

**Marginality and Cultural Intimacy  
in a Transnational Haitian Community**

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## Marginality and Cultural Intimacy in a Transnational Haitian Community

Abstract: Haitian migrants living in Guadeloupe, French West Indies, face the predicament of all marginal groups – simultaneously inside and outside the dominant social order – but from a transnational perspective. Subjected to formal state control (arrest and deportation) and stigmatized as culturally inferior, Haitians respond to their marginality in two ways. At one level, they press claims to full legal incorporation as citizens or documented residents. At another level, however, they self-consciously elaborate the position of cultural outsider in order to defend against their denigration and criticize the dominant exclusionary norms. Although Haitian migrants wish to obtain the proper residency papers, they do not aim at assimilation. In fact, they draw on their cultural distinctiveness to underscore the political and cultural weakness of Guadeloupe, and many Guadeloupeans agree with their critique. The transnational orientation of Haitian migrants thus influences how they experience, re-interpret and resist their marginalization.

This article examines the marginalization of the Haitian transnational community in Guadeloupe, French West Indies<sup>1</sup>. About 25,000 Haitians live in Guadeloupe, an overseas department of France located in the eastern Caribbean (INSEE 1999). They constitute a small minority enclave that is subject to economic and legal discrimination. At the same time, the Haitian community is one node within the wider Haitian diaspora: a transnational network that links together the homeland with migrant settlements throughout the Caribbean and North America. I

argue here that the marginalization of Haitians in Guadeloupe takes place in specifically transnational terms.

Both the distinctive form of marginality which Haitians face and the ways they protest and re-interpret it emerge from their continual travel across borders and diasporic consciousness (cf. Kivisto 2001). Most Haitians remain vulnerable to arrest and deportation under French immigration law. The threat affects their use of urban space, and it drives their residential and economic exclusion. Moreover, the stigma attached to Haitians refers specifically to their foreign origins and shallow local loyalties. Finally, Haitians respond to their marginality not by seeking to assimilate into the surrounding society, but by cultivating a creative estrangement from it. The strategies Haitians use to minimize the danger of arrest and to counteract their stigma draw upon their 'cultural bifocality' (Peters 1997). That is, they respond to the immediate frustrations of life in Guadeloupe on the basis of long-term participation in the Haitian diaspora. They respond to denigrating stereotypes by explicitly restating their identity as Haitians and on that basis, constructing defensive counter-stereotypes of French Guadeloupean society.

### *Collective Marginality and Transnational Communities*

In certain respects, the Haitian enclave in Guadeloupe fits the general portrait of collective marginality<sup>2</sup>. By definition, marginal groups occupy an unequal and disadvantaged position within common fields of knowledge and power (Tsing 1993: xi). Such groups are not only excluded from full participation in social life. Their exclusion also conflicts with normative claims of equality and sentiments of belonging (see Germani 1980). Most marginal groups, moreover, combine aspects of both structural exclusion and ambiguous belonging. Occupying the lower rungs in a stratified society, marginal groups are excluded from political processes, economic resources, and cultural esteem. Occupying a position between distinct political and cultural formations, group members

elaborate multiple identities and jointly participate in several distinct social worlds. For example, most Haitians in Guadeloupe have entered the secondary sector of unskilled and easily replaceable labor (cf. Rouse 1991). Living in Pointe-à-Pitre, the island's largest city, they are nonetheless denied basic urban services and opportunities. In response, Haitians explicitly claim de jure membership in the social mainstream. Because many of them have worked in Guadeloupe for two decades or more, they feel entitled to legal residence and French welfare benefits. However, they do not wish to merge seamlessly with the local population and its cultural practices. They actively teach their children Haitian Creole; they belong to all-Haitian institutions (notably store-front churches); and many consider Guadeloupe as a way-station on a longer transnational trajectory involving future residence in the USA, Canada, or back in Haiti.

In other respects, the predicament of transnational Haitians in Guadeloupe differs from classic models of marginality in social theory. Much of the scholarly literature advances general propositions on the basis of quite specific cases or historical types. For Simmel (1908/1950), traders who settle in a foreign society provide the definitional example of marginality: fundamentally mobile persons who are not 'organically connected through established ties of kinship, loyalty or occupation' with members of the surrounding society (p. 404). From this single illustrative case, Simmel builds his theory of categorical strangers, their enlightened objectivity, their tendency to be treated as generic outsiders, and their vulnerability to scapegoating. Robert Park (1937/1950) favors a different definitional example: groups who live on the margins of two (often antagonistic) societies. His typical case is the hybrid individual (e.g., Eurasian, Mulatto, or partially assimilated Jew), a historical product of large-scale migration or imperialism, who is not 'willing to break, even if he were permitted to do so, with his past and his traditions, and not quite accepted, because of racial prejudice, in the new society in which he now [seeks] to find a place'

(p. 354). This ideal type underlies Park's characterization of the generic 'marginal man' as a sophisticated cosmopolitan who is gripped by inner turmoil and distressing self-consciousness.

Mid-twentieth century American social science featured several debates over another influential ideal type of marginality: traditional enclaves within modernizing cities which yet remain unintegrated with urban institutions and whose residents are politically apathetic, anomic, and socially disorganized (as evidenced by violent crime, family breakdown, etc.). Perlman (1976) criticized this 'myth of marginality' by reference to poor rural-to-urban migrants living as squatters in Rio de Janeiro. Based on her intensive case study, Perlman argued that marginality in general is a form of material domination: a dependent position within hierarchically-ranked groups which is enforced by active rejection from the labor market and other opportunities of city life. Several contemporary studies also rely on case studies of Latin American urban squatters to build general theories of marginality as enforced inequality and dependence (e.g., Lomnitz 1977, Peattie 1974, Vélez-Ibañez 1983; Byrne 1999 provides a recent restatement of this view).

Clearly, marginality is a broad term that refers to several distinct but overlapping social conditions. Many of the types of marginality mentioned by the above authors also characterize transnational Haitians in Guadeloupe. They are a product of large-scale migration; they are urban dwellers who yet do not benefit from local opportunities and are treated as disloyal outsiders; and they occupy a liminal position between different cultures. However, in the classic literature about settled traders, hybrid individuals, and urban squatters, marginal and mainstream groups belong to the same national society (e.g., Spitzer 1989). Fundamental questions of citizenship or a shared future in the same national space are rarely raised. By contrast, current-day transnational groups such as Haitians in Guadeloupe are marginalized precisely because of their chronic state of divided allegiance (see Rouse 1991). Transnational groups thus face specific barriers from the dominant society, and they craft specific responses to stigma and exclusion.

Transnational enclaves – especially of migrants from developing societies now living in North American or European cities – are marginalized because of the way they incorporate in larger, more powerful national societies. By definition, transnational groups fabricate their social lives with images, ideas, and opportunities that arise in both local and distant settings (Appadurai 1996: 54). They continually shift their gaze between immediate, face-to-face conditions and distant events and commitments (see Peters 1997). In order to foreground such porous cultural boundaries and multiple commitments, anthropologists have theorized transnational groups as novel social formations, neither spatial extensions of the homeland nor as simple minorities or sub-cultures within the wealthier societies where migrants currently live and work (see Gupta and Ferguson 1997, Basch et al. 1994, Lavie and Swedenberg 1996). However, their ‘multiple and constant interconnections across international borders’ (Glick Schiller et al. 1995: 48) make them vulnerable to charges of political disloyalty and economic parasitism. The legal harassment of migrants with irregular citizenship leads to coercive and violent exclusion. Their ambiguous belonging to both home and receiving society engenders social aloofness and denigration from their neighbors. The case of Haitians in Guadeloupe exemplifies this general picture of transnational marginality along with the range of possible responses.

### *The Arrival and Legal Marginalization of Haitians in Guadeloupe*

The current global diaspora of Haitians began in the early 1960’s with the exodus of the political enemies of ‘president for life’ Francois Duvalier along with other members of the middle and upper class. By 1972, a broader cross-section of Haitian society had begun to leave due to worsening economic deprivation and political repression<sup>3</sup>. The second wave of migration has continued until today, waxing and waning in accordance with political events at home as well as immigration policies abroad. Haitian migrants typically face poverty, formal and informal

discrimination, and outright hostility in the societies where they settle (Lawless 1992). Like other transnational groups, Haitians do not resemble immigrant minorities which have permanently ruptured with their collective pasts or labor migrants with ticket in hand for the return home (Basch et al.: 4). They establish new enclaved communities at a symbolic distance from the receiving society, and they organize new forms of connectedness with kin, friends, and business and political partners throughout the diaspora.

The enclave in Guadeloupe resembles other Haitian transnational communities (see Stepick 1998, Laguerre1998). Of the approximately 25,000 Haitians now living in Guadeloupe<sup>4</sup>, almost all were born in Haiti, the majority hope to move eventually to the USA or Canada, and those holding current visas and work permits travel in a wide circuit between Guadeloupe, Haiti, other Caribbean nations, France, and the United States. Their local enclave exhibits an ephemeral or unstable quality, and it has a range of possible futures (cf. Glick-Schiller et al. 1987). It may persist in its present form as a loosely organized group of undocumented workers, continually replenished by new arrivals from Haiti. Segments of this population may eventually gain French citizenship or disappear over time through individual re-settlement in the USA or deportation back to Haiti (the fate in 1995 of the former Haitian community on St. Martin, an offshore dependency of Guadeloupe)<sup>5</sup>.

The marginalization of Haitians in Guadeloupe dates from their arrival on the island in the mid-1970's. Haitians originally came as cane cutters in the midst of a bitter struggle over unionization in the declining Guadeloupean sugar industry (Hurbon 1983). Without their knowledge, Haitian men were used as strikebreakers by the owners of sugar plantations, and in 1975 they became the target of violent opposition (including lynch mobs) led by pro-union Guadeloupeans. Although the violence was quickly quelled by progressive politicians and activist Catholic priests, it left an enduring image of Haitians as opportunistic foreigners opposed to the interest of the

ordinary Guadeloupean. In the 1980's, Haitian immigration increased from the relatively controlled deployment of poorly paid agricultural workers to a wave of small merchants and unskilled laborers who came without documentation or who remained after their visa expired. The majority of today's Haitian community in Pointe-à-Pitre belongs to this migration wave<sup>6</sup>. Most of the men work in the construction industry as masons or laborers, and most women become commerçantes (in Haitian Creole, madan sara): individual outdoor vendors of agricultural produce, clothing, and household goods.

All the Haitians I spoke with in Guadeloupe would prefer to have their papers in order. Unfortunately, the twists and turns in French immigration policy create enormous difficulties for them (see Hargreaves 1995). Their first decade on the island gave Haitian migrants a false sense of security. The sugar workers of the mid-1970's had legitimate short-term labor contracts, and up until 1981, any Haitian with a valid passport and return ticket could legally enter Guadeloupe simply by leaving a cash deposit at the airport immigration office. They received a one-month visa, and through timely visits to the Sub-prefecture in Pointe-à-Pitre, they could eventually renew it for periods of three months or one year. During this period, Haitians benefited from Mitterand's general amnesty for immigrants who had illegally settled in France. Those with a steady job and proven date of entry could easily obtain ten-year residence permits. However, exclusionary rhetoric has gradually risen in metropolitan France since the early 1970's, and when the center-right took control of the government in 1993, Interior Minister Charles Pasqua promptly announced the goal of 'zero immigration.' The 'Pasqua laws' (Les lois Pasqua) tightened entry requirements, increased identity checks, and sharply restricted access to residency permits. They also authorized deportations without judicial review on the broad grounds of threats to public order. In Guadeloupe, these deportations involve strong-arm tactics such as arrests at night and forced entry into private homes (GISTI 1996: 133).

How Haitians try to become regularized thus depends on how and when they entered Guadeloupe. Those who arrived before 1981, recalling Mitterand's amnesty policy, feel entitled to legal residency. They carefully guard their Haitian passports and their receipts for visa renewals and asylum applications. With these documents in hand, they try to obtain residency cards at the immigration office in Pointe-à-Pitre, but are almost invariably turned away. Immigration officials tell them that an expired passport is insufficient, or that they must obtain their visa first from the French embassy in Haiti, or that a labor contract is needed, or that periods of undocumented residency disqualify them for regularization, etc. Haitians who arrived after 1981 or with false papers often follow up another provision in French law. They try to obtain a family residence card by marrying or having a child with a French citizen or convincing a citizen to adopt a child born in Haiti. Several people referred to this strategy with the popular saying 'Every Guadeloupean has his Haitian.' Guadeloupeans not only employ Haitians as domestic or manual laborers; they may also protect Haitians through marriage and kinship ties. Nonetheless, I knew of only a handful of Guadeloupean-Haitian marriages. Most Haitians told me their poverty makes them unattractive partners.

*Ethnography of an Immigration Raid: Pragmatic Responses to Marginality*

For the above reasons, between 60% and 80% of Haitians in Pointe-à-Pitre lack proper citizenship or residency papers, according to Haitian community leaders and Guadeloupean lawyers and social workers. Their uncertain legal status creates a fundamental insecurity in everyday life, and it also drives their political, economic, and residential marginalization. The following narrative of an immigration sweep suggests how people gauge and respond to these threats. At the start of my research, I joined the Church of God of Prophecy, an all-Haitian Pentecostal church in Pointe-à-Pitre. I attended worship services and frequently traveled to

revivals co-sponsored with other local Haitian congregations. Arriving after dark at one revival in June 1996, our van pulled into a long gravel driveway already cluttered with parked cars and trucks. Members of three Haitian churches milled about in front of the revival tent waiting for the service to begin. The area was poorly lit by a single weak street lamp, and most people, preoccupied with greeting friends and watching over their children, initially did not notice the two Guadeloupean men, each with a side arm and a vest emblazoned 'Police,' moving quietly but briskly through the crowd. They talked quickly to several people chosen randomly in the crowd, before beginning to interrogate Rony Jean, a member of the Church of God who had driven with us. After a few questions, the police led Rony away, pushing back someone who tried to speak with him, and escorted him to the back of an unmarked car where two other Haitian church members were already sitting.

The police worked unobtrusively for a few more minutes, with no one raising their voices in question or protest. After they returned to their car and backed it onto the main road, one of the police got out and confronted the driver of our van, another church member in his mid-twenties named Néné Baptiste. Speaking sharply in Guadeloupean Creole, instead of the official and more respectful French, he asked for Néné's papers. Showing no emotion, Néné reached into his briefcase and handed over the passport, and then the police demanded his residence card. Néné gave it to him, but the policeman, still unsatisfied, asked to see his driver's license, and summarily told him it was out of date and that he did not have the right to drive. At this point, Néné's deference vanished and he started to argue, but the police simply repeated that he could no longer drive in Guadeloupe and must come to the police headquarters in two days at 8 am. Confiscating his license, the police drove away with the three Haitians they had arrested still sitting in the back<sup>7</sup>.

Extremely shaken, Néné returned to the small group of us still standing by his van, where one middle-aged woman was repeating that she had no idea what was happening until it was nearly over. Another said this was the first time she had seen such a thing with her own eyes, and then urgently posed a series of questions. Why did the police decide to ask Rony for his papers? Why did they conduct their raid tonight? Did someone in the neighborhood tip them off? A young man related that a few days ago, the French immigration service had stopped Rony from boarding a flight to Montreal. He had a valid visa for Canada but an outdated Haitian passport, and he was forced to return to his house. Did the police put Rony's name in a computer and then follow him here? In lieu of an answer, the first woman simply said, 'I always carry my papers with me! I never forget them!'

Néné and I left the heated discussion and joined the Haitian pastors standing with a few others on the edge of the crowd. Their mood was pained and dismayed as they struggled with people's concerns. Will they return Rony? 'Probably not,' Pastor Rodrigue, the head of the Church of God of Prophecy, answered ruefully, 'the guy's not legal' (msye pa an règ). Will the police come back after the service, now that they know where to find us? 'No,' said another pastor, 'they've already had their fill' (yo deja pran manje yo). They strongly objected to Néné's treatment, asserting that the police can make him renew the license, but they cannot confiscate it outright. ('But you know, this *is* France,' said one pastor, shaking his head from side to side.) However, arresting people in front of their revival rankled the pastors even more. They don't have the right to enter the church, said Rodrigue simply, so instead they come right up next to it. Yes, they do this in front of the door of the house of God, a woman bitterly agreed.

The speculations and anguished debates about these events ultimately lasted several weeks. To begin with, people were shocked that the raid targeted a meeting of Haitian Pentecostal churches. About half of all Haitians in Guadeloupe have become Pentecostal. These

congregations offer the only formal institutional affiliation available to undocumented migrants as well as an implicit anti-assimilation message. The pastors are all legally resident Haitians, and their churches are registered at the Prefecture in accordance with the French law governing civil associations (the law of 1901). The law of 1901 originally aimed to curtail the power of religious organizations by placing them under secular state control (see Agulhon 1993). In Guadeloupe, however, it has the opposite effect of giving Haitian churches more power than they otherwise would enjoy. As legitimate leaders of recognized associations, Haitian pastors have the right to visit their congregants who wait in jail before deportation, an opportunity denied to family or friends. Besides boosting morale, these visits address practical concerns about the recuperation of money and belongings. Moreover, because of the residential dispersal of migrants, Pentecostal churches are the only all-Haitian spaces in the city, and they offer a place to speak Haitian Creole freely and a source of job tips, friends, and even marriage partners. Because their parent denominations have implanted similar churches throughout the Caribbean and North America, Haitian missionaries and pastors routinely travel from Guadeloupe to Haiti and other transnational communities. (For example, the Church of God of Prophecy has fifteen congregations in Miami, New York, and Boston.) The regional Pentecostal network offers a low-cost and trustworthy conduit to circulate money, cassette tapes, and letters between dispersed friends and families and hence to maintain transnational linkages (see Richman 1992: 67ff). Launching an immigration raid at a Pentecostal revival thus threatens one of the major staging grounds of the Haitian transnational community (see Brodwin 2000 and Stepick 1998: 85).

People's reactions to the raid also emerged from their broad personal experience with legal marginalization. Most Haitians I spoke with know a relative, friend, or neighbor who has been arrested and deported to Haiti. People often described the difficulties faced by those without papers: the reluctance to seek official aid or even to enter a government office and the pervasive

anxiety that makes them ‘sleep with one eye open.’ The threat of deportation also alters how people inhabit urban space. The immigration police<sup>8</sup> typically raid areas with a high concentration of Haitians, such as construction sites and outdoor markets. Consequently, Haitian migrants do not linger or socialize on the streets after work, and some people without jobs prefer never to leave the alleys and courtyards near their home. Random stops on the street are rarer, in part because Haitian migrants live scattered throughout several popular neighborhoods rather than in a single enclave. Nonetheless, the police occasionally do seek out undocumented individuals through street-checks as well as interrogations at people’s homes. Some Haitians try to move every few months to avoid arrest. Summing up the situation, one man told me ‘It makes you never want to go outside,’ and he illustrated his point by squeezing his shoulders together, arms held tightly to his sides, and glancing around him in a caricature of a hunted animal.

Haitians deeply resent their treatment, but they do not assert a blanket claim to rightful residence in Guadeloupe. I heard no one argue that their hostile reception in the 1970’s incurred a moral obligation to grant them citizenship, or that the French Antilles, an extraordinarily wealthy society by regional standards, should ease the way for Haitian migrants coming from a far poorer nation (cf. Patterson 1987: 255-257). People usually denounce not the injustice of deportations in the abstract, but rather the particular way they are carried out. The police take those arrested to a detention center at the central Raizet airport and then expel them in two days<sup>9</sup>. Willy Louis, a 23-year-old undocumented Haitian man, provides the most common scenario: ‘They take you right to the airport, and you’re forced to leave in your dirty clothes. They don’t let you go back to your house to recover your belongings to ask your boss for the money you’re owed.’ Belot Maxwell, a 42 year-old Haitian man with a valid French 10-year residence card, explains the resulting stigma:

Haitians feel shame when they’re sent back from Guadeloupe.

They arrive with an old pair of pants, a dirty shirt, they don’t have

anything with them, and this is how they return to their family.

What is their family thinking? That they spent so much time in the other country, and have only this to show for it?

The stigma of dirty clothes and meager belongings figured in every conversation about deportation. People criticize these indignities because they threaten an important diaspora ideal. Deportation destroys not only one's own economic prospects, but also one's reputation as a solid provider and a bridgehead for other family members to move abroad. In the ideal migration trajectory, one leaves the country poor but ambitious, finds work and supports dependents back home, and returns to Haiti for a visit with the visible marks of financial success (expensive clothing and gifts). Returning as a deportee with dirty clothes demolishes this scenario; hence, virtually everyone singles out their treatment at Raizet – in particular, being denied showers and a change of clothes – as one of the most objectionable aspects of deportation.

People thus calculate the cost of legal marginality in terms of their transnational allegiances. Depending on their economic circumstances, they do not necessarily fear returning to Haiti, in and of itself. Willy Louis explained the situation to me as we sat in his sparsely furnished one-room home in a popular neighborhood wedged between a busy road and a newly built apartment complex. The neighborhood itself, a remnant of early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Pointe-à-Pitre, consists of a few narrow alleyways lined by the colonial-era 'cases créoles,' a once-ubiquitous housing style occupied now by only the poorest Guadeloupeans and migrants from Haiti and Dominica. The city already plans to raze this area and construct modern public housing blocks (the Habitations à Loyer Modéré or HLM), typical of the poorest urban zones in metropolitan France. Without citizenship papers, Willy will not qualify for an apartment in the HLM, and he will probably move to another part of the city or to a squatter settlement in the abandoned sugar fields on the city's edge. Arriving in Guadeloupe during the economic downturn of the mid-1990's, Willy

has never been able to count on construction work more than a few days per week (let alone a long-term labor contract), and undocumented workers like him usually do not dare protest low or withheld wages. After recounting his options, Willy told me plainly that he would rather be in Haiti. He has entered a downward spiral of economic and residential marginality that benefits neither him nor his dependents in the homeland. In his case, economic and legal marginality has become de facto extrusion, and no personal loyalties or dreams of assimilation impel him to stay in Guadeloupe.

Haitian women respond to their marginalization using the same transnational calculus. Those without papers cannot advance past the lowest rung in the regional marketing network: buying their stock locally and selling it directly to shoppers. They cannot travel to Miami, San Juan, Curaçao, and other regional centers in order purchase their own commodities in bulk. They cannot import the Haitian crafts popular among middle-class Guadeloupean and tourists, because clearing them through customs requires proof of legal residence. Because undocumented residents cannot own agricultural land, women who sell produce must buy it from Guadeloupean truck farmers, and hence they reap lower profits. Renting a stall in centrally located marketplaces costs up to 30 francs per day, so most Haitian women sell their products from over-flowing tables set up on sidewalks. Here they face daily harassment from established shopkeepers as well as the police. In light of their poor prospects, some women contemplate returning to Haiti as the logical next step. Like the men described above, they explicitly compare their current urban poverty to the meager but reliable livelihoods available in rural Haiti, and their insecurity in Guadeloupe to the shelter and mutual aid of the lakou (the kin-based co-residential unit still common in the Haitian countryside).

To survive the interwoven forms of marginalization, Haitians learn how to gauge their vulnerability in different arenas of everyday life. The immigration raid at the Pentecostal revival confirmed people's impression that police target them when their guard is down. In the summer of

1996, I heard of several Haitian men arrested as they arrived at construction sites in the morning or as they left after a full day's work. Police also interrogate people on the streets near their homes, and those who have lived in Guadeloupe since the early 1980's seem especially at risk. Such individuals have grown less vigilant over the years, and many of them (wrongly) believe that they are entitled to legal residence. Like the people arrested in front of the revival, they assume a level of protection they do not actually enjoy. Aware of the danger, the pastor of the Church of God of Prophecy specifically instructed his congregation how to avoid the police in his sermon a few days after the raid:

You have to be careful... When you come to the church, look to your left, look to your right to see if immigration [police] are there. Enter quickly and move to the front of the church where it is empty. Since the police don't have the right to enter the temple, you'll be safe there... People are afraid, but that doesn't mean that you can stay in your little room and not come to give praise to God!

The pastor here addresses people's vulnerability along with a professional dilemma of his own. He obviously cannot ignore the raid on his own church, but he also cannot warn people to stay away entirely, because, by his own reckoning, 75% of church members are undocumented. In any case, the pragmatic advice and limited protection offered by Haitian Pentecostal churches fill a need unmet by any other institution in Guadeloupe. The Haitian transnational community has not entered the middle-class; hence it does not have its own legal advocates or mass media outlets to educate people about immigration law. A state-regulated mutual assistance agency occasionally helps undocumented Haitian members gain residency cards, but only a few Haitians are willing to pay the membership fees.

Haitians have developed a good sense of the local and supra-local processes that maintain their marginality. Most people connect the shifting climate for undocumented migrants to the policies of successive French administrations. They describe the immigration crackdown when Jacques Chirac took office in 1993 and link their own situation to the widely reported expulsions of undocumented Maghrebians and Black Africans in metropolitan France in the mid-1990's (Valls-Russel 1993, Freedman and Tarr 2000). Nonetheless, Haitians know that they run the greatest personal danger of arrest in those zones controlled by Guadeloupeans, not white métropoles (civil servants or professionals from France). 'It's blacks who are arresting blacks,' one man said angrily as he described the immigration raid at the Pentecostal revival. Consequently, Haitians told me they are less vulnerable to arrest in formal state institutions than on the street, despite the higher level of bureaucratic scrutiny. For example, people make repeated trips to the Prefecture in Basse-Terre (the department capital) to obtain valid visas or residency cards. They bring their entire dossier with them, including current and expired passports and visas, multiple requests for political asylum, work permits, etc. In their quest to be regularized, they necessarily expose their irregular status directly to French officials. However, they do so without fear of immediate or future arrest. People explained to me they simply have greater trust in the métropoles who work there compared to the Guadeloupean staff of the municipal Sub-prefecture in Pointe-à-Pitre.

*Discursive Responses to Marginality: Claims of Cultural Intimacy*

Haitians respond to marginality through not only pragmatic tactics (regularizing their status and coping with poverty), but also the collective imagination. The objective legal, economic, and residential conditions described above produce certain affinities of experience among Haitians in Guadeloupe (cf. Bentley 1987). Reflecting on the constraints that they all face, migrants express their interests and sentiments in similar ways, and they react similarly to harassment and the

dangers of arrest. In particular, migrants elaborate stereotypes about the essential qualities of Haitians and Guadeloupeans. They invoke these stereotypes both to explain why they are denigrated in the dominant society and to defend against their stigma.

The need for concealment creates a pervasive anxiety about personal security. Migrants know that despite all precautions, they can easily be arrested and deported without appeal, and they describe the risk in tones of resigned inevitability. In the weeks following the arrests at the Pentecostal revival, church members often commented on the police's surreptitious methods and compared their experience to being caught in a well-laid trap. I mentioned once to Néné and Pastor Rodrigue that French law officially forbids immigration raids after 6 p.m., and that I could serve as a witness if other church members mounted a legal challenge. Rodrigue answered quickly and derisively, 'No, they're the ones who make the law. They don't respect the law, when it comes to Haitians. And the government will support them, whatever they do.' Motivated by similar sentiments, most people do not bother to contest expulsions or to argue that undocumented Haitians have a right to remain on the island.

Occasionally, however, people openly protest less extreme types of harassment and disrespect. For example, Haitian market women verbally resist the municipal police who force them to move their makeshift stalls and threaten to confiscate their goods. One woman described what she typically tells police, 'I say, give me a place to sell! I live here, I had my children here, now they're at school. They [the police] say they can't give me a place to sell my things. But if they let us in the country, they should let us work.' Her complaint not only makes the limited claim to pursue her livelihood in peace. It also points out the contradictions of Guadeloupean immigration policy that invited Haitian workers during the labor shortages of the late 1970's and 1980's, but then hounded them out in the tight economy of the 1990's. Moreover, Haitians defend themselves against certain denigrating stereotypes held by ordinary Guadeloupean citizens. I witnessed one

such exchange when a shopkeeper aggressively accused a Haitian customer of sending all his money home and depriving the local economy. Adopting a patient, almost didactic tone, the customer cited migrants' sadness about family left behind and the responsibility not to abandon them, and then explained the vicious cycle of poverty which traps people in menial jobs with no opportunity to better their skills and hence increase their income.

Haitians' reactions to marginality thus encompass resigned acceptance about deportation and verbal resistance to the snubs of everyday life. However, migrants also speculate about the roots of their mistreatment. They argue that their dishonor and precarious social position are an effect of Guadeloupeans' ambivalence about their own identity as both Black Caribbeans and French citizens. They claim that Guadeloupeans who stigmatize Haitians are motivated by their fear of Haiti and envy of its cultural resources. Serge Souffrant, a middle-aged church deacon, offered one version of this account as I sat with him in the Sub-prefecture after an unsuccessful attempt to obtain a residency card.

They humiliate us. Even in a Black country, they despise us. You know that we were the first Black country to take our independence from France. France was afraid of us, and ever since then, wherever we go, they despise us.

I heard similar complaints from all segments of the Haitian community: Pentecostals and Catholics, recent arrivals and long-term residents, men and women. Serge explicitly blames the wounded pride of France (defeated in Haiti's war of independence, 1791-1804) for its long-standing denigration of Haitians. He asserts that the assimilation of Guadeloupe into the French nation-state outweighs any commonality between the Black residents of Guadeloupe and those of Haiti<sup>10</sup>. He thus explains why migrants are humiliated by Guadeloupeans despite the two groups' shared history (former colonial plantation societies with African-descended populations, speaking

similar Creole languages, etc.). A second, even more common argument seizes on a lingering ambivalence in Guadeloupeans' self-identification as French. It claims that Guadeloupeans actually envy Haitians' cultural autonomy. Guadeloupeans, who always try to imitate the French, are intimidated by Haitians' cultural autonomy and their obvious national pride.

Both arguments rest on a particular stereotype of the over-assimilated Guadeloupean who yet cannot quite shake off his Caribbean identity. The stereotype pinpoints the 'sore zone of cultural sensitivity' among the Black French residents of Guadeloupe (Herzfeld 1997: x). Migrants claim that the very presence of Haitians disturbs the official ideology of French superiority, either by conjuring up memories of historical defeat or by forcing Guadeloupeans to acknowledge that they acquired French citizenship at a high cultural cost. The second argument, in particular, seizes on the profound ambivalence of Guadeloupeans. It proposes that Guadeloupeans actually do recognize their commonality with Haitians, but are embarrassed by it, because it belies their formal identity as French.

The most elaborate version of the second argument concerns Guadeloupeans' surreptitious use of Haitian Vodoun healing. In Haiti, people who suffer from humanly caused illnesses must seek out the healing power of neo-African Vodoun practitioners; Western biomedicine is regarded as ineffective in such cases (Brodwin 1996, Brown 1991). Haitian migrants assume that Guadeloupeans follow the same logic of medical decision-making. For example, I asked a Haitian friend in Pointe-à-Pitre what would happen if Guadeloupeans were afflicted with a humanly sent illness. He replied, 'They go to an houngan (male Vodoun practitioner). They find one here or they go to Haiti.' Surprised, I asked whether Guadeloupeans believe in this sort of healing power. 'They believe in it more than we do! But they won't tell you. You can ask them, but they keep it hidden.'

The same theme appears when Haitians discuss local folk healers (called quimboiseurs and gadezafè in Guadeloupean Creole) whose practices overlap those of Vodoun specialists. Like the houngan, these healers perform exorcisms and lead prayer groups and specialize in illnesses caused by social conflict (see Bougerol 1993, Ducosson 1989). They emerge from the same historical matrix as Haitian Vodoun: plantation slavery, the centuries-long intermixing of West African and French Catholic religious practices, and suppression by the Catholic clergy. The folk healers of Guadeloupe are, in a historical sense, cognates of those in Haiti. However, Haitian migrants dismiss them as far weaker than their Haitian counterparts, and they also state that local quimboiseurs learn their trade through apprenticeships with Haitians.

The conviction that Guadeloupeans secretly acknowledge the superior power of Haitian Vodoun also enters Haitians' criticism of their employers. Certain wealthy Guadeloupeans, I was told, owe their fortune to a Faustian bargain with a Haitian Vodoun practitioner. Furthermore, the same Guadeloupean who cheats Haitians on the job or disrespects them in the street will run to a Haitian houngan when biomedical treatments fail. As one Haitian man put it, Guadeloupeans 'know that Haiti is the original. They know Haitians are born with it. They know it's the African rite which is the strongest.' Set against the negative clichés attached to Haitians, this is a resistant and cynical counter-image which migrants hold of the dominant society. It asserts that despite their European Community passports and French cultural fluency, Guadeloupeans have ready recourse to Haitian healers with their neo-African practices.

What do Haitian migrants accomplish by such arguments? First and foremost, Haitians claim cultural intimacy with Guadeloupeans. Cultural intimacy refers to 'the sharing of known and recognizable traits that not only define insiderhood but are also ... disapproved by powerful outsiders' (Herzfeld 1997: 94). Haitian migrants claim to be the secret sharers of Guadeloupe's deep cultural essence. Moreover, the traits the two groups share undercut the Guadeloupeans'

preferred, formal self-presentation, and Haitians criticize the hypocrisy of Guadeloupeans who, on these grounds, deny commonality with Haitians. Through the caricature of Guadeloupeans who secretly consult Vodoun healers and acknowledge their superiority, Haitians not only assert their own cultural vitality. They also point out the embarrassing self-recognition of Guadeloupeans and the ambivalence over their joint (European) French and (neo-African) Caribbean allegiances. After all, Haitians have many opportunities to learn the everyday dimensions of ambivalence as they observe, with an outsider's eye, how Guadeloupean society operates. The Creole language is still largely suppressed in schools and offices; the local media still features the endless debates over sovereignty, a large percentage of the island's population depends on the French welfare system, and sanitized presentations of Antillean folklore on television is sandwiched into the programming from metropolitan France.

Noting Guadeloupeans' ambivalent participation in French society, Haitians encapsulate the cultural politics of the island in their stereotype of its Black French residents who both repudiate and long for their Antillean past, and hence both denigrate and covertly envy the (Creole-speaking, politically independent, and culturally autonomous) Haitians in their midst. Stereotypes are discursive weapons of power, and Haitians use their stereotype of French Guadeloupeans to invert the power relations between them and the dominant society (compare Herzfeld 1997: 13). The caricature allows Haitian migrants to imagine their place in Guadeloupe on more favorable terms. It negates the dominant clichés of Haitians as rapacious, intrusive foreigners and substitutes an (equally essentialized) image of Haitians as more authentic and culturally self-assured Caribbeans.

### *The Accuracy of Stereotypes*

Haitians use their stereotype of Guadeloupeans not only as form of discursive resistance: an accusation of hypocrisy aimed at the group that denigrates and harasses them. They also use it to diagnose the contradictions in Guadeloupean society that underlie their marginalization in the first place. Intriguingly, their diagnosis is confirmed by Guadeloupeans themselves. Many Guadeloupeans concurred that the Haitian houngan is more powerful than local folk healers, and they related stories of local residents who consult Haitian Vodoun practitioners: e.g., a university administrator who traveled to Haiti in order to rid himself of a chronic illness caused by a curse and a politician who sought an houngan's help in winning an election. Some people explicitly ranked the spiritual potency of various types of healers. They placed Africans first, followed by Haitian houngans (who, as one friend explained, are more powerful because Haiti has preserved its African culture longer than the Antilles) Guadeloupean gadézafes, and finally folk healers from Martinique.

Just as Haitian migrants suspect, their presence elicits a mixture of envy and fear. From the Guadeloupean perspective, however, their ambivalence towards Haitians has precise historical roots. The French Antilles was historically split into a valorized French stratum and a devalorized neo-African Creole stratum (see Burton 1993 and Suvélor 1983). The dominant cultural hierarchy, pervading language, religion, family structure, diet, etc., gave the greatest esteem to practices which were affectively the most foreign for the majority population (Benoist 1972). However, ever since the transformation from colony to department in 1946, the cultural politics of the Antilles, especially Martinique and Guadeloupe, have entered a new, and for many, more disturbing phase. The elitist hierarchy of the colonial period had at least preserved the relative autonomy of Creole practices. By contrast, political and economic integration have brought in their wake massive cultural assimilation. In the past fifty years, residents of the Antilles have become

eager consumers of French products, life-styles, and media. As Suvélor notes (1983: 2203), the mode of life in these islands was turned upside-down in just a few decades, and an imported consumerism and urbanization have cut off people from the perspectives and habits of their Antillean past.

Middle-class Guadeloupeans openly discuss the dislocation and its effects in daily life. People complain about having to live in apartment complexes built by French firms and designed for a cold northern European climate. They recount the loss of neighborhood grocery stores and butcher shops, driven out by competition from grandes surfaces and hypermarchés, the ever-growing shopping malls and supermarkets. They report that their children feel uncomfortable speaking Creole after a few years of higher education or job-training in France. Talk of such cultural losses often leads to more general comments about their divided identity such as the following: 'We Guadeloupeans don't know who we are;' 'We are a mixture of all races...;' 'We don't know whether we are truly French;' 'We're descendents of people brought here against their will: the slaves and pirates.' Ruddy Nannette, a Guadeloupean social worker, explicitly connected people's ambiguous and uprooted identity to the process of cultural assimilation.

People identify with what they see on television. There could be a weather report about snow in a certain region of France, and people start to get really interested in it. There is a whole generation of children here named Krystal and Bobby, after the characters in Dallas [the syndicated American series] that everyone watched on television... Assimilation is still going forward, and we in Guadeloupe don't have any grounding. We are facing something that is moving very fast, but we are not in control at all.

Against the background of rapid assimilation, many Guadeloupeans regard Haitians as reminders of their own disappearing past. For example, when Haitians started to arrive in the 1970's, their language sounded vaguely familiar to people, for it contained many words that fell out of use decades before in Guadeloupean Creole as it became more gallicized<sup>11</sup>. People recall that Haitian bands were the first musical groups presented as 'local programming' on Guadeloupean radio stations in the 1960's and 1970's, before the current wave of zouk and other Antillean popular styles. Many long-time residents of Pointe-à-Pitre commented that Haitians have darker skin, just like the inhabitants of Marie-Galante, a rural island dependency of Guadeloupe to which many city-dwellers trace their family origins and which has recently become a tourist destination vaunted for its old-fashioned peasant lifestyle.

Haitians thus represent to Guadeloupeans a past phase of their own cultural development. However, Haitians also threaten their identity in the present, already a delicate issue because of the pressures of French assimilation. In the words of one middle-class woman,

There is a fear of Haiti. People see it and they think it is like Africa. It can make us regress – that is people's fear. 'We have already been emancipated from Africa, from savagery, and we should continue to move towards France': this is people's attitude.

Such sentiments capture the fear of Haitians who, in the Guadeloupean imagination, may undercut their own tenuous European cultural citizenship. Ruddy Nannette discusses the other dimension of Guadeloupeans' response: the uncomfortable self-recognition that Haitians can provoke.

If we had something [of our own] to preserve, it would be better.

The Haitians have that. They want to preserve their history, their

language. Every Haitian that I met knows the history of their country, its battles, and so on .... So, when faced with Haitians, they are the mirror that we don't want.

Ruddy's comments bear out the claims of cultural intimacy made by Haitian migrants. Their presence elicits envy and resentment because they embody what Guadeloupeans have lost in the process of assimilation. They are an unwanted mirror because they reflect back not the Frenchified Guadeloupean culture of today, but the richer, more Antillean-based culture of the past. Finally, ambivalence towards Haitians also enters discussions of Guadeloupe's future. There is a long-standing debate about the island's possible independence from France, and a violent independence movement enjoyed popular support in the 1960's and 1970's. The opponents of independence still invoke Haiti as the best reason to remain a French department. Many discussions raise the rhetorical question, what will we become as a sovereign nation? The response is, another Haiti: poor, disorganized, and politically corrupt; independent but at an unacceptable price. Therefore, in Guadeloupeans' talk about both their present identity and political future, Haitians become objects of desire and fear. They symbolically possess what Guadeloupeans believe they lack, and they symbolically threaten what Guadeloupeans hope they have achieved.

### *Conclusion*

The structural exclusion and symbolic denigration of Haitians in Guadeloupe are directly linked to their transnational status. Their arrival as unskilled laborers and their difficulty in obtaining valid residency have produced their economic and residential marginality. Their multiple connections across international boundaries provoke suspicion and stigma as intrusive outsiders. Haitians' response to marginalization is also distinctively transnational. The ideal for most migrants

is full participation in the wider Haitian network, stretching from the homeland to far-flung diasporic enclaves. They resent their marginality because it prevents them from pursuing success in transnational terms: improving their economic circumstances and raising their esteem by supporting dependents back home (see Basch et al. 1994: 150). For most Haitians, marginality is not an obstacle to full membership in French Guadeloupean society, simply because few wish to join it in the first place. Most migrants do not envy the cultural capital of Guadeloupeans. They do not treat their enclave in Pointe-à-Pitre as a stepping-stone to full absorption into the surrounding society, but rather as one node in the diaspora, albeit more frustrating than many others. Therefore, Haitians respond to their marginality simply by trying to avoid deportation, not by assimilating to dominant Guadeloupean norms.

Haitians' discursive defense against their stigma – their remarkably accurate stereotype about Guadeloupeans – brings to light another aspect of transnational marginality. Through their claims of cultural intimacy, Haitians resist the specific operations of power which they encounter in Guadeloupe (cf. Abu-Lughod 1990). Haitians have learned to interpret their stigma not as a generic xenophobia, but rather a specific strategy, calibrated to Guadeloupeans' anxiety about standing on the margin of French civilization. Haitians have achieved an objective penetration into the conditions of their marginality (cf. Willis 1977), and it recalls the enlightened objectivity long considered a defining feature of all marginal groups. However, the Haitian perspective is specifically transnational. After all, the objectivity gained by marginal groups is always directed towards the specific exclusionary ideologies and structures which they encounter. For example, Spitzer (1989) showed that hybrid individuals gain an expert knowledge of doctrines of racial purity precisely because they are treated as exemplars of impure or contaminated people. In a similar fashion, Haitian transnationals have become experts in the contradictions of Guadeloupean society because they are treated as obstacles to assimilation or reminders of its high social cost.

Haitian transnational migrants – who ambiguously belong to diverse societies – are uniquely positioned to ferret out the unstable hegemony of French cultural models in Guadeloupe. They specifically draw on their transnational perspective to diagnose the society which marginalizes them.

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Field research was conducted in Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe over eight months in 1994 and 1996. Interviews were conducted by the author in French and Haitian and Guadeloupean Creole.

<sup>2</sup> I restrict my discussion here to collective marginality: the dilemma faced by corporate groups that simultaneously belong to and are repudiated by the surrounding society. The marginalization of specific individuals (e.g., because of their occupation, religion, class, race, or gender) requires a different analysis (see, e.g., Rasmussen 1992).

<sup>3</sup> The structural origins of Haitian migration in the twentieth century are analyzed in Lundahl 1983 and Trouillot 1990. For the specific political and economic background of post-World War II migration, see Fouron 1993 and Catanese 1999, among others.

<sup>4</sup> The 1990 census lists 12,000 Haitians out of the departmental total of 387,034 (INSEE 1992). However, most Guadeloupean and Haitian officials -- social workers, lawyers, and pastors -- estimated the real number as twice this official figure by the mid 1990s, and in 1999, the official number of foreigners in Guadeloupe (almost all Haitians) was 25,000 (INSEE 1999).

<sup>5</sup> Most studies of the Haitians in the French Antilles, primarily Guadeloupe and French Guyana, focus on their arrival and the first decade of settlement, and hence do not discuss their present

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adaptations and likely future. See Celeste 1989, Bebel-Gisler and Hurbon 1987, Hurbon 1983, Daveira n.d., and, for French Guyana, Cherubini 1989.

<sup>6</sup> A sizeable number of Haitians also live in rural Guadeloupe, principally around Sainte Rose and Lamentin on the island of Basse-Terre, the site of most commercial sugar, pineapple and banana plantations. For logistical reasons, I limited my research to the Pointe-à-Pitre area, the commercial and industrial center of the department. About 125,000 people (35% of the entire population of Guadeloupe) live in this metropolis (which includes the communes of Pointe-à-Pitre, Les Abymes, Baie-Mahault, and Le Gosier). This is the most densely inhabited region in the French Antilles (Atohoum and Cazenave 1994:20).

<sup>7</sup> The police apprehended a total of eight Haitians – three in one car and five in another. One was later released when a friend brought his identity papers to the detention center, and the rest were deported to Haiti.

<sup>8</sup> Immigration raids are conducted by the federal and municipal police as well as the PAF (Police de l’Air et des Frontières, Air and Border Police), a service connected to the National Office of Immigration (n.a. 1987). Consistent with the anti-immigrant mood of President Jacques Chirac’s administration, in 1995, the PAF was renamed the CILEC (Contrôle de l’Immigration et de Lutte Contre l’Emploi Clandestin, the Service for Immigrant Control and the Fight against Clandestine Workers).

<sup>9</sup> Like all foreigners expelled from French territory, Haitians in Guadeloupe do not have the right of appeal or even legal counsel (GISTI 1974: 78, Amar and Milza 1990: 119).

<sup>10</sup> Colonized in the mid-seventeenth century by France, Guadeloupe (along with Martinique and French Guyana) became a department of France in 1946. The commercial and administrative dependency upon France has intensified ever since (see Abenon 1992).

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<sup>11</sup> Guadeloupeans cited the Haitian Creole word rad (clothes) which was replaced by the French-derived linge in the local Creole, and the Haitian kapon (cowardly) which in Guadeloupe gave way to lâche.

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a mode of cultural production involving the production and reproduction of transnational social and cultural phenomenon. Cultural diasporas, which incorporate religious experiences, are groups that reject the identity categories and social structures that nation states impose on them, opting instead to express identities based on a blurring of origin and destination and associated with loose, multiple connections to various groups, settings, and practices. One of the principal books that examining religion from a transnational perspective is Rudolph and Piscatori's (1997) *Transnational Religion and Fading States*. Here, "transnational" is used in two ways, neither to do with migrants. Cultural intimacy, in other words, explains the mutual reproduction of different levels of identity. Using the concept of cultural intimacy as a departure point, this paper develops a framework for understanding incongruities in the domestic and international facades of state identity. We argue that there is a structural component to the level of discomfort caused by negative international appraisals of a given state. Cultural Marginality. *The Marginal Man*. The term "marginality" was first introduced by Robert Park in 1928. Park's "marginal man" is "on the margin of two cultures and two societies which never completely [interpenetrate and fuse]" (Park 1928: 892, Brackets in original quote). Follow-up questions were asked to acquire additional information such as "Was it in an all Krishna community or did you live in a neighborhood with people of various cultures?" as well as questions addressing the participants' interactions with their parents, family members, peers, and community (both within the Krishna community and the mainstream cultural community).