THE LITERATURE

I met Naomi² at an event hosted by Maison d’Haïti, the major Haitian cultural center in Montreal. She spoke on a panel featuring scholars and activists involved in the Haitian community. I introduced myself after the panel and we stayed in contact during my time in Montreal and beyond. She is in her mid-thirties with very light skin and curly hair. She is extremely well-connected in the community and always involved with activism alongside her graduate studies. On a cold night in January of 2017, Naomi and I met up for an interview over hot chocolate in a café in Montreal. In addition to the formal interview, we talked for hours about our lives and our research. That evening Naomi told me:

It’s hard because I don’t really identify with U.S. Black feminist [theory], though I have a lot of respect for it and understand the context in which it arose.

—Naomi, a biracial, Haitian-born graduate student in Canada

This quote led me to ask the question of what is missing for Naomi when she looks at U.S. Black feminist theory. I posit that what is missing for her is an acknowledgment of how U.S.-based theories fit within a transnational racial framework. Her comment emphasizes how race and ethnicity cannot be fully understood without historical and cultural context. I attempt to address her concerns by deploying transnational analyses of race and ethnicity that can allow for deeper understanding of these contexts. Much of the rich literature on race and ethnicity in U.S. sociology has focused specifically on race within the context of the United States. To explore race transnationally, scholars must be careful not to apply uncritically U.S.-based theories and concepts to other contexts, and to remain mindful of the contexts within which theories are developed. For the purposes

of this article I refer to Vertovec's most basic definition of transnationalism as "multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states" (Vertovec 1999). In addition to the wealth of scholarship produced on race and ethnicity in the U.S. context, we can also draw from the work of postcolonial scholars such as Frantz Fanon (2008), Paul Gilroy (1993), Stuart Hall (1996), Jacqui Alexander (2005), and others. Though the work of postcolonial scholars such as these provides one piece of the puzzle for analyzing race transnationally, the focus of this article is the ways in which U.S.-based scholarship on race can be used with care to study race transnationally. Through transnational analyses of the ways in which race and ethnicity are constructed we can build upon existing theories, testing, challenging, and developing ever more nuanced understandings of race and ethnicity. I contend that aspects of U.S. black feminist theory can do important work in describing and analyzing how the work site becomes a place of racial formation.

Feminist theories of race and paid labor provide a basis for understanding the intersecting power relations at play for Haitian women within the global political economy. Following the work of Marxist feminist scholars, I argue that paid labor is inseparable from issues of gender, culture, and the global political economy (Brewer 1999; Ong 2010). Early Marxist feminists argued that women's oppression is rooted in their relationship to the means of production vis-à-vis men (Benston 1989). Some have suggested that women's employment outside the home is empowering, and leads to greater gender equality in the household. This argument largely evolved from studies of white, middle-class, heterosexual women in the United States as they have struggled to gain gender equality within the workforce.

For Haitian women, the things that they share with middle-class white women in the U.S. because of gender are inflected differently because of race, citizenship status, and language, as well as gender (Charusheela 2003; Kim 2013). S. Charusheela argues that paid work historically has had very different mean-

ings for descendants of slaves and immigrants who are brought to metropolises to perform cheap labor. Charusheela goes so far as to assert, “The actual experience of work, far from being liberation from the bonds of home, was and is often demeaning, undignified, and oppressive” (2003, p. 298). In addition to the challenges of reframing normative gender relations within the household, women of color have experienced work outside of the household as degrading but necessary for survival. On top of the challenges of paid work, rather than freeing women of color from the bonds of the household, work outside the home involves a double day for many women, as they must perform work outside the home while also taking care of their families.

U.S.-based theories of race and ethnicity can be used to inform transnational analyses, but only if thoughtfully applied with attention to how the local context shaped the development of the theories. This article draws from the seminal works of renowned U.S. feminist scholars Rose Brewer (1999) and Evelyn Nakano Glenn (2011) to examine how the lived experiences of Haitian women in diaspora might enable us to extend and augment current scholarship about how labor affects the lives of women of color in intersecting and historically constituted ways. The racial and gendered division of labor is rooted in social, and arguably cultural, systems of meaning.

Looking particularly at the U.S. context, Brewer identifies the ways in which the position of Black women within the U.S. labor system reflects the historical and systematic oppression of Black women. Glenn, also focusing on the U.S., examines the intersection of race and labor in three local sites, creating a comparative historical analysis of race and gender, labor, and citizenship during the era of U.S. Reconstruction. While these two authors specifically write about the United States, I argue that their theories of race, gender, and labor as rooted in a cultural system of meaning and material relations can elucidate the racialized processes of citizenship-making in other nations as well, especially in this age of transnational neoliberalism. Simultane-

ously, the experiences of Haitian women in diaspora in this study can draw attention to how we need to adapt these theories when examining these processes outside of the United States.

At the core of Brewer's analysis is the notion that women of color occupy a position within the paid work force that is determined by race, gender, and class. Black women in the United States are often relegated to poorly paid, gender-segregated jobs, such as domestic labor and clerical work, and face disproportionate rates of unemployment while engaging in unpaid and devalued social reproductive labor (Brewer, 1999; Marable, 2015). Black women's placement within labor hierarchies in the United States remains intertwined with global neoliberal projects that systematically track women and minorities into insecure forms of employment, consisting of positions that fluctuate based on the ebb and flow of capitalist market demands (Brewer 1999; Kim 2013).

By adapting Brewer's analysis of Black women's relationships to paid labor in the United States to look at experiences of Haitian women in Boston, Montreal, and Paris, I argue that the historical relationship of each nation to colonialism, racism, gender oppression, and xenophobia influences the ways that Haitian women become situated within the workforce. Similarly, I assert that Glenn's historically situated analysis of race, gender, labor, and citizenship can inform a transnational analysis of the ways that Haitian women's labor connects them to forms of both membership and exclusion in various nations.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

To contextualize my ethnographic data on Haitian women, race, and labor, I now provide a brief history of Haitian migration, and an overview of each of the three field sites. August 14, 1791, marked the beginning of the Haitian Revolution, a slave revolt that defeated Napoleon's army and led to Haitian Independence in January of 1804 (Dayan 1995). Haiti became the first independent Black republic in the world. Following the revolution, Haiti

fought a battle of international diplomacy for over half a century to gain recognition as an independent nation-state while the international community, notably the United States, France, and the Vatican, refused to come to terms with the implications of an independent Black nation (Trouillot 1995). France demanded that Haiti pay reparations to compensate for the economic loss of the colony. Haiti endured serious political instability, including a military occupation by the United States beginning in 1915 that lasted for 19 years. The occupation officially ended in 1934, but the United States continued to play a large role in Haiti both politically and financially (Levin 1995).

A few decades after the end of U.S. occupation marked the start of the brutally repressive Duvalier dictatorship, which lasted almost thirty years, from 1957 to 1986 (James 2010). Foreign governments continued to play a large role in Haitian politics following the Duvalier regime by supporting political candidates who aligned with foreign interests and by orchestrating the coup d'état that overthrew President Aristide in 1991. Most recently, prominent interventions in Haiti have taken the form of foreign aid with restrictive conditions and the proliferation of activity by nongovernmental organizations, which some scholars argue has become a form of neocolonialism (Schuller 2008).

The first major flow of Haitian emigration occurred during the Duvalier regime (Basch, Schiller, & Blanc 2005). Under the dictatorship, many intellectuals and members of the political opposition fled to the United States, Canada, and France, among other nations, since these governments historically played a large role in Haitian politics (Basch, Schiller, & Blanc 2005; Delachet-Guillon 1996). Canada never occupied Haiti in an official sense, but Canadian banks opened in Haiti during the Duvalier dictatorship in order to advance Canadian business interests in the nation, despite that fact that investing in the Duvalier dictatorship supported the oppressive regime and continued to fuel the out-migration of Haitians, many of whom landed in Montreal (Bernardin 1974).

The first wave of immigrants consisted almost exclusively of middle- and upper-class Haitians, many of whom faced poverty and discrimination because of migrating. To make a living, Haitian immigrants had to enter the workforce in subordinate roles, many taking jobs in service industries, especially in health care as physicians' aides and hospital workers (Basch Glick Schiller, & Szanton Blanc 2005).

This study focuses on three metropolitan areas, one in each country, in which many Haitians have made their homes and developed thriving diasporic communities: Boston, Montreal, and Paris.

Boston, Massachusetts, USA

Beginning with the first wave of Haitian migrants in the late 1950s, the number of people of Haitian ancestry in the United States continues to grow steadily, with an estimated 290,000 people in 1990, 548,000 in 2000, and 830,000 in 2009 (Buchanan 2010). Haitians in the first wave of migration to Boston in the 1960s and 1970s found themselves in the midst of violent race riots over the desegregation of schools. Caught in the middle of longstanding racial tensions between white and African American residents of the city, they shared the brunt of the anger that many white residents directed at all Black people. As in other U.S. destinations for Haitian migrants, Boston's long history of racial tensions has seriously influenced the inclusion and exclusion of Haitians from dominant U.S. society. Massachusetts is home to the third-largest Haitian community in the United States, following Florida and New York. The Haitian community in Massachusetts has played an important role in the cultural and economic life of the state over the past 50 years. As of 2004, there were an estimated 60,630 Haitians in Massachusetts, mostly concentrated around Boston and its outlying suburbs (Jackson 2011). In Boston, 20% of Haitians work in health care support occupations, including as registered nurses and in administrative support positions (Menino 2009).

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

The first major wave of Haitian migrants to Quebec occurred during the period known in Quebec as *la révolution tranquille*—the quiet revolution, which allowed for the migration of primarily upper-class, French-speaking Haitians to take professional jobs in the province during the 1960s (Mills 2013; Pegram 2005). By 1974, Haitian migrants made up the largest number of migrants coming to Quebec, accounting for 14.5% of total incoming migrants (Jadotte 1977). When increasing numbers of lower-class Haitians began to migrate to Quebec in subsequent years, the provincial and national governments shifted to an immigration policy that prioritized labor-ability over race and ethnicity. In the case of Haitians in Quebec, the first wave of migrants was temporarily accepted into the nation because of their professional and French-language skills. Quebec only began recruiting Haitians after first attempting to recruit French-speaking Europeans. This history reveals the interconnectedness of race, labor, and class in who was included in the nation. Today, Haitians are one of the largest non-European ethnic groups in Canada. As of 2001, 82,000 Haitians lived in Canada, 90% of whom lived in Quebec (Statistics Canada 2007).

Paris, Île-de-France, France

France's national policy on race is legally mandated colorblindness. Collecting data on race through any national census is forbidden. This supposed colorblindness, however, does not translate into an absence of racial tensions, nor does it alter assumptions about which people properly represent the French nation. French law makes it difficult to know exactly how large the Haitian community is in France, but estimates coalesce around anywhere between 30,000 to 60,000, primarily concentrated in the Paris region (Delachet-Guillon, 1996; Fleurimond 2003).¹ France is considerably farther from Haiti than the Caribbean and North American destinations that attract Haitian migrants, but Haiti's history as a former colony of France gives that nation a certain

familiarity and appeal to Haitians who have the means to travel there. Over past decades the Haitian community in France has shifted between moments of great political mobilization and a virtual absence of visible Haitian cultural and political organization.

METHODS

This project consists of ethnographic research with Haitian women in Boston, Montreal, and Paris from 2011 through 2017. In total, I actively engaged in fieldwork for approximately 6 months in Boston, 6 months in Montreal, and 3 months in Paris. My fieldwork included 39 in-depth, semi-structured interviews ranging from one to four hours in length. I identified the interviewees through snowball sampling, with the assistance of key informants in each site. Each interviewee, except one, was born in Haiti.³ Most emigrated in young adulthood, though some in the Boston sample migrated in adolescence and two in the Montreal sample migrated as children, though they still had strong memories of their early lives in Haiti. The vast majority of interviewees lived in Port-au-Prince prior to emigrating and were of the middle and upper classes in Haiti.

As a Haitian American woman who grew up in Boston, I began this project by reaching out to my family's social networks in the city and asked for referrals to other Haitian women who might be willing to take part in my research. In Montreal, I began with no formal ties to the Haitian community, but quickly found key informants through Haitian folkloric dance classes that I attended. My two key informants in Montreal introduced me to many more Haitian women in the community, easing my access to this group. In Paris, I made contacts at a conference on the Haitian diaspora, one of whom became a key informant for my research. In each location, my status as a second-generation Haitian woman whose family was of the middle class eased my entry into the communities for my research. Most of the interviews in each location took place in the interviewee's home, though a handful took place in cafes and several took place within the

women's workplaces. In addition to the formal interviews, I had hundreds of conversations with members of the Haitian communities where I conducted my research, resulting in over 600 pages of detailed fieldnotes.

Basing my analysis on grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Lofland et al. 2007), I coded the fieldnotes and transcribed interviews using Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis software. I began with open coding, and then refined my initial codes to capture themes of race, gender, discrimination, culture, and labor. Through this process I came to build a framework for understanding how the Haitian women in this study experience race and ethnicity in different geographic locations, each with their unique historical contexts.

BLACKNESS, HAITIANNES, RACE, AND ETHNICITY

First Wave of Migration

The ways in which race is socially constructed as a category in Haiti differ from the social construction of race in the United States, Canada, and France (Basch, Glick Schiller, & Szanton Blanc 2005; Waters 1999). In Haiti, race and class function as interconnected categories, with lighter-skinned Haitians tending to occupy positions of power and membership in the higher socioeconomic classes. Perhaps as a result of the strong correlation between race and class in Haiti, race serves as a much more fluid category in Haiti than in the United States. For instance, a person's race in Haiti may change based on his or her social and economic situation, rather than being fixed based on one's skin color. When moving to the United States, Haitians face much less flexible racial categories that impact their interpersonal relations (Waters 1999, p. 31).

In Montreal, the first wave of Haitian migrants encountered issues of social integration. The government opened its borders to Haitian migrants of a certain class because Quebec needed skilled laborers to replenish the workforce due in large part to Quebec's low birthrate. Around the same time many Haitian

intellectuals were seeking asylum from the Duvalier dictatorship. According to a first-hand account by one of the early Haitian migrants, this government-level desire to welcome laborers preceded wide acceptance of the idea of socially integrating foreigners at the level of the general population.

Quebec, a francophone nation within a larger Anglophone nation, has fought to maintain French Canadian ethnic and cultural identity, leaving many unsettled by the sudden influx of foreigners, even those who speak French. This feeling of viewing immigrants as forever foreign permeates a statement by Guerda, a retired nurse in her late 60s. She is also a feminist activist and works for the public radio corporation. She is small in stature, and has short grey hair and medium brown skin. She told me about her entry into Quebec's workforce during an interview in the living room of her home, a bright and sunny space, on a cold winter morning in 2016.

I remember when I was studying to become a nurse, an instructor told me that I was a representative of my country. And I thought, "A representative of my country? What does that mean? I can't represent my country. I am from Haiti, but I'm not here to represent my country. No one gave me an ambassador's mandate. Would you evaluate me for who I am inside this course?"⁴

—Guerda (Montreal)

The wariness about foreigners in Montreal largely was expressed through anxieties about maintaining French Canadian ethnic identity and a persistent assumption that Quebec's history is that of white French Canadians, despite the fact that today 1 in 5 people in Montreal are foreign born. In 2017, the city of Montreal marked its 375th anniversary with a video that included only white French Canadians, providing a clear example of the enduring image of Quebec's people despite the great diversity in Montreal today. The video sparked outrage from minorities in the city and was quickly taken down and replaced by media that more

accurately depicted the city's diversity. Each Haitian woman I interviewed that week expressed their dismay over the racism of excluding all but French Quebecers in Montreal's history.

Many immigrants know of racial tensions in the United States before migrating and are prepared to encounter a certain amount of structural racism, but sometimes they feel unprepared to face the interpersonal racism that they experience. While Haitians immigrating to the United States may not feel antagonism towards white Americans, since they did not historically experience slavery in the United States, white Americans often see Haitians as African American, and therefore may subject Haitians to the same racist treatment doled out to African Americans. This was particularly true for the early wave of immigrants, in the 1960s and 1970s, many of whom had light skin and enjoyed a privileged status in Haiti prior to migrating (Pierre-Louis 2013). The experience of racism may have been particularly shocking for the first major wave of Haitian immigrants in the 1960s since they arrived in the United States in the midst of racial tensions surrounding the civil rights movement. In Boston, many first-wave migrants found themselves in the middle of race riots over busing to desegregate schools (Formisano 2004; Lupo 1988). Contrary to descriptions of social unease experienced by Haitians in Montreal because of their status as foreigners, early Haitian migrants to Boston describe scenes of blatant racial hostility and violence directed at them because of their perceived similarities to African Americans. They found themselves caught between white (many Irish and Italian) and African American Bostonians. Josephine, a middle-aged woman in Boston, reflected on the racial and ethnic tensions in the city when she arrived:

There were certain areas in Boston you couldn't venture into because it could really cost—you could end up being very hurt. So it was hard. I mean, I remember it being very scary, more scary than anything else. Because I lived in fear all the time, not knowing, not understanding ...

My sister probably had it a little easier than I did, but I went to [public high school]. At the time, it was being desegregated, and it was during busing. We were bused to school, with police escort. We had riots every other day. You're in class one minute, next thing you know riot, boom, you're home. So you were not getting a proper education ...

But you get thrust into Boston in the middle of desegregation and it's racist and it's cold. The black kids don't like you. The white kids don't like you. The Haitian kids who are somewhat hip don't want to associate with you because you've just come.

—Josephine (Boston)

Haitian immigrants have at times aligned themselves with African Americans (Marcelin 2005; Waters 1999) and at other times defined themselves as distinctly separate from African Americans (Marcelin 2005; Basch Glick Schiller, & Szanton Blanc 2005; Waters 1999).

In both the Boston and Montreal contexts, the first wave of Haitian migrants in the 1960s and 1970s entered into contested and emergent racial hierarchies. The nuances of those hierarchies and the ways in which racial and ethnic identity are inflected varies depending on the historical context of each site. These examples illustrate how racial tensions affected early Haitian migrants in work, in school, and in the streets. The following section focuses on the nexus of race, ethnicity, and work to highlight the ways in which the workplace served as a stage upon which anxieties over race and ethnicity played out for Haitian workers and their colleagues.

Race, Ethnicity, and Work

Perceptions that Haitians are hard workers and good employees, both from within immigrant communities and from dominant Western society, has led employers in North America and France to seek out Haitian women, often as domestic workers (Delachet-Guillon 1996; Waters 1999). Many Haitian immigrants,

particularly in the United States, are aware of this stereotype and choose to consciously embrace it, expressing great pride in the highly touted West Indian work ethic. This stereotype at times offers a strategically beneficial trope for Haitians to employ, allowing them entry into the paid workforce; however, the image of Haitians as efficient and productive employees continues to situate Haitian migrants as subservient to white Westerners and makes them targets for labor exploitation because of the assumption they will not or cannot complain.

The benevolent racism of categorizing Haitians as “good workers” conceals the historical and contemporary destabilization of the Haitian economy and exploitation of Haitian labor that has led so many Haitians to seek work abroad. Western nations have played a crucial role, though to varying degrees, in destabilizing Haiti economically, creating the conditions that require Haitians to seek employment through foreign companies or abroad. Dubbing Haitians as “good workers” sets them in conflict with other marginalized groups in search of work within gendered and racialized labor hierarchies, and creates the image of Haitians as good lower-level employees who can follow orders, rather than as workers who occupy leadership roles.

In Boston’s paid labor hierarchy, early Haitian migrants were clearly differentiated from African Americans. Almost every Haitian woman with whom I spoke in Boston referenced the fact that employers believe Haitians to be good workers, often citing this stereotype with pride. Flore, an elegant Haitian woman in her 80s who migrated to Boston during the 1950s, speaks to this perception. She migrated with her husband as one of the first Haitian families in Boston. She reflected on the influx of Haitians during the first major wave of migration in the 1960s. During an interview in her home in a well-to-do suburb of Boston, with her daughter and grandchildren gathered in the next room, Flore told me:

Because Haitian people, there is something good in Haitians. When they come here, they work. They see

Haitian people will have two, three jobs. When they go to do a job, they work.

Every Haitian who goes to the hospital, they like them because they're very hard workers. I don't know if you've heard that talk. But they are hard workers. They did like Haitians. Matter of fact, if you say you're black, they say, "You're not black, you're Haitian." But I don't know, you're not black, you're Haitian. That's the way they used to put Haitian people. "You are not black."

That's the truth. And all of these people nearly come and they find jobs right away. There a lot of them in hospital now. Because they are good workers, are real, real good workers. So that's again—See, some people, they have two, three jobs. They go to this hospital, they go and they go and do this. They're very good workers.

—Flore (Boston)

Differentiating Haitians from African Americans in this way sheds light on the racial tensions between white and black Americans at this time. White employers in certain circumstances privileged Haitian workers over African Americans, using the trope of Haitians as hard-working as a way to situate Haitians above African Americans in the labor hierarchy. By privileging Haitians above African Americans, white employers fostered divisiveness along ethnic lines rather than a Black solidarity between African Americans and immigrants that could have had more power to challenge conditions in the workplace.

In stark contrast, Haitians I have spoken to in Montreal were surprised to hear of the prevalence of the "good worker" stereotype in Boston. Many in Montreal cite having been able to find fulfilling work, despite the challenges of being Black immigrant women. Without the challenge of situating themselves in relation to the largely invisible native Black Quebecers, Haitians in Montreal cited their status as foreigners as more of a roadblock than

the fact that they are Black. In Montreal racism and xenophobia are inextricably linked, as someone who is Black is automatically assumed to be non-native.

For Haitians in Montreal, the race issues are more subtle than in the United States, often involving othering comments about hair or asking Haitian women to perform their Haitian-ness in some way in an overzealous, and sometimes offensive, display of multicultural appreciation. For instance, several Haitians in Montreal stated that coworkers would make offhanded comments about their food in a sometimes complimentary, but always othering manner.

Guerda reflects on her entry into Quebec's workforce as a Black woman in the 1970s:

I moved [to Quebec] in the 1970s and it was very difficult for Black women, very difficult. We were expected to stay in our low-level jobs and not advance. There was this condescendence. I remember when I arrived at the hospital for my job and they all knew that I was the new hire, but no one would even look at me. I was the only Black person there. So I loudly said, "My name is Guerda. I am a part of your team now." A few years later, when they had come to trust me, they told me that they were not very happy that I had started working with them because they were not used to working with Black people.⁵

—Guerda (Montreal)

Guerda forcefully inserted herself into her new work team, boldly introducing herself and stating her position as if daring her new coworkers to challenge her right to be there.

Farah, a Haitian woman who moved to Montreal in 2005, reported that she sees subtle racism in her workplace today. Farah is a tall, dark-skinned woman with shoulder-length straightened hair. She wears glasses and has a slight gap between her front teeth. She works part-time as an event coordinator for a company in Montreal, and part-time as a self-employed fitness coach.

During an interview in a small, unfinished room at the center where she works as a fitness coach, Farah said:

Racism is] subtle here. It's very subtle. Sometimes if you don't have two situations you won't feel it. They hide it very well, but it's mostly in the job I have right now, because in the job I have I'm a receptionist/event coordinator. And then sometimes for example if I am at the reception desk some people might come and they don't say "hi." But I will notice that sometimes when I have a lot of work I have a temp come to work as a second receptionist for 4 hours. Often she's blonde, someone white. If for example I am behind her, the same person who never says hello to me will greet her with, "Hi, how are you?" But with me they never say "Hello." So it's like that, really subtle.

But you really have ... I'm not looking for racism, but there is a difference in comportment when there's someone who's like them, who's not me. For example, the Black employees in the office, and we don't have many, but there are 2 Black people out of 80 employees. There are differences. The white people, when they are together they are friends with each other, they walk together, they are always together, but the Black people have to walk alone and don't really have friends here.

Here it's very subtle. If you don't find yourself in certain situations you would say, "Oh, it's a welcoming country, they love Black people, they love immigrants!" You know, if I'm in the States I know they don't like Black people so I will be careful, you know? But here, you tend not to be careful but they are after you. They are really racist here but they hide it really well so you cannot say they are racist.⁶

—Farah (Montreal)

Paris did not receive the same influx of Haitian migrants as did Montreal and Boston during the first wave of Haitian emi-

gration under the Duvalier dictatorship; however, a small number of Haitians have lived, worked, and studied in France since the colonial days when Saint Domingue was a French colony. In France, lack of a large, visible presence allows Haitians smoother integration than migrants from Africa and the Middle East. Similar to the ways in which Haitians situated themselves in relation to Black Americans in Boston, Haitians in Paris are situated in relation to Muslim, North African immigrants. Though different than race in the United States and in Montreal, North African immigrants and their children experience discrimination in France on the basis of skin color and religion (Beaman 2017).

While the Haitian Revolution dealt a huge blow to France as an imperial power, the Algerian Revolution is a more recent military defeat that weighs heavily on French consciousness, particularly as large numbers of North Africans have migrated to France in recent decades. Many perceive the influx of North African migrants as a threat to the French nation, as it represents a reversal of the imperial flow of the French population as they colonized North Africa. Though Haitians and North Africans are both Black and therefore visually marked as not fully French, Haitians are considered closer to the ideal of “Frenchness” by way of their dress and affiliation with Christianity. Afro-Caribbeans were positioned against Africans, in that Afro-Caribbeans were considered closer to white (Bazenguissa-Ganga 2012). In comparison to North Africans, Haitians are therefore considered more easily assimilated into the French nation. In the current moment, racism largely takes the shape of Islamophobia in France (Scott, 2007), temporarily rendering Christian Haitians as part of the dominant French cultural identity that stands against immigrant and native-born French Muslims.

An example of this is the way that Mirlande, one of my research participants in Paris in the summer of 2017, spoke about Muslims from North Africa. Mirlande is a middle-aged woman with light brown skin. Each time I saw her she dressed very modestly, in a matronly manner that makes her appear older than she is. Her hair is always pulled back into a tight bun at the nape of

her neck, and she likes to wear colorful 1980s-style headbands. Mirlande first moved from Haiti to New York, and then from New York to Paris, where she lived, worked, and raised a family.

On several occasions Mirlande made comments that signaled her dislike of North African Muslims. One day we were leaving an event hosted by the Haitian Catholic Association in Paris. We left the church's reception area where the event was held and were walking side-by-side to the metro. It was a Sunday afternoon and there were hardly any other people on the sidewalk. Mirlande was telling me about how she brings books for the Haitian priest to read, and how she had just left a copy of *The Alchemist* with him. Suddenly, Mirlande stopped her exuberant storytelling and fell silent. She then whispered under her breath with a hint of disdain, "I bet you don't see THAT in the United States." I saw a Black man walking towards us wearing traditional North African garb, a long tunic and a cap on his head. Pretending not to understand, I asked her to clarify. As we approached the man on the otherwise vacant, stone-paved sidewalk, Mirlande silently but emphatically gestured toward the man with her head and eyes.

On another occasion, Mirlande and I left a Haitian cultural event in another part of town in search of something to eat. It was after 3 pm and she complained that she had not eaten lunch because she had expected there to be food at the event. We asked for directions to the nearest restaurant and set off in the sweltering heat. We soon found a little pedestrian street scattered with small restaurants. The first place we came across advertised that they served halal food. Mirlande quickly dismissed it as an option. Despite the fact that she was feeling faint with hunger, she told me that she would never trust those people's food.

Not all Haitian women in Paris expressed anti-Muslim sentiments like this, but Mirlande's case provides an extreme example of the ways in which Haitians are situated as separate from the Muslim, North African population of the city. By way of religious affiliation and dress, Haitians find themselves more easily a part of the French population. In some cases that separation may

be unintentional, though in Mirlande's case she very clearly and repeatedly differentiated herself from the North African other. While differentiating herself from French Muslims, Mirlande still finds herself towards the bottom of the paid labor hierarchy, performing the gendered labor of caring for small children, just like several other Haitian women I interviewed in Paris.

A handful of women across the sites worked for the United Nations (UN) or other large international organizations, both while in Haiti and while living abroad. Their language skills, often speaking French, Kreyol, Spanish, and sometimes English, put them at an advantage in international agencies. The Haitian women who worked for the UN spoke of a rigid hierarchy within the organization, however, where Haitian women were often hired as local staff and white Americans and Europeans were frequently hired as international staff. Though language skills and cultural familiarity gained Haitian women entry into these large and powerful organizations, their positions within those organizations were frequently constrained by internal power dynamics that maintain hierarchies based on country of origin, and therefore race. These organizations are unique in that they foster an international consciousness in the workplace, cultivating a desire to travel and take part in multiple national contexts, rather than remaining rooted firmly in a single country.

Tamara is a tall middle-aged woman with very light skin dusted with freckles. When I interviewed her, she wore a long grey dress that clung to her curves, and her short, straight, black hair was messily styled atop her head. Tamara participated in multiple national contexts from the time she lived in Haiti and worked first for the United Nations and then for the American Embassy. She came from a well-connected family in Haiti and she knew the head of recruitment for the United Nations. After working for the UN, Tamara transitioned to a job with the American Embassy in Port-au-Prince.

Tamara enjoyed working for the American embassy. She said, "Oh, it's great. Americans are good with Haitians, they

treat us well.”⁷ She worked as an administrator and reported that the American consuls greatly appreciated her. Though Tamara had an enjoyable experience working for the American Embassy, her work still situated her within racialized global power dynamics. The presence of the American embassy speaks to the long relationship between the United States and Haiti, particularly during the U.S. occupation from 1915 to 1934, U.S. meddling in Haitian elections, and contemporary U.S. involvement in the form of coercive foreign aid.

Tamara needed to leave the American embassy for personal reasons and decided to move to Paris. Since she had previously worked for the UN in Haiti it was relatively easy for her to transition into working for it once she moved to France. While working for UNESCO, an agency of the UN, in France, Tamara did a lot of work with African countries, especially Tanzania. After working for UNESCO, she went on UN Peacekeeping operations in Africa.

The United Nations was founded in the United States and largely maintains Western ideals across the globe. As a Black woman and a native of Haiti, Tamara was tracked into a particular career path within the United Nations that rendered her subordinate to her white American and European counterparts while in Haiti. She was able to negotiate her positioning within the UN from being local staff in Haiti to working as a Paris-based employee. As part of the UNESCO and the UN Peacekeeping operations, Tamara was situated in a position of power over the Africans with whom she interacted.

DISCUSSION

Race and ethnicity exist across national borders, but the local context always inflects the ways in which these categories manifest and shape people’s daily lives. Brewer’s work lends itself to adaptation outside of the U.S. context precisely because she constructs her theoretical contribution in relation to the specifics of the historical relationship between Black women and labor in the

United States. Her theory is grounded in a particular history but has generalizability beyond that specific contact. It enables scholars to apply that attention to specificity to other contexts, and in the process extend and augment her theory of race, gender, and labor.

Similarly, we must understand the experiences of Haitian women with regards to race and ethnicity in each of these locales as shaped by the historical contexts of each setting. In Boston, early immigrants found themselves in the midst of a struggle over desegregation, part of a long history of the afterlife of slavery and forced segregation in the United States. That racial history shaped the experiences of Haitian migrants as they worked to find their place within a raced social, political, and economic hierarchy. Haitians in Montreal around this same time faced a strikingly different landscape. Racism certainly existed in the Montreal context as well, but it was shaped by the history of Quebec's ethnic identity and anxieties over protecting and maintaining a uniquely Quebecois ethnic identity. Compared to Boston, the racism faced by Haitians in Quebec was much more subtle, though still pervasive. Quebec did not carry a history of hundreds of years of slavery and segregation, which means that racism developed quite differently in Quebec than in the United States.

Lastly, France's long imperial history has shaped the nation's deeply entrenched racist ideologies. As an imperial metropole, Paris has long attracted migrants from previous colonies. Haiti's fight for independence fades into more distant history when compared to the more recent fight for Algerian independence. Since Haitians migrated to France in much smaller numbers, they were able to integrate with more ease in some ways than if Haitians had a larger presence on the national stage. Contemporary French citizens generally view North African immigrants as unable to assimilate and a threat to the nation. Meanwhile, Haitians in Paris are dispersed enough that they do not garner much national attention as a group.

Experiences of middle- and upper-class Haitian migrants shed light on the shifting meanings associated with racial and ethnic identity and the ways in which those meanings influence daily life. In Montreal during the Quiet Revolution, Haitian migrants met a type of racist resistance that was deeply grounded in xenophobic fears of outsiders diluting the prized French-Canadian ethnic identity. This xenophobia no doubt carried with it racist undertones, given that the ocular component of race allows one to differentiate between racial “insiders” and “outsiders.” Quebec provides an example of a dominant native ethnic group (French Canadian) attempting to protect itself from outside threats. As seen in the examples above, Haitian women came face to face with French Canadian racism when attempting to integrate in the workplace. In the quote from Guerda, we see that her French-Canadian colleagues refused to greet her because they were uncomfortable and unhappy having to work with a Black woman. Guerda challenged their quiet racism by boldly introducing herself to the silent room and making a show of acting overly polite and cordial in the face of their silent treatment. Through her continued work alongside these colleagues, she eventually became integrated to the point where they felt comfortable verbalizing their earlier misgivings.

In contrast to the general social unease reported by early migrants in Montreal, early Haitian migrants in Boston were met with overt racial slurs and threats to personal safety. This intense reaction stems from the particulars of the relationship between the United States, slavery, and the long and drawn-out process of desegregation. Haitians in Boston met racism from white Bostonians not for being “outsiders,” but for being “Black.” Simultaneously, at times African Americans dissociated from Haitian migrants, perhaps in part because of the ways in which Haitian labor became more highly valued than African American labor. This labor hierarchy reinforced ethnic divisions between Haitians and African Americans, but did not necessarily shield Haitians from the brunt of the racism directed towards Blacks, regardless of their ethnicity.

Unlike in Montreal, many of the whites in Boston during the first wave of Haitian migration were descendants of immigrants from Ireland and Italy themselves. Irish and Italian immigrants in the United States were at times racialized as less than fully white and struggled to negotiate their place in the racially and ethnically stratified paid labor market (Handlin 1991; O'Connor 1995; Stack 1979). Attempting to maintain their ethnic identities from outsiders, white ethnic groups in Boston were largely outsiders themselves, struggling to make a place for themselves in the existing racial hierarchies in the United States.

In France, a purportedly universalist nation in which the state actively aims to erase racial difference, racism nonetheless persists but takes on different forms due to the taboo associated with the term race. For this reason, racism in France often manifests in coded language about religion or culture. As the vast majority of Haitians are Christian, this religious alignment eases Haitian integration into French society in a way that Muslim immigrants from North Africa do not experience. As they were placed in relation with African Americans in Boston during the 1960s and 1970s, Haitians in Paris are situated above North African immigrants in France's social and economic hierarchies. Though secular in name, France's national work holidays reflect the Christian calendar, allowing Haitian migrants to integrate into the workplace more easily than immigrants of other faiths.

In addition to the experiences of Haitian women in these three nation-states, Haitians also participate in paid labor within international organizations such as the United Nations. While the UN does not represent any single nation, it broadly represents the interests of the West. The UN is a transnational organization with a disproportionately Western agenda. Within the UN, the organization creates structures and hierarchies that continue to privilege employees from North American and Western European nations and track employees from Haiti into subordinate administrative roles. In this way, global racial and ethnic hierarchies are reinforced through employment within the UN;

however, at moments Haitian women are able to negotiate their positioning within the UN. In one example, a Haitian woman moved to Montreal before working for the UN in a supervisory capacity over staff in Barbados. In another example, Tamara moved to Paris and then traveled to work in Africa as a representative of France.

CONCLUSION

This transnational examination of work, race, and ethnicity illustrates the ways in which race and ethnicity are constructed and contested across different spaces. Racism exists in each of these locations in some form, but the way that it manifests is strictly related to the specific history of each locale. We can talk about concepts of race and ethnicity transnationally, but only while remaining grounded in the specificities of individual locations. Scholarship on race that has been developed based solely on the U.S. context, such as the work of Rose Brewer, can help to reveal processes of race and ethnicity in other places. However, we must be cautious and deliberate when applying U.S.-based race theories to other contexts; blindly applying U.S. theories of race to the rest of the world is an act of scholarly imperialism and misses the nuances of space, place, and history.

The experiences of these Haitian women demonstrate that racism manifests differently across locations, and that the particular expression of racism is dependent on each location's historical context. Race is a concept that transcends national boundaries, but it is complex and constantly shifting in its manifestations. The way we see race in daily workplace interactions for Haitians in Boston differs from the way that race and racism play out in Montreal or Paris. Manifestations of racial difference also shift across time, though the historical context informs contemporary expressions of race and racism. For instance, Haitian migrants during the 1960s and 1970s faced different social and political climates than those who emigrated in more recent years; that said, the history of race riots in Boston during the 1970s and the push for multicultural inclusion inform the city's current racial climate.

This article examined the ways in which positioning within the paid labor system, in both national and international contexts, shapes the manifestations of race and ethnicity for Haitian women in diaspora. The above examples include instances where Haitian women in Boston, Montreal, Paris, and the UN experienced and took part in shaping racial formations inside and outside of the workplace. Both the movement of Haitian women transnationally and the presence of international organizations draw attention to the ways in which race and ethnicity exist not only within discrete locales but between and among locales. Using the method of multi-sited ethnography, the experiences of Haitian women in this article highlight the interconnectedness of place and nations when examined through the lens of race and paid labor. The interconnectedness of race and ethnicity across sites is precisely what enables us to adapt the work of U.S. feminist scholars on race and labor to help explain the relationship between race and paid labor transnationally as well.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Though not explicitly the focus of this article, the experiences of Haitian women in diaspora shape their identities with regards to Haiti as well as to the United States, Canada, and France.
- 2 All names are pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of research participants.
- 3 The one who was not born in Haiti was born to Haitian parents in Miami and immediately returned to Haiti for her early childhood.
- 4 Translated from French by the author.
- 5 Translated from French by the author.
- 6 Translated from French by the author.
- 7 Translated from French by the author.

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