

TRAVELLERS OF THE CARIBBEAN: POSITIONING BRASÍLIA IN THE HAITIAN MIGRATION TRAILS¹

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Abstract

In the last decade, Brazil has received a large number of Haitian migrants. According to scholars, these migrants are motivated to emigrate from Haiti by better job opportunities as well as good life conditions in some of the large Brazilian cities (Chaves 2008; Fernandes, Castro e Ribeiro 2014). Nonetheless, Brasilia reveals another face of this massive migration. Based on a qualitative research conducted with 40 Haitians living in the Brazilian capital, this paper explores the presence of Haitians in Brazil beyond a unidirectional movement linking Haiti to Brazil. The research reveals that Haitians and their historical practice of living on the move have enabled them to deal with border controls and circulate through several countries in South America, including Brazil. Therefore, we show that the recent presence of Brasilia in the mobility performed by Haitians has to be understood through a vast dynamic meshwork of places, people and information throughout the American continent. The paper, therefore, argues that the migration to the Brazilian capital cannot be understood as a linear movement - with a clear beginning and end point to the journey - characterized by an established Haiti-Brasilia connection and nor can this city be defined as a place where these migrants attempt to settle down. In order to develop such argument, the presentation explores the two main Haitian migration trails observed in the fieldwork – the Pacific Corridor and the Air Corridor –, into which Brasilia is inserted.

Keywords: mobility, migrant trails, South America

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Introduction

This article examines the presence of Brasilia in the Haitian migration trails connecting Haiti to South America. It responds to recent calls among scholars for studies of migration to overcome perspectives focusing on the beginning and alleged end points of the journey (Fitzgerald 2009, Hunter et al. 2010), and to incorporate the complexities of present-day mobility, the continuous shifts of individual itineraries and the changes of ‘position’ that may occur during these movements (Schrooten, Salazar and Dias 2015 *forthcoming*). By mapping the trajectories of Haitians who currently reside in Brasilia but did not come directly from Haiti, I draw attention to the role of the Brazilian capital for a group of people whose biographies are marked by the places and people linking their movements through the American continent. Defining themselves as travellers who are moving in search of a better life, without cutting their bonds with Haiti, they understand Brasilia as a part of their ongoing migratory movement. Therefore, I argue that this city is not seen as a final destination by these travellers who are engaged in mobility, but as a new temporary place that sustains the international Haitian migration trails in South America (Silva 2013, Handerson 2015).

The paper is structured in five main sections. First, I outline the main theoretical debates on migratory mobility. The purpose of this first section is to review the literature on mobility and the journey, contributing to the analysis of the empirical data. In the second section, I briefly explore the mobility features behind the migration performed by Haitians. My focus here is to show how these migrants have historically produced vast migration trails connecting Haiti to different places across the globe, and to what extent these itineraries have enabled a constant circulation of people and information within this Caribbean country. I then turn to explore how the recent presence of Brasilia in the mobility performed by Haitians has to be understood through a dynamic meshwork of places, people and information throughout South America. In the fourth section, I reveal how such meshwork produces the two main Haitian migration trails – *the Pacific Corridor* and *the Air Corridor* – into which Brasilia is inserted. Finally, in the last section, the article concludes with my argument that Brasilia cannot be considered as the end point of the journey, but as a temporary place for many of these Haitians who see themselves as engaged in ongoing mobility.

Living on the move

Human movement is the focus of a range of social science disciplines, including geography, sociology, political sciences, demography and anthropology. Still, many of the studies remain based on an abstract conception of flow (Knowles 2011, Schrooten, Salazar and Dias 2015 *forthcoming*). With the exception of some early contributions on circular migration (Hugo 1982, Prothero and Chapman 1985), stepwise migration (Conway 1980, Riddell and Harvey 1972), and, more recently, a transnational approach to migration (Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013, Faist 2000), most migration researchers have followed a rather ‘rooted’ and static notion of migration, seeing it as a unidirectional movement whereby migrants “uproot themselves, leave behind home and country, and face the painful process of incorporation into a different society and culture” (Glick Schiller, Basch and Szanton-Blanc 1992: 48).

Traditional migration-related research has strongly focused on the beginning and so-called end points of the journey, paying specific attention to the decision-making process before departure on the one hand and integration in the destination countries and the maintenance of transnational contacts on the other (Fitzgerald 2009, Piore 1980). Nonetheless, “the content of the line between them would remain unexplored. The cumulative effects of these movements are also what remain taken for granted in more recent social theory where movement is coded as *travel*, *nomadism*, *routes* or *lines of flight*.” (Cresswell 2006:2).

A research field has emerged that goes beyond embodied migrations to an understanding of mobility. Whereas in migration studies the actual interest is not in the movement, but in the departure and/or arrival (involving issues of uprooting and integration), ‘mobility’ has become a keyword of the social sciences, delineating a new domain of debates, approaches and methodologies that seek to understand contemporary processes of movement (Adey 2014, Cresswell 2006, Glick Schiller and Salazar 2013, Urry 2007).

Whilst mobility itself is not a new idea in the social sciences (Cresswell 2010), the idea of a mobilities ‘paradigm’ (Sheller and Urry 2006) has gained considerable speed over the last decade. The conceptual framework developed within mobility studies has the potential to enrich our understandings of the dynamics that constitute

contemporary mobile people's experiences and to give insight to the mobilities under study (Schrooten, Salazar and Dias 2015: 05 *forthcoming*).

Scholars have paid attention to the practices of mobility as experienced by subjects (Ingold 2000, 2011a, 2011b; de Certeau 1997, Knowles 2011, Cresswell 2006). Within this scholarship, movement is rarely just movement; it carries with it the burden of meaning and experience lived and produced in space. "Here, movement becomes mobility" (Cresswell 2006:06). So, they argue, mobility is a subjective practice which involves space and negotiation. "To move is to do something. Moving involves making a choice within, or despite, the constraints of society and geography" (Cresswell and Merriman 2011:5). It is through unpacking these lines that the researcher aims to show what type of negotiations and choices are behind migration. They reveal not just the reasons why migrants move to a determined place, but how and why that place was chosen.

The conceptual framework developed within mobility studies has the potential to enrich our understanding of the dynamics that constitute contemporary mobile people's experiences and to give insight into the mobilities under study. In what follows, I discuss two aspects that are at the core of my empirical analysis of the trajectories of Haitians who are 'engaged in mobility'. First, mobility scholars argue that there is no difference between place and space. There are only spaces, where inhabitants cross along paths that lead from place to place. "Places, then, are delineated by movement, not by the outer limits to movement" (Ingold 2011a:34). In that sense, in space lives are led *through, from, to* and *around* and not *across*, while place is not just about location but also histories. Tim Ingold suggests conceptualizing spaces through the mobility of people in tangled and complex trails that compose their lives at many different levels of social connection. The idea of *meshwork* (2011a, 2011b) becomes an efficient thinking tool to analyse this relationship between people and space through migration trails. In his argument, Ingold (2000) says that the traveller is her or his own existential movement; he or she is connected to the *social meshwork* registering his/her biography along the trails which link spaces. His approach affirms that this mobility of inhabitants connects places by bringing them into a mesh of trails where people carry on their everyday lives. "Bound together by the itineraries of their inhabitants, places exist not in

space but as nodes in a matrix of movement” (Ingold 2000:220). Borrowing Lefebvre’s definition of meshwork, he (2011a) defines mobility

[not as] a network of point-to-point connections but a tangled mesh of interwoven and complex knotted strands. Every strand is a way of life, and every knot a place. Indeed the mesh is something like a net in its original sense of an openwork fabric of interlaced or knotted cords (2011a:37).

Therefore, places, people and movement compose this intertwined meshwork which subsequently produces migration trails.

The second contribution is mobility scholars’ argument that mobility is a concept that covers different forms of mobile people. Empirical studies have demonstrated that tourists, refugees, migrants and international business people develop particular forms and even speed of movement. “Mobility may have different purposes and can, consequently, present different features. In fact, there is a continuum of population mobilities, ranging from short term temporary movements to permanent migration” (Schrooten, Salazar and Dias 2015:5 *forthcoming*). So, unfolding each one gives us the opportunity not only to glimpse such plurality of movement, but to enrich this broader concept too. Bell and Ward (2000), for example, attempt to conceptualize different forms of physical mobility by comparing temporary mobility with permanent migration. They define temporary mobility as a non-permanent move of varying duration, which assumes a circular return to a usual residence, whereas permanent migration is seen as a permanent change of usual residence. Temporary mobility and permanent migration are furthermore distinguished through key dimensions of duration, frequency and seasonality. As such, it places a higher significance on the consistent intention to move on. The trajectories of the Haitians under study also reflect a variety of mobilities. This variety is notable between different respondents as well as within the trajectory of each respondent. To better comprehend these trajectories, I explore Haitian mobility to Latin America in the following section.

Haitian international trails

Historically, Haiti has been a country with massive migration to different destinations. However, studies show that Haitian migration cannot be understood just as an automatic response to political and economic crisis. According to Casey (2012), Haitian society has been marked by constant circulation of people, especially since the abolition of slavery in the nineteenth century. In this period, there was a constant movement of Haitians abroad. It was, for instance, common for Haitian elites to be educated in France. Besides, “individuals also moved between Haiti and the early communities of Haitian-Americans in United States cities like Philadelphia, Baltimore, New York, New Orleans, Charleston, Savannah, and others” (Casey 2012:39). However, Haiti was also a migration destination from Europe and the Americas. Casey argues that this participation by Haiti in Atlantic-wide flows of goods, people, and ideas created especially strong linkages with other places of the Atlantic.

In the early decades of Haitian independence, Haitian leaders Henry Christophe and Jean-Pierre Boyer supported attempts to bring African-Americans from the United States to Haiti. Despite many failed colonization projects, approximately “13,000 African Americans made the journey to Haiti between 1824 and 1827” though most eventually returned. Movements also occurred independently of these well-known colonization projects. Before slavery was abolished in Puerto Rico, runaway slaves sought to reach Haiti by “stealing small boats or fishing vessels or hiring themselves out as sailors.” 100 individuals from Europe, the Middle East, and other parts of the Americas arrived in Haiti as well (Casey 2012:40).

Even when borders were enforced in the twentieth century and migration became strictly controlled, Haitians still acted on their own aspirations and exerted some degree of control over their migration. Studies exploring the current Haitian migration to Brazil argue that this intense practice of international circulation is very present among their respondents (Silva 2013, 2015; Handerson 2015). Beyond the chaotic scenario produced by earthquake, coups d'état and economic crises, the emigration of Haitians to Brazil is still part of the historical process of international migration which started in the nineteenth century.

In fact, scholars have shown that Haitians do not necessarily migrate from Haiti to Brazil. They rather come from other countries, where they have been temporarily living. Silva, for example, reveals in his study on Haitians living in the state of Amazon that

many of these travellers had already migrated to the Dominican Republic, and lived there briefly, or for a few years, which “indicates that some had used this country as a stop on the way to Brazil. Since 2013, Haitians coming from Venezuela have also increased, perhaps due to the encouragement of family members or compatriots already in Brazil” (Silva 2013:08). For many Haitians, the practice of leaving their homes for Brazil or any other country is not an abandonment of their country but a tactic to improve their social and economic position there.

So, studies suggest that mobility is a common practice among Haitians, which would be temporary mobility as a non-permanent move of varying duration, which assumes a circular and temporary return to the usual residence, in Haiti. In his ethnographic work on Haitian migrants in Brazil, Suriname and French Guiana, Handerson (2015) draws attention to the term *diaspora* utilized among his respondents. According to him, in these countries as well as in the United States, France, Canada and other Caribbean countries, the term is used by Haitians to describe compatriots who reside abroad, but will go back temporarily to Haiti and then abroad again.

There is no *diaspora* without a temporary return. From the point of view of the ethnographer, it is not a return but a new arrival. This observation has to be unfolded through the categories and words used by the natives themselves. My respondents did not use the creole word *tounen*, which means the *new arrival* of the *diaspora* subject, but the words *diaspora rive: diaspora arrived*, or *diaspora vini: diaspora came*, from the perspective of those who stayed. The travelers use the expression “Diaspora pral vizite Ayiti”, “Diaspora is going to visit Haiti” or “Diaspora ap desann Ayiti”, literally: “Diaspora is going down to Haiti” (Handerson 2015: 354).

In that sense, for those who return for good to Haiti it is no longer considered a *diaspora*, and that can mean failure in terms of ongoing mobility performance.

Unfolding the places behind the Haitian migration trails in South America

By analysing each individual migration journey of the research respondents, I draw attention to the fact that the mobility of the Haitians includes several places before they arrive in Brasilia. While in some interviews I could identify with more details the names of cities and the role of the migrant network in these places, in others the respondents did not provide much information about the places they were living and why they were

there. Instead they only mentioned the names of the countries they passed through. Thus I had to work with different layers – cities and countries – to compose the migration trails produced by these travellers, even though the interviews provided good findings.

My findings suggest that the Haitians do not migrate directly from Haiti to the Brazilian capital. They rather come through different countries in Latin America. Jocelyne, a 52-year-old female migrant, stresses that the considerable number of places accessed in South America alone is related to the fact that “Haitians are used to travel”. According to her, they have the practice of moving from country to country or city to city in search of good living conditions. And that includes not only jobs, but the weather and even a better environment for raising children.

Moreover, the interviews also evidence that a considerable number of Haitians were actually already living outside this Caribbean country. The Dominican Republic seems to be the most explored country. 23 of the 34 respondents had lived in the capital of the Dominican Republic before arriving in Brasilia. Frantz, for instance, says that he lived there “for six years. But in comings and goings. I stayed [in Santo Domingo] between six months and one year, then I returned to Haiti. After a while, I went back to Dominican Republic.” As he reported, this neighbouring country was chosen because it could provide better living conditions for his family back in Haiti. So the temporary mobility between both places gave him the chance to keep in touch with his homeland. In the same vein, Roger says that the distance between his town in Haiti and Santo Domingo could be easily covered by bus. “I was used to doing that ... entering and leaving Haiti ... arrived in Dominican Republic then went back to Haiti. [...] By bus, the capital of Dominican Republic to Haiti takes only four or five hours.” After six years of living this temporary mobility across the Hispaniola Island, Frantz decided to move from the Dominican Republic in the direction of Brazil. He recalls that, without much money, travelling by coach was the best option to cover most of his journey. “I travelled to Ecuador, then Peru. Then another country... Each state that I arrived in, I got a coach.”

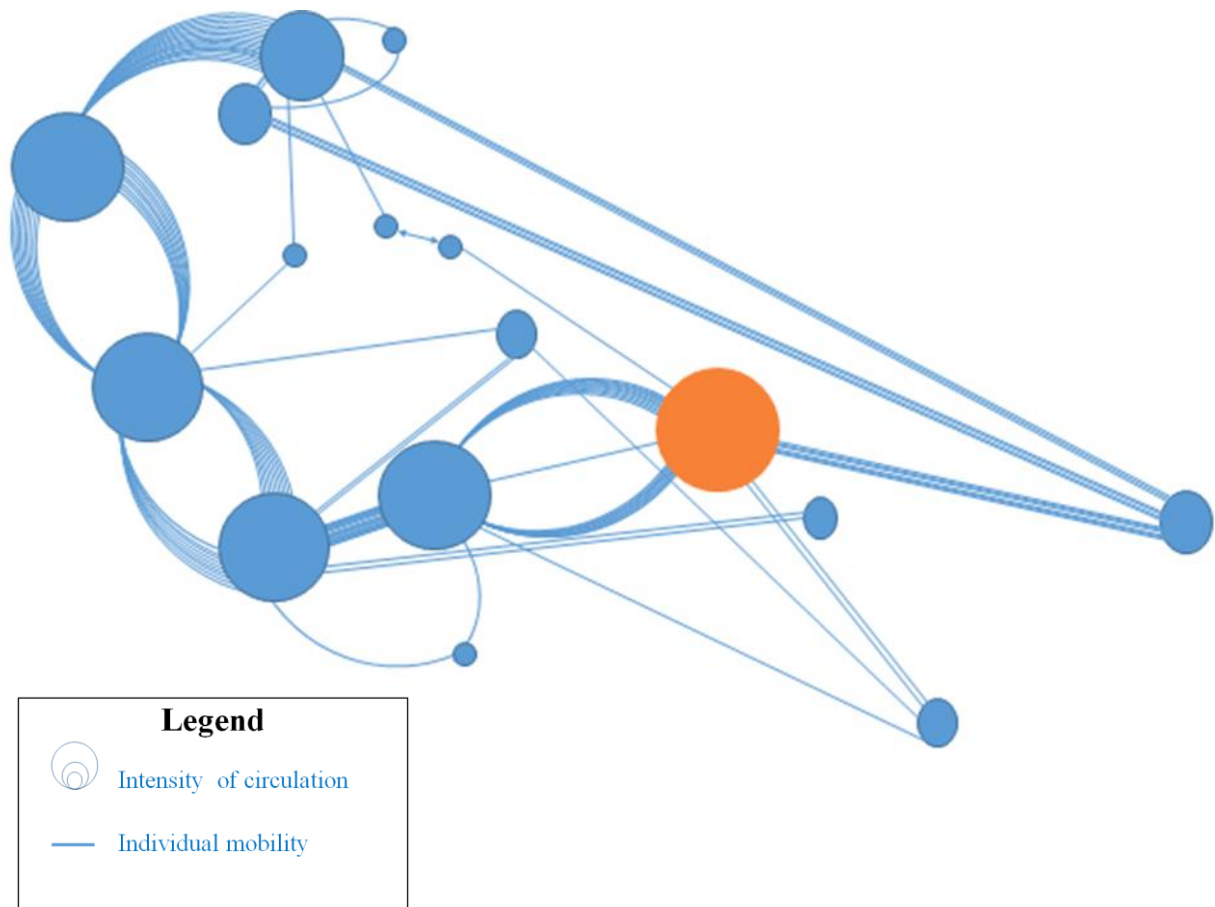
Frantz was not the only interviewee who moved from country to country. Other respondents had also been in other places before Brasilia. Colombia, Venezuela, Bolivia, the Bahamas, Panama and Ecuador, and some Brazilian cities such as São Paulo, Manaus and Rio Branco were some of the places that the respondents mentioned

when asked where they were before coming to Brasilia. So the findings indicate that none of the respondents produced a mobility characterized by a linear movement with clear departure or arrival places. Besides, the cities where these travellers lived temporarily encouraged their mobility to another place. This was the case with Raoul, a 34-year-old migrant, who explained how he accessed Brazil through the Venezuelan border. According to him, Haitians who live in this South American country take advantage of crossing the border to obtain a Refugee Visa in Brazilian territory. Silva (2013) found that Haitians “believed that the request for refugee status would be an indisputable justification for remaining in the country. Since Brazil is signatory to conventions about refugees and is known for its tradition of giving them shelter, this request could not be denied” (Silva 2013: 5).

However, in Raoul’s case, he opted for a tourist visa. Otherwise the “federal police would not allow me to circulate between both countries.” So he went to “the Brazilian Embassy in Venezuela and applied for a [visitor] visa to get into the Brazilian territory. That was in April 2014. After getting it, I went to Boa Vista, Roraima, and stayed for twenty days.” Raoul continues by explaining that he moved around between Venezuela and Roraima for a few months due to his ‘particular business’, which was not revealed in the interview. After this period, he decided to continue his journey into the Brazilian territory. So, instead of settling down, Haitians are encouraged by the possibilities found in the arrival place to keep moving to other destinations. If the movement does not work as planned, they return and evaluate new alternatives.

Tracking the itineraries of the 34 respondents reveals the cities or countries in Latin America accessed by Haitians before arriving in Brasilia (see Migration Flow Map 1). The lines indicate the movement produced by each respondent. It is important to note that the movement performed by these migrants not only connects the cities or countries that each one passed through, but also shows how these travellers pass continually through and between these places as with Raoul, Frantz and Roger mentioned above. The circles, on the other hand, represent the places accessed by the lines. The large circles indicate cities and countries that were more frequented by the respondents, while the small ones show which were visited by just one person or a small group.

Migration Flow Map 1: Meshwork produced by Haitians journeying to Brasilia



Through the migration flow map above, this paper shows that Haitians and distinct cities and countries in Latin America are interwoven in a complex meshwork connecting Haiti to South America. Lines and circles abstractly represent the way they produce and interact with space in their mobility. Haitians “bump awkwardly along creating pathways as they go; they grate against each other; they dodge, stop and go, negotiate obstacles, back-track and move off in new directions propelled by different intersecting logics” (Knowles 2011: 174). Despite the fact that there is no single network from city-to-city composing linear itineraries between Haiti and Brasilia, the movements performed by Haitians, the repetition and improvisation, still produce migration trails. The quantity of individual mobilities and, thus, the size of the circles illustrates this. Therefore, unfolding the motives behind such itineraries is important to an understanding of why certain places are chosen in the migration trails as well as the role played by Brasilia in this migration meshwork.

Drawing the two migration trails leading to Brasília

“Everyone who comes to Brazil must pass by coyotes”

(Wesley, a respondent)

After revealing the places involved in the migration itineraries produced by the respondents, I identify the two main trails explored by Haitians to get into Brasilia (see Map 2). The first route – *the Air Corridor* – is shorter and is mainly an air route connecting Port-au-Prince to São Paulo city which lands Haitians in Brazilian territory. The other route – defined in this paper as *the Pacific Corridor* – explores the existing air connection between Panama City and the Andes, mainly represented by Quito, which goes to Peru before crossing the Brazilian border. In fact, this seems to be the route most utilized by the Haitians in Brasilia. As the findings reveal, both trails are built through the presence of ‘coyotes’, a term defined by the respondents, and the relationship between the travellers and these border people starts in Haiti. Daniel, one of the respondents, recalls that despite the fact that relatives and friends living abroad strongly advise the person wanting to migrate not to contact these border crossers, the travel agents still force them to buy such services. He says “the travel agency warns that the travel will not work. I have to travel with coyotes. What are you gonna do? You have to contact and be bonded to a coyote.”

Map 2: The presence of Brasilia in the migration trails of Haitians



The Air Corridor

The first migration route unfolded in this research is the one from Port-au-Prince or Santo Domingo to São Paulo city, which is essentially an air flight connection between Haiti and/or the Dominican Republic to Brazil. The findings reveal that this movement is considered as the “official way to depart” from the Hispaniola Island to Brazil based on the fact that travellers need to hold a Refugee Visa issued by the Haitian government before embarking on a plane. In fact, this is considered the best way to access the Brazilian territory and then continue the journey into the territory. After all, as Bertha,

another respondent explains, “we arrive holding the right visa requested by the Brazilian authorities.” Therefore, leaving the Hispaniola Island to land in São Paulo city holding a visa allows them to get into Brazil as refugees.

Nonetheless, respondents mentioned that the bureaucracy and the low number of visas issued daily by the Brazilian Consulate make this circuit hard to access through the official route. It is time-consuming to apply for such a visa from the Brazilian consulate in Port-au-Prince, and the high cost means that only Haitians with good financial resources can afford such a visa. According to Roger, the “Haitian government requests us to pay. Besides there is a strong market around this visa. It is not easy. Sometimes the price may vary between two hundred dollars and even two thousand dollars....” Eltius and Wesley, two young Haitians who migrated via this route, explain that those who decide on this air circuit route end up being bonded to coyotes as these border crossers are able to speed up the issue of visas for their clients. Wesley explains:

Coyotes have contacts with people inside the [Brazilian] embassy. Let me tell you what they do. If you are alone, they will not talk to you because the coyote has already given some money to them. It means the coyote is the one who has to intermediate the negotiation.

Jocelyne adds that some of these border crossers also have contact with people working at the airports to make it easier for travellers to embark on the plane. As a result, she explains, this connection is less utilized by Haitians to get into Brazil. They prefer to access the Pacific Corridor that does not require a visa.

The Pacific Corridor

On this journey performed by Haitians, some places play major key roles. Among the countries included in this route, the Dominican Republic, Panama, Ecuador and Peru are most frequently mentioned. According to Eltius, departing from Santo Domingo is the best strategy for Haitians. He recalls

people who were stopped by the immigration of Port-au-Prince and sometimes sent back. It means that people coming out of the Dominican Republic had more security, and were lucky. [...] I know many Haitians who came straight from Haiti, not passing

through the Dominican Republic, and as soon as they put their feet on the immigration [border control] of Port-au-Prince airport they started wasting money.

As with the previous migration route, Eltius notes how the entire journey is organized by coyotes, in Haiti. From there they are able to contact other border crossers spread over Ecuador and Peru in order to enable the mobility through these countries. According to Eltius, the Haitian border crossers work jointly with travel agencies. “When the coyote says R\$ 1,500.00, it means that he will buy a ticket for \$ 1,000.00 from the agency. Do you understand?” In the same vein, Daniel explains that “it is the coyote who has to take the person to the travel agency. Otherwise, the travel agent will say that there are no flight tickets.”

So, from Santo Domingo or Port-au-Prince, an air flight gets them into the American Continent. In fact, this corridor on the Pacific side (*Panama City – Quito – Peru*) was accessed by 25 of the 34 Haitians interviewed in Brazil. These Latin American countries work jointly as a sort of corridor that leads these migrants into South America. This route, in particular, “goes through Central and South American countries that do not require a visa to a Brazilian border in the states of Amazonas or Acre, where it would be easier to enter” (Silva 2013: 05). In common they share the fact that the porosities in their border controls facilitate the mobility of Haitians. The Panamanian capital offers a flight connection with a visitor visa to leave the island of Hispaniola for the continent; Quito and the Ecuadorian immigration policy provides effective entry into South America; and Peru and its migration industry, managed by skilled border people previously contacted by Haitian coyotes, makes the final connection to the Brazilian territory by providing access to Acre state in Brazil.

Panama City – Quito – Peru

It is extremely important to note that Panama City as the port-of-entry to the continent is understood by the respondents to be a place of passage. None of the interviewees stayed in the city but instead made flight connections to the Ecuadorian capital. According to them, this is the way to get into South America without drawing attention to themselves as they travel to South America holding a visitor visa. The findings suggest that Tocumen International Airport and its flight connections to different South American countries is the main reason why Haitians include Panama City in their vast migration

meshwork covering Latin America. It acts as a *migration node* connecting the Island of Hispaniola to many South American cities, including Quito.

Ecuador, on the other hand, is not considered just as a place of passage; a few interviewees said that they actually lived in the country for a while before continuing their migration journey². Denolds, for instance, lived and worked in the Ecuadorian capital for four months. However, after realizing that many compatriots were continuing their journey to Brazil, he also decided to do that. He explains that in 2013 and 2014 Haitians did not have to apply for a visa to enter the country “Ecuador gives entry to us. We can enter without any visa.” In fact, Denolds recalls that

[...] there were a lot of Haitians living there. Most of them are just moving through, but others stay, I also stayed for a while. Then I said to myself, I am also going to Brazil....everybody is going. Must have something good over there [Brazil]. Then I worked and saved some money and came.

According to the respondents, economic opportunities and friendships encourage these Haitians to continue their journey to Brazil. The solution found by them was to make contact in the Peruvian territory with the migration industry and skilled border people in charge of providing the connection between Ecuador and Brazil. Called ‘coyotes’ by some respondents, these skilled border crossers use their knowledge of the Peruvian and Brazilian border controls and the coach connections between both countries to send migrants through the borders. Wesley says that the price of the border crossing movement can vary between R\$ 1,000.00 and R\$ 2,500.00, and that includes a bogus visa to facilitate the mobility through the Peruvian territory. “There was a coyote who charged me R\$1,000 for a visa of five years. He actually stamped it on my passport. When I saw that I immediately removed it. The page almost ripped...”

The journey from Ecuador to Peru and from there to Brazil is made by coach, and as stated by the respondents, it can take between 9 and 22 days to accomplish. Gilbert, for instance, recalls that after landing in Quito he got a bus to the border with the Peruvian territory, “then another bus ... each region that I arrived in, I had to take another bus. I

² In July 2008 Ecuador opened its doors to foreign migrants and asylum seekers, dropping all visa requirements and opening the floodgates to thousands of Haitians who swept into Ecuador and over the border into Colombia.

did not have documents, and without a visa I could not get a flight ... I did not have money either. Travelling by bus is not cheap though.” His travel from Ecuador to Peru and Brazil lasted 13 days in total.

The main ports-of-entry in the Brazilian territory through this migration circuit are the cities of Rio Branco and Brasileia in the state of Acre, and Manaus in Amazonas state. Three research informants accessed the capital of the Amazonia state, Manaus, but Rio Branco and Brasileia together accounted for seventeen Haitians. Acre state, in particular, is the place the Haitians have to pass through in order to get a visa, working permission and the *Certificado de Pessoa Fisica* – CPF (a number allocated by the Brazilian Federal Revenue to both Brazilians and resident aliens who are economically active. Without these documents, their chances of becoming part of Brazilian society are very much reduced³.

From there, another coach assured their mobility into the Brazilian territory. Respondents explained that from Acre they accessed cities in Goias, São Paulo and Santa Catarina states before arriving in Brasilia, while others’ moves had been straightforward.

Brasilia in the Haitian migration trails

There are Brazilians who always ask ‘Why do you come to Brazil? (in the sense of ‘why did you choose Brazil?’)’. Haitians come to Brazil because it is difficult to travel from Haiti to another country, if you realize that there are Haitians coming to here [Brazil] because it is easy to enter. I cannot neglect my country, you know? I came here to spend time and apply for a visa to a better country than Brazil.

Gilbert, a male Haitian living in Brasilia since 2014, gave this answer during an interview. In fact, that was not an isolated answer among the group interviewed. Many other respondents shared in common the feeling and even the hope that Brasilia was a

³ In Acre, Haitians can be issued with a document certifying their request for refugee status and their registration at the Ministry of Labour, and be vaccinated against tropical diseases. Moreover, Silva (2013) reveals that Brasileia is a compulsory stop, “because the Federal Police has its office in the neighboring city of Epitaciolandia. The Haitians must attend that office and request the refugee protocol” (Silva 2013: 5).

temporary place. The majority of the respondents arrived in the Brazilian capital between 2012 and 2014 through the two migration trails unfolded above. However, Brasilia is not considered by them as the final destination. They rather state that other Brazilian cities such as São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, or countries such as the United States, France and Holland could be the next destination in their diasporic movement.

Raoul, for example, does not work with the idea of settling down in Brasilia. The United States is his main goal. He compares the average salary in Brazil to what he could make in dollars and stresses that the difference is considerable. He says, in Brazil, “I make around 250 dollars. Then I have the rent, bills, and send some money to my family. Do you think that is enough?” So, after living in the Dominican Republic, Venezuela and Roraima, Brasilia is not the last stop for this young adult Haitian whose son lives in Port-au-Prince. “I do have plans to move to the United States...and in the future I want to gather my family anywhere. It can be in Brazil, the United States, Venezuela, Haiti...anywhere”. In the same vein, Raymond explains that after living in Manaus and Santa Catarina he decided to follow a friend who was living in Brasilia. That was three years ago. Since then, Raymond does not see himself staying in Brasilia. For him, the chance to live in a French-speaking country could be a great opportunity. “I am thinking to live in another country... [...] but I am still evaluating the challenges to apply for a visa. [...] I am considering France.” Raymond is a Haitian whose family is spread over different countries in America – the Dominican Republic, the United States, and Canada – and in France.

Like him, other respondents also have relatives and friends living outside of Haiti. According to them, that is an opportunity to keep moving to other places in search of better living conditions. Vanel comments that after living in the Bahamas he returned to Haiti and from there travelled to São Paulo and afterwards to Brasilia. He has lived in Brasilia for almost three years, but the difficulty in finding a profitable job has forced him to consider the possibility of leaving this city. “My wife and daughter are living in the United States. There it is better, but I did not manage to get a visa [...] I would move from Brasilia to Santa Catarina where I have a friend or then to Parana.[...] My son is moving to here, Brazil.” Vanel, Raoul and Raymond reveal how widespread in different countries and Brazilian cities their relatives and friends are. Moreover, they

also show that the contact and exchange of information between them is intense, and how this enables them to continue their temporary mobility through different places.

Conclusion

By positioning Brasilia in the Haitian migration trails across Latin America and the way the migrants create their own mobility, this paper has argued that migration is not a linear movement with a clear beginning and end point to the journey. It has shown that the ongoing Haitian migration to Brasilia cannot be understood as a linear movement characterized by an established Haiti-Brasilia connection and nor can this city be defined as a place where these migrants attempt to settle down. The research reveals that the Haitians and their historical practice of living on the move have enabled them to deal with border controls and circulate through several countries in South America. Unpacking how the mobility of each of the respondents was produced through these places enabled this paper to draw two particular migration trails that lead Haitians to Brasilia: *the Pacific Corridor* and *the Air Flight Corridor*.

As stated by the respondents, Haiti is the hub around which all these movements circulate. Despite the fact that there are several aspects which make Haiti a country difficult to live in and these migrants have ambitions to keep on the move, they still recognize their affective connections to the country. According to them, “Haiti is my home” and that means sporadic visits. Living with temporary mobility, for the Haitians, means that the travellers cannot cut their bonds with Haiti. In the interviews they say that they may not return for good, but at some point they will visit their homeland. “I lost my interest in the Dominican Republic, but not in Haiti. I want to go there. Not to live, to spend my life there; I want to go to visit my family and then return here”, says David, a Haitian who lived in the Dominican Republic almost his entire life, and has been in Brasilia since 2012. There is no such ongoing movement without a temporary return. Brasilia is a place that, like other cities across the American and European continents, is not seen as the last stop, but as a node in a vast meshwork composed of South American cities and countries, border people and acquaintances that enable these travellers of the Caribbean to be constantly moving and opening new frontiers.

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