

**LA VOIX DES FEMMES:
HAITIAN WOMEN'S RIGHTS, NATIONAL POLITICS AND BLACK ACTIVISM IN
PORT-AU-PRINCE AND MONTREAL, 1934-1986**

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(History and Women's Studies)
in the University of Michigan
2013

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DEDICATION

For LaRosa, Margaret, and Johnnie, the two librarians and the eternal student, who insisted that I honor the freedom to read and write.

&

For the women of *Le Cercle*.
Nou se fann tout bon!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the History and Women's Studies Departments at the University of Michigan.

I am especially grateful to my Dissertation Committee Members. Matthew J. Smith, thank you for your close reading of everything I send to you, from emails to dissertation chapters. You have continued to be selfless in your attention to detail and in your mentorship. Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, thank you for sharing new and compelling ways to narrate and teach the histories of Latin America and North America. Tiya Miles, thank you for being a compassionate mentor and inspiring visionary. I have learned volumes from your example. Nadine Naber, thank you for kindly taking me by the hand during the most difficult times on this journey. You are an ally and a friend. Sueann Caulfield, you have patiently walked this graduate school road with me from beginning to end. Thank you for always asking the difficult questions, while encouraging me to stay true to my vision.

I give my sincere gratitude to the professors and mentors who taught and provided instructive and kind words of encouragement during my graduate school process including, Julius Scott, Martha Jones, Laurent Dubois, Richard Turits, Hannah Rosen, Rebecca Scott, and Deborah Keller-Cohen. I would also like to give special thanks to

Kathleen King, Aimee Germain, Lorna Alstetter, and Diana Denney, for taking care of the necessary details with efficiency and grace.

The Department of African and Afroamerican Studies remains a center of refuge. I am grateful to the staff, who always welcomed me with a smile and open arms, particularly Mrs. Elizabeth James, LaQuita Willis, and Faye Portis.

I am grateful for funding, fellowships and grants provided by the Andrew C. Mellon Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Canadian Embassy and the Canadian Studies Association, the Conference on Latin American History, the Haitian Studies Association, and the History Department, the Women's Studies Department, the Institute for Research on Women and Gender, and the Horace Rackham School of Graduate Studies at the University of Michigan.

I am indebted to my intellectual and spiritual shepherds at Spelman College who encouraged me to share women's stories: Kathleen Phillips Lewis, Bahati Kuumba, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Veta Goler, Cynthia Spence, Dona Akiba Harper, and Shirley Toland-Dix. Thank you for guiding me into this world of scholarly research, recording, and wandering.

I would like to thank the members of Haitian Studies Association for reading, listening and providing critical feedback on different components of the this project. Special thanks goes to Millery Polyné, Claudine Michel, Gina A. Ulysse, Kate Ramsey, Yveline Alexis, Manoucheka Celeste, and Casta Guillaume.

Many people supported my work in Port-au-Prince, Haiti and Montreal, Canada. I am grateful to Rose Desilus, Joseph Vieux, Wilner Vieux, Mme. Murielle, Marie André, Wani Coriolan, Nicolas Reinault; Frantz Voltaire and Peddy Multidore at the *Centre International de Documentation et d'Information Haïtienne Caribbénne et Afro-Canadienne* (CIDIHCA); Clorinde Zéphir and ENFOFAMN; the Concordia University Oral History Department, and the members of the Haiti Group and Rwanda Group at the *Histoire de Vie* Project. I owe a special thanks to Stéphane Martelly and the Oral History Creative Writing Group, our late night conversations about love, trauma, translation, and survival pushed my conceptual framing of this project. Stéphane, thank you for being my teacher, my confidant, and my fellow comedian.

For the women of the *Cercle des femmes endeuillées de la Maison d'Haïti*, thank you for making me whole again. That day in early January 2010 cracked us into many pieces and I am amazed at the care and the tenderness with which you were willing to heal our wounds. Thank you for the days when everyone cried. Thank you for the days when no one cried. Thank you for turning a room in North Montreal into a sacred space. I offer my sincere gratitude to all of the women who led me to that place with their constant support, Myriam, Monik, Murielle, Mrs. Suzie, Marie-Célie, Fabienne, and Pascal.

I could not have completed this dissertation without an amazing graduate student support system. Special thanks to my University of Michigan community: Kanika Harris, Afia Ofori-Mensa, Kirisitina Sailiata, Lani Teves, and Isabel Millan. I am also grateful to the Black Humanities Collective. I owe a special thanks to my community outside of the

university including, INCITE! Ann Arbor Chapter, the Strong Tower Community, and the members of the 6am Boot Camp Class.

To the members of the Incredibles Writing Group, you are my heroes. Matt Blanton, Paul Farber, and Tayana Hardin thank you for your super love, super eyes, and super powers.

Paul Farber, we have shared our dreams, our victories, our defeats, and our home. Thank you for helping me to gracefully embrace the seasons of our lives. On to Season 3!

Matthew Blanton, your critical eye never ceases to amaze me and your jokes never cease to make me laugh.

Chantalle Verna, thank you for being my friend, colleague and loving big sister during this process. You consistently lent your kind words, advice, and your family. Special thanks to the Surpris, Dauphan and Charlier families for giving me a place to lay my head, fill my stomach, laugh hysterically, and dance.

Lara Stein Pardo, thank you for being my running partner on weekday mornings, co-collaborator in artistic expression, and co-explorer of great cities. Kristine Molina, thank God for the “buddy system.” You are a dear friend and confidant.

Maria Paz Esguerra, thank for holding me at the moments when I shook with laughter and tears. Thank you for witnessing my growth and loving me through the pains. You are my sister.

Tayana Hardin, thank you for exposing me to the erotic and dark phrases of a future with feeling. I am blessed to have such a compassionate and loving soulmate.

Special thanks to my intellectual foremothers Audre Lorde and Ntozake Shange, for allowing me to witness a childhood crush on a man named Toussaint.

I could not have completed this dissertation without the love and support of my friends and family. Mia Austin and Stephanie Poplika you teach me daily what it means to be friends and sisters. Thank you for guarding my physical and emotional safety during this journey. To the Sanders, Bowers, Grant, Mizzell, and Jones families: who knew that looking through old boxes of letters and photographs was the slow sculpting of a life long passion.

Simunye, thank you for being my first teacher. You taught me what it means to be a compassionate, critical, and loving educator. Your prayers saved me. Joseph, thank you for being my first student. It is a blessing to have a “twin” who loves unapologetically, and expects the extraordinary. I am blessed to call you both my brothers.

Billye and Edwin Sanders, the dancer and the fisherman, thank you for giving me free reign over the world and the direction of my life. Thank you for loving me deeply and

unconditionally. I am constantly amazed by your commitment to my happiness and success. This dissertation is yours. Dad, you can take off your tie. Mom, take a bow.

Amari Johnson, thank you for being my home base. I am grateful for every meal, night out, day in, and every washed dish. Your support saved me and kept me sane. I love you in that place that I do not know fully, but I look forward to spending the rest of my life on this side and the other exploring that space.

To those who have gone before and to those who are to come, thank you for paving a way so that I might live and write my truth.

PREFACE
HISTORICAL HAUNTINGS

Literary scholar Myriam Chancy opens her 1992 book, *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women*, with the story of Solange, a fictional schoolgirl, who is feverishly searching for some mention of women in her Haitian History textbook when she is fatally shot by gunfire in the streets of Port-au-Prince.¹ Throughout Chancy’s analysis of Haitian women’s writing, Solange continues to appear—haunting the pages of the book as a reminder that a comprehensive history of Haitian women remains untold. Yet before Solange “has crossed that thin line” into the world from which she will repeatedly return “to nag your conscience,” she feels the urge to write her name. On the stone bench where she rests, Solange is tempted to contribute to the initials and hearts that have been etched into the seating, but “she has been taught not to carve into objects that belong to the public, like trees or outhouses.” She reflects on this act of defiance to a false sense of order and “wishes she were brave enough” to leave her mark. Balancing the textbook that has failed to represent the nation’s women in her lap, “she takes her pencil and writes her name on the bench, first in script and then in print; she feels like a large weight has been lifted from her spirit.”² Moments later, she makes her transition.

Solange’s spirit saunters throughout this dissertation. Tragically, Chancy’s narration

¹ Myriam J. A. Chancy, *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 3-5. Chancy explains that she crafted Solange after reading Paul Farmer’s *The Uses of*

² Chancy, *Framing Silence*, 3.

is more than a creative critique of the silences in Haitian historical scholarship. It is also a troubling, yet accurate, review of the state of Haitian women's history. Despite the centrality of Haitian women's bodies, work, and lives to the politics, governments and national ideologies that are foregrounded in Haitian history, historians have taken little interest in women or in using gender as a lens for historical analysis of Haiti. This inattentiveness has left the written history of Haitian women and activism scattered among a few academic articles and countless footnotes.

I imagine that when Solange—the symbolic referent for those who seek a tangible record of their existence—set her pencil to the stone bench, she had to trace her name multiple times. With each repetition, I envision her drawing from the memory pool of the amnesiac and invoked the living legacies of the women in *La Voix des Femmes*.³ She quelled her fear of misbehavior and satiated her thirst for self-knowledge in her foremothers' courage to voice their existence—the adolescent strength of Eleanor Charles and Vierginie as they witnessed and signed their court testimonies of assault under the U.S. Occupation; the trailblazing foresight of feminist leaders Madeleine Sylvain and Yvonne Rimpel as they published their rights to citizenship in the newspaper *La Voix des Femmes*; the undaunting care of Marjorie Villefranche to cultivate a *maison* for Haiti in a foreign land; and the magnetic voice of Maguy Métellus' riding the radio waves "From one Island to Another."

This narration is inspired by the book that Solange never read. Solange, like many iconic women in Haitian literature, incites us to want and expect more out of the

³Jan J. Dominique, *Memoir of an Amnesiac*, trans. Irine François (Coconut Creek, FL: Caribbean Studies Press, 2008).

historical record of the nation.⁴ They beckon us to probe further into the worlds from which they are created and in which they are often snuffed out. Literature, particularly that of women, has been the repository of Haitian history; taking us where the archive and the researcher cannot or chose not to go. *La Voix des Femmes* is indebted to the women who were written into these alternative worlds: women like Marie-Celie Agnant's Emma, who in pursuit of her nation's gendered history was diagnosed insane; or Jan J. Dominique's Paul, who carrying her father's name explores her sexuality and the androgyny of memory and history by questioning the need to write the past if we will only forget it. Literature sets the precedent for how to write and record Haitian women's history and how to migrate across time, space, and subjectivity. These narratives give historians license to tell complicated, conflicting, and new stories.

At the 2009 Haitian Studies Association Conference (HSA), keynote speaker Gina Athena Ulysse challenged the audience to create new narratives of Haiti, and as she later added in an anthology on Haiti and diaspora, "or at least other narratives because the old ones no longer suffice."⁵ Two and a half months after this charge was submitted to the HSA, the earth shook in Carrfour and reverberated in Port-au-Prince, taking with it the leaders of the contemporary Haitian women's movement. The death of these women, including Ann Marie Coriolan, Myriam Merlet, Magalie Marcelin, and Mirielle Anglade, sparked a profound sense of urgency to document Haitian women's lives and tell new stories.⁶

⁴ See Marie-Célie Agnant, *The Book of Emma*, trans. Zilpha Ellis (London, Ontario: Insomnia Press), 2007; Edwidge Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998); Jan J. Dominique, *Memoir of the Amnestiac*, trans. Irine François (Coconut Creek, FL: Caribbean Studies Press, 2008).

⁵ Gina Athena Ulysse, "Going Home Again and Again: Coffee Memories, Peasant Food and the Vodou Some of Us Do," *Diasporas of Haiti*, 265.

⁶ Grace Sanders, "Plotting the Future: Emotion, Black Transnational Feminism & Narrative Production, A Tribute to the Haitian Women's Movement" (paper presented at conference "CAAS at 40: Research and

This story, then, is also propelled by an urgency to record and remember—to trace the names in stone. In the early departure of these *fanm vayan* (courageous women) from this realm to the other, I was confronted with the challenge to create the new narratives that we seek. My refocused attentiveness led me to submit myself to the discomfort of telling wholistic characterizations and emotionally present narratives. Attending to the new means that simple phrasings such as, “the early women’s movement was elite and the late women’s movement was grassroots” have to be troubled to disrupt familiar, but simplified boundaries. Disrupting familiar categorizations and boundaries can be painful. It can be difficult to admit that some of the protagonists and antagonists of our collective memory are, in fact, labyrinthine—human. That the ones who claimed to care may have hurt, and the ones who hurt may have cared. In her discussion of histories that hurt in the relationship between African American and American Indian slavery, Tiya Miles suggests “the very stories that pain us so are the maps to our inner worlds, and the better worlds that we envision for our children.”⁷

Thus, as this story often traverses some torturous paths of history and crosses borders and bodies, the story of the Haitian women’s movement is also a love story. I do not suggest this to simplify its emotional complexity or to establish a happy ending. This history deserves more than to be tied up with a pretty bow. I submit this lens to the reader because little but love could consume these women’s lives in a way that led them to commit to each other, their families, and their country(ies). I know this is a love story because as I sat in my Montreal apartment two months after the January 12, 2010,

Community Partnerships” for the Center for Afroamerican and African Studies, Ann Arbor, MI, March 2010.

⁷ Tiya Miles, *Ties That Bind: The Story of An Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), xv.

earthquake, watching a memorial service for Haitian women on my computer screen, I looked at the audience of women from all sectors of life commit themselves to remembrance and recovery of this time in history—a chapter that I fully expect would make it into Solange’s book and leave her captivated.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BCCHM	Bureau de la Communauté Chrétienne des Haitiens de Montréal
LFAS	Ligue Féminine d'Action Sociale
LVDF	La Voix des Femmes
PSP	Parti Socialist Populaire
RAFA	Rasanbleman Fanm Ayisyèn
UP	Union Patriotique

ABSTRACT

La Voix des Femmes: Haitian Women's Rights, National Politics, and Black Activism in Port-au-Prince and Montréal, 1934-1986 is a response to the haunting absence of scholarly attention to Haitian women in Caribbean and North American political history in the twentieth century. I consider the ways in which elite and middle-class Haitian women's concepts and practices of activism and feminism both emerged from and influenced debates on race, nationalism, and international politics among black activists in Haiti and North America during the U.S. Occupation (1915- 1934) and in the half century that followed. I argue that in the post-U.S. Occupation period of renewed nostalgia for the Haitian Revolution, Haitian women challenged the premise and promise of Haitian democracy and national identity by publically articulating their experiences of violence, sexual practice, and political inequality. In voicing their experiences and documenting their perspectives on working class and poor women's lives, elite women crafted a feminist framework for understanding modern Haitian womanhood and carved a space in the archival history of the region that calls for a recalibration of the collective memory and written record of twentieth century Haitian, Caribbean and North American transnational political and social history.

Tracing the evolution of the women's movement through the lives of its pioneering leadership and the migration of Haitian women activists from Port-au-Prince, Haiti, to Montreal, Canada, in the mid-20th century, I study Haitian women's strategic

pivoting between national and international alliances to achieve their feminist goals. In my exploration of Haitian women's collaborations with early twentieth century Pan-Africanists, African American clubwomen, Haitian left-wing politicians, and Afro-Canadian feminists, I consider the corporeal and metaphoric uses of Haitian women's bodies to demarcate the boundaries of Haitian citizenship and authenticate post-colonial Black humanity internationally. By contextualizing the interrelated narratives of Haitian women's transnational activism and their negotiation of issues such as foreign intervention, African descendancy, and transmigrant identities, *La Voix des Femmes* communicates the evolving meaning and purposes of Haitian women's activism in national and regional color, class, and cultural politics.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION—SCATTERED MEMORIES

-Does the Ligue have a library or an archive?
- My dear child, you are coming into politics.

- Chantalle Verna & Paulette Poujol Oriol, 2002¹

The violent eviction happened in the early 1970s. Paulette Poujol Oriol remembered it was before President François Duvalier’s death in April 1971. On that day, a group of the president’s paramilitary army, popularly known as the *tonton makout*, arrived at the office of the first women’s rights organization, *La Ligue Feminine d’Action Sociale* (The Women’s League for Social Action, LFAS). Without notification or explanation, the men, led by Luckner Carbonne, barged their way into the building on Rue Bicentnaire. They savagely ransacked the office and threw the LFAS’s documents into the street. When they finished Carbonne claimed the feminist headquarters as his own. In the mysterious way that information spread while silence was maintained during the Duvalier regime, members of LFAS were quickly notified of the property invasion. When they reached the organizational headquarters they found a mound of office supplies and papers littering the city block. As the women scrambled to recover the materials, hurried passersby and urban traffic muddied the organization’s historical

¹ Chantalle Verna, “The Ligue Feminine d’Action Sociale: An Interview with Paulette Poujol Oriol,” *The Journal of Haitian Studies*, vol 17, no 1 (2011: 246-257), 254.

record. The women salvaged the remaining soiled fragments of their collective history and returned to their homes.²

Paulette Oriol shared this story with me in the summer of 2007.³ As she vividly recounted what she knew of that day, she opened the bottom drawer of a file cabinet in her Bois Verna office where we met. She explained that when she became president of LFAS in 1987, she went door-to-door in search of LFAS's written archival legacy. When she completed her retrieval expedition, the entire collection fit into the bottom drawer of a metal file cabinet in her office.⁴

As Oriol told me the story of what she called the "scattered" archive of the early women's movement, my gaze traveled back and forth between this intellectual icon and the encased history against the wall. I imagined the activists' frantic effort to recover documents from the streets and later Oriol's search in LFAS members' homes mimicked the frenzied search for knowledge and self-representation that literary scholar Myriam Chancy describes in her illustration of her character Solange.

Like Solange's haunting representation, the presence of the unfilled drawer reflected the alarming absence of women in Haitian historiography. The storage space

² This narration is taken from Chantalle Verna's interview with Paulette Poujol Oriol. Oriol was an award-winning author of several books including *Le Creuset*, Port-au-Prince: Éditions Henri Deschamps, 1980), *La fleur rouge: nouvelles*, Port-au-Prince: Éditions Le Natal, 1992), and *Le Passage/Vale of Tears: A Novel From Haiti*, Bethesda, MD: Ibex Publishers, Inc., 2006). Her mother was an early member of the *Ligue Feminine d'Action Sociale*. Oriol became the president of LFAS in 1987 and held that office until her death in 2011. The author worked with Verna on her publication of the interview. See Verna, "The Ligue Feminine d'Action Sociale," 246.

³ Paulette Poujol Oriol, Interviewed by author, July 8-9, 2007, Bois Verna, Haiti. During this interview Oriol recounted a similar story to the one she told Verna in 2002.

⁴ Madame Oriol's file cabinet is not the only repository of information on the LFAS and the women's movement. Before the January 12, 2010 earthquake, there was also ENFOFAMN and other organizations such as Solidarité Fanm Ayisyen (SOFA). The infrastructure of ENFOFAMN was severely compromised during the earthquake. While some papers and publications were preserved, a significant portion of this information on the early period of the women's movement was lost in the earthquake destruction.

reverberated the reality that Michel-Rolph Trouillot identifies in his work on historical representation:

The presences of absences embodied in sources (artifacts and bodies that turn an event into fact) or archives (facts collected, thematized, and processed as documents and monuments) are neither neutral or natural. They are created. As such, they are not mere presences and absences, but mentions or silences of various kinds and degrees.⁵

Confronted with the contents at the bottom of Oriol's metal drawer, I found new significance in the story of Haitian women's activism.

The lives of Haitian women are poorly represented in public archives. This absence is not merely an oversight in documentation. As Trouillot explains, silences in archives are also a reflection of the history in which, "inequalities experienced by actors lead to uneven historical power in the inscription of traces."⁶ While moments throughout the twentieth century have been referenced as appendages to male dominated histories of the nation, for example the 1950 women's suffrage victory, few scholars have undertaken a full-length study that addresses the continuities and contradictions of women's political activism and its impact on Haiti over the twentieth century.⁷

La Voix des Femmes: Haitian Women's Rights, National Politics, and Black Activism in Port-au-Prince and Montréal, 1919-1986, is a narrative history of the physical, conceptual, and political movements of elite and middle class Haitian women activists in the twentieth century. I explore how these movements intersected and overlapped to inform and

⁵ Michel Rolph-Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 48.

⁶ Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 48.

⁷ For scholarship that incorporates these moments into their larger narrative see Myriam Chancy, *Framing Silences: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997); Elizabeth Abbott, *Haiti: A Shattered Nation* (New York: Overlook Duckworth, 2011); Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Haiti, State Against Nation: The Origins & Legacy of Duvalierism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990); Beverly Bell, *Walking on Fire: Haitian Women's Stories of Survival and Resistance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

produce political practice and woman-centered consciousness in Haiti and Canada. As I highlight women's experiences as activists, intellectuals, transmigrants, and members of families and kinship networks, I consider Haitian women's roles as key actors in radical Haitian politics of the twentieth century. Additionally, in my exploration of Haitian women's collaborations with early twentieth century Pan-Africanists, African American clubwomen, Haitian left-wing politicians, and Afro-Canadian youth activists, I consider the corporeal and metaphoric uses of Haitian women's bodies to demarcate the boundaries of Haitian citizenship, bolster the rhetorical legitimacy of leftist organizers, and authenticate post-colonial Black humanity internationally.

By contextualizing the interrelated narratives of Haitian women's transnational activism, *La Voix des Femmes* also communicates the evolving meaning and purposes of Haitian feminist thought in national and regional color, class, and cultural politics. In particular, I show that throughout the twentieth century Haitian women's activism and woman-centered consciousness maintained conceptual continuity with a focus on: 1) the protection, control, and national meaning of Haitian women's bodies; 2) the incorporation of multi-dimensional and intersecting political and cultural philosophies and activist practice; and 3) the maintenance of Haitian kinship networks through shared meaning of family, home, ancestral identity, and discourses of class equality.

As women's political activism and woman-centered consciousness evolved throughout the century and across national borders into Canada, I argue that Haitian women challenged the premise and promise of Haitian democracy and national identity by publically articulating their experiences of violence, sexual practice, and political inequality. In voicing their experiences and documenting their perspectives on Haitian women's lives, women activists disrupted traditional gender, class, and cultural

frameworks and crafted a feminist theory and practice for understanding modern Haitian society that woman and men in Haiti and in the *dyaspora* employed for transforming national policy, establishing international allies, and carving out new narratives of Haiti in archival history.

This dissertation is drawn from an interest in a comprehensive historical narrative of Haitian women's activism and feminist thought in the twentieth century. In this project I am concerned with presenting a multifaceted narrative that incorporates the history of political thought and action with the personal and interpersonal implementation of these discourses in quotidian life. More specifically I study Haitian women's activism as a segue into the multiple articulations of Haitian women's voice and conceptualization of gendered subjectivity, national identity, and citizenship. In passionate debate, political action, critical prose, and public testimony, Haitian women bare witness to their most sincere desires for themselves, their families, and their nation.

CONTEXT & CHRONOLOGY

In 1937 Madeleine Sylvain spent her winter vacation in Montreal, Canada. Sylvain, the first Haitian woman to earn her jurist doctorate and the co-founder of the women's political organization, *La Ligue Feminine d'Action Sociale* (LFAS), was in her second year of graduate school at Bryn Mawr College in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. When she completed her final projects for the term, she left her studies at the prestigious School of Social Work, made her way to the 30th Street train station, and headed to Quebec. There, she met up with Phillip Cantave, her long time family friend and the Haitian

Ambassador to Canada. In the biting Canadian cold, Cantave escorted Sylvain around town as she visited tourist sights and made several public speeches.⁸

Madeleine's presence in the city did not go unnoticed. Sylvain was, as the regional papers reported, from a "distinguished family in the famous Black Republic."⁹ Her mother and father, Eugene and George Sylvain, were leaders of the U.S. anti-occupation organization, the *Union Patriotique* (1915-1934), and her three sisters, Suzanne, Yvonne, and Jeanne, were also well known for their scholastic achievement and political leadership.¹⁰ Madeleine's semi-celebrity was augmented during her time in Philadelphia as the major African American media outlets, including the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Pittsburgh Courier*, were fascinated with the "Haitian girl" who scored a "meritorious victory" for all Haitian women when she earned a fellowship to study in the United States.¹¹ With the U.S. journalists chronicling Sylvain's academic successes, the Canadian press was enthusiastic to meet with and interview Sylvain when she arrived.

La Presse, the leading newspaper in Montreal, followed Sylvain throughout her weeklong stay in the city. During this time, a reporter asked Sylvain, the editor of her own newspaper, *La Voix des Femmes*, about the condition of Haitian women. She responded, "Haitian women do not have any rights. The law treats us as if we are children, criminals,

⁸ "A Haiti, la femme n'a pas de droits," *La Presse*, (Montreal: 20 December 1937).

⁹ "Madelein [sic] Sylvain to attend Bryn Mawr," *The Chicago Defender* (October 3, 1936), 24, Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain Papers, Box 1, Folder 4, Stanford University Archives (from here on SUA).

¹⁰ Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain and Yvonne Sylvain were particularly well-known in the United States and their professional accomplishments and anthropologist and doctor were repeatedly covered by the Black Press.

¹¹ "Haitian Girl In Bryn Mawr on Fellowship; Miss Madeleine Sylvain To exclusive School for Graduate Work," *Chicago Defender*, October 2, 1937 vol XXXIII no 23. Cover page has picture of Madeleine Sylvain.; "Haitian Women Score Meritorious Victory When Mlle. Sylvain Wins Bryn Mawr Fellowship," *The Pittsburgh Courier*, Saturday September 26, 1936, 2, SUA.

or insane.”¹² Madeleine’s bleak assessment of women’s rights under the law was accurate. In the interwar period, Haitian women’s citizenship was dictated by civil codes drawn from the French Napoleonic Code. Under these laws, women in the twentieth century were considered minors. Additionally, they were disproportionately criminalized for their decisions to take control over their familial and sexual lives, either through their parenting choices or in their decisions to divorce their husbands. Moreover, women who participated in alternative forms of political or religious practice were considered mentally ill for wanting equal rights as men, and were accused of suffering from a confused gender identity.¹³

As an attorney, Sylvain was aware that these laws and the governments that enforced them in her country were an impediment to women’s equal rights, but they were also an extension of a social practice, largely maintained by men, but promoted by some women, that devalued women’s social, civil, and political rights and questioned their ability to govern themselves. In her leadership of LFAS, Sylvain witnessed the interface between the legal and civil articulations of women’s rights. For example, although the public platform for women’s rights was framed by a discourse on universal suffrage and equal participation in government, the majority of Sylvain’s work in 1937 and throughout the following three decades of activism was focused on the cultural and social rights and the interpersonal relationships between women and men. In this way, the movement was located in night schools, public workshops, and bedrooms rather than in courtrooms and voting lines.

¹² “A Haiti, la femme n’a pas de droits,” *La Press* (Montreal: December 20, 1937). Madeleine Sylvain remarked, “Les femmes haïtiennes n’ont aucun droit. La loi nous traite comme si nous étions des enfants, des criminelles ou des folles.”

¹³ Monique Brisson, “Situation juridique et constitutionnelle de la femme haïtienne,” in *Femme: Sociale et Legislation*, eds, Suzy Castor, Monique Brisson and Norma McLeod, (Port-au-Prince: Centre des Research et de Formation Economique et Sociale pour le Développement, 1988), 22.

Madeleine's transparency and open criticism of her country's social order may have appeared unpatriotic and even criminal to some of her critics at home. The headline that accompanied her interview, "In Haiti, Women Have No Rights," certainly had the makings of a public relations disaster.¹⁴ However, Sylvain saw herself as an unofficial diplomat of the nation that was emerging from the repressive occupying governance of the United States (1915-1934).¹⁵ She boasted about Haiti's revolution and independence in 1804 and highlighted folklore as one of the many gems of the country. Her trip to Montreal, while recreational, was also an extension of the international work that Sylvain's mother and father carried out during their anti-occupation organizing and that she and her compatriots continued in the post-occupation period to garner support for their women's movement throughout the Caribbean, Latin America, and North America. These women pledged that Haitian women's reality and "voice must be heard and listened to."¹⁶ So they spoke frankly.

At this early moment in women's political organizing, speaking out against the government may have been answered with an editorial in the Haitian national newspapers, *Le Nouvelliste* or *Le Matin*, but it was also probable that Madeleine heard nothing about her public statement. However, in the following two decades political declarations that critiqued the government, particularly women's role in the nation, would be met with torture, imprisonment, and death under the François Duvalier presidency (1957-1971). The categorically new form of governance that used assaults on

¹⁴ "A Haiti, la femme n'a pas de droits," *La Press* (Montreal: December 20, 1937).

¹⁵ "Mlle M. Sylvain parle du folklore haïtien," *La Presse*, Wednesday, December 22, 1937. "L'illustration Nouvelle," Friday, December 24, 1937; "Le Canada—Montreal, Des Montrealais partent en croisiere pour Haiti," Thursday, December 23, 1937; "Le Canada—Montreal, Mlle Madeleine Sylvain au dejeuner du Jeune Barreau," Wednesday, December 22, 1937, Box 1, Folder 4, SUA.

¹⁶ Madeleine Sylvain-Bouchereau, "Nous Revoici," *La Voix des Femmes*, vol 9 no 1 (Saturday, January 11, 1947) 1.

women's and girls' bodies to frighten the nation into submission, combined with economic depression and changes in North American immigration policy in the late 1950s and early 1960s, would be the catalyst for the Haitian great migration, beginning in the late 1950s and extending through the 1990s. A fifth of these migrants would make their way to Canada.¹⁷

Young girls and women were among the 500,000 Haitians who left their homes and families between the late 1950s and early 1980s for cities such as Montreal.¹⁸ The mass migration occurred at a pivotal moment in the women's movement and shifted the direction and function of the movement's energies and feminist meanings. As the conditions in Haiti continued to decline many families, who originally assumed their time in Montreal was temporary, stayed and their experiences of migration and activism transformed the boundaries of Haitian citizenship and regional meanings of national belonging.

Madeleine could not have known that her trip to Montreal that winter would foreshadow the trajectory of the Haitian women's movement. In 1937, Madeleine's organization, the LFAS, was only in its second year of social service and political activism, and in her assessment, their "progress [was] still hardly perceptible."¹⁹ Yet over the following two decades Sylvain with her friends and allies radically transformed the meaning and practice of women's activism in Haiti by seeking to "solve the problems nearest [to] their hearts as mothers and apostles of a broader life."²⁰ These women fought for and won many legislative victories in favor of women's rights to vote, work, and

¹⁷ Michelle Labelle, Serge Larose, and Victor Piché, "Émigration et immigration: les Haïtiens au Québec," *Sociologie et sociétés* 15, no2 (1983:73-88), 80, 84.

¹⁸ Labelle, et. al, "Émigration et immigration," 80.

¹⁹ Madeleine G. Sylvain, "The Feminist Movement in Haiti," in *Bulletin of the Pan American Union*, vol LXXIII, no 6 (June 1939: 315-321), 321.

²⁰ Sylvain, "The Feminist Movement in Haiti," 321.

provide for their families. However after 1956, their public criticism of the government and proclamations for gender equality made them vulnerable to political repression and many women activists chose to flee the country. Some of the former activists and women arrived in Montreal and followed Madeleine's footsteps and used the francophone city as a stage to solicit support for their activist concerns and become spokeswomen for their nation from abroad. Madeleine's generation of feminist activists (1934-1956) and the generation that followed them (1956-1986) navigated complicated and dangerous political, cultural, and interpersonal battles to protect their ideas of civility and sovereignty of their nation, families, and bodies. This intergenerational and international fight for Haitian women's right to openly organize and live their day-to-day lives while investing in a modern and democratic vision of their nation is the subject of this dissertation.

When the founders of the *Ligue Feminine d'Action Sociale* set out to liberate and educate Haitian women, they knew their mission was prodigious. Madeleine Sylvain admitted several years into their work that, "This program may seem ambitious, but the members of the League have faith in potentialities of Haitian women, believing that they can work together in a friendly spirit, sustained by their devotion to their ideal."²¹ In addition to faith, Madeleine also drew her confidence from the historical record of women's political organizing during the U.S. occupation. In her study of women and the law, Haitian historian and legal scholar, Mirlande Manigat contends that women's participation in public protests and clandestine anti-occupation initiatives was a civic

²¹ Ibid. 10.

rebirth for women on behalf of their country and themselves.²² Likewise in her canonical text, *Haiti et ses femmes*, Madeleine Sylvain explains that women were instrumental in the nationalist movement to oust the U.S. government, and as a result gained new knowledge about local and international organizing that ignited questions about women’s access to full citizenship within Haiti.

The significance of this rebirth in political consciousness and its impact on the trajectory of women’s activism cannot be overstated. For this reason, I begin the narrative of *La Voix des Femmes* in 1919 during the U.S. occupation period. I trace the ideological lineage of early Haitian feminist thought by documenting women’s public and private actions and international collaborations against the U.S. occupation. I continue the story with the founding of the first women’s organization, *La Ligue Féminine d’Action Sociale* (LFAS) in 1934. I follow the development of women’s activism alongside the radical movements of the post-occupation period, giving special attention to women’s role in the 1946 revolution and debates among communist, socialist, and black nationalist thinkers. From these heated debates that often used “women’s issues” as fodder for discursive battles about the future of the nation, the narrative follows François Duvalier’s presidency (1957-1971), the rise in state-sanctioned violence, and the mass migration of Haitians to North America in the 1960s and 70s. The story continues in Montreal and documents Haitian women’s anti-Duvalier, transnational feminist, and community organizing through organizations such as *Maison d’Haïti*, RAFA (Rally of Haitian Women), and *Point de Ralliement*. The narrative ends with the exile of President Jean-Claude Duvalier in 1986 and the repatriation of women to Haiti—beginning a new period of women’s activism.

²² Manigat was not the first to make this assertion. Madelaine Sylvain Bouchereau made a similar claim in, *Haiti and ses femmes: une etude d’évolution culturelle*, (Port-au-Prince: Les Presses Libres, 1957).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMING & HISTORIOGRAPHY

In the limited scholarship on Haitian women's political organizing, scholars have identified a chronological and ideological divide in the women's movement.²³ Similar to the break between first, second, and third wave feminisms in the United States, the period of activism in the post-U.S. occupation period (1934-1956), which was largely led by the LFAS, is considered early feminism and is characterized as elitist, conservative, and largely self-serving to the small group of fair-skinned women that led it.²⁴ The twenty year period between François Duvalier's presidency and his son Jean Claude Duvalier's departure from the nation in 1986 is considered a period of clandestine activism and remains a period largely unstudied.²⁵ The period from 1986 until the present is articulated as a "new" feminism that is rooted in radical grassroots organizing of poor and working class women, draws from transnational organizing between women in Haiti and those in the *diaspora*, and has a practical relevance in Haitian women's lives through the formation of organizations, co-operatives, and alliances with the Women's Ministry of Haiti.

This popular chronology and intellectual history has been crystallized in recent Haitian feminist scholarship. Haitian feminist scholar and sociologist Carolle Charles' invaluable work on feminism, sexuality, and activism is instructive in this regard. In her

²³ Carolle Charles, "Gender and Politics in Contemporary Haiti: The Duvalierist State, Transnationalism and the Emergence of a New Feminism, 1980-1990," *Feminist Studies* 21 (Spring 1995); Beverly Bell, *Walking on Fire: Haitian Women's Stories of Survival and Resistance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

²⁴ Carolle Charles, "Gender and Politics in Contemporary Haiti: The Duvalierist State, Transnationalism and the Emergence of a New Feminism, 1980-1990," *Feminist Studies* 21 (Spring 1995): 135-137. In several interviews with feminist leaders in Haiti and in Canada, the LFAS was repeatedly depicted as the Haitian women's movement's elite and unattached foremothers. When I asked one feminist activist in Montreal about LFAS she replied, "Oh yes, my aunt knew them. The ladies who got dressed up and had tea." Anonymous, Interviewed by author, June 7, 2008, Montreal, Canada.

²⁵ Haitian women's literature fills the gaps in historical scholarship. See MarieVieux-Chauvet, *Love, Anger, Madness: A Haitian Trilogy*, translated by Rose-Myriam Réjouis and Val Vinokur (New York: Modern Library, 2009); Anne-Christine d'Adskey, *Under the Bone* (New York: Straus & Giroux, 1994); Edwidge Danticat, *The Dew Breakers* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004).

1998 article “Gender and Politics in Contemporary Haiti,” Charles explores the evolution of feminism in relation to the Duvalier regime. She argues that the “new Haitian women’s movement” beginning in the 1980s had its birth in the “gendering of state violence under the Duvalier regime” and in the “transnationalization of gender struggles” because of migration to North America.²⁶ Charles is the first scholar to historicize the relationship between the Duvalier’s regime, migration, and feminism. More specifically, she provides an early genealogy of Haitian women’s activism in Montreal. In her analysis Charles disassociates the new transnational activism of the post-1957 period from earlier feminism during the U.S. occupation and post-occupation periods by framing early feminist activists as elite intellectuals who “represented the interests of middle-class women,” and who “suffered from [their] narrow class perspectives.”²⁷ She furthers, “For the Ligue, female suffrage was important because it also opened the door to public office, facilitating social mobility for a privileged minority.”²⁸ In addition to class differences, Charles also argues that the Duvalier regime’s exertion of violence against women and men established gender equality for the first time in the nation’s history.²⁹

Myriam Chancy’s analysis of Haitian feminism challenges Charles’ characterization of the LFAS and early feminists. She explains, “Faced with finding solutions to poverty, illiteracy, limited education, inaccessible careers, voting rights, and protection under the law, Haitian feminists could not afford to be narrow in their vision.”³⁰ Chancy maintains

²⁶ Charles, “Gender and Politics in Contemporary Haiti,” 136-137.

²⁷ Charles, “Gender and Politics in Contemporary Haiti,” 147.

²⁸ Ibid, 147.

²⁹ Ibid, 147.

³⁰ Myriam J. A. Chancy, “Nou là!: Haitian Feminism as the Crossroads Politics of Theory and Action,” in *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997: 24-45), 44.

that Charles' characterization contributes to divisive images of Haitian women along class and color lines, and submits that "What is essential to the proper evaluation of Haitian feminism on the global scale is to recognize that the category of 'oppressed' is not a static one."³¹ Finally, Chancy, and more recently historian Erica James take issue with Chancy's assertion that the indiscriminate violence of the Duvalier presidencies made women and men equal. Both scholars maintain that Haitian women have historically been targets of violence in male dominated politics yet they have not received equal social or political representation. James further maintains that Duvalier's dictatorship may have increased women's consciousness about their vulnerability to state violence, but that women activists were already seen as political actors subject to violence because of their early feminist activism.³²

La Voix des Femmes is situated within this discourse on Haitian feminist thought, practice, and historical significance. This project draws from Charles' insightful analysis of the Duvalierist state and the transnational feminist communities that emerged in Montreal after the 1960s. Yet rather than asserting a chronological and ideological divide between pre- and post-1957 feminist practice and thought, I suggest that in migration to Montreal Haitian feminism became a more multi-vocal movement. Here I draw from historian Michel Laguerre's argument that Haitian transnational processes "are *multivocal* in that diverse voices are heard and diverse means of communication are used for the purpose of maintaining a flow of informal relations between the homeland and diaspora."³³ Before the 1950s the voice of the women's movement was centralized

³¹ Chancy, "Nou là!: Haitian Feminism as the Crossroads Politics of Theory and Action," 44.

³² Eric James, *Democratic Insecurities: Violence, Trauma, and Intervention in Haiti*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 63.

³³ Michel Laguerre, *Diasporic Citizenship: Haitian Americans in Transnational America*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 169.

through *La Ligue Feminine d'Action Sociale* and several other philanthropic women's organizations. However, in the post-1950s the LFAS was joined by other feminist organizations. Particularly in Montreal, Haitian women's participation in the communist, feminist, anti-colonial, and black nationalist movements layered and informed the multiple expressions of women's consciousness within and between the *diaspora* and Haiti.

The attention towards the multi-vocal presentation of Haitian feminism, however, does not ignore Charles' class characterization of early feminism. The majority of the actors in the story of Haitian feminism were educated and had access to financial and social capital. Throughout the dissertation I identify these women as elite and middle class. Certainly, these women's feminist practice was infused with elite cultural prejudices, however this dissertation shows that they were able, even if for brief periods, to establish an inclusive feminist agenda that led to changes in Haitian laws and traditional gender roles in the twentieth century. Elite and middle class women's access to outlets of articulation, although limited, situated them as the visible representatives of women's political and social consciousness of the period. There were of course poor and working class women who organized and articulated their feminist consciousness. Yet, as anthropologist Gina Ulysse reminds us the multiplicity of Haitian women's experiences, "have hardly been recognized since access to expression is classed."³⁴

However, the privileged access to articulation does not preclude women's ability to organize and create relevant feminist practice across social differences. In this way this project is closely aligned with Myriam Chancy's assertion that Haitian women's shared

³⁴ Gina Ulysse, "Papa, Patriarchy, and Power: Snapshots of a Good Haitian Girl, Feminism, and Diasporic Dreams," *The Journal of Haitian Studies*, vol 12 no. 1 (2006), 27. For contemporary analysis of rural and urban poor women's activism see, Charolle Charles, "Popular Images of Gender and Sexuality in Haiti," in *The Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean* ed, Linden Lewis, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2003: 169-189); Beverly Bell, *Walking on Fire: Haitian Women's Stories of Survival and Resistance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

national experiences of sexism, domestic violence and state-sanctioned brutality as members of a post-colonial society created a space for collective feminist meaning among all Haitian women in and outside of the territorialized nation.³⁵ These corporeal experiences, for Chancy, bind women's activism and achievements despite class, color and cultural difference.³⁶ Likewise, historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot advises us of "the danger of taking Haiti for a cast society lies not in the observations upon which this analysis is based—Haiti is undeniably a society split in two—but in focusing on the split between elites and masses, rural and urban, mulâtre and black, French and Creole, or Christian and Vodoun believer, we run the risk of masking the exchanges and contacts underlying these oppositions."³⁷ I maintain that the narrative of Haitian women's political organizing and woman-centered consciousness reveals these points of exchange and contact. I show that throughout the twentieth century Haitian feminists' attention to gender equality and their shared experiences as African descended and Third World women presented alternative identity formations that complicated polarizing race, color, and class definitions.

³⁵ Myriam J. A. Chancy, "Nou là!: Haitian Feminism as the Crossroads Politics of Theory and Action," in *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women* by Myriam Chancy (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 24-45.

³⁶ The *Ligue* and Haitian feminism, Chancy furthers, must be situated in a Third World feminist context in which class, race, and nation are complicated by global systems of oppression. Chancy discusses the shared identity of Haitian women as a part of the African diaspora. She gives specific attention to "Third World Women in the West," where she highlights the shared experience of Haitian and African-American women as black women. Also see Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

³⁷ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Haiti: State Against Nation*, 81.

RELEVANT LITERATURE

I conceptualize Haitian women's activism from 1919 to 1986 in Port-au-Prince and Montreal as several interrelated movements.³⁸ I draw my framing of women's activism in this period from post-colonial feminist scholars and black feminist scholars who maintain that women's political and feminist consciousness develops through multiple and overlapping systems of oppression and resistance.³⁹ My conceptualization of the movement is particularly aligned with Lizabeth Paravisini-Gerbert's analysis of Caribbean women's movements. She asserts that due to the complexity of Caribbean women's subjectivities many Caribbean women have not identified with a feminist characterization of their actions. Rather than a broad "feminism," she advocates seeing women's activism as "movements." The history of Haitian women's activism, then, cannot be divorced from the histories of local and international struggles for and challenges to power around it.⁴⁰

Although there is a gap in the historical record of Haitian women's activism, the history of twentieth century Haitian politics and radical thought is well documented. In the period of the U.S. occupation I build on the work of historians Mary Renda and Alan McPherson.⁴¹ In her canonical text on the U.S. intervention and white American masculinity, Renda shows that U.S. marines justified brutal violence against Haitians by

³⁸ See Lizabeth Paravisini-Gerbert, "Decolonizing Feminism: The Home-Grown Roots of Caribbean Women's Movements," in *Daughters of Caliban: Caribbean Women in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Consuelo Lopez Springfield (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 3-17.

³⁹ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, (New York: Routledge, 2000), Ann Stoler and Frederick Cooper, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Ann Stoler, et al., *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

⁴⁰ Mirlande Manigat, *Etre Femme en Haiti Heir et Aujourd'hui*, 282. Manigat frames Haitian women's politics within the *mouvance* of national politics.

⁴¹ Mary A. Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

projecting a popular image of Haitian hyper sexuality and criminality. She also reveals that among African Americans in the U.S., artists, musicians, and writers responded to the derogatory imaging with positive images of Haitian and African descended people. I expand the scope of Renda's work to focus on the shared acts of resistance between Haitian women and African American women through reading clubs and schools that aimed to educate and produce a counter narrative to U.S. racist propaganda. In this regard, Alan McPherson's work is also instructive, as he presents Haitian women's complex responses to U.S. intervention, including women's cooperation with U.S. marines to thwart anti-occupation movements.⁴² Although McPherson's work is insightful for its diverse representation of Haitian women in the U.S. occupation period, my work diverges from McPherson's in my categorization of Haitian women's activism. McPherson, for example, maintains that, "Haiti's elite women in the 1920s founded no distinct organization and seemed even more to be extensions of male relatives." Many elite women in the 1920s and 1930s were related to male intellectuals, politicians, and leaders of the anti-occupation movement. However, McPherson dismisses these women's contribution to the nationalist movement because of their interpersonal relationships. This dissertation shows that these interpersonal relationships provide new sites for understanding Caribbean feminist and Haitian nationalist thought.

In addition to projects on the U.S. occupation, narratives of the post-occupation period in Haiti provide an essential framework for this dissertation. In particular David

⁴² In addition to Renda and McPherson's work, Suzy Castor, Hans Schmidt, Brenda Plummer, and Michel Laguerre also present invaluable narratives and compelling arguments about the impact of U.S. intervention on Haitian society and women's role as market women, guerrilla warriors, and anti-occupation activists. In particular, Laguerre's presentation of the Haitian military creation during the U.S. occupation and its mutation during the Duvalier regime conveys the role of the United States in constructing a hyper militarized state that would ultimately only ever use its expertise against Haitian citizens and terrorize women.

Nicholls, Matthew Smith, Millery Polyné, and Frantz Voltaire each provide meticulously detailed and compelling histories of the politics and intellectual thought of the time.⁴³ For example, Polyné’s work connects the political strategies of Haitian activists and intellectuals with those of African Americans in the region. Polyné argues that Haitian and African American political alliances and “counter-acts” against regional racism and imperialism throughout the twentieth century represented an Afro-modernity that challenged the U.S.-centered tenets of Pan Americanism. His work is particularly useful as a guide to understanding the complex tensions and harmony within Caribbean and North American political organizing. Likewise Smith and Nicholls, both provide a historical lineage of intellectual thought that is necessary for understanding women’s activism in the period. In particular Smith’s work situates the dynamic radical activism of the period as a central factor in the development of the social and political culture of twentieth-century Haiti. Smith argues that the exchange of radical ideas and political action in the “postoccupation experience was modern Haiti’s greatest moment of political promise.” Although each of these scholars acknowledges the women’s movement, none of them situate it as equally dynamic and ideologically sophisticated as the other political factions of the time. This project considers Haitian women’s evolving political consciousness as a primary component of the radical milieu of the mid-twentieth century.⁴⁴

The Duvalier presidents and their legacy have been studied at great length.⁴⁵ Of the

⁴³ See David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour, and National Independence in Haiti* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996); Matthew Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti: Radicalism, Conflict, and Political Change, 1934-1957*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Frantz Voltaire, ed., *Pouvoir noir en Haïti: l'explosion de 1946* (Montreal: Editions de CIDIHCA, 1988); Millery Polyné, *From Douglass to Duvalier: U.S. African Americans, Haiti, and Pan Americanism, 1870-1964* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2010).

⁴⁴ Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti*, 3.

⁴⁵ David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour, and National Independence in Haiti* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996); Enfofam, *Haitian Women Between Repression and Democracy* (Port-au-Prince:

many analyses, this project benefits most from Michael-Rolph Trouillot's work on the state and nation in relation to Duvalier's systemic and psychological power of the nation. This project is particularly indebted to Trouillot's genealogy of violence against women in Haiti.⁴⁶ In addition to this history, Haitian women's fictional accounts of life between 1956 and 1986 provide vivid reconstructions of truths that were often silenced by government repression. Marie Vieux-Chauvet's trilogy, *Love, Anger, Madness*, is instrumental in filling this lacuna. Written during François Duvalier's presidency (1957-1971), the stories provide interpersonal context for the political conditions of the 1960s and 1970s. The vivid interplay between the main character Claire, a brown skinned elite woman, and the leader of the nation Commandant Calédu, a dark-skinned violent dictator known for his dark sunglasses, khaki suit, and his spies, is a dramatic representation of the relationship between women and the Duvalier regime.⁴⁷ Vieux-Chauvet's forced exile from Haiti in the 1960s is evidence of this text's close representation of reality.

Like Vieux-Chauvet, many women who spoke out against the Duvalier regime or were perceived threats to the administration migrated out of the country. In the history of Haitian migration to Montreal, Sean Mills' study of radical thought in the 1960s is

ENFOFANM Editions, 1993); Elizabeth Abbott, *Haiti: The Duvaliers and Their Legacy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1988); Patrick Bellegarde-Smith, *Haiti: The Breached Citadel* (Toronto: Canadian Scholar's Press, 2004).

⁴⁶ Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Haiti, State Against Nation: The Origins & Legacy of Duvalierism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990), 165. See also Clorinde Zephir, "Dictator Duvalier Orders the Torture of Journalist Yvonne Hakime Rimpel," in *Haitian Women Between Repression and Democracy* edited by ENFOFANM (Port-au-Prince: ENFOFANM Editions, 1993), 27; Pressoir Pierre, *Témoignages: 1946-1976, l'espérance déçue*; Mirlande Manigat, *Etre Femme en Haiti Heir et Aujourd'hui: Le Regard des Constitutions, des Lois et de la Société* (Port-au-Prince: Université Quisqueya, 2002).

⁴⁷ Haitian feminist theorists and literary scholars routinely refer to Marie-Vieux Chauvet's work as an iconic testimony of the Duvalier period. See Myriam Chancy, *Framing Silences: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997); Régine Jean-Charles, *Gendering VIOlence: Francophone Women Writers, Representations of Violence, and the Violence of Representation*, Doctoral dissertation (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Edwidge Danticat, "Introduction," in *Love, Anger, Madness: A Haitian Trilogy*, translated by Rose-Myriam Réjouis and Val Vinokur (New York: Modern Library, 2009).

compelling and nuanced. Mills argues that the 1960s were a moment when new migrants from the Caribbean and Latin America helped construct the radical leftist politics of the city. In particular, he shows that anti-imperialist and anti-racist sentiment drew various activist groups together under a collective “grammar of descent” against sexism, racism, and capitalism. I expound upon Mills’ work to look more closely at the impact of Haitian women’s activism on the radical social thought of the 1960s in Montreal and Port-au-Prince.

The focus on Haitian women’s multiple movements and contribution to political thought is drawn from scholarship that looks closely at the relationship between Caribbean and African descended women’s activism and migration.⁴⁸ In particular, this dissertation is indebted to Carole Boyce Davies’ analysis of “migrant subjectivity.” Davies explains that Afro-Caribbean subjectivity and intern radical feminist activism is developed and constructed through the process of movement.⁴⁹ In *La Voix des Femmes*, this movement includes the local, national, and international movement of women’s physical bodies and the movement of ideas. From departure to arrival, whether from the market to home, or from Port-au-Prince to Montreal, this dissertation asks what happens in the interim and how do these interactions and experiences define the sojourner and her approach to activism?

Movement and migration also strongly informed Haitian women’s concepts of citizenship in the twentieth century. In his theoretically rich analysis of diasporic citizenship, Michel Laguerre explains this citizenship as “the situation of the individual

⁴⁸ Myriam Chancy, *Searching for Safe Space: Afro-Caribbean Women Writers in Exile* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997).

⁴⁹ Carol Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the subject*, (New York: Routledge, 1994), 20.

who lives outside the boundaries of the nation-state to which he or she had formerly held primary allegiance and who experiences through transnational migration (or the redesigning of the homeland boundaries) the subjective reality of belonging to two or more nation-states.”⁵⁰ Laguerre argues that the transmigrants’ citizenship is formed by the presupposition of border-crossing.⁵¹ If we take Nina Glick-Schiller’s assertion that “wherever their networks extend, transmigrants remain tied to their ancestral land by their actions as well as their thoughts, even though they may not frequently or ever travel ‘home’ again,” this project then considers how this relationship to migration and home informed the evolution of Haitian women’s feminist practice and thought.⁵² What real or imagined allegiance did women in the *diaspora* have to Haiti and how did their political action and consciousness evolve in relation to this allegiance?

This preoccupation with Haitian women’s subjectivity in the process of movement is anchored in a study and attention to the body. One of the claims of the dissertation is that women come to their activist consciousness through their understanding of a threat

⁵⁰ Michel Laguerre, *Diasporic Citizenship: Haitian Americans in Transnational America* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 12

⁵¹ Laguerre, *Diasporic Citizenship*, 12.

⁵² Nina Glick-Schiller, “Foreword, Locality, Globality and the Popularization of a Diasporic Consciousness: Learning from the Haitian Case,” in *Geographies of the Haitian Diaspora*, edited by Regine O. Jackson (New York: Routledge, 2011: xxi-xxix); Nina Glick-Schiller and George Fouron, “Everywhere We Go, We Are in Danger”: Ti Manno and the Emergence of a Haitian Transnational Identity,” *American Ethnologist* 17 (May 1990): 329, Nina Glick-Schiller, et al. *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Nationalism Reconsidered* (1992). See also, Linda Basch, Nina Glick-Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (Langhorne, Pa.: Gordon and Breach, 1994), 8 & 147. Also see Nina Glick-Schiller and Georges Eugene Fouron, *Georges Woke Up Laughing: Long-Distance Nationalism and the Search for Home* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), and Paul Brodwin, “Marginality and Subjectivity in the Haitian Diaspora,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 76 (Summer 2003): 406. The home in many ways is the space upon which Haitian women make claims on their gendered subjectivity and reject the constructs placed on them in these structural and psychological spaces. In this way *La Voix des Femmes*, benefits from an extensive body of feminist scholarship and gendered histories that attend to the home and situate it as a significant site of cultural and social meaning making and execution of political practice including, Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (2nd ed.), (New York: Routledge, 2000); Gina Ulysse, “Papa, Patriarchy, and Power: Snapshots of a Good Haitian Girl, Feminism, and Diasporic Dreams,” *Journal of Haitian Studies* 12, no1 (Spring 2006: 24-47); Kathleen Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

to their livelihood and their bodies. In particular I show that movement both in the physical sense of migration and displacement and movement in the sense of political organizing and social activism were informed by physical threats to women's bodies.

ON VIOLENCE

This story necessitates a confrontation with violence. Over the course of the twentieth century Haitian women have testified to their experiences of violence as well as recorded their objection to it. In documenting violence there is the risk of creating a meta-narrative in which women's lives, particularly African descended women, can only be understood through violence. While there are several violent stories in this dissertation, these narrations are not meant to serve as wholly representative of Haitian women's experiences. Rather, the intention is to show a complex image of women's lives in which care, violence, action, and inaction all exist in the same space and are equally worthy of historical representation.

In balancing the fine line between, tending to violence and reinscribing trauma and injury to black female bodies, these stories, as Hershini B. Young instructs, are not an invitation to the "privileged body of the reader" to fetishize, erase or elide the traumatized black body or the history of physical injury to women.⁵³ Young asserts that the repeated historical sexual assault of black women's bodies is "non-quantifiable." There are no number of words, or absence of them, that can handle the gravity of the physical, psychological, or spiritual violation, while there are simultaneously no words to

⁵³ Hershini Bhana Young, *Haunting Capital: Memory, Text & the Black Diasporic Body*, (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2006)

fill the “absence that is seething with presence.”⁵⁴ Yet, it is in some of the more violent spaces in this history that we hear women’s most compassionate and intimate voices, providing insight into the social and interpersonal construction and meanings of Haitian womanhood.⁵⁵

With this understanding, *La Voix des Femmes* is firmly rooted and in conversation with Caribbean, Latin American and transnational feminist scholarship that contends that women of color cannot be discussed metaphorically, as is typical of western feminisms. Rather the physicality of Afro-Caribbean women’s experiences through colonization, forced labor, and institutionalized violence demands a recognition of the individual or collective memory and fear of these corporeal atrocities in understanding Afro-Caribbean women’s motives and meaning behind their activism and feminist consciousness.⁵⁶

SOURCES AND TERMINOLOGY

In order to tell this epic story of activism, family, violence, migration, and healing, I employ multiple mediums and interdisciplinary analyses to document and embrace the totality of Haitian women’s lives. More specifically, I draw from archival research, Haitian literary criticism, and oral history to highlight Haitian women’s written, oral and creative histories as necessary octaves of a collective historical voice. It is at this

⁵⁴ Young, *Haunting Capital: Memory, Text & the Black Diasporic Body*

⁵⁵ See Carolle Charles, “Popular Images of Gender and Sexuality: Poorer and Working Class Haitian Women’s Discourses on the Use of Their Bodies,” in *The Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean*, ed. by Linden Lewis (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2001: 169-189). Charles identifies women’s use of their bodies as a “counter-power” against patriarchal society by opting out of marriage or exploring with their sexuality.

⁵⁶ See Lizabeth Paravisini-Gerbert, “Decolonizing Feminism: The Home-Grown Roots of Caribbean Women’s Movements,” in *Daughters of Caliban: Caribbean Women in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Consuelo Lopez Springfield (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 3-17; and Myriam J. A. Chancy, *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

kalfou/carrefour/crossroads of interdisciplinary methods, and of interlocking historical narratives of Haiti, the Caribbean and North America that *La Voix des Femmes* is situated.

Haitian women activists did and do speak for themselves.⁵⁷ Therefore, oral histories are a significant component of this dissertation. In her study of women writers Haitian-Canadian author Myriam Chancy emphasizes the importance of speech as a foundation of Haitian feminist practice. She explains that speech, which in Haitian history has often been “an endangered activity,” is also a point of departure in Haitian feminism, “which progresses from *speech activation* to *dialogue integration*, to the paradoxical *creation of an imperceptible women’s space*, to the *enforced implementation of women’s rights*.”⁵⁸ Vocalization, then, is the invitation to commune, to be heard and to establish presence and impending action. It is the audible representation of a challenge to the gender repressive practice of nationalism, patriarchy, imperialism, and migration. Orality, then, is a central component and practice of Haitian history.⁵⁹ In the face of archives that represent the inequalities of the gendered, classed and racialized experiences of Haitian women it is necessary to privilege the areas where women’s interpretations of their lives can be heard.

To this end, this dissertation draws from over 40 interviews with Haitian women and men in Haiti, Canada and the United States ranging in length from 3 to 10 hours over days, weeks, and months in Haitian Krèyol, French and English. Drawing from feminist ethnography and practice, the interviews are a joint process of theorization in which the interviewees and I discussed the meaning of their stories and their memories in

⁵⁷ See Myriam Chancy, *Framing Silences: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 13, and Gayatri C. Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (London: Macmillan, 1988), 271-315.

⁵⁸ Myriam Chancy, *Framing Silences*, 27.

⁵⁹ Michel Rolph-Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995). The *histoire/istwa* is both the history and the telling of history.

relation to the written history. I collected many of these interviews in Montreal, Canada where I worked as a student-in-residence at the *Centre International de Documentation et d'Information Haïtienne Caribéenne et Afro-Canadienne* (CIDIHCA) and as an archivist and workshop co-facilitator in art-therapy and storytelling at *Maison d'Haïti* from February 2010 to September 2011. During this time, I joined Concordia University's "Haiti Group" of the *Montreal Life Stories Project*, where I conducted interviews regarding Haitian migration and life in Montreal.

In my use of oral history I am cognizant that individual memory is a complicated source for historical recovery given its malleability and capacity for constant change. However, as Edwidge Danicats asserts, "Grappling with memory is [...] one of many complicated Haitian obsessions."⁶⁰ This dissertation reflects a similar preoccupation through its privileging of oral history as an equal source as textual archives. I am less concerned with the discrepancies between stories and more interested in what Jacques Le Goff would call "the fruit of an inexact evocation."⁶¹ I am interested in the meaning of these differences, "collective agreements," and memories of the amnesiac.⁶² I accept this as a premise of my research and welcome the contradictions as a means to read these multiple texts against one another to reveal a nuanced and compelling narrative.

As stated in the preface, Haitian women's writings are also an invaluable source with which my work is in conversation. Haitian women have sought many mediums to

⁶⁰ Edwidge Danicats, *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 63.

⁶¹ Jacques Le Goff, *History & Memory*, translated by Steven Rendall and Elizabeth Claman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 57.

⁶² In *Memoir of an Amnesiac*, the protagonist Paul asks, "How does one recall events accurately? Is it so important to go on with the story? This young woman, writing a long time after, is striving for precision. Which one? That of dates and events lived or her own truth across the genesis of history? A long time after, can the events be traced in their entirety? But she, leaning toward a past still near, cannot ignore this present that appears to be so far at times." Jan J. Dominique, *Memoir of an Amnesiac*, (Coconut Creek, FL: Caribbean Studies Press, 2008), 90.

express their activism. Various women have chosen to accompany their political organizing with written works that also challenge systems of oppression and injustice. As a result I use these texts—memoirs, literature, poetry, and social histories—to construct the story of Haitian women’s activism.⁶³

In addition to personal archives, oral histories, and women’s writings, I also conducted archival research in the government papers of various organizations and government initiatives in Haiti and North America. Similar to my reading of women activists’ oral histories, I recognize that the subjects and producers of these documents (court transcripts, political brochures, personal letters) operated within matrixes of power and privilege that inform the production of history.⁶⁴ I am also aware that there are moments when documents of a particular kind may outweigh others. As much as possible, I try to use a consistent balance of sources between written archival documents, oral histories and close readings of literature.

Finally, this project is informed by how women and men translate and transmit history. In this regard terminology in reference to race, color, class, and cultural dynamics in Haiti require careful navigation.⁶⁵ Taking this into consideration, throughout the dissertation I use the words and spellings that are particular to the time period that I am discussing.⁶⁶ The most complicated terminology for the purposes of this dissertation is that which address race, color, and class, particularly blackness. Michel Rolph-Trouillot’s

⁶³ These stories and analysis of Haitian women’s activist experiences can be found in Marie Vieux-Chauvet’s, *Amour, Colere, et Folie*, Marie Celie-Agnant’s, *The Book of Emma*, Edwidge Danticat’s *The Dew Breakers*, and Myriam Chancy’s *Searching for Safe Spaces: afro-caribbean women writers in exile*.

⁶⁴ Michel Rolph-Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 48. See Bibliography for list of archives, interviews, and literature used in the dissertation.

⁶⁵ For example, at the point where this narrative begins (the early twentieth century) terms like the “Haitian *dyaspora* (diaspora)” did not exist as they did by the end of the century.

⁶⁶ Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1888-1898*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 10.

analysis of terms is useful in this regard. Trouillot explains that since the Haitian Revolution and Independence from French colonization in 1804, “the nation has always conceived of itself as a ‘black’ community.”⁶⁷ In the dissertation I use this understanding of blackness to describe a shared African ancestry between Haitians and other African descended people.⁶⁸ At the same time, familiar terms like black, white, and *mûlatre* have to be situated within the historical context of the period under discussion. In the history of Haiti this is particularly important as Trouillot shows that color definitions in Haiti are not simply cosmetic. Instead, color is defined by a series of epidermic and somatic factors that include comportment, skin tone, family lineage, hair color, language, and economic resources. For example, within this formulation there are dozens of classifications for light-skinned individuals including, *griffe*, *brun*, *clair*. For this reason, I follow the example of more recent historians such as Kate Ramsey and Matthew Smith, in my application of the terms *milat* and black.⁶⁹ As Smith explains, the use of the Krèyol term *milat* refers to both class and color.⁷⁰ Similarly “black” not only refers to skin tone, but also to economic, social, and political position.

DISSERTATION ORGANIZATION

La Voix des Femmes is composed of six chapters, including an Introduction and Epilogue, which are framed by the previously unexplored biographical narratives of Haitian women and iconic moments in the Haitian women’s movement. Part I is

⁶⁷ Trouillot, *Haiti, State Against Nation*, 117.

⁶⁸ In the archive this meaning of black is most often understood as *nègre*, however the political meaning of this term changes over time and space. For more on the political evolution of this term in Afro-Francophone discourses of the mid-twentieth century see Brent Hayes Edwards,

⁶⁹ Kate Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law: Vodou and Power in Haiti* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Smith, *Red & Black in Haiti*, (2009), 198.

⁷⁰ Smith, *Red & Black in Haiti*, 198.

centered on Port-au-Prince, Haiti and it is framed by the organizational underpinnings and evolution of the *La Ligue Feminine d'Action Sociale*. Chapter 2—“Feminist Frequencies: Occupied Bodies, Diasporic Politics, and Visualized Blackness, 1915-1934” attends to the early evolution of Haitian feminism during the U.S. Occupation. Using court testimonies of peasant women who were raped by U.S. marines, I show how elite and middle class Haitian women used violated black bodies as proxy for imagining the oppression of African descended people globally and as the foundation for the early constructions of a national women’s movement. In this context, I contend that Haitian women developed a black feminist transnational solidarity with African descended women in the region based on shared experiences of racialized sexual violence sanctioned by Jim Crow politics in U.S. occupied Haiti and the U.S. South respectively; a gender conscious anti-imperialism; and a complex international black uplift agenda, which promoted African centered education and sexual conservatism.

Chapter 3—“Tormented By the Need to Help: Family, Philanthropy, Leftist-Leanings, and *La Ligue Feminine d'Action Sociale*, 1934-50” tells the story of Haitian women’s post-U.S. Occupation activism through the organizational history of the first women’s organization, *La Ligue Feminine d'Action Sociale* (LFAS). Building on the pervious chapter, I use LFAS newspapers, private correspondences, activists’ public lecture notes, oral histories, and reports from Haitian senate and constitutional debates to document the transition in Haitian women’s activism from an anti-imperial and anti-racist international project to an anti-patriarchal national focused movement. I contend that Haitian women’s platform concerning parental rights, the condition of the Haitian family structure—particularly the practice of *plasaj* (a Haitian family practice of multiple sexual and romantic partnerships)—and the political aesthetic of womanhood collided with

national narratives of citizenship and humanity that were espoused by radical leftist politicians in the post-U.S. occupation period. The conflict in vision for the political and social future of the nation resulted in violent debates between politicians and intellectuals that set the stage for the repressive administrations of the 1950s and 1960s.

Part II is built around the migration history to Montreal and historical consideration of the Haitian *diaspora* in Canada. In Chapter 4—“Violence, Migration, and Home, 1951-1970,” I document the increase in violence against women under the presidencies of Paul Magloire (1950-1956) and François Duvalier (1957-1971) and its impact on families, particularly young girls. I consider the impact of families’ decisions to migrate out of Haiti on the evolution of Haitian activism and articulations of Haitian feminisms. I consider the evolution of the Haitian women’s movement and activists’ lives through their experiences and interpretations of home and migration. In particular I look at the evolution in quality and function of the Haitian women’s movement and feminisms provoked by physical threats to young women’s bodies. To accomplish this, I pair the history of home invasion and family separation in migration with the construction of new nationalist domestic spaces and diasporic kinship relations—youth communist organizing, black power rhetoric, and feminist philosophy and practice.

In contrast to scholarship that maintains Haitian women were silenced under the repressive Duvalier regime, I contend that there was a change in the quality and function of the Haitian women’s articulation of activism that emerged through an evolved feminist consciousness, a collective Haitian diasporic identity, and a new understanding of individual subjectivity as a result of physical threats to the body, migration, and alternative structural and psychological conceptions of home. In particular, I pair the history of home invasion and family separation during the Duvalier regime with the

simultaneous construction of new nationalist domestic spaces and diasporic kinships. In order to tell this story, I trace the lives of five women and their international migrations from Haiti to France, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the United States, ultimately settling in Montreal, Canada.

La Voix des Femmes tells a story of Haitian women's activism that oscillates between the national and the international, often achieving its most dynamic and consistent identity in the discursive and tangible space between both. In Chapter 5—"From One Island to the Other': Community Organizing, Transnational Identities & the Haitian Feminist Diasporic *Lakou*, 1965-1980" I show Haitian women activists' experiences as authors of a Haitian diasporic feminism built upon a dynamic system of information flow and ideological exchange within and across Haitian and Canadian national borders. Focused on Montreal as a harbor for this thoroughfare of exchange and a hotbed for radical organizing in the 1970s and 80s, this chapter illustrates Haitian women's alliances with Afro-Caribbean community organizers, student activists, and Canadian feminists. I show that Haitian women's developments of feminist organizations and alternative constructions of home, like *Maison d'Haiti*. I maintain that the discourses and work among these activist collaborations on concepts of migrant communities, citizenship, and deportation shaped local demographics, national policy and international relations between North America and the Caribbean.

Through biographical sketches, like that of Madeleine Sylvain Bouchereau, critical analysis of contemporary writings, speeches, and oral history narrations, I use Haitian women's activism as a focal point for understanding how the dramatic historical shifts in the twentieth century informed the women's lives and collective conceptualization of national identity, culture, and woman-centered thought. At moments throughout the

twentieth-century elite Haitian women presented a feminist agenda that encompassed the different and complex experiences of women in the country and in the diaspora. However, throughout the century Haitian women's vision of themselves, articulation of their political agenda, and their relationship to the nation reflected discontinuity in the Haitian women's movement that was often divided along class, color, and cultural lines. Ultimately, at its foundation this dissertation is an exercise in recuperating the missing contents of Paulette Oriol's cabinet and the many other fragmented personal archival collections. It is my hope that the contents of these cabinets, memories, and archives will provide insight into the evolving meaning of women's political history and feminist thought in Haiti.

PART I

Feminism is not an empty phrase, but a reality. To be a feminist, one must have an ideal and be tormented by the need to help others. Feminism is, in short, the collective efforts of women for the betterment of women.¹

- Marie Theresa Poitevien, 1946

Despite the distance, common feelings connect our hearts.²

- Lucienne Estimé, 1950

¹ Marie Theresa Poitevien, "La Feminisme," La femme haitienne repond aux attaques formulées contre elle à l'Assemblée Constituante, 1946; CIDIHCA. "Le féminisme n'est pas un vain mot, mais une réalité. Pour être féministe, il faut avoir un idéal et être tourmenté par le besoin de secourir les autres."

² Lucienne Estimé, "Premier Congres National Des Femmes Haïtiennes, (Port-au-Prince: Bibliothèque Nationale d'Haïti 1950), 6.

On Monday evening April 10th, 1950, two hundred women from Haiti, the Caribbean and the United States filled the main reception hall of the Haitian National Palace. They gathered to witness the opening ceremony of the first Haitian Women's National Congress. The Haitian women's organization *La Ligue Feminine d'Action Sociale* (LFAS) organized the Congress as an extension of Port-au-Prince's Bi-Centennial Exposition and as a platform for women from throughout the region to debate issues of gender equality, women's rights, and most specifically, Haitian women's suffrage. As the sun set outside the room and guests waited for the festivities to begin, Lucienne H. Estimé, the host of the venue, first lady of the nation, and LFAS member, caught a glimpse of her husband, President Dumarius Estimé, as he and several advisors entered the room from the rear.³ He had come to support his wife as she gave the opening address, her first official duty as President of Honor for the Congress.⁴

As leaders of the republic Madame and President Estimé had both put extensive time, energy and government resources into the Exposition and the Congress. They engineered the Exposition to reignite the excitement of their supporters who had enthusiastically ushered them into the presidency following Haiti's revolution of 1946.⁵ Four years into their leadership, the Estimé's were unable to ignore the cloud of criticism

³ "Partial Diary, Trip to Haiti, Easter Vacation, April 1950," Layle Lane Papers, Mooreland-Springarn (MS), Washington, DC.

⁴ "Partial Diary, Trip to Haiti," Layle Lane Papers, MS. Also See Lucienne Estimé, *Dialogue avec mes souvenirs*, (Port-au-Prince: Éditions Mémoire, 2001), 108-110.

⁵ For more on the Second Revolution of 1934 see, Chantalle Verna, "Haiti's 'second independence' and the promise of pan-American cooperation, 1934-1956," Doctoral dissertation, (Michigan State University: 2005); Matthew Smith, *Red & Black in Haiti: Radicalism, Conflict & Political Change, 1934-1957* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); and Frantz Voltaire (ed.), *Pouvoir noir en Haïti: l'explosion de 1946*, (Montreal & Port-au-Prince: CIDIHCA, 1988). In 1946, Haitian leftist intellectuals, *noirists*, and labor leaders successfully organized themselves to overthrow president Elie Lescot (1941-1946) and usher Estimé in as the first black president since the U.S. occupation.

and suspicion from politicians and citizens that had befallen them.⁶ Further, under their administration political divisions intensified and the nation had fallen into an economic crisis.

Estimé, the first black president since the end of the U.S. Occupation in 1934, needed to resuscitate his nation and his popular image among the black middle class and the majority black citizenry. The First Family of the Republic were, as a result, straddling the line between desperation and enthusiasm about the Exposition and invested over 60% of the nation's annual budget on pavilions, bridges, and beautifying the capital city.⁷ Madame and President Estimé anticipated that this extravagant showcase of the nation and the Women's Congress would rally support around the presidency and be a part of their lasting legacy as first family.⁸

With her family's political future in mind, Mme. Estimé rose to speak. Until this point Mme. Estimé, like many of the wives of the republic before her, had limited her public speaking appearances. Yet as the murmurs of the distinguished audience settled into silence, the first lady greeted her guests with statesmen-like poise and "a subtle simplicity of emotion."⁹ Lucienne proclaimed, "In my role as President of Honor, it is my pleasure to cordially welcome the delegates from the friendly nations and our sisters from the province who immediately accepted [the invitation] to attend this beautiful manifestation of female effort. Their presence permits us to say that despite the distance,

⁶ Although well intended, Estimé failed to appease his black-middle class base or his left wing supporters who were troubled by his relationship with the bourgeoisie class. The president had also struggled to maintain control over the military that openly expressed their dissent.

⁷ This expense would draw more criticism than praise, further spiraling the Haitian government finances into debt and making the nation more vulnerable to foreign capital and economic intervention. For more see Matthew Smith, *Red and Black in Haiti* (2009); and David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour, and National Independence in Haiti*, 3rd edition (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996).

⁸ Lucienne H. Estimé, *Dumarsais Estimé: Dialogue avec mes souvenirs*, (Port-au-Prince: Les Éditions Mémoire, Bibliothèque Nationale d'Haïti, 2001), 109-110.

⁹ *Premier Congrès National Des Femmes Haïtiennes*, (Port-au-Prince: Bibliothèque Nationale d'Haïti 1950), 6.

common feelings connect our hearts and that we are guided by the same ideals.”¹⁰

The delegates traveled from as near as Croix-de-Bouquet and as far as Detroit, Michigan to attend the Congress. The women gathered in the national palace represented Haiti’s leading feminist activists, the nation’s first female doctors, lawyers, and social workers, and Lucienne’s co-collaborators on philanthropic and social service projects including her own orphanage, *l’Abri des Orphelins*. Her international guests were equally accomplished. Traveling from Puerto Rico, Cuba, Jamaica and the United States, these women included some of the most active and politically influential African American and Latin American women of their time, including Dorothy Irene Height, U.S. black women’s activist and President of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc.; Vivian Carter Mason, President of the U.S. National Council of Negro Women; Layle Lane, educator and U.S. Socialist Party member; and Felisa Rinçon de Gautier, San Juan mayor and Caribbean feminist activist.¹¹

Many of the Haitian women present had traveled both geographic and ideological distances to the congress. After the end of the U.S. occupation, Haitian women and men were divided by their opinions regarding the direction and future of the country. The women’s movement evolved through a decade and a half of raging rhetorical and sometimes physically violent battles among black nationalists, Communists, Socialists, elite business owners, and labor organizers, all of whom drew on differences within the nation such as class, color, and culture to push their respective agendas, each claiming to have the best interests of the nation in mind. Yet despite the division among politicians and intellectuals, leaders of LFAS had developed a unified movement that emphasized

¹⁰ *Premier Congrès National Des Femmes Haïtiennes*, (Port-au-Prince: Bibliothèque Nationale d’Haïti 1950), 6.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 6-7. Also see “Haiti” Countries Collection, MS 445, Sophia Smith Archives, Smith College, Northampton, MA.

social work and civic and scholastic education as methods for achieving goals such as universal suffrage and civil rights. In addition, the organization successfully fought for and won, among other accomplishments, the right for girls to attend public schools in 1943 and the right for married women to hold their own wages in 1944.¹² The conflict between the radical leftist movements in the 1930s through the 1950s, however, informed the practice of the women's movement by magnifying the color, class and culture consciousness of women and forcing these issues into an inclusive feminist discourse. In particular, within the women's movement the gap between poor and elite women was vast, and while the leaders espoused a universal feminist rhetoric, elite women remained the architects and leaders of the movement.

As Lucienne Estimé stood before the Congress she was aware of the past successes of the movement, having participated in them, yet the reality of women's continued subordination still loomed over the union. Haitian women were not only denied political and civil rights, they were also disproportionately affected by fiscal downturns in the country following her husband's administration's failed domestic and international economic ventures.¹³ Day-to-day, poor and working class women's life experiences teetered between life and death with disproportionate numbers of sexual assaults, communicable and sexually transmitted diseases, and extreme poverty.¹⁴ While many women were struggling to feed, clothe, and educate their families, it is certain that some were indifferent to what many critics saw as a crusade for elite women's rights.¹⁵

However, in its philanthropic and service efforts LFAS established a significant and

¹² Madeleine Sylvain Bouchereau, *Haiti et ses femmes: une étude d'évolution culturelle*, (Port-au-Prince: Les Presses Libres, 1957).

¹³ Women made up the majority of workforce in the urban factories.

¹⁴ Sylvain-Bouchereau, *Haiti et ses femmes*, 189. Also see Yvonne Sylvain, "La mortalité infantile," *La Voix des Femmes*, no 53, (Dec 1947), 8.

¹⁵ Suzie Boisrond, interviewed by author, March 7, 2011, Montreal, Canada.

respected presence in the provinces and managed to earn the support of women outside of the urban center of Port-au-Prince. The diverse representation of women at the congress was a powerful representation of national solidarity and the evidence of the progress of the movement.

Among the international attendees at the 1950 Congress, the rhetorical distance was smaller. In the three decades preceding this "female effort" the region was bustling with feminist and woman-centered activism including several Pan Caribbean and international women's congresses.¹⁶ During this period LFAS founders Alice Garoute and Madeleine Sylvain established relationships with women in political movements throughout North America, the Caribbean, and Europe. Representatives from each of these areas joined LFAS in Port-au-Prince for this final push to the vote, however, the international delegates were overwhelmingly African American women.¹⁷

By 1950 the Black Clubwomen's Movement in the United States was ending as the civil rights movement emerged and the early formulations of black feminist politics established roots.¹⁸ Similar to Haitian women, U.S. Black women spent the first half of the 20th century fighting assaults on their civil, political, economic, and physical freedoms

¹⁶ Regional international women's conferences included: Liga Feminista Panamericana conference (Mexico, 1923), Inter-American Commission of Women (Havana, 1930), and International Council of Women of the Darker Races, (Chicago, 1933). In an editorial titled, "Ladies' Day," *TIME Magazine* advertised the Congress describing it as an "aggressive full-scale feminist crusade," March 27, 1950.

¹⁷ In the thirty years during and following the U.S. occupation Haitian women's feminism evolved through a dynamic exchange of ideas and actions between Haitian and regional activists. Haitian women activists developed their feminist praxis in this thoroughfare of ideological reciprocity and pivoted between their multiple interpersonal, local, national and international identities as women, mothers, elite and middle-class Haitians, post-colonial and post-occupied subjects, Caribbean and Latin American citizens, and members of the increasingly intellectualized and articulated African diaspora. The political subjectivity of many of the international delegates who attended the Congress corresponded with those of their hosts. In a future project I will discuss the smaller Puerto Rican, Cuban and Jamaican delegations.

¹⁸ Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*, (Harper Collins, ; Beverly Guy-Sheftall, ed., *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, (The New Press, 1995); Kimberly Springer, *Still Lifting, Still Climbing: Contemporary African American Women's Activism*, (NY: New York University Press, 1999).

and safe livelihood in the United States. Since the Haitian Revolution and Independence of 1804, African American women and men looked to Haiti as an example of racial equality and resistance against white supremacy in the region.¹⁹ In the post-occupation era, U.S. African American women were particularly encouraged by the image of a black man (Dumarsais Estimé) leading a nation only a sea away and the potential implications of his presidency on the vision of black leadership in the United States.²⁰

First Lady Estimé was cognizant of the affinity the international delegates had for her husband and the parallels in Haitian and African American women's struggles for social and civil rights. She was also aware that some if not all of these struggles corresponded with the diverse conditions and concerns of women in her own country. Despite differences in class, color, political ideology, language, or nationality, the women who converged in Port-au-Prince were committed to what they saw as a shared purpose to advance and improve the condition of women in Haiti and the hemisphere. Narrowing in on their commonality, Mme. Estimé impressed upon her guests that women's rights and improved social status was a matter of "life and death."²¹

Lucienne Estimé's celebration of camaraderie coupled with her stern messaging spoke to the immediacy of the moment. In the weeks before the Congress, leaders of the LFAS received a verbal commitment from President Estimé that Haitian women would

¹⁹ Doris L. Garraway (ed.), *Tree of Liberty: Cultural Legacies of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008). Also see Mary Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

²⁰ Letters between Alice Garoute (LFAS founder) and Mary McCleod Bethune, August 20, 1949, September 4, 1949, and October 1, 1949. Mary McLeod Bethune Papers, National Archives for Black Women's History, Mary McLeod Bethune Council House, Washington, DC.

²¹ *Premier Congrès National Des Femmes Haïtiennes*, 6.

be granted the right to vote within the coming months.²² With his political influence waning with senators by the Spring of 1950, this was a premature commitment, but Estimé attempted to remain true to the promise he made to his wife, closest advisors, and several African American allies.²³ While members of LFAS were encouraged by Estimé's support, they also recognized the power of national and international enthusiasm for their suffrage campaign. The Haitian Women's Congress was a stage to put unified national popular and international pressure on Haitian senators to pass women's suffrage legislation.

Using the First Haitian Women's Congress as a frame, Part I of *La Voix des Femmes* is anchored in several lines of inquiry: What is the history of the movement that led to the 1950 women's congress? What were the political and organizational relationships among the congress attendees? What do these relationships reveal about the history of Haitian women's activism, national politics, and regional alliances in the early twentieth century? And finally what were the "common feelings" and "same ideals" that Mme. Estimé referred to and how did that shared sentimentality and ideology draw both the most influential women of Haiti and the leaders of women's movements throughout the region away from their families and national projects to spend the days surrounding Easter in Port-au-Prince in 1950?

Chapter 2—"Feminist Frequencies: Occupied Bodies, Diasporic Politics, and Visualized Blackness, 1915-1934" addresses these questions with a focus on the early

²² Letters between Alice Garoute (LFAS founder) and Mary McCleod Bethune, August 20, 1949, September 4, 1949, and October 1, 1949. Mary McCleod Bethune Papers, National Archives for Black Women's History, Mary McCleod Bethune Council House, Washington, DC.

²³ Lucienne H. Estimé, *Dumarsais Estimé: Dialogue avec mes souvenirs*, (Port-au-Prince: Les Éditions Mémoire, Bibliothèque Nationale d'Haïti, 2001), 109-110. Also see letters between Alice Garoute (LFAS founder) and Mary McCleod Bethune, August 20, 1949, September 4, 1949, and October 1, 1949. Mary McCleod Bethune Papers, National Archives for Black Women's History, Mary McCleod Bethune Council House, Washington, DC.

evolution of Haitian feminism during the U.S. Occupation. The chapter is told through the stories of Eleanor Charles, Viergina, and Alice Garoute. The women in this chapter originate from all sectors of Haitian society and yet in the cacophony of difference—color, class, culture, experience—this women’s stories maintain a fragile harmony in defense of their humanity. With women’s claims on humanity in mind, this chapter also considers the resonances of shared experience between Haitian and African American women as compromised citizens of occupying forces. I give specific attention to the ways in which elite Haitian women articulated their blackness in relation to African American women. I maintain that elite and middle class Haitian women saw violated woman’s bodies as proxies for imagining the oppression of African descended people globally.

The momentum of Haitian women’s international activism against U.S. imperialism and white supremacy under the occupation proved difficult to transfer to a national movement after the U.S. marines left. The factors under which Haitian women would unify had to be redefined. Thus, while elite Haitian women established international solidarity on the shared experiences of regional blackness, the concept of blackness within Haiti was complicated by national constructions of color, class, and culture. The manner in which elite women maneuvered the politics of color, class, and culture in the occupation and post-occupation period framed their feminist discourse and prepared them for the international stage in 1950. The story of how these women came together despite their differences is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2
FEMINIST FREQUENCIES—
OCCUPIED BODIES, DIASPORIC POLITICS, AND VISUALIZED BLACKNESS, 1915-1934

When Alice Garoute arrived at her new home in Jérémie at the end of the nineteenth century, she had already lived a life that groomed her for the ups and downs of activist and political leadership. Born Alice Thézan in 1874, Alice’s maternal family were members of the *milat* “petite bourgeoisie” who were known for their political agitation in the northern city of Cap Haitian.¹ In the early 1880s, her mother, who was rumored to carry a revolver in her corsage, and uncle were particularly renowned for operations led by Jean-Pierre Boyer-Balezais to overthrow the Salomon government (1879-1888).² As a result of their anti-Salomon activity, Alice’s parents along with their young girl were exiled from Haiti. For the next several years, they found community among the growing elite Haitian refugee community in Kingston, Jamaica. Although Alice and her family found peace and safety among exiles in Jamaica, their fellow elite rebels in Haiti experienced a violent government crackdown that ended with the “Bloody Week” of 1883, when opponents and defenders of the Salomon government took to the

¹ Ghislaine Charlier, Interviewed by author, September 17, 2010, Montreal, Canada. Ghislaine Rey Charlier is a Haitian author and activist. She is Alice Garoute’s granddaughter. Her husband Etienne Charlier was the founder of the *Parti Socialiste Populaire* (PSP), a leading scholar on Haitian early history, and a vocal supporter of the feminist movement. In addition to her two books, *Mémoires d’une affranchie* (Montreal: Éditions du Méridien, 1989) and *Anthologie du roman Haïtien 1859-1946* (Sherbrooke, QC: Éditions Naaman, 1978), she has also written several articles on history and politics in Haiti and she helped edited and her husband’s collected volumes.

² David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour, and National Independence in Haiti*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press), 110.

streets in a violent civil war.³

When Alice and her family returned to Haiti, she was a teenager and an eligible age for courtships and marriage. As a member of the petite bourgeoisie, Alice was likely encouraged to find a suitable husband for her social status—an educated man with either political ambition or business savvy—which she did.⁴ At some point in her late teens or early twenties, Alice married her first husband and settled in Port-au-Prince. Little is known of her first husband. However, shortly into their marriage the circumstances of the relationship were no longer acceptable for Alice. As a result, Alice divorced her first husband after a few years of marriage and two miscarriages.⁵

At the end of the nineteenth century divorce within elite communities was rare and socially discouraged.⁶ Elite women were groomed from birth to learn the social etiquette of the bourgeoisie culture—hostessing, home decorating, and refined French speaking—in order to capture the attention and ultimately the marriage proposal of a young elite suitor.⁷ The fate of a woman who was unable to learn and perform these bourgeoisie practices was life long maidterdom—living in her parents’ home under her father’s rules and supervision indefinitely.⁸ Women who attempted to chart their own paths outside of marriage had to learn to withstand the whispers of neighborhood gossip.

³ Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier*, 110.

⁴ Madeleine Sylvain Bouchereau, *Haiti et ses femmes*, 205-210. Sylvain Bouchereau explains in her study of bourgeoisie marriage, “The young girl from the bourgeoisie is raised with her sights on marriage. Often, the thirteen or fourteen year old girl, and sometimes even the eight or ten year old, has a boyfriend.”

⁵ Jasmine Claude-Narcisse, *Mémoire de femme*, (Port-au-Prince: UNICEF-HAITI, 1997).

⁶ Sylvain Bouchereau, *Haiti et ses femmes*, 214-215.

⁷ Sylvain Bouchereau, 156.

⁸ Marie-Vieux Chauvet, *Love, Anger, Madness*, trans Rose-Myriam Réjouis and Val Vinokur (New York: Modern Library, 2009). Originally written in 1967, *Love, Anger, Madness (Amour, colère et folie)* captures this social paradox for elite women who are groomed for marriage, but never marry and live with their parents through her famous character Claire. Claire proclaims in the first page of the canonical texts of Haitian women’s twentieth century literature, “I am [...] an old maid! No husband. Doesn’t know love. Hasn’t even lived, really. [...] I am thirty-nine years old and still a virgin. The unenviable fate of most women in small Haitian towns” (2).

Often their reputations or their families' reputations were soiled by the assumption that elite women who lived and worked outside of the watchful eye of a father or husband were highly promiscuous, or worse, the family had lost the capacity to provide for the daughter, leaving her to work outside of the home.⁹ Thus, Alice's choice to return to the even more ill-fated status of divorcee was not common and even feared by some. Yet there is no evidence that Alice experienced substantial fear or public shame regarding her divorce. Her ability to finalize a divorce suggests that the conditions of her marriage were not only unbearable for her, but were likely horrible enough that she received the support of her family and community.¹⁰

With her first and short-lived marriage behind her, Alice moved forward with her life and soon met a young attorney who would become her husband. The chronology and circumstance of Alice's introduction and courtship to her second husband, Auguste Garoute, are unclear. It is likely, however, that the two were drawn together by their love for politics and commitment to justice. Auguste Garoute was born to a *milat* woman of modest means in the countryside of Jérémie. He lived most of his early childhood among the working class. When his parents died, Auguste's eldest brother, who had married a prosperous young female merchant, arranged for him and his younger brother Pascal to attend school in Port-au-Prince. The two Garoute brothers excelled in their studies and eventually enrolled in law school. After receiving his jurist doctorate, Auguste decided to return to his native Jérémie and practice law. As his professional career soared, Auguste also met and married a fellow native of Jérémie, Marie-Noelle. Beyond being know as "a

⁹ Jean Price-Mars, *La vocation de l'élite*, (Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie Edmond Chenet, 1919), 112.

¹⁰ Sylvain Bouchereau, 214. Madeleine Sylvain attributes most elite divorces to infidelity. She explains that many women in the twentieth century decided to divorce their husbands because they no longer wanted to live by the double standard that encouraged women to remain monogamous and care for the home while their husbands participated in open extramarital affairs. The public explanation for divorce was often attributed to other fabricated reasons.

beauty with green eyes,” Marie-Noelle was also known for her family lineage that counted her as a descendant of an original signer of the Haitian declaration of independence.¹¹ Marie’s family prestige and fair complexion, along with Auguste’s professional prowess and expertise, propelled the Garoute’s into the bourgeoisie class of Jérémie. The young family settled in a magnificent wood home in the city center and began to raise their five children. Tragically, soon after their youngest child was born, Marie fell ill and died.¹²

Auguste’s status as a young widower immediately placed the successful attorney and future judge back on the market for a wife. Auguste was known as a man of brevity and clarity of thought with a calm disposition. His serene and assuring presence made him the confidant to many of Jérémie’s elite, a number of whom he represented in court.¹³ His presence also made Garoute the premiere eligible bachelor of the city upon Marie’s death. Alice had surely heard of Auguste’s endearing reputation when she met her future husband during one of his many business and service visits to Port-au-Prince. His reputation along with his clear ambition was certainly appealing to Alice on both a professional and personal level. Alice and Auguste likely had a short courtship and were married in the final years of the nineteenth century.

Alice came to Jérémie with an arduous charge. First, she had to establish herself in the home built by Marie, who by all accounts, had been a socially established, loving, and cherished wife and mother. In her capacity as confidante and wife to her husband, Alice also became instantly responsible for his children. The task of raising a young family with children who were still grieving their mother’s death was likely difficult and possibly

¹¹ Ghislaine, Charlier, Interviewed by author, September 17, 2010, Montreal, Canada.

¹² Ghislaine, Charlier, Interviewed by author, September 17, 2010, Montreal, Canada.

¹³ Ghislaine, Charlier, Interviewed by author, September 17, 2010, Montreal, Canada.

painful at times. In addition to navigating the routine and emotions of her new family, as the wife of a prominent elite attorney, Alice was also confronted with the no less taxing endeavor of entering the complicated social milieu of Jérémie.

At the turn of the century, the historic city of Jérémie was one of the largest and flourishing cities in the nation. The streets of Grande Rue were lined with elegant wood homes inspired by eighteenth century European architecture, interspersed with export companies and boutiques selling coffee, cacao and the most elegant fabrics of the day. The “City of Poets” was also the birthplace of and a haven for the finest writers, artists and intellectuals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, including Emile Roumer, Edmond LaForest, and Fernand Marineau. Along with its reputation for superior creative talent, the southern city was also considered a nucleus for the nation’s *milat* elite and was infamously recognized for having strict lines of demarcation among social classes.¹⁴

Within Jérémie’s class and color hierarchy there were further barriers to elite social acceptance that depended on one’s answers to qualifying questions of ancestry. When Alice relocated from Port-au-Prince, she was certainly a young woman of means, but in Jérémie she lacked the familiarity and legacy that her husband had in the city. Garoute’s answers to the questions “Who are your parents? Who are your grandparents? What is your family name?” were not sufficient to promptly propel her into the bourgeoisie class, a reality that, her relatives remember, always disturbed her.¹⁵ At the same time, Alice was no stranger to hard work even if that work included climbing the social ladder of elite Jérémie. Lacking the esteemed social currency, the fair skinned

¹⁴ Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier*, 141.

¹⁵ Ghislaine, Charlier, Interviewed by author, September 17, 2010, Montreal, Canada. Also see Jasmine Claude-Narcisse, *Mémoire de femme*, (Port-au-Prince: UNICEF-HAITI, 1997).

Garoute made a name for herself through her capacity to entertain and her commitment to the intellectual growth and professional rigor she demanded of herself, her husband, her children and her grandchildren.

Alice soon proved to be a dogmatic advocate and proponent of her new family. Within the first few years of their marriage, Alice slowly gained acceptance among the Jérémie elite, although her foreign Port-au-Prince and Cap Haitian upbringing still left some of the highest members of the elite questioning Alice's worthiness. Alice decided to verify her social stature through her relationships to family and childhood friends. One such friend was Louis Borno the Minister to Foreign Affairs and Justice and future President of Haiti (1922-1930). According to her family, Alice used this and other relationships to rally support for her husband's career. For example, in early 1915 Alice wrote a letter to Borno sharing the events of her new life and strongly encouraging him to consider nominating her husband, "a man of valor and good integrity," for the *Tribunal de Cassation*, the supreme or final court of appeal in Haiti.¹⁶ Before the end of Borno's term as Minister of Foreign Affairs and Justice in February of 1915, Auguste was appointed as a judge on the highest court in the country.

Auguste's career soared during the first decade of their marriage. His appointment to the court occurred months before the U.S. occupation making his first judicial decisions ones that would permanently impact the nation. In 1915, along with Monsieur Cabesh, Garoute was one of the only two representatives who refused to sign the protectorate that ratified the U.S. occupation.¹⁷ Auguste adamantly maintained that if the United States claimed to be a true protectorate, they would wait for Haiti to ask for

¹⁶ Charlier, Interviewed by author, September 17, 2010, Montreal, Canada.

¹⁷ George Sylvain, *Dix années de lutte*, (Port-au-Prince, 1920).

their protection. The idea that the U.S. government would impose their protection was absurd to Garoute. For his decision to abstain from signing the protectorate, Garoute became known as a man of firm values, integrity, and legal rigor. With his reputation many elite and middle class professionals and intellectuals desired his advice and approval. However, Alice was cautious of such admiration. She was known to routinely dismiss guests from her home who she believed were seeking to bribe her husband for favorable judgments.¹⁸

Alice was not afraid to speak her mind even at the cost of shattered social and political relationships, however, she spend much of her time cultivating friendships and seeking intellectual company. With time, Alice became known for hosting the most exciting balls, outdoor parties, weekend vacations, intellectual debates, and local theatrical productions. Alice often had roles in these private productions. In her stage performances and productions, Alice's attention to detail and witty humor shone in her interpretations of French and English literature including Shakespeare.¹⁹ Alice's gift for performance was also apparent in her frequent practice of "reading cards." Using the cards as accouterments to legitimate her "visions," she was known to predict the destinies of her closest friends. Alice limited her foresight to the realm of friendships and romance. Family history maintains that her clairvoyance in this area was compelling. Once a young girl ran out of the Garoute home crying hysterically after Alice read her cards and insisted

¹⁸ Charlier, Interviewed by author, September 17, 2010. On one occasion, an ambitious politician and his wife came to the Garoute home for dinner. At a certain point in the dinner the man and his wife presented Auguste with two ties from their latest trip to Jamaica. As Auguste reviewed the gifts, Alice entered the room and saw them. After glancing over the ties she forcefully asked her guests, "Do you think you are going to buy my husband off with two ties?!" and proceeded to forcefully dismiss their guests.

¹⁹ Charlier, Interviewed by author, September 17, 2010, Montreal, Canada. Also see Ghislaine Rey Charlier, Interviewed by Stéphane Martelly, Video recording by author, Histoire de Vie Oral History Project and Archive, Concordia University, Montreal, Canada.

that it was ill advised for the young woman to marry the man she was in love with.²⁰ Whether her visions were divinely ordained, informed by the spirit of Ezuli, or whether Alice used the cards to incite action and real drama in the community, these semi-prophetic and performative moments reflected her powers of persuasion.

Although her card reading and visions were reserved for her family and closest friends, her commitment to the characters in her public storytelling and plays was evidence of her well read and charming personality, which appealed to socially and financially affluent women like Madame Thérèse Hudicourt. Thérèse was the wife of Pierre Hudicourt, an attorney, Haitian nationalist, and early Marxist. Thérèse was also interested in the intellectual discourse of the period. Alice and Thérèse became fast friends and combined their literary thirst to establish a library in the salon of the Garoute home. The women used the library as space to hold weekly reading club meetings for a small circle of elite women. The women read French and English novels and prose, as well as political literature such as Marx and early French feminists. The exclusive club, which resembled the reading clubs organized by Black U.S. women during the same period, served to expand Alice's circle of influence, and also expanded the vision the club members had of themselves in their nation, region, and the world.

The concerns of the nation and women's place as citizens were foremost on the minds of Alice and her friends. By the first decade of the twentieth century Alice and her husband were firmly placed into the highest ranks of Haitian society. While the social acceptance that came with this appointment was likely comforting, as Auguste Garoute's wife, and thus legally a minor, Alice was prohibited from full control of her professional

²⁰ Charlier, Interviewed by author, September 23, 2010, Montreal, Canada. Also see Charlier, Interviewed by Stéphane Martelly, Video recording by author, Histoire de Vie Oral History Project and Archive, Concordia University, Montreal, Canada.

and financial decisions. Her record as a clever and discerning wife had no bearing on her access to civil rights.

In the summer of 1915, U.S. Marine ships docked on the very shores where Garoute and her friends held cookouts and vacationed with their families. Initially their social and economic status protected the women from the impositions of the U.S. government on Haitian society. However, as the occupation entered its third year the women began to witness changes in their relatively sheltered lives.²¹ Most notably, the city that Alice worked so hard to make her home was changing. As U.S. Marines diverted the commerce and urban markets away from coastal cities like Jérémie, Saint-Marc and Cap Haitian, and centralized the economy and politics of the nation around Port-au-Prince, the people followed.²² Soon many elite residents of Jérémie were forced to move to Port-au-Prince, if not commute back and forth, like the Garoute family, as education, commerce and politics moved to the capital city.²³ The migration pattern toward Port-au-Prince in the early twentieth century began to drain the talent from the city of poets and over the following three decades ultimately change the demographic landscape of the entire country.²⁴ At some point during the first decade of the occupation Alice and her family moved to Port-au-Prince, but frequently traveled home to Jérémie. Living between two of the most influential cities of the nation, Garoute witnessed the threat to Haiti's sovereignty and heard the stories from throughout the nation.

²¹ Nicholls, 151. Also see Hans Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1971), 149

²² Micheline Labelle, Émigration et immigration: les Haïtiens au Québec, 76-77. Also see Hans Schmidt,

²³ Patrick Bellegarde-Smith, *Haiti: The Breached Citadel* (Toronto: Canadian Scholar's Press, Inc., 2004), 115.

²⁴ Micheline Labelle, Serge Larose, Victor Piché, "Émigration et immigration: les Haïtiens au Québec," *Sociologie et sociétés* vol 15, no 2 (1983: 73-88), 77; Rigoberto López, Marjorie Villefranche, and Frantz Voltaire, *Port-au-Prince is Mine (Potoprens se pam)* (Montreal: CIDIHCA: 2000), The collaborators state that the population of Port-au-Prince grew from roughly 60,000 at the end of the nineteenth century to about 150,000 by the mid-twentieth century.

FOUR HUNDRED AND FORTY MILES AWAY

At dusk on September 1, 1919 Eleanor Charles and her mother, Elizabeth Saint-Bernard, were walking home from an extended day of vending and shopping at the Gonaïves marché. The teenager and her mother traveled the dirt road carrying their extra produce on their heads as they laughed and discussed the daily events at the market. The women were familiar with the six-mile stretch of road between the market and their home in Petite Riviere Bayonnais.²⁵ Perhaps in their comfort with the surroundings or in the naïve assumption that U.S. marines would abide by the ordinance that prohibited them from leaving the city center, the women briefly relaxed their guard forgetting that their nation was under military occupation.²⁶ In their moment of sensory repose Eleanor and Elizabeth failed to hear the armored car speeding towards them. As they approached the iron bridge on St. Marc Road, the women had little time to react. Before they could change direction U.S. Marine Corps Private Edward Paul Pietszak, Private Pierre Edward Hope, and a young Haitian boy named Jerome Eli pulled up next to them. Private Pietszak instructed both ladies to get into the car. Eleanor and her mother immediately began to run in the opposite direction. Eleanor, trying to preserve the family produce with one hand on her head and the other propelling her stride, could not run fast enough. Private Pietszak caught her.²⁷ The day's produce fell to the dirt road—an assortment of tropical fruit rolling off of the embankment next to the bridge.

²⁵ Naval Court of Inquiry Proceedings, Folder “Brigade Commander, Correspondence to (3 Jan 18- 29 Dec 19),” Box 2, Headquarters Tenth Company Gendarmerie D’Haïti, The National Archives and Records Administration I (NARA I).

²⁶ Naval Court of Inquiry Proceedings, Folder “Brigade Commander, Correspondence to (3 Jan 18- 29 Dec 19),” Box 2, Headquarters Tenth Company Gendarmerie D’Haïti, (NARA I). The district commander remarked that Private Pietszak was in violation of an ordinance that prohibited marines to go any further than the “iron bridge.”

²⁷ Naval Court of Inquiry Proceedings, Folder “Brigade Commander, Correspondence to (3 Jan 18- 29 Dec 19),” (NARA I).

Eleanor later testified that a drunk Pitetszak pulled her into the bushes that lined the street, threw her to the ground, raped her, and then “forced her to open her mouth.”²⁸ As evidence of the assault, a military doctor confirmed that Eleanor’s dress and skin were lacerated, and that her “maidenhead” had been recently ruptured.²⁹ Perhaps in an act of resistance, resolution, or in an effort to escape her body, Eleanor relaxed to her muscles during the attack.³⁰ Private Pietszak later used what historian Hannah Rosen might call Eleanor’s “calculated submission” against her when he testified, “the girl did not resist very much.”³¹ After Pietszak was finished with Eleanor he placed one gourde into her lacerated and muddied hand. The payment of less than fifty U.S. cents would allow Pietszak to maintain that the sexual assault was a paid transaction of prostitution.³²

Eleanor and Elizabeth represented the most vulnerable Haitian citizens of the military occupation.³³ As market women, farmers, and servants, poor and working class women’s livelihood placed them in direct purview of U.S marines’ public surveillance. In

²⁸ Naval Court of Inquiry Proceedings, Folder “Brigade Commander, Correspondence to (3 Jan 18- 29 Dec 19),” (NARA I).

²⁹ Naval Court of Inquiry Proceedings, Folder “Brigade Commander, Correspondence to (3 Jan 18- 29 Dec 19),” NARA I.

³⁰ Black women intellectuals and writers have attempted to capture the sentiment accompanied with the violent act of interracial rape. See Marie Vieux-Chauvet, *Amour, Colère, et Folie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968); Edwidge Danticat, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*; (New York: Vintage Books, 1994) and Julie Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust* (New York: Plume, 1997), In *Daughters of the Dust*, for example, Ula is being raped and says she has to “throw my soul into the trees; I gotta wait ‘til this is over” 306-308.

³¹ Naval Court of Inquiry Proceedings, Folder “Brigade Commander, Correspondence to (3 Jan 18- 29 Dec 19),” NARA I. In her study of sexual violence against African American women after slave emancipation in the United States, Rosen shows that during acts of sexual violence and rape, women “negotiated or calculated submission under enormous constraints” of violence. Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 11.

³² Naval Court of Inquiry Proceedings, Folder “Brigade Commander, Correspondence to (3 Jan 18- 29 Dec 19),” NARA I. In the introduction of the dissertation I give extensive attention to the meaning, process and intent for sharing narratives of trauma and injury to black female bodies. See dissertation introduction and Hershini Bhana Young’s, *Haunting Capital: Memory, Text & the Black Diasporic Body*, (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2006) for more on this.

³³ The poor working class and peasantry were also the men and women who labored in the U.S. marines revival of the *corvée* system. In this forced labor system, men and women were paid little or nothing as they served jail time for petty crimes, or were most commonly taken from the streets to work U.S. government projects such as streets and railroads.

their journeys to, from, and during work these women traversed the roads of the country where they were exposed and least protected against the unwanted solicitation of foreign and native men alike.³⁴ Under the occupation, this public vulnerability reiterated their social status. Eleanor and Elizabeth were removed from the elite women and men with whom Alice and her husband associated. These women's paths only crossed as women like Eleanor and Elizabeth worked from sunrise to sunset as maids or live-in servants for women like Alice and her friends.³⁵

Public labor was a marker of class and social respectability. Proper elite women were given a Catholic education and were taught social etiquette, sexual conservatism and public piety.³⁶ While some women worked as secretaries or primary and secondary school teachers, physical labor outside of the home was a sign of compromised sexual morality. Public labor meant that a woman would be exposed to the unsupervised solicitation of men, or worse, she may fall prey to her own sexual desires. An elite women's ability to abstain from working was not only a reflection on her status, but it was an indicator of her father, husband and family's social position. An elite family that was financially vulnerable enough to put the women of the family to work was also making their women vulnerable to the perceived sexual lucidity of the non-elite world.

According to elite standards of labor and sexuality, Eleanor's reputation would have been in question long before Private Pietszak assaulted her. However the decision to

³⁴ This same class of women also solicited marines' advances in their professional capacities as sex workers. The number of sex workers during the occupation is unknown, however McPherson writes, "In Port-au-Prince, a city of 100,000, there were 147 registered saloons or dance halls and prostitutes operated out of all of them" (587). The intimate access that sex workers had to marines occasionally provided them opportunities to spy on anti-occupation activists and rebels. This relationship between sex, prostitution and the exchange of sensitive political and government information would later be used against Haitian women as they petitioned for the right to vote. See Chapter 3 of dissertation, "*La Voix des Femmes: Haitian Women's Rights, National Politics, and Black Activism in Port-au-Prince and Montréal, 1934-1986.*"

³⁵ Edwidge Danticat, "Between the Pool and the Gardenias," *Krik? Krak* (New York: Soho Press, 1995), 95.

³⁶ Sylvain Bouchereau, *Haiti et ses femmes*, 156.

publicly report the incident to the military opened the door for further queries into Eleanor's sexual practices. Private Pietszak accused Eleanor of fabricating the sexual assault. And it is likely that others within and outside of the military placed some responsibility for the incident on Eleanor. Despite these allegations, Eleanor maintained her innocence. Upon her mother's relentless pursuit of justice the case was opened to a U.S. naval investigation, in which Elizabeth requested a court martial and compensation in the amount of 100 *gourdes* "on the grounds that the girl has lost her reputation and it will be difficult for her to get work to do."³⁷ The court martial was never granted and Eleanor was never compensated.

If awarded, one hundred *gourdes* may not have been able to sustain the women for any extended period of time. However, the minimal financial compensation could have provided some repair to Eleanor's broken reputation and restore her family's honor.³⁸ The image of sexual purity for peasant women was marketable in the domestic service work arena. Privileged families had the power to withhold work from women who had reputations of illicit sexual behavior.³⁹ Although Eleanor had been raped, the knowledge that she had any sexual experiences, involuntary or voluntary, still had the potential to taint her resume. The monetary redress would have been verification and material evidence of Eleanor's non-compliance to sex with Pietszak, thus reducing the impact on her ability to market herself as a respectable worker. Without a trial or compensation, Eleanor's body would heal, but her social reputation was permanently damaged. Young

³⁷ Alan McPherson, "Personal Occupations: Women's Responses to U.S. Military Occupations in Latin America," *The Historian*, (2010), 596. *Gourdes* is Haitian currency.

³⁸ The average annual income of market women was --- in 1920s. *Occupied Haiti*, 1927.

³⁹ The marines were not the only possible threats to young girls. Elite men were also known to take advantage of young girls who worked in their homes by leveraging their power as employers to receive sexual favors. In many cases girls' reputations were spared because hid the indiscretions from their wives and the public. Discretion and secrecy prohibited a young girl from testifying about her experience, but it could also preserve her reputation.

Eleanor, who according to court records did not know her age but looked between thirteen and fourteen years old, was robbed of her *oné e respé*.⁴⁰

It is impossible to conceive the complexity of emotions that women and their families felt in the early days of military invasion, but fear, concern, confusion, and helplessness were likely among them. Children who were Eleanor's age or the age of Alice's oldest grandchildren at the time of the invasion have told the most revealing accounts of the cataclysmic shift in society during the U.S. Occupation. For example, the vivid adolescent memory of activist Jean Dominique is captured in his writings and those of his daughter J. Jan Dominique, who recounts that her grandfather forbade her father to pledge allegiance to the stars and strips that flew over his school.⁴¹ Or the horrifying account of author Edwidge Danticat's grandfather who upon walking down the street as a child saw three marines playing what he thought was soccer. The game was familiar, suggesting that the foreigners may not be the monsters his mother had described them to be. Only as he got closer he realized that the strange shaped ball they were kicking was a man's head.⁴²

Under these conditions parents took precautions. Elizabeth walked Eleanor home from the market, and Alice shielded her children and grandchildren from the violence of militarization through the means afforded her a woman of status. However, physical accompaniment and economic privileges were porous in their protection. The reports of violence against girls and women increased as the occupation continued. Historian Mary Renda maintains that after 1915, violence against Haitian women “characterized the

⁴⁰ The call and response Haitian greeting, *oné e respé* was (and continues to be) central to the cultural fabric of twentieth century Haiti—a fabric that was strategically unraveled by the pillaging of Eleanor's and other young women's bodies.

⁴¹ Jan J. Dominique, *Memoir of an Amnesiac*, translated by Irlin François, (Coconut Creek, FL: Caribbean Studies Press, 2008), 21-23.

⁴² Edwidge Danticat, *Brother, I'm Dying*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 246-247.

occupation.”⁴³ Renda further explains that the “routine of violence” meant that few cases of assault against women were prosecuted by U.S. courts martial. Eleanor’s case is evidence of this. Although her testimony was taken for an initial inquiry, the case never went to courts martial. As various political and intellectual factions debated the conditions of the occupation, they may have ignored or been ignorant of the assault on poor and peasant women’s bodies, but by 1920 the malodor of young female carnage became too strong to ignore, and the winds of travel and media were carrying the scent further.

RUMORS SPREAD

On May 15, 1920, nine months after the attack on Eleanor Charles and almost five years into the U.S. occupation of Haiti, the headline of the widely distributed African American newspaper the *Chicago Defender* read, “U.S. Troops Attack Haitian Girls.” The article projected a story of rape and murder of Haitian women into the African American consciousness. Reverend S. E. Churchstone-Lord, an African American pastor of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Port-au-Prince, reported the alleged attack to the paper:

...white soldiers of the American army are sending a reign of terror throughout the republic and attempting to beat the Haitians into submission. The most serious charge [...] against the white soldiers is that on one night nine little Haitian girls, ranging in ages from 8 to 12 died as a result of being criminally assaulted. The further charge is made that members of the native constabulary are compelled by the white officers to procure native women for use of the whites as concubines.⁴⁴

According to the *Chicago Defender*, when women escaped the fate of death or sexual assault, their lesser fate included prostitution by Haitian male pimps at the behest of white U.S.

⁴³ Renda, *Taking Haiti*, 163.

⁴⁴ “U.S. Troops Attack Haitian Girls,” *Chicago Defender*, May 15, 1920.

soldiers. In his narration of the twisted exchange of sex and power Reverend Churchstone-Lord further revealed, “that the Haitian people preferred Colored United States troops in the event the American government continued to maintain protectorate over the republic. They declared that the white troops are too arrogant and are known for their disrespect for the native Haitians, especially women and girls.”⁴⁵

Churchstone-Lord’s report in the *Chicago Defender* exposed a structure of brutal rape, assault and murder of Haitian girls and women by white U.S. Marines and occupation authorities. Although a fraction of incidences were reported to the U.S. Marines or the Haitian Gendarmerie during the occupation, women and men disclosed the gendered assaults on Haitian women’s bodies through word of mouth, newspapers, journals, public letters, and when possible courts-martial. It is through all or a combination of these means that Reverend Churchstone-Lord received knowledge of the Haitian girls’ deaths and revealed the story to the *Chicago Defender*.

Haitians possessed half-a-decade of intimate knowledge of white U.S. Marine’s disrespect for Haitian women. Since the early days of the U.S. occupation, the paternalistic imperialism and white supremacist approach to the intervention were poorly received and actively rejected by vocal proponents of *desoccupation*. Haitian officials such as, Auguste Garoute, and intellectuals including Jean Price-Mars, Perçeval Thoby, and Georges Sylvain advocated for Haitian sovereignty and defended the nation’s capability of self-governance via the nationalist organizations l’*Union Patriotique* (UP) and l’*Union Naitionaliste*. Through public forums and print media such as the *Courrier Haitien*, the *Nouveliste*, *Haiti Intégrale*, *La Patrie*, and *Le Matin*, these men voiced their discontent and warned their countrywomen and men about the dangers of the occupation to the Haitian

⁴⁵ “U.S. Troops Attack Haitian Girls,” *Chicago Defender*, May 15, 1920.

polity.⁴⁶ In addition to political organizations, the more militant *Cacos*, led by Charlemagne Péralte and Benoît Batrville, opposed the occupation and articulated their concerns through guerilla warfare attacking and killing U.S. marines in the name of national independence and freedom. Although the counter occupation movements had a diverse class membership, they were largely characterized by their methods and participant majority. On the one hand, the UP's most visible members were middle and upper class professionals, intellectuals and politicians who believed in structural, policy and diplomatic resistance to the occupation. On the other hand, the *cacos* most visible counter military forces were working class, peasant farmers, and market women who supported armed resistance as the route to national sovereignty.⁴⁷ Although the UP and the *cacos* never had any official alliance, they were symbolically bound by their shared contempt for the occupation and concern for, as one *cacos* general put it, the “ladies and young girls” who were “condemned” and “left to die of wounded pride.”⁴⁸

Despite the threat to safety under military occupation, there were pro-occupation organizations. Many of these pro-occupation elite and middle class Haitians supported and defended the occupation its initial years. However, after the Haitian Constitution was dissolved by the U. S. government on June 12, 1918, the cordial social and political relationships between pro-occupation Haitian elite and U.S. marines in public settings,

⁴⁶ RG 127 Records of the United States Marine Corps, Records of the Gendarmerie d'Haiti, 1915-1934, High Commissioner, Folder “Correspondence to Bandit activities and descriptions,” Box 3, NARA I. Also see George Sylvain, *Dix années de lutte pour la liberté 1915-1925*, vol 1 (Port-au-Prince: Editions Henri Deschamps, 1925, 195-).

⁴⁷ For more information on the complex class participation of the *cacos* see Yveline Alexis, *Nationalism & the Politics of Historical Memory: Charlemagne Peralte's Rebellion against U.S. Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1986*, doctoral dissertation, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 2011). Alexis maintains that contrary to the traditional characterization of the *cacos* as a peasant class struggle, the “freedom fighters” were also represented by elite and affluent Haitians. These affiliations, Alexis argues, strengthened the *cacos* threat to the U.S. occupation.

⁴⁸ Open letter from *cacos* generals, 1919. RG 127, Folder “Correspondence to Bandit activities and descriptions,” Box 3, NARA I.

clubs, and hotels were curtailed with the rise of U.S. imported Jim Crow policies.⁴⁹ Haitians were barred from areas frequented by white U.S. citizens and U.S. citizens stopped patronizing Haitian businesses. After 1919 when U.S. Marines were permitted to bring their wives and families to Haiti the constraints on Haitian and American interactions in social environments or through business and commerce were even tighter.⁵⁰ With the arrival of white U.S. women, white men who were previously willing to fraternize with elite Haitian men and women, and openly solicit the company of poor and working class Haitian women, turned their attention toward the white occupying U.S. family.⁵¹ The rise of Jim Crow inspired racial segregation and actions of white superiority that uniquely affected the Haitian elite erased any semblance of honor and respect between Haitians and U.S. marines and solidified the absolute decline in civility.

Moreover, the attack on Haitian women's bodies in the face of avid protections of white women and children blurred the longstanding social divide of class and color in Haitian society. Many elites began to realize that their indifference to the plight of working class and peasant women would not protect their own wives, sisters, and daughters from the same fate. All Haitian women were forced to consider that their daughter could be walking home with friends, playing outside or returning from the market as either vendor or consumer and fall prey to the advances of U.S. marines. Class, color, or social standing could not shield any woman from the social stratification or sexual assault incubated by Jim Crow. The violence against women's bodies collapsed social hierarchies on top of one another. Haitian women had the choice to recoil in the

⁴⁹ Schmidt, 136.

⁵⁰ Magdaline W. Shannon, *Jean Price-Mars, the Haitian Elite and the American Occupation, 1915-35*, (1996), 45.

⁵¹ Hans Schmidt, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 137 &140.

face of aggression or respond.

The distressing visual of lifeless preadolescent black girls put the intentions of the occupation into question and launched Alice Garoute, Thérèse Hudicourt, and other elite Haitian women into action. Alice and her husband had been explicit about their opposition to the occupation before the first U.S. marine arrived in Haiti. As a result, it was no surprise that Alice was among the female members of the *Union Patriotique* who used her affiliation to the nationalist organization to channel their frustrations and fears. In the fall of 1920 following the attack on Eleanor and the summer attack on the nine Haitian girls, the *Union Patriotique* began plans to send a delegation to Washington, D.C. to present their concerns of U.S. Marines' misconduct and propose a strategy for ending the occupation. The UP had a monthly membership fee of 1 gourde per month, however the diverse class make-up of the organization meant that dues were not always paid on time or at all. As a result, fundraising became a central component of the UP's operational efforts and necessary variable for the anti-occupation organization's ultimate success. Women activists bore the responsibility for securing the organization's financial security and future.⁵² The UP women's first order of business was to secure money for the commission to Washington, D.C.

Eugène Malbranche-Sylvain was at the helm of this women's collective effort. Eugène, like her husband George Sylvain, was well versed in the history of the nation and believed in her sovereignty. As a member of the *Union Patriotique* she was indoctrinated in

⁵² The dues-paying women activists of the UP were in large part the middle and elite wives, daughters, sisters and friends of the leading anti-occupation activists, and for their economic standing could afford the 1 gourde a month membership. However, the *Union Patriotique* was flexible about dues payment. As a result, the membership had a diverse class make-up including working class and some peasant women. If not official members of the UP, market women like Elizabeth and Eleanor Saint-Bernard, who were most vulnerable to the unsolicited attention of U.S. marines, were the women that the female membership of the UP organized on behalf of and in solidarity with. George Sylvain, *Dix années de lutte pour la liberté 1915-1925*, Tome I (Port-au-Prince: Editions Henri Deschamps,), 144.

the language of sovereignty of mind, body and spirit to which her husband promoted and she likely contributed.⁵³ As one of the “wives, daughters and sisters [she] was keen to contribute [her] personal efforts in this work of national liberation.”⁵⁴ In Port-au-Prince, Eugène garnered the support of her friends Alice and Thérèse, who combined their resources to establish an urban anti-occupation women’s collective.⁵⁵ As mothers and daughters of the nation Malbranche-Sylvain, Garoute and Hudicourt mined the streets of Port-au-Prince for donations.

On the inaugural day of fundraising in November 1920 a reported two hundred Haitian women took to the streets of Port-au-Prince.⁵⁶ The names of the hundreds of women who traversed the urban center that day are unknown, however it is likely that Malbranche-Sylvain’s fundraising compatriots were other vocal anti-occupation women activists including Mme. Perçeval Thoby.⁵⁷ Among Malbranche-Sylvain’s companions her teenage daughters Madeleine and Suzanne, who would emerge in the next decade as the leaders and founding members of the *Ligue Feminine d’Action Sociale*, were also likely to be nearby—perhaps holding their mother’s collection bucket or simply walking in her shadow chatting about their teenage lives, unconsciously absorbing the intricacies of mass mobilization. If the future feminists did not accompany their mother, they surely heard

⁵³ Sylvain, *Dix années de lutte*, 11.

⁵⁴ Sylvain, 92.

⁵⁵ Figure out what to do with this: Alice became the leader of the Caproise movement which comprised women from Cap Haitian. This is important, because the letter to the Caproise has one of the only references to Dominican women and their anti-occupation and feminist movements.

⁵⁶ Sylvain, *Dix Années de Lutte*, 92-93.

⁵⁷ Ten years later, on the 1st of March 1930, Mme. Thoby, Justinien Ricot, and Thérèse Vieux-Clesca led the largest independent protest against the U.S. occupation during the Forbes Commission visit to Haiti. On the morning of March 1st a reported 15,000 to 30,000 (varying Haitian and U.S. reports) women marched in the streets of Port-au-Prince following a prayer and mass at the l’Eglise du Sacré-Coeur. This event will be discussed in a revised version of this chapter. See Mirlande Manigat, *Être femme en Haïti hier et aujourd’hui, le regard des constitutions, des lois et de la société* (Port-au-Prince: Université Quisqueya, 2002), 25-27; and Madeleine Sylvain-Bourchereau, *Haiti et ses femmes, Une étude d’évolution culturelle*, (Port-au-Prince: Imp. Les Presses Libres, 1957), 81.

of the day's success.⁵⁸ From sunup to sundown, the women knocked on doors and walked the streets collecting funds from passersby. At the end of the first day the women collected 100 US dollars.⁵⁹

In the five months between October 1920 and February 1921 Haitian women led the fundraising initiative to subsidize the *Union Patriotique's* delegation to the United States. The campaign spread throughout the country to all 61 committees of the *Union Patriotique* with elite and middle-class women as the predominant fundraisers and administrative managers. As financial keepers of the 1921 trip to the United States, women were instructed to spend two to three days a week soliciting funds from families in the women's respective neighborhoods.⁶⁰

In their role as fundraisers, the UP women spent weeks in the homes of families across the country. It was in these intimate encounters to fund the *desoccupation* movement that women shared and collected the stories of the atrocities of the occupation. The women spent hours in home visits—holding the hands of bereaved mothers and children,

⁵⁸ It is also during this anti-occupation organizing that one of the characteristics of the Haitian women's movement and practice of Haitian feminism was established. At a time when children were often instructed to be seen and not heard, Alice encouraged the reading club members and the anti-occupation fundraisers to bring their children and grandchildren as the women conducted their work. This participation and witnessing on the part of the women's children established a multigenerational movement, an element that would be essential to the women's movement's sustainability. Alice and Eugene indoctrinated their daughters and granddaughters in the politics and literature of the day. While teaching her granddaughter, Ghislaine Rey, how to sew, Alice also facilitated Ghislaine's experiential knowledge by allowing her to attend the meetings and encouraging her interest in the books the women read in their club.

⁵⁹ See George Sylvain, *Dix Années de Lutte pour la Liberté, 1915-1925*, (Port-au-Prince: Editions Henri Deschamps, 1925, 195-); Manigat, *Être femme en Haïti hier et aujourd'hui* (2002); and Alan McPherson, "Personal Occupations: Women's Response to U.S. Military Occupation in Latin America," *The Historian* (2010).

⁶⁰ Although the estimated 16,000 members of the *Union Patriotique* were asked to pay dues of 1 goudé per month, many members did not pay regularly or pay at all. As a result, the organization was largely dependent on large donor contributions from affluent members of the organization and international supporters. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) strongly supported the UP. During the Harding administration's McCormick Commission the leading investigator repeatedly interrogated George Sylvain (UP) and James Weldon Johnson (NAACP) about their financial contributions to the UP. The interrogation suggests that there was reason to believe members of the NAACP were assisting the UP financially. If this were the case, prominent women in the NAACP including Addie Hunton, NAACP treasure had detailed knowledge about the Haitian delegation and its grievances against the U.S. occupation, which would further foment a relationship between Haitian and U.S. Black women activists (*McCormick Commission Report*, 192, Library of Congress).

finding medical care for injured victims, and wiping the tear drenched faces of families across the nation. During these visits women of the *Union Patriotique* heard the terror of the occupation, created an archive of Haitian female experience and later transmitted these narratives to the organization's membership and to unaffiliated women and men throughout the country and the region. From this reservoir of experiential knowledge and archived stories, the women synthesized the narratives and situated them at the center of the 1921 UP's delegation report. The stories were also reported in U.S. newspapers, and several years later they were printed in the book *Occupied Haiti* after Haitian women requested a woman-led investigative commission.⁶¹

The voices of dozens of women were heard in the list of grievances with the United States government that included,

[...] the burning alive of Cazo Noel, and of Médard Belony and his wife, the summary execution of the three children of Hergénéé, and of the twin sisters Athélia and Cloraine Etienne, the beating and torturing with fire of the widow of Romain Bregarde, the beating to death of the notary, M. Garnier, Jr., the burying alive of one Vixina in broad daylight in the court of the Gendarmerie at Maissade, the execution by beating of Dorléan Joseph, the execution by machine gun of the daughters of the widow Célicour Rosier in the yard of their house, when their mother, aged 84, received two bullets in her thigh [...]⁶²

Haitian women spoke.

Madame Garnier, widow of the notary who was killed by Lieut. Williams at Maissade, told Judge Advocate Dyer privately, on November 27, 1920, of the shooting of Madame Lumenesse, mother of eight children, by Lieut. Williams.⁶³

And the list continued.

[...] M. Onexil hanged and burned alive in his house at Lauhaudiagne; execution of Madame Eucharice Cadichon at Mamon; [...] the execution of Madam Prévoit with a baby of several months at "Savane à Lingue" [...] Hanging of Fabre Yoyo from a mango

⁶¹ Emily Greene Balch, ed. *Occupied Haiti* (New York: The Writers Publishing Company, Inc., 1927), 126. See also Alan McPherson, "Personal Occupations: Women's Response to U.S. Military Occupation in Latin America," *The Historian* 3 (2010).

⁶² Emily Greene Balch, ed. *Occupied Haiti* (New York: The Writers Publishing Company, Inc., 1927), 126.

⁶³ First reported in the *Courier Haitien*, 18 December 1920. Listed in the open letter written by the *Union Patriotique* in *The Nation*, vol 112, no 2916, (May 25, 1921: 767-775).

tree; [and] On Jan 30 some marines [...] killed a pregnant woman at a place called Thomans.⁶⁴

As Malbranche-Sylvain and Garoute heard the litany of intimate attacks, beatings and burnings of women, the callused disrespect that certain U.S. marines had for Haitian women became clear. This brutal scenario warranted a desire for safety and solidarity with other women and men who could help protect or assist Haitian women and men in fighting back. The delegation to Washington, they hoped, would assist to establish these alliances.

In February 1921, during the first weeks of the Warren Harding administration, the UP delegation, which included future Haitian president Sténio Vincent and Haitian representative to Washington, Percéval Thoby, departed Haiti with their grievances. The men arrived in Washington during a season of political positioning and readjustment. The timing of their arrival was inopportune and limited the political efficacy of the trip. In the months preceding their arrival, then Senator Harding repeatedly discussed Haiti and used the U.S. occupation as an example of President Woodrow Wilson's chaotic and unorganized foreign policy. With the hint of U.S. Marines misconduct circulating in the air of U.S. public and political opinion, Harding capitalized on the rumors of naval abuse during the 1920 United States Presidential Elections accusing the Wilson administration of "the rape of Haiti."⁶⁵ The savvy campaign strategy for Harding, however, adversely affected the initiatives of the UP months later. When the women and men of the UP finally collected enough money to send a delegation to Washington and testify to the

⁶⁴ H. Pauléus Sannon, Sténio Vincent, Perceval Thoby, *The Nation*, October 1920. Also see Sylvain, 183-186.

⁶⁵ Magdaline W. Shannon, *Jean Price-Mars, the Haitian Elite, and the American Occupation*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 54. Also see Assistant Secretary to NAACP to its branches, July 28, 1920, and James Weldon Johnson to Hon. Warren G. Harding, October 27, 1920, File C 325, NAACP Papers, Manuscripts Division, LOC.

ephemeral and corporal rape of Haitians the election season had passed and senator Harding was then President-Elect Harding.⁶⁶ Harding's concern regarding the conditions in Haiti were less useful to the president-elect.

Harding and other U.S. government officials declined the *Union Patriotique's* request for a formal conversation to discuss their concerns in February 1921. While the White House and Congress continued to evade the accusations of atrocities in Haiti, U.S. African Americans were focusing more attention on the Caribbean nation. Instead of meeting with leading U.S. officials, Vincent and Thoby met with the leaders of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) who had questioned the occupation from the beginning.⁶⁷ W E. B. DuBois, NAACP President; James Weldon Johnson, NAACP National Secretary; and Addie Hunton, NAACP National Treasurer met with the UP delegation. In many ways this meeting was just as important as meeting with the Harding administration. The relationship between the UP and the NAACP had blossomed over the previous two years. In 1920, while the United States wavered on sending a commission to investigate the occupation, the NAACP sent Johnson to Haiti for a two-month fact finding mission.⁶⁸ In a series of articles in the *Nation*, Johnson reported that U.S. marines were "violently steeped in color prejudice," and that they raped and assaulted women so frequently that it was not viewed as a crime. According to Johnson, these violations against Haitian women (and men) were

⁶⁶ President Harding was not inaugurated until March 4, 1921.

⁶⁷ Millery Polyné explains that some African Americans took some time to support Haiti because of their self-interests/own concerns that Haiti's hardships as a "black" nation would reflect poorly on U.S. African Americans who were embattled in a fight for citizenship and civil rights in the United States. However, the violations on Haitian sovereignty were too grave to ignore or disassociate from. See Polyné, *From Douglass to Duvalier*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2009).

⁶⁸ Johnson and Sylvain were allies and friends since the early days of the occupation. In his book, *Dix année de lutte*, Sylvain credits Johnson with supporting his (black) nationalist vision and encouraging him to start the *Union Patriotique*.

dismantling Haitian families.

The *UP* women's home visits along with Thoby, Vincent, and Johnson's reports from Haiti all confirmed that black womanhood and the black family on both sides of the Caribbean Sea were under attack. Like Haitian women, African American women were the bodies upon which U.S. white supremacy and hegemony spread fear and control. And similar to elite Haitian women, U.S. Black clubwomen and social activists recognized the threat to their livelihood and to that of their black sisters.

The callous and careless attitude of white U.S. Marines to public sexual and physical assaults on the black Haitian bodies held more than a passing resemblance to the experiences of black women and men in the United States. Similar to Haitian women's experience, the promise of the turn of the twentieth century had soured for U.S. Black women with the rise of post-Reconstruction era racism and violent racialized social controls. U.S. African American women's bodies, like Haitian women's bodies, delineated the borderlines of citizenship, civility, and sovereignty. Despite white America's perpetual attacks on black womanhood, U.S. Black women sought alliances with white U.S. women for suffrage and women's rights. However by the early 1920s it became clear to many U.S. African American women activists including Mary Church Terrell, president of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW), and Margaret Washington, wife of African American intellectual Booker T. Washington, and others that black and white feminist interests were not aligned.⁶⁹ "White women saw the franchise as a cure for many

⁶⁹ Harding's campaign position on Haiti and his greater inclusivity of African Americans through the Republican Party gained support from African American club women. At this same time, Terrell and Washington had worked very closely with the Harding administration to get him elected. Terrell led the Negro Women's Republican Club. Months into his presidency it was clear that Harding had no intention of withdrawing U.S. Marines from Haiti and that in fact the occupation was developing a greater stronghold on the Caribbean nation. In this way, similar to her collaboration with white feminists, their interest in being

of their ills,” historian Paula Giddings explains, “But for Black women, sexual exploitation headed the list.”⁷⁰ And as U.S. Black suffragist Nannie Helen Burroughs asserted, a black woman “needs the ballot, to reckon with men who place no value upon her virtue, and to mold healthy sentiment in favor of her own protection.”⁷¹

In addition to garnering the respect of white men, U.S. Black women were frustrated by their second-class status in white women’s national and international organizations. The tentacles of “Jim Crowism” had worked their way into feminism and Black clubwomen and social activists such as Terrell and Washington decided that rather than wedge themselves into a white feminist organizational system that marginalized them and saw them as unequal women and ill-equipped mothers, they would turn their energy inward. Terrell explained this inward turn in a letter to various “race” organizations in 1920, “We will alas lay plans to fight Jim Crowism in all its hideous forms; to see to it that colored women receive the same consideration in politics as other women receive; [...] These are critical times for our race. We must shape our own future destiny.”⁷² This strategic sculpting included a focus and concerted effort towards developing cultural education and becoming familiar with the lives of African descended people nationally and internationally.

At this same moment of frustration with racist white feminists and integrationist politics, the May 15, 1920 *Chicago Defender* crossed Terrell’s desk. The violations of Haitian

integrated equally into U.S. democracy and society had showed promise but was revealing limited and slow results, rather leaving the women used and underappreciated

⁷⁰ Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1984, cop. 1984), 121.

⁷¹ Giddings, *When and Where I Enter*, 121.

⁷² Letter to the National Federation of Colored Organizations and Interests of America, the National Equal Rights League, the National Race Congress, and the Colored Protective Association of Pennsylvania from Mary Church Terrell, January 1920. March Church Terrell Paper, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress (LOC) Washington, DC.

women's black bodies only furthered U.S. African American women's convictions to collaborate with black women internationally. This shift in alliance and re-envisioning of Haitian women as kindred black sisters was evident in Terrell's response to a petition distributed by Emily Greene Balch, President of the International Women's League of Peace and Freedom (WILPF) in March of 1921. The petition asked members to support a campaign to remove and bar black soldiers from serving in occupied German territory because of their alleged rape and assault of German women. Terrell, a member and officer of WILPF, immediately found fault in the claim that *only* black men were guilty of such crimes and responded:

I belong to a race whose women have been the victims of assaults committed upon them by white men and men of all other races. As a rule, these men have ruined and wrecked the women of my race with impunity. For that reason I sympathize deeply with the German women, if they are really the victims of the passions of black men. [...] However, [...] Our own American soldiers treated the Haitian women brutally. On good authority it is asserted that young Haitian girls were actually murdered by some of our soldiers. I can not vouch for the truth of that statement but it is not at all difficult for me to believe that white Americans would treat colored women as brutally as our soldiers are said to have treated the Haitian women.⁷³

The accusations of black men's sexual barbarity and pathologic violence against white German women adversely resonated with Terrell. Terrell's problem with the accusation, as she and many of her fellow clubwomen and activists articulated, was that an essentialist attack on the character of black men was ultimately an attack on black women. Propaganda suggesting black men's inherent sexual barbarity routinely went hand-in-hand with claims of black women's promiscuity and hyper-sexuality. In these early days of black feminist formulations, U.S. African American women's feminist practice was not only gender based, but encompassed their multiple subjectivities— including gender and race—a standpoint that white U.S. feminists had failed to comprehend, further unveiling

⁷³ Mary Church Terrell Papers, Reel 5, Manuscripts Division, (LOC).

the racism within the (white) U.S. feminist movement.

In response to the allegations against black male soldiers, Terrell turned to black women's "ruined" and "wrecked" bodies. Terrell invoked the historical weight of generations of sexual and physical violence against black women at the hands of white men. As president of the NACW, the premier black women's rights and advocacy organization in the United States, Terrell was a pioneer in documenting Black women's history and was well versed in their historical subjugation. A trailblazer in the knowledge base of U.S. Black women, Terrell was also on a steep learning curve as she gained a better understanding of the conditions of African descended women regionally. She was quickly learning that this U.S. American cultivated assault on black women's discursive and physical bodies was being exported.

The U.S. Occupation in Haiti was conceptualized through and supported ideas of Haitian exoticism and primitivism. The assault on Haitian sovereignty was justified by the U.S. government through the portrayal of Haitians as careless and inept at self-governance.⁷⁴ As Mary Renda has demonstrated Haiti and its people were perceived as children in order to justify the heavy-handed parental treatment of the United States. Under this infantile characterization, Haitian men, like U.S. Black men during the same period, were perceived as unfit for political, familial, and economic control, while black women and men alike were cast as animals running amuck with uncontrolled sexual desire and prowess.⁷⁵ Through art, literature, and popular media, U.S. marines,

⁷⁴ The U.S. government maintained that the childlike and volatile behavior of Haitians would lead to fighting that would either result in a non-U.S. foreign intervention or civil war. Both options were considered a threat to U.S. economic and geo-political interests for hemispheric control in the years leading and following World War I.

⁷⁵ Michele Mitchell explains that, "As contemporary commentary typically portrayed the race as immoral and African Americans were considered a syphilitic race by the beginning of the twentieth century, promiscuity assumed additional meanings for black women and men. [...] Rampant allegations that the race was inherently

missionaries and foreign anthropologists created a hyper-sexualization of the island and its women so that, as Renda shows, “the discursive construction of the Haitian woman as exotic and promiscuous” was adopted as white American popular truth.⁷⁶

Mirroring the historical discursive construction of U.S. Black women as the consummate sexual receiver unable to be raped, this concept of Haitian sexual barbarism and “gender disorder were convenient indeed for [marines] who wanted to prove their masculinity by dominating women.”⁷⁷ As the *UP* and NAACP reports illustrated, this desire to dominate combined with perceptions of Haitian women as sexually loose created an environment where sexual violence against Haitian women was commonplace and lead to comments like that of Captain John Houston Craige who maintained, “rape, I believe, implies a lack of consent. I never heard of a case where consent was lacking in Haiti’s black belt.”⁷⁸ Craige’s comments regarding Haitian women hauntingly echoed white racist sentiments about U.S. Black women in the Bible belt of the U.S. South.

Mary Church Terrell and other clubwomen were tragically familiar with this terrorizing script that cast black women’s bodies as disposable objects to the physical and social power of white men (and women). As she read Balch’s letter and crafted her response, she was also aware that interracial rape was often used as the back-drop to justify violence against black communities. Equally versed in the language of the anti-lynching movement, as a future member of the Anti-Lynching Crusaders and a political associate of female anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Terrell suspected this

lascivious and degenerate were anything but benign: such allegation rationalized lynching and ritualized rape, legitimated segregation, and restricted employment opportunities.” See Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation*, 11.

⁷⁶ Mary Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 234.

⁷⁷ Renda, *Taking Haiti*, 234.

⁷⁸ Renda, 163. Craige was the author of *Black Bagdad* and *Cannibal Cousins*, two books that suggested Haitian primitivism.

duality of interracial rape and sanctioned terrorism of black communities existed in Haiti as well, but she could not “vouch” for it. With this foresight, Terrell and others refused to sign the WILPF petition.

Although Terrell could not personally vouch for the truth regarding white U.S. marines’ rape and terrorization of Haitian women, girls and families, it was, as she wrote, “not at all difficult for me to believe.” As each day of the occupation continued there were more concrete examples from which she could draw. Three months after Terrell wrote her response to Balch, Viergina Antoine’s brother was finishing his day’s work at the ration dump on the U.S. Marine base between Mirebalais and Terre Rouge, Haiti.

VIERGINA ANTOINE

It was dark at nine o’ clock, but the stars provided some light as Dieudonne Antoine organized the last barrel of produce for the naval breakfast the following morning. As he put the final fruit in its place and wiped his hands on his worn shirt he saw his supervisor U.S. Marine Lieutenant William Lang returning from Pont Beudet. He approached Lt. Lang and asked to return to the Gendarmerie barracks for the night. Lang consented. In a matter of seconds however Lang’s consent became conditional as he asked Antoine to take him to Antoine’s family home in Malaise. Dieudonne recognized the nature of Lang’s request. He had heard rumors of these kinds of queries from other young men on base. And from these rumors he knew that taking Lang to his home would only cause trouble. He refused his employer. However, after Lt. Lang threatened his life, Dieudonne decided to escort Lang to his home.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Dieudonne Testimony, Court proceedings and testimony of Viergina Antoine, Dieudonne Antoine, Felenia Cadet, William Lang, & Martin Flores. Record of Proceedings of a General Court-Martial of

On the ride to Mirebalais, Lang gave Dieudonne his instructions, “When we reach the house call your sister and tell her that you wish to speak with her.”⁸⁰ Outside of his home, Dieudonne called out for his sister, Viergina. She did not respond. With the barrel of Lt. Lang’s gun in his back, he called again. She remained silent. Lang yelled, “Open the door!” Fenelia Cadet, Dieudonne and Viergina’s mother, heard Lang’s threats from inside the small home. She knew what was happening. She too had heard the rumors. She was determined to protect her daughter. She walked outside to confront the officer. As Fenelia emerged in the doorway Lang pushed past her and “entered the house” where he “broke down two walls of the house” and “broke down a table, and lighted a match.” Through the light of the match Lang found Viergina lying silent and stiff on her mother’s bed. He grabbed her and “held her by the wrist, and drew her outside.” Viergina “tried to resist and was crying,” but as she later recalled, “he hit me on my body. He took me to the woods, threw me on the ground, and then had intercourse with me [...] As this part had resistance,” referring to her virgin body, “he ordered me to suck his penis.”⁸¹ Viergina continued to scream as her mother “cried out for help.”⁸²

The horrific cacophony of mother-daughter tears pierced the evening silence. Lt. Lang offered Viergina a *gourde*, but she refused. Upon her refusal the officer began to beat her. Dieudonne could not withstand listening to the continued abuse so “in order to stop

William M. Lang convened at the Marine Barracks, Port-au-Prince, Republic of Haiti, RG 125 Records of the Office of the Judge Advocate General (Navy), 1866-1942, NARA I, Washington, DC.

⁸⁰ Dieudonne Testimony, Court proceedings and testimony of Viergina Antoine, Dieudonne Antoine, Felenia Cadet, William Lang, & Martin Flores. Record of Proceedings of a General Court-Martial of William M. Lang convened at the Marine Barracks, Port-au-Prince, Republic of Haiti, RG 125 Records of the Office of the Judge Advocate General (Navy), 1866-1942, NARA I

⁸¹ Viergina Testimony, Court proceedings and testimony of Viergina Antoine, Dieudonne Antoine, Felenia Cadet, William Lang, & Martin Flores. Record of Proceedings of a General Court-Martial of William M. Lang convened at the Marine Barracks, Port-au-Prince, Republic of Haiti, RG 125 Records of the Office of the Judge Advocate General (Navy), 1866-1942, NARA I.

⁸² Viergina Testimony, Court proceedings and testimony of Viergina Antoine, Dieudonne Antoine, Felenia Cadet, William Lang, & Martin Flores., NARA I.

him from hitting her I told her to take the money.” Abiding her brother’s command Viergina explained, “Seeing that, I was obliged to take the gourde,” she accepted the money. The transaction was over. Lang then instructed Dieudonne to take him back to the camp.⁸³ Three days later Felenia reported the rape to the chief of marines at Mirebalais.⁸⁴

Lieutenant William Lang was arrested, charged, and convicted on four counts for the “Assault and Battery” of Dieudonne and Viergina Antoine; the “Rape” of Viergina Antoine; the “Scandalous conduct tending to the destruction of good morals” for forcing Viergina to have oral sex; and the “Conduct to the prejudice of good order and discipline” for threatening Private Martin Flores’ life if he reported the events of May 16, 1921. The Judge Advocate General of the U.S. Navy sentenced Lang to fifty years in prison.⁸⁵

The conviction of Lieutenant Lang was unprecedented.⁸⁶ Throughout the occupation U.S. marines were routinely accused of violence against Haitian citizens, but rarely did these allegations translate into courts martial, and even more rare was the conviction of a white male for interracial rape in any U.S. military or civilian court. This case, however, could not be ignored. In addition to the brutality of the events on May 16th, Lang had already been mentioned in the stories that women *desoccupation* activists

⁸³ Court proceedings and testimony of Viergina Antoine, Dieudonne Antoine, Felenia Cadet, William Lang, & Martin Flores. Record of Proceedings of a General Court-Martial of William M. Lang convened at the Marine Barracks, Port-au-Prince, Republic of Haiti, RG 125 Records of the Office of the Judge Advocate General (Navy), 1866-1942. NARA I.

⁸⁴ Court proceedings and testimony of Viergina Antoine, Dieudonne Antoine, Felenia Cadet, William Lang, & Martin Flores. Record of Proceedings of a General Court-Martial of William M. Lang convened at the Marine Barracks, Port-au-Prince, Republic of Haiti, RG 125 Records of the Office of the Judge Advocate General (Navy), 1866-1942, Box 898, Folder, “William Lang, Case 53735.” NARA I.

⁸⁵ Record of Proceedings of a General Court-Martial of William M. Lang convened at the Marine Barracks, Port-au-Prince, Republic of Haiti, RG 125 Records of the Office of the Judge Advocate General (Navy), 1866-1942, Box 898, Folder, “William Lang, Case 53735.” NARA I, Washington, DC.

⁸⁶ At this point in the occupation, there was no record of any other case of rape that went to court martial.

collected for the UP's Washington commission months before. From the first years of his station in Haiti, Lt. Lang perpetrated and oversaw violent acts under his command, including public lynchings of Haitian men, torture and theft. In the previous incidences victims or witnesses either adhered to Lang's threats of retribution and did not report the crimes, or the assaults joined the list of grievances and rumors about the violent occupation. This time, however, as Lang lamented in his testimony, "the niggers went and told."⁸⁷

The news of Lang's most recent misconduct spread quickly, beginning with Fenelia's report to the chief of marines, traveling to members of the *desoccupation* movement, and continuing to black activists in the United States. The stories amassed for the UP trip to Washington three months before had not garnered the respect of U.S. officials, but the process of collection encouraged a movement toward disclosure in Haiti. Haitian women learned that recording and reporting the injustices of the U.S. occupation may not provide their families with full redress, but sharing and reporting served as an act of resistance and recourse for their families in an occupation culture that worked to maintain silences.⁸⁸

The word spread. The assault on the Cadet-Antoine family verified the allegations that Terrell and other U.S. Black women had been unable to confirm. Indeed, Haitian women were being raped, killed, and prostituted by white marines. Dieudonne was forced

⁸⁷ *Nation*, May 1920. NARA II. RG 125 Records of the Office of the Judge Advocate General (Navy), 1866-1942, Box 898, Folder, "William Lang, Case 53735." NARA I, Washington, DC.

⁸⁸ *Nation*, Open letter from *Union Patriotique* after requesting a Naval Court of Inquiry from Mr. Josephus Daniels that had not been fulfilled. "The Haitian people feel that if the Naval Court of Inquiry has not fulfilled in Haiti the broad mandate conferred upon it by Mr. Josephus Daniels, it is because it was faced with charges of such a horrible nature that it thought best to pass them over in silence. And this is why the tactics of the Navy Department have been and still are to consider the 'incident' as closed. This cannot be. The voice of truth and justice cannot be stilled. The Haitian people awaits with confidence an honest, impartial, and thorough investigation," October 16, 1920.

to pimp his sister Viergina, while Felenia was treated as a brothel mistress. For U.S. Black women activists the attack on Viergina, unlike the attack on Eleanor two years before, invoked particular vestiges of a recent past—the terror of the post-emancipation United States that had evolved into the horror of the Jim Crow present. Similar to the night riders of the post-emancipation period and the Klu Klux Klan and lynch mobs of the early twentieth century, Lang had violated the sanctity of the Cadet-Antoine home on that fateful Monday night.⁸⁹ The physical and symbolic walls of security and respectability were “broke down.”⁹⁰ The scenario was worse than Terrell and others had projected, but it was familiar.

Black homes in the United States had been under assault since slave emancipation and into the post-reconstruction period. As historian Hannah Rosen has delineated, white male violation of the sacred home space of black families were “scripted events that represented as normative and unexceptional white men soliciting black women in their own homes for sex.” The penetration of the black home by white men, Rosen maintains, “portrayed all black women as sexually available and subservient to all white men [and] erased or denied the coercion and violence necessary on the part of assailants to enact sex in various forms.”⁹¹ Moreover when they violently entered the home to sexually assault black women “white men also rejected black women’s potential identities as honorable

⁸⁹ In another version of this chapter I will discuss that Lang’s use of terror was not haphazard. As a native of Georgia and the closest grandson to his former Confederate soldier grandfather, Lang was certainly familiar with the reports of violence and lynchings against black communities, if he did not witness and/or participate in them himself.

⁹⁰ In *Terror in the Heart of Freedom*, Hannah Rosen narrates the common trajectory of white men who broke into freedpeople’s homes in the postemancipation period. The narration holds an eerie similarity to Lang’s attack: “Attacks almost always occurred after sundown and usually after midnight, when victims were asleep. White men in disguise surrounded the houses and called for a particular resident to come out or banged on doors and forced their way inside. Assailants dragged victims outside in their bedclothes, destroyed or stole their furnishings and clothing, and burned or tore down their houses” (Rosen, 189-190).

⁹¹ Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 8.

wives and daughters, caring for and protected within their families. Instead, assailants' words and actions positioned black women and men outside proper domestic relationships and inside realms of the illicit, transgressive, and criminal."⁹² The domestic fracture then was not limited to the night of the violence--the trauma and assault would continue to reverberate.

The sense of legal recourse and justice that Viergina and her family received from the U.S. courts martial and conviction of Lang was tenuous.⁹³ Viergina won her case, but her legitimacy and that of her family's was consistently put into question. In letters to U.S. President Harding and the Secretary of the Navy, Edwin Denby, U.S. Southern defenders of Lang maintained that Viergina and Dieudonne were "children without moral training" and that the siblings were "instigated by their ignorant and uncivilized mother," to concocted the entire story.⁹⁴ Viergina and her family were depicted as "ignorant and uncivilized negroes, hardly removed a degree from cannibals" while Lang, although convicted, was depicted as an unfortunate young man who had fallen prey to the "depressing and maddening environment and the hot climate as well as barbarous

⁹² Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom*, 182.

⁹³ The profundity and the perplexing reality of the case was also that the occupation conditions provided some recourse for Haitian women that black women and men would not have been afforded under the same circumstances the same scenario would have likely not made it to a U.S. court in the United States. That is, Lang was charged with the brutal assault on Dieudonne and the rape of Viergina because of military law, which unlike landed U.S. law was not superseded by the law of Jim Crow.

Lang, a Georgia native and grandson of a former confederate soldier, would likely have gotten away with his actions in the United States. In fact, during the years for which white U.S. citizens petition for Lang's release, his female patron and friend even maintained that white men are not even convicted for that long when they rape white women. Likewise his Confederate grandfather wrote to President Hoover that his family legacy as an honorable citizen should warrant Lang's release from federal prison.

The arguments that were made on Lang's behalf, in the face of his and other white U.S. Marine's racial prejudice and violence towards Haitians, was not unlike what Terrell and other club women were fighting in the United States. The same white Georgian confederates to push women's voting legislation through, which ultimately revealed the racism and self interest of white suffragists such as Susan, Clark, who were willing to appease their southern representatives by insuring that voting legislation was ratified for white women only. (suffragist imperialism)]

⁹⁴ Letter from Julia Cope of Atlanta, GA to Edwin Denby, Nov 6, 1922. Julia Cope also wrote letters to Theodore Roosevelt, Assistant Secretary of the Navy and President Warren Harding who she claimed as an old "church friend." NARA I (Washington, DC) and NARA II (Atlanta, GA).

surroundings.”⁹⁵ Legally Viergina’s honor and that of her family was defended, but the physical violence, and what historian Hannah Rosen calls “the discursive dimensions of violence,” continued to encourage racist acts of violence against Haitian women and men.⁹⁶

The discursive violence against Haitian women and men continued to construct an image of Haitian criminality and justify white U.S. marine’s barbarity. In April 1922 the Harding administration finally responded to the reports of U.S. marines’ misconduct by forming an official commission to investigate the occupation. The McCormick Commission arrived in Haiti on April 20, 1922. Much of the commission was focused on the allegations collected by the *Union Patriotique*.⁹⁷ In line with the occupation script of Haiti’s primitivism, the commission representatives disregarded many of the stories Haitian women had collected during their fundraising campaigns for the UP. The commissioners were more concerned with preserving the image of the U.S. Navy. As a result they used the common pathology and tropes of Haitian inherent violence and barbarity to justify the blatant murder and torture of Haitians. In particular, when sexual violence against Haitian women was acknowledged it was routinely excused with sympathies towards the assailant who was forced to suffer in the harsh Haitian conditions. The commission excused much of the alleged behavior as incidences that could not be avoided because they happened while U.S. Marines were trying to fight armed Haitian

⁹⁵ Ben Johnson Cope, an editor at *The Atlanta Georgian*, argued that even if Lang was guilty his sentencing was too harsh. Cope cited a trial of a fifty-five year old white man who was sentenced to 15 years in prison after raping a seven year old white girl. Cope maintained that if a white man gets such a sentence for raping a white girl, the sentencing of fifty years was far too severe for raping a black girl. Letter from Ben Johnson Cope to Hon. Edwin Denby, Secretary of the Navy, February 10, 1923 NARA I.

⁹⁶ Rosen, *Terror in the Hear of Freedom*, 8.

⁹⁷ The commission was also investigating the UP. The senators were particularly interested in the activities of the leadership and their political and economic alliances in the U.S. See “Inquiry Into Occupation and Administration of Haiti and the Dominican Republic,” 67th Congress, 2nd Session. Senate Report No. 794, LOC.

rebels, namely *cacos*.

The *cacos* “freedom fighters” were the strongest anti-occupation guerilla army of the time and arguably the largest threat to U.S. control of Haiti and white marines’ sense of racial and masculine superiority. For five years the *cacos* led a relentless battle against the occupation and thus became the scapegoat for white male criminality.⁹⁸ In this insurgency women often participated as clandestine carriers of weapons and harbored the liberation fighters in their homes. It is in this capacity and in their proximity to male *cacos* that the commission excused the assault on and murder of Haitian women and men throughout the occupation.⁹⁹ When confronted with attacks such as the one against Eleanor the commission maintained that these were isolated incidences of insanity by crazed military men. The plea of insanity silenced any argument that there was a systemic structure of accepted sexual and physical violence against Haitian women and men.

The technology of fear and paranoia was further utilized to justify Haitian deaths. The commission explained, “The transformation from peasant to bandit and vice versa could be made at an instant’s warning. There was reason to suspect almost any male adult of being from time to time engaged in active lawlessness and habituated to guerrilla warfare.”¹⁰⁰ In this equation of warfare, being black and Haitian were criminal offenses, punishable by death. Torture and cruel beatings, according to the commission, were only committed by Haitian “rebels” because “Americans [were] not given to mutilating their

⁹⁸ For more on *cacos* See Yveline Alexis dissertation, *Nationalism & the Politics of Historical Memory*.

⁹⁹ Senator Otto explained the civilian casualties in his report, “The casualties, whatever they were, undoubtedly included some non-combatants. The bandits were found resting in settlements where they were surrounded by their women and children, or in villages where they camped and were tolerated by the inhabitants through fear or friendship. When encountered they had to be instantly attacked. These conditions largely account for the deaths of the bystanders.” Senate Report No 794, 14-15, LOC.

¹⁰⁰ Senate Report No 794, 13, LOC.

dead enemies.”¹⁰¹

Rape and physical violence were used to temper Haitian alleged criminality. Reminiscent of the experiences of the racialized terror perpetuated on U.S. Black women and men in the post-Reconstruction era and throughout the early twentieth century, interracial assaults and sexual violence against Haitian women were often partnered with brutal violence against Haitian men. In the testimonies of rape recounted by Eleanor Charles and Vierginia Antoine, the women recalled how Haitian men were forced to watch or were simultaneously beaten into submission. Additionally, as the McCormick commission insinuated, the incidences and insidiousness of gender specific assaults escalated during the anti-occupation Haitian *caco* rebellions, but the commission failed to acknowledge that the attacks were not exclusive to this period.¹⁰² In the same red summer of 1919 when there were a record number of lynchings in the United States, the leader of the *cacos* rebellion, Charlemagne Péralte, was captured and killed with his body displayed— hanging lifeless by two ropes against a wooden boards—a national and international lynching.¹⁰³ Péralte’s body was displayed as what Hannah Rosen might call “a verbal and corporeal language” revealing the gendered political culture through which white men and women sought to control and conquer Black independence and citizenship within the domestic and occupied United States.

Black women’s bodies in Haiti and the United States were the collective occupied

¹⁰¹ The history of Native American displacement and genocide in addition to systemic lynching and beating of Black Americans throughout the United States’ history suggests otherwise. The McCormick Commission concluded “that tortures of Haitians by Americans has not in any case been established.” Senate Report No 794, 22. In a future version of this paper I will discuss preservation of U.S. military honor, silencing of Haitian stories--referring to the vehicular homicide of a Haitian woman in May of 1922 and the court proceedings.

¹⁰² The height of the *cacos* wars were between 1915 and 1920.

¹⁰³ There had been significant work done on the meaning of Péralte’s assassination and the public display of his body. Many have equated it to a crucifixion. Although there is no record of black male rape of white females during the occupation, the symbolic threat of interracial rape as a medium of Jim Crow thrives.

body—caught in the cross hairs of white male desire to control black humanity regionally. As Danielle McGuire explains in her work on rape and the African American freedom struggle, “During [...] Jim Crow, sexualized violence served, as a ‘ritualistic reenactment of the daily pattern of social dominance,’ and interracial rape became the battleground upon which black men and women fought for ownership of their own bodies.”¹⁰⁴ It is in response to this ritual of rape, on the battleground over sovereignty of land (anti-imperialism) and the black diasporic body that Haitian women and African American women aligned themselves.

A SYMPHONY IN ACTION: ORGANIZATIONAL ALLIANCES

As Viergina recovered and the families of the nine little girls mourned, Haitian anti-occupation women activists and U.S. African American clubwomen turned to one another as international allies to improve the condition of women of the “darker races.” In August 1922 a small group of women including Theodora Holly, Haitian activist and French language editor for the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA)’s newspaper *The Negro World*, Mme. Charles Dubé, a Haitian teacher and philanthropist, Mary Church Terrell, Margaret Washington, Addie Hunton, and Mary McCleod Bethune, NAACP member and future president of the National Council of Negro Women, founded the International Council of Women of the Darker Races. The primary focus of the organization’s inaugural year was “Haitian women and children.”¹⁰⁵ Although the exclusive group of 100 members deemed themselves an international

¹⁰⁴ Danielle L. McGuire, “‘It Was Like All of Us Had Been Raped’”: Sexual Violence, Community Mobilization, and the African American Freedom Struggle,” *The Journal of American History* 91, no 3 (Dec 2004), 907. Also see McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance--A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010).

¹⁰⁵ Mary Church Terrell Papers, Box 102-12 “Organizational Affiliations, A-N, Folder 239, “International Council of Women of the Darker Races,” Mooreland-Springarn (MS), Howard University, Washington, DC.

women's organization the majority of the women were U.S. Black women. The largest and most sustained international membership were Haitian women—four, including founders Theodora Holly, and executive member Mme. Charles Dubé.

Despite the percentage imbalance these elite Haitian and African American women activists developed allegiance to an imagined community of African descended people: “Whereas we are organized for mutual international cooperation and sympathetic understanding in every forward movement among women and children of the darker races of the world, for the dissemination of knowledge of peoples of color the world over that there may be a larger appreciation of their history and accomplishments.”¹⁰⁶ The desire to develop a collective offensive on behalf of women “of color” foreshadowed what historian Lisa G. Materson argues was the foundations of a larger turn in the late twentieth century of a collective “women of color” identity.¹⁰⁷ Yet although the ICWDR originally espoused an image of peoples of color that included India and Japan, their operation and membership reflected a more regional base and African descended focus.

The ICWDR's Haitian and U.S. Black membership and organizational practice represented a woman centered Afro-Modernity. In his analysis of Haitian and U.S. African American (primarily male) political alliances, Millery Polyné maintains that African Americans in Haiti and the U.S. were drawn to each other by an Afro-Modernity which was “evidenced in the *normative convergence* of two or more African and African-descended peoples and social movements in response to perceived commonalities of

¹⁰⁶ Mary Church Terrell Papers, Box 102-12 “Organizational Affiliations, A-N, Folder 239, “International Council of Women of the Darker Races,” Minutes from inaugural meeting, MS.

¹⁰⁷ Lisa G. Materson, “African American women's global journeys and the construction of cross-ethnic racial identity,” *Women's Studies International Forum* 32, (2005: 35-42), 37.

oppression.”¹⁰⁸ Polyné further explains that “the Afro-Modernity practiced by Haitians and U.S. blacks exhibited three main characteristics: the creation of an ‘imagined community’ based upon shared beliefs of Western hegemony against African-descended peoples; the formulation of ‘alternative political and cultural networks across national-state boundaries’; and a clear critique of Enlightenment discourses and the ‘processes of modernization by the West.’” Haitian and U.S. Black women gave less attention to critiques of Enlightenment discourse, however their shared experiences of violence against black female bodies created the normative convergence of an imagined black women’s transnational community and the development of political and social politics against white U.S. hegemony.

The ICWDR’s alternative transnational political and cultural network was constructed through the contemporary and historical healing of the black female body. Through the injury and effort to heal black women’s corporeal and discursive collective body, Haitian and U.S. African American women helped to shape the meaning of black international politics of the period.¹⁰⁹ In their contribution to this dynamic political arena the ICWDR’s inaugural year’s focus was the “conditions of the women and children of Haiti.”¹¹⁰

Theodora Holly spearheaded most of the investigation into the conditions of Haitian women and children. The daughter of emigrationist Bishop Theodore Holly, Theodora was born in Haiti and spoke fluent French and English. In the 1880s, Holly’s parents came to Haiti to escape the racial prejudice of the United States and were

¹⁰⁸ Millery Polyné, *From Douglass to Duvalier: U.S. African Americans, Haiti, and Pan Americanism, 1870-1964*, (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010), 15.

¹⁰⁹ Materson, 37.

¹¹⁰ Mary Church Terrell Papers, Box 102-12 “Organizational Affiliations, A-N, Folder 239, “International Council of Women of the Darker Races,” Minutes from inaugural meeting, MS.

pioneers in the emigrationist movement. As a result Holly was reared in a family that valued the possibility of cross-national collaborations between people of African descent. As an editor for the United Negro Improvement Association's (UNIA) newspaper the *Negro World*, Holly was also *au courant* on the operation of regional black organizing and Pan-African discourse. Holly's family legacy and experiential knowledge made her an ideal conduit for the early internationalization of the ICWDR.¹¹¹

In the first years of the ICWDR Holly made several trips for organizational conferences in Washington (1923) and Chicago (1924). Holly viewed her collaboration with African American women similar to that of her sisters and brothers in the UNIA, that there was a kinship bond between African descended people that should be built upon and vigilantly protected. In this way, Holly, "hoped to learn more of what our women are doing in the United States."¹¹²

In order to build solidarity among Haitian and U.S. Black women, Holly maintained that Haitian girls and women needed to be made "alive to the world-wide progress of women in general and of their colored American sisters in particular."¹¹³ This desire for knowledge of black women drove the intellectual reciprocity between Haitian and African American women. Through educating themselves and sharing their respective histories Haitian and U.S. African American women authored a positive

¹¹¹ Within a month of the ICWDR's original meeting, Terrell and Washington pushed for an immediate investigative trip to Port-au-Prince. After a series of letter writing the women of the ICWDR decided to allocate 100 dollars of the ICWDR's infant budget to a fact finding trip that would be conducted by Emily H. Williams. Williams who was already scheduled to accompany her husband and principal of Tuskegee Institute, W. T. B. Williams, to Haiti for an educational research trip, returned with a full report, highlighting the needs of the country that she saw as similar to the "darkest Africa." Williams' conclusions reveal that she approached the country and the people as if elite Black women like her could save Haiti. She reports scenes of primitivism and makes missionary-like claims that Haiti "needs our help." Moreover, Williams repeatedly refers to the good nature and positive report of Lieutenant Russell. Russell being the same leader of the U.S. Marine Corps who denied U.S. marines' misconduct and suggested claims of abuse against Haitian women were unfounded and lacked evidence.

¹¹² Letter from to Theodora Holly to Margaret Washington, June 14, 1923. Mary Church Terrell Papers, MS.

¹¹³ Letter from to Theodora Holly to Margaret Washington, June 14, 1923. Mary Church Terrell Papers, MS.

counter-narrative that directly confronted the racist and sexist images and stereotypes of black women regionally. The objective to establish a “definite cooperation among the women of all the darker races for the purpose of studying the condition under which each subgroup lived and progressed” resulted in the ICWDR’s successful and far-reaching intellectual campaign which involved study groups and initiatives to introduce black history and literature into U.S. and Haitian school curriculums.

Haitian and U.S. African American women of the ICWDR recognized early on that their geographic distance and financial constraints would handicap the progress of the organization. As a result, the women of the ICWDR began to rely heavily on discursive fellowship.¹¹⁴ The ICWDR began “study clubs” in which members of the organization would invite fellow members and non-members to read texts by African descended people throughout the world. The reading lists included works from Walter White, W.E.B. DuBois, and Jean Price-Mars. The ICWDR’s interest in African culture and tradition corresponded with conversations emerging Haitian intellectuals. In particular, Theodora’s brother, Arthur Holly along with Justin Dorsainvil, and Price-Mars celebration of African art, culture, and language started the ethnologist movement in Haiti. The scholars attributed African descended people with a unique culture and particular black ethnic understanding of the world.¹¹⁵ Holly even maintained that African descended people had “a mythical association between the individual soul and the collective soul.”¹¹⁶ Holly, Dorsainvil, and Price-Mars’ writings were extremely influence on young people during the occupation and led to *indiginisme*—a cultural, and

¹¹⁴ See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 1991). Anderson addresses the role of print media and culture in establishing national identity and community.

¹¹⁵ David Nicholls, 152.

¹¹⁶ Nicholls, 154.

philosophical movement to research and value the African heritage of Haiti.¹¹⁷ It is likely that members of the ICWDR were also influenced by the compelling writings and ideas of these men.

Through these “study clubs” the women professed that they would educate themselves on the African cultures of the world and infiltrate the black educational system with the knowledge that they gained, ultimately strengthening the darker races through familiarity of self and one-another. This self-study was a central component to developing a black women’s intellectual culture. For example, in Paris in the 1930s the Nardal Sisters, Jane and Paulette Nardal, were hosting *cercle d’amis* (circle of friends) where they also established women’s spaces to consider the future of African descended people in the modern world.¹¹⁸

Although there were no black women writers represented in their written curriculum, the ICWDR created an alternative curriculum of guest lectures and research projects to establish a black women’s intellectual archive. This archive included public lectures to which Theodora Holly was the most sought after speaker--talking to young girls and women about the history of Haitian women and culture in both the United States and in Haiti. In addition to Holly’s public lectures, the women collected newspapers and photographs of Haitian and U.S. African American women. After an investigative trip to Port-au-Prince, Layle Lane a member of the ICWDR wrote, “Haitian correspondents for the Negro press, and vice versa, would enable great numbers who cannot travel a chance to know each group better. The exchange of papers and magazines among those who know French and English would further help in an

¹¹⁷ Nicholls, 158.

¹¹⁸ Brent Hayes Edwards, 122 & 156. Edwards calls these spaces “black communal space.” See also David Nicholls, *From Desselins to Duvalier*, 158.

understanding among the two peoples.”¹¹⁹ In a letter to Margaret Washington, Holly illustrated the significance of this exchange of print media, explaining that she had given a lecture to a girls club in Port-au-Prince and showed the young women Washington’s picture as an example of an “inspirational” black woman.¹²⁰ Through copies of speeches and sharing photographs Haitian and African American women bridged their geographical distance but also established new meanings and images for the black woman, recovering the collective black female body in the black women’s imaginary.¹²¹ Sharing photographs visually bound Haitian and U.S. African American women through mutual racial recognition and corporeal respectability.¹²²

Haitian and U.S. African American women’s politicized portraiture was shared through the postal service and was transported by women during their research trips between Haiti and the United States. The ICWDR invested a large portion of their resources into investigative trips. One of the most important of these trips was Addie Hunton’s 1926 trip to Haiti. Perhaps as a peace offering or as financial strategy Addie Hunton, then president of the ICWDR, decided to collaborate with Emily Greene Balch of WILPF, and several other participants including Charlotte Atwood, Zonia Baber, and Paul H. Douglass for a research trip to Haiti. In an extensive 180 page report which was later published as *Occupied Haiti* and edited by Emily Balch, the members reported on the

¹¹⁹ Layle Lane, “An American Woman In Haiti,” Layle Lane Additions, Folder “Writings Notebook of news clips some re: Haiti” MS.

¹²⁰ Letter from to Theodora Holly to Margaret Washington, June 14, 1923. Mary Church Terrell Papers, MS.

¹²¹ E. Francis White discusses this process of “revising history/creating subjectivity” in *Dark Continent of Our Bodies: Black Feminism and the Politics of Respectability* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001),” where she maintains that “to represent is to symbolically stand for those who have no voice, on one hand, and to make clear the character of a group of people, on the other hand. Black feminists entered these historical debates seeking and offering representation in terms of gender and race. We found ourselves revising not only dominant history but also ‘black’ history and ‘women’s’ history. In the process, we created a black feminist subject who had the power to represent herself” 51.

¹²² Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: W. E. B. Dubois, Race & Visual Culture* (Duke University Press, 2004). Smith “reads photographic archives as racialized sites invested in laying claim to contested cultural meanings,” 7.

violence of the U.S. Occupation in Haiti and recommended the U.S. Navy's immediate withdraw from the country.¹²³

The trip did not result in the withdraw of U.S. marines, but as Hunton later wrote she believed the "trip to Haiti had some definite re-actions." She felt the trip and their report had gotten some attention and pushed Senator King to propose a bill to Congress encouraging the end of the Occupation. Hunton further expressed that other "high officials" were taking notice and that her "quiet propaganda in behalf of Haiti" continued.¹²⁴ Hunton's propaganda was far from quiet. In 1926 alone, she gave addresses at the California State Convention of the National Association of Colored Women, National Federation of Colored Women's Clubs, the NAACP Chicago Convention, the National Association of Colored Women in Oakland, California, and the Pan African Conference the following year in New York. Each time Hunton spoke of Haiti and her experience with women and children.

Hunton's trip to Haiti and speaking engagements solidified her relationship with Holly and other women activists in Haiti and created new opportunities for the women to work together. By 1926 and after the death of Margaret Washington the ICWDR had experienced its most vibrant political years. The organization existed largely in name as the most active members like Hunton became more involved in the NAACP and in specific efforts and collaborations with Haitian women in Haiti and in the United States.¹²⁵ Most notably Addie Hunton's friendship and collaboration with U.S. African American musician, writer, and philanthropist Harriet Gibbs Marshall and Haitian

¹²³ Emily Greene Balch, ed. *Occupied Haiti* (New York: The Writers Publishing Company, Inc., 1927).

¹²⁴ Letter from Addie Hunton to Gibbs Marshall, Marshall Papers, Folder 79, "Correspondence – Haiti D to H," June 19, 1926, Mooreland-Springarn, Howard University, Washington, DC.

¹²⁵ Margaret Washington died June 4, 1925.

educator Rosina Jean-Joseph had grown stronger over the years of her affiliation with ICWDR and pushed her to focus her attention on Haiti.

Harriet Gibbs Marshall moved to Haiti a few months before the assault on Vierginia in 1921. She arrived with her husband, Napoleon Bonaparte Marshall, who was “connected with the American Legation and who was sent to Haiti to study the situation, and if possible to create better relations between the Haitian and the white Americans of the Occupation.”¹²⁶ As Reverend Churchstone-Lord reported in the May 1920 *Chicago Defender* article, elite and middle class Haitians encouraged the presence of U.S. African Americans in Haiti, believing that African Americans would bring a sensitivity and respect for Haitian women and men that was lacking from white U.S. marines.¹²⁷ The Haitian paper *La Nouvelliste* echoed this sentiment, “Only people of the black race will be able to understand the true needs of the Haitian Negroes; these people alone will be able to measure the extent to which our pride had been chilled and the chagrin that gnaws us.”¹²⁸

Gibbs Marshall and her husband were immediately exposed to the atrocities of the U.S. occupation. Moreover they became aware of the U.S. government’s efforts to disrupt Haitian and U.S. Black solidarity by suggesting that Haitians had negative sentiments towards U.S. African Americans. Marshall latter wrote in a draft of a letter to NAACP president W.E.B. Dubois that “the propaganda some white Americans are making of this point (the real feeling of the Haitian to the colored American) is the same

¹²⁶ Letter from Harriet Gibbs Marshall to Washington politician, August 2, 1924, Marshall Papers, MS.

¹²⁷ U.S. Black males could not serve in U.S. Navy until ---. The U.S. African Americans who came to Haiti were members of the army or representatives of the government through legations.

¹²⁸ Marshall Papers, Folder 90: “Save Haiti League – Business Records Publicity.” *Nouvelliste*, Lundi July 7, 1924, “Another Error Accredited To The United States By Design,” MS.

method of dividing us, they have been employing for hundreds of years.”¹²⁹ The Marshall’s witness to the divisive methods and offenses against Haitians by white Americans were compounded by the racial prejudice and mistreatment that the family experienced in their official capacity in Haiti.

Although Napoleon Marshall was sent to Haiti as a member of the American Legation to mend tensions between white marines and Haitians, Marshall spent his first two years of his assignment in Haiti as an assistant clerk, conducting remedial tasks such as filing papers, translating letters, and often being assigned no tasks at all. This insult to Marshall’s capabilities and his purpose “to fill a special and important work” in Haiti was compounded by the fact that Marshall was not paid a living wage. With time on his hands Marshall and Gibbs Marshall established their own relationships with elite Haitians.

The Marshall’s were integrated into elite Haitian society. They went to social events, shared holidays, and exchanged ideas about how to change the condition of Haitian women and men under the occupation. After several failed attempts to express their concerns to the United States government, they turned to the U.S. African American press to spread the knowledge of their experience, writing open letters and editorials for the NAACP’s *The Crisis* and other smaller affiliates.

Gibbs Marshall took a particular interest in the condition of Haitian women and children and began to associate with Haitian women who were like-minded, believing “the educated, cultured few” could “help the impoverished many.”¹³⁰ Madame Charles

¹²⁹ Marshall Papers, Folder 90: “Save Haiti League – Business Records Publicity.” *Nouvelliste*, Lundi July 7, 1924, “Another Error Accredited To The United States By Design,” MS.

¹³⁰ Marshall Papers, April 4, 1924, Letter to Mrs. John M. Gleen, President of the American Association for Organizing Family Social Work, MS.

Dubé from the ICWDR, Rosina Jean-Joseph, a teacher of business, and Madame Dantés Bellegarde, wife of diplomat to France and philanthropist Dantés Bellegarde, were among these women. These “most prominent Haitian women who [had] done commendable work for the amelioration of the sort of their more unfortunate sisters,” decided to establish the *L’Oeuvre des Femmes Haitiennes pour L’Organization du Travail*. These women included, Mme. Etienne Mathon, former President of *La Zélatrice* a woman’s organization in Port-au-Prince and future co-founder of *La Ligue Feminine d’Action Sociale*; Mme. Servincent, former Director of the Primary School; Mme. Clement Pethel, former president of *Femina*, a social and charitable work organization; Mme. Louis Guillaume, President of the Association of Older Student of St. Rose de Lima; Mme. Tancrede Auguste, former first-lady and president of *La Creche*, and institution for illegitimate and abandoned children; Mlle. Annais Boucherau, independent social work in Port-au-Prince; Mme. Justin Madieu, primary school founder; Mlle. Henrietta Valen, Principal of the Night School for Adults; and Mlle. Henriette Bianby, social worker and primary school principal.¹³¹

For two years President Rosina Jean-Joseph and Vice-President Harriet Marshall planned and fundraised for the social work organization that they founded on March 2, 1926, *L’Oeuvre des Femmes Haitiennes pour L’Organization du Travail*. During the years of preparation, Marshall solicited the financial assistance of the American Association for Organizing Family Social Work who sponsored Rosina Jean-Joseph to study social work in New York for two years before starting the organization. When Jean-Joseph returned from New York she combined her experience as a student in Europe and the United States and her expertise as a teacher and businesswoman in Haiti to the “American

¹³¹ Marshall Papers, Box 112-2, C, Folder 85, “Women of Haiti,” MS.

methods” of social work she learned during her internship. The goals of the organization included: a primary organizational center which would house workshops on hygiene, cooking, finances, cleaning, sewing, and gardening; a kindergarten; and a mothering center, where women would learn how to care for infants, clean, and discipline their children.

The daughter of a former Haitian diplomat, Jean-Joseph used her connections with the wealthiest Haitians and “a group of two hundred intelligent Haitians to join with her in a movement for the development of native arts and industrial training for the masses.”¹³² Likewise U.S. African Americans Marshall and Layle Lane used their personal and professional affiliations in the United States to host showers, fashion shows, and drives for school supplies and clothing for the students. Financial contributions from Marshall’s own Negro Music Conservatory, The American Association for Social Work, members of the ICWDR, The Empire State Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs and various black educational outlets including Tuskegee University and Bethune-Cookman College allowed the women to established and fund an ambitious agenda for the early years of their organization.¹³³

Between their inaugural meeting on March 2, 1926 and September of that same year the *L’Oeuvre des Femmes Haitiennes* opened the Jean Joseph Industrial School and gained the support of many economically resourceful and politically influential Haitians and U.S. Blacks of the time including, Mme. Dantes Bellegarde, Mme. François Dalencour, Mme. Pascal Elie, Eugenie Jean Joseph, Mary McLeod Bethune (President of

¹³² Layle Lane Papers, Box 184-1, The Jean Joseph School Brochure, MS.

¹³³ Marshall also wrote to the former President Theodore Roosevelt for his assistance, as well as to architect brothers Moses and Calvin McKissak of Nashville, TN known as “Designers and Builders of Churches, Schools, Fraternal Buildings and Residences Structural Steel and Reinforced Concrete” for fiscal support and for support with building the various schools and centers.

the National Federation of Colored Women's Clubs), Eva T. Bowles (Secretary for Colored Work of National Board YMCA), and Layle Lane (socialist activist, teacher and treasurer of *L'Oeuvre des Femmes Haitiennes*).

Through the Jean Joseph School Haitian and U.S. African American women were able to institutionalize their efforts to educate themselves and their children on black cultural and social respectability. Although the Jean Joseph School had U.S. African American board members and key officers, Haitian and U.S. Black women chose to promote the industrial education center as "A School founded March 2nd 1926, by a group of Haitians to develop Native Industries and afford a practical education for the Masses."¹³⁴ The school served as the major institution of the women's organization. The school was primarily concerned with industrial education of young women and men including the "special production and sale of active products and the fabrication of native materials into paper; baskets; hats; water jugs" and "other useful materials." Revolutionary in its concept and economic strategy to help Haitian women and men move from an import dependent country to a self-sufficient nation, the women mobilized the rhetoric of "self-help."

Like the ICWDR, a special feature of *L'Oeuvre des Femmes Haitiennes* and the Jean Joseph School was the creation of an education that focused on African descended people and promote a politics of black respectability. The school established a Reading Room that served the primary purpose of collecting and exchanging foreign journals; lectures; pictures and historical artifacts. Young women and men were admitted to the school. However, the self-help and "self-education," was particularly focused on Haitian women. The school board members emphasized women centered leadership from the educators

¹³⁴ The Jean Joseph School Brochure, Layle Lane Papers, Box 184-1, MS.

and the students. In a fundraising letter to Theodore Roosevelt, Gibbs Marshall thanked the former U.S. President for his financial support of *L'Oeuvre des Femmes* and the Jean Joseph School, but emphasized that “There are many gentleman members in this organization but we deem it wise to have women officers to awaken them to civic obligations and activity.”¹³⁵ In the *L'Oeuvre des Femmes* early programing Rosina Jean Joseph also explained, “It is important to initiate young girls to the basic principles of housekeeping that are the foundation of the good and healthy family life. They will learn to properly do the work that is becoming of a women, suggesting to them the noble ambition of becoming a “mama” one day. They would learn how to wash, iron, and cook without thinking. To this last point, we will never know enough how much influence one ‘good broth’ can have on husbands.”¹³⁶ The *l'Oeuvre* set out to maximize the natural and cultivated talents of girls and women so that they could become good housekeepers and wives producing “beautiful children in the streets.”¹³⁷

The image of beautiful children in the streets was of no small import. The cultivation and display of clean and well-socialized children was a direct counter-narrative to the dominate images and writings circulated throughout the United States that depicted unclothed and unkempt Haitian youth. In this way the industrial education promoted by the Jean Joseph School was gender specific. Haitian girls were educated to become excellent wives and mothers while contributing to the national economy through industries and tasks that could be done in-between housework and raising children. The “domestic” industrial education was designed to establish integrity and counter the rape

¹³⁵ Letter from Harriet G. Marshall to Theodore Roosevelt, June 30, 1927. Marshall papers, Box 112-2, C, Folder 82: Correspondence-Haiti-R to W, Mooreland-Springarn, Howard University.

¹³⁶ Letter from Rosina Jean Joseph to Mrs. John M. Gleen, President of the American Association for Organizing Family Social Work. Marshall Papers, MS

¹³⁷ Layle Lane Papers, Mooreland-Springarn.

and assault of Haitian women that was endorsed by racist discursive technologies and stripped black women of their respectability as mothers and wives. The women sought to reform the image that women and men in Haiti and the U.S. had of themselves and their collective blackness.

As the Jean Joseph school grew in numbers and in popularity, the U.S. Occupation was receiving more open and international criticism. While supporting the Jean Joseph School the Marshall's also worked with school leaders like Dantés Bellegardes to create a coalition against the occupation. In 1929 the Marshall's led a formal campaign against the occupation and founded the "Save Haiti " Foundation. Through letter writing, issues in publications, and meetings with top Haitian and United States officials the Marshall's and others petitioned for the occupations immediate end.

In 1934 the final troops left Haiti. The energy of the anti-occupation movement and the assault on black women's bodies mobilized Haitian and U.S. Black women who were previously active in their respective communities. The women redefined themselves and their movements through collective action and imaging. In particular Haitian and U.S. Black women developed a transnational alliance that would define the parameters of both the Haitian and U.S. Black women's feminist movements. In 1935 Madeleine Sylvain, Alice Garoute, and Alice Mathon, an original board member of the Jean-Joseph School, founded the *Ligue Feminine d'Action Sociale* (LFAS). These women built LFAS on a foundation of anti-occupation activism, social work and collaborative projects with U.S. African American women. As the women's movements transformed and evolved in both Haiti and the United States the relationship with these activists and their collective recognition of a bond based on shared blackness also changed.

Elite Haitian women continued to focus their efforts on the family and Haitian

womanhood to affirm Haitian modernity. These women combined their concern for Haitian women with their upper-class desires to uplift the Haitian poor class masses. During this time LFAS projects held a particular articulation of racial uplift that was cocooned in a campaign of sexual conservatism. Although less frequently, women from both countries maintained communication. In 1940 President Elie Lescot's wife wrote an open letter to the National Council of Negro Women where she situated the cleanliness and health of the nation in women's hands, praying that one day their would be a Ministry of Public Health led by women. In this same issue of *The Aframerican Women's Journal* the commitment to collective redrawing of the black woman's respectable body was continued in a collection of portraits titled, "A Symphony in Action."¹³⁸

Haitian women's political action and attention to uplift, health, and cleanliness was not unlike U.S. African American women's turn to a politics of respectability at the turn of the twentieth century. As Michele Mitchell has argued, politics of respectability was one way of to counter the negative images of black women's sexuality and abilities as good mothers and wives. Mitchell suggests that "from respectability and uplift to terrorism and miscegenation, sexuality was pare and parcel of black ruminations on how to improve the present as well as the future because racial oppression loomed so large and posed very real threats to black lives."¹³⁹ Similarly, the real threat on Haitian women's lives resonated beyond the U.S. Occupation and into a program of recovery for Haitian women. Haitian women reclaimed their power as citizens through controls on women's sexuality. This control over Haitian women's sexuality and the perceptions of Haitian

¹³⁸ "A Symphony in Action," *The Aframerican Women's Journal of the National Council of Negro Women*, Summer and Fall 1940. National Archives for Black Women's History, Washington, DC.

¹³⁹ Michele Mitchell, *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2004). Mitchell's work provides an extensive analysis of the relationship between U.S. Black women's sexuality and African American "virility."

women's sexuality served as a tool to support self-determination of Haitian women.

The U.S. occupation had imposed a direct assault on Haitian female and male bodies. Although Haitian women restored their physical and discursive bodies by recounting their stories and fighting in the nationalist project toward Haitian sovereignty, the post-occupation Haitian governments continued to deny women full citizenship rights. In this way, the first decade of the LFAS activism was centered on restoring a respectable image of Haitian women's sexuality and social value to Haitians, not U.S. Americans. Over the years of the post-occupation period Haitian and U.S. African American women maintained a steady flow of communication and collaborative work on projects including several orphanages and business ventures. As the battle for Haitian women's suffrage became more entrenched elite Haitian women activists continued to foster this relationship.

Throughout the 1940s leaders of the LFAS became particularly close with members of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW). More specifically, Lucienne Estimé and Mary McLeod Bethune, founder and president of the National Council of Negro Women, were good friends, corresponded frequently, and encouraged collaboration between their respective organizations. As activist Ruth Clement-Bond explained in a letter referring to Bethune and Estimé's relationship, "the Negro women of the United States, who feel a kinship with the people of this black republic [...] believing that through collaboration, even on this small project, there can come a wider knowledge and a better understanding of each other."¹⁴⁰ Both women had the ear of most influential activists and

¹⁴⁰ Ruth Clement-Bond to Bethune, January 21, 1947 from Port-au-Prince, NCNW Papers, Box 5, Folder 2, National Archives for Black Women's History, Washington, DC. Founder Fortuna Guery also wrote that Bethune was a "good friend of me and my country," in letter to Bethune January 1950.

politicians of their respective nations.¹⁴¹ In 1948 Estimé became a member of the NCNW and in 1949 Bethune made her first and only trip to Haiti.¹⁴²

After her trip to Haiti, Bethune wrote to LFAS member Fortuna Guery, “Your Haiti has stirred me as I have never before been stirred.” The emphasis on “physical culture” and public health that Bethune witnessed during her meetings with FLAS members and tours of the organizations projects reflected cross-national projects Haitian and U.S. Black women had discussed and worked on for three decades. Bethune later enthusiastically remarked, “Oh I can see it now the thousands and thousands of [Haitian] women with a swing and a poise like princesses of Africa lifting themselves by their own bootstraps!”¹⁴³ She further proclaimed that Haiti was “a land of peoples of my own color--ruled--and ruled NOBLY--by black men; your lovely women, awakening to your needs,- aspiring to greater levels;-wanting the franchise.”¹⁴⁴

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Eleanor’s, Viergina’s, and the nine little girls’ stories reverberated across the Caribbean Sea and resonated with Haitian and U.S. African American women. In these women’s shared desire to mend the wounds of sexual and physical violence, Haitian and U.S. Black women developed an alternative political arena in which they developed a vigilant offensive to protect their corporeal discursive bodies. In this process these women reaffirmed their citizenship in the “flesh and blood diaspora” of African descended

¹⁴¹ Lucienne was the first lady of her nation and active in philanthropic and civic work in Haiti. Bethune was known to be a close associate of Eleanor Roosevelt and other influential U.S. officials.

¹⁴² Bethune had planned to attend the 1950 Congress, however she was too ill to travel. Repeated illness compromised Bethune’s ability to travel until her death in 1955.

¹⁴³ National Council of Negro Women Papers, Letter from Bethune to Vivian Carter Mason.

¹⁴⁴ Letter from Bethune to Fortuna Guery, July 29, 1949. National Archives for Black Women’s History, Washington, DC.

women.¹⁴⁵ Haitian and U.S. African American women's international alliance provided a space for black women's political organizing that was absent in their own countries. In this way Haitian and African American women's alliances transcended the political and social confines of their respective nation states. However the operation of these alliances did not always reflect a balanced "black sisterhood."

For example, in the first year of the ICWDR, Addie W. Hunton, field secretary for the NAACP and member of the ICWDR, brought the non-U.S. membership imbalance of the ICWDR to the attention of Margaret Washington. In the original version of the constitution two-thirds of the membership positions were to be filled by residents of the United States and one-third foreign membership. In a 1923 letter presented several months before the first ICWDR constitutional meeting in Washington, Hunton expressed her concern that maintaining that a dominance of United States members would further disrupt the balance of power between women in the United States and foreign women. Aware of the imbalance in power Washington, Terrell and others agreed and the quota for the organization was changed to fifty percent U.S. and fifty percent foreign. Although well intended the constitutional quotas of fifty percent foreign membership were never met. And the balance of power was and would continue to be a looming reality to be negotiated or ignored throughout the international collaboration between Haitian and U.S. African American women.

Likewise African American women like Bethune-Cookman were arguably well meaning in their excitement and alliance with Haitian women. At the same time, there was often a level of condescension and superiority that hovered over these women's

¹⁴⁵ Hershini Young, *Haunting Capital: Memory, Text, and the Black Diasporic Body*, (Lebanon, NH: Dartmouth College Press-University Press of New England, 2006), 1.

alliances. As citizens (although unequal) of the former occupying nation, African American women adopted many concepts of American essentialism periodically expressing the belief that they were more civilized than Haitians. Elite African American women's ultimate investment in integrating into hegemonic dominant white culture meant they were occasionally guilty of using a lens of social superiority when they collaborated with Haitian women. Moreover, elite Haitian and African American women's concern for women's bodies had the potential to turn the victims into mythical and iconic figures in international discourse. That is, violated women—the naturalized, ethnically pure, and primitive black body—were imagined as the price of the occupying and foreign white forces. The violation not only was an assault on the individual, but an assault on the collective imagination that these women represented.

Similarly elite Haitian women's concern for Haitian women writ large and their physical and discursive sovereignty was also a reflection of their paralleled desires to take advantage of the opportunities in the post-occupation period and their fears that the large majority of poor and formally uneducated women would represent all Haitian women internationally. With a feminist practice largely defined by benevolence, philanthropy, and social and sexual conservatism elite Haitian and U.S. Black women's activism was not completely inclusive and often upheld class divisions and unequal power relations among Haitian and African American women. Yet these women's work and particularly the organizational structure and focus of women's collectives like the ICWDR, the *L'Oeuvre des Femmes Haitiennes* and the *Ligue Feminine d'Action Sociale* produced notable advances in black women's rights, access to political power, and ideological constructions

of black women's African diasporic identity.¹⁴⁶ As the women's movement evolved within Haiti, elite Haitian woman would have to rearticulate their racialized feminist rhetoric to produce a nationally inclusive movement for all Haitian women. This transition in rhetoric, and political practice in Haiti is the subject of the next chapter.

¹⁴⁶ During the five days of the Haitian Women's National Congress, Haitian and U.S. Black women celebrated their collective successes. On the second day of the Congress, Haitian women illustrated the important bond that the women had constructed over the three decades by hosting a special reception in honor of U.S. Black women who represented the *Chicago Defender*—the same newspaper that published Haitian women's voices and sparked the collective activist energies of Haitian and U.S. Black women.

CHAPTER 3

TORMENTED BY THE NEED TO HELP—*La Ligue Feminine d'Action Sociale*, 1934-1950

Haitian women's anti-U.S. occupation organizing spawned a new sense of social consciousness regarding women's position in the country. As fundraisers, activists, and members of the anti-occupation movement, these women also accumulated a record of leadership. Thus when the transitioning Constitutional Convention met in 1932, Alice Garoute and Thérèse Hudicourt anticipated that the new legal doctrine would reflect an appreciation for women's active participation in earning the nation's sovereignty.¹ It did not. When the details of the 1932 Constitution were announced, Article 8 stipulated that male citizens of twenty-one years of age or older were the only citizens eligible to vote in national or regional elections.²

Alice and her friends were disenchanted. Not only had the constitutional representatives denied women full enfranchisement, they had also given little consideration to other amendments including women's right to hold their own wages, the right to adult citizenship status in marriage, and the right to maintain Haitian citizenship if they married a foreigner. In the two decades of establishing their own intellectual communities through fundraising and reading groups, Alice and Thérèse had studied the history of political organizing in Haiti. Through popular history and storytelling they

¹ Madeleine Sylvain-Bouchereau, *Haiti et ses femmes*, (Port-au-Prince: Henri Dechamps, 1957), 82.

² Madeleine Sylvain-Bouchereau, *Haiti et ses femmes*, (Port-au-Prince: Henri Dechamps, 1957); Mirlande Manigat, *Etre Femme en Haiti Heir et Aujourd'hui: Le Regard des Constitutions, des Lois et de la Société* (Port-au-Prince: Université Quisqueya, 2002), 282.

learned they were the descendants of Queen Aucuna, Catherine Flon, Defilée, and the daughters of a revolution that introduced the modern world to racial and human equality.³ Yet history seemed to be repeating itself. Just as these women had become symbols of democracy for their defense of the nation, they also remained mythical foremothers with no concrete rights in the independent nation. The national history suggested that gender equality would not come without action from a united front with clear demands for the transitioning Haitian government.

This history also suggested that a movement needed clear leadership. In this regard, Alice Garoute was an obvious choice. Alice was socially respected, politically savvy, and through her anti-occupation organizing, skillfully led a generation of women into activism. In this new cohort of activists the most enthusiastic were Eugene Malbranche-Sylvain's four daughters. At the end of the U.S. Occupation, Madeleine, Suzanne, Yvonne and Jeanne emerged from their parents' political shadow as intellectuals and public servants.⁴ In particular, Madeleine—the young girl who canvassed with her mother in the streets of Port-au-Prince in the 1920s—completed law school the year before the 1932 Constitutional Convention. Her legal insight and family legacy of activism also made her the ideal face of the women's movement. In anticipation of the nation's full independence in 1934, Madeleine and Alice joined their collective expertise and worked for two years discussing their respective visions for a women's political organization.

Throughout the occupation, elite Haitian women established relationships with

³ Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). Dayan discusses the legacy of these women in popular history and folklore.

⁴ George Sylvain died in 1922 and Eugene Malbranche Sylvain died in December 1931. For more on the Sylvain legacy see George Sylvain, *Dix années de lutte pour la liberté, 1915-1925, Volume 1* (Port-au-Prince: Editions Henri Deschamps, 192).

African American women and women throughout the Caribbean including, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic.⁵ For Alice and Madeleine, the movements in these respective countries modeled what a Haitian women's movement could look like. As illustrated in the previous chapter, elite Haitian women's collective sympathies with African American women played a significant role in early articulations of women's activism in Haiti. Yet in the final moments of organizing in 1934, Alice and Madeleine turned to their immediate neighbors in the Dominican Republic. Until the end of 1933 and early 1934, the proximity of the two nations had little bearing on Haitian and Dominican women's collective organizing. And according to archival records and public history, the relationship that did ensue in the winter months of 1934 was fleeting.⁶

A number of reasons may explain the short-lived collaboration. First, both Haiti and the Dominican Republic were occupied by the United States at the turn of the century (1915-1934 and 1916-1924, respectively) but, the occupation ended in the Dominican Republic almost a decade before it ended in Haiti. This time provided elite Dominican women the opportunity to develop a concrete feminist discourse outside of the occupied state.⁷ Second, the discourse on feminism that elite Dominican women developed in the 1920s was quickly intertwined with the anti-Haitian rhetoric of the Dominican nationalist political climate.⁸ Third, and somewhat related, women on both sides of the island fed upon rumors and myths negatively stereotyping women in both

⁵ *Premier Congrès National Des Femmes Haïtiennes*, Bibliothèque Nationale d'Haïti, Port-au-Prince, Haïti (1950), 1-2.

⁶ Ginetta Candelario, April Mayes, Grace Louise B. Sanders, "Hispaniola Feminisms," Panel Presentation of Collaborative Project at Transnational Hispaniola Conference II, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, 2012. Ginetta Candelario, "'When the time comes we will align ourselves actively': Feminist Maternalism and Anti-Haitianism in the Dominican Republic during the Trujillo Era," Women's Studies Graduate Association Annual Speaker Series, March 23, 2007, University of Michigan.

⁷ Candelario, "'When the time comes we will align ourselves actively'," March 23, 2007.

⁸ Candelario, "'When the time comes we will align ourselves actively,'" March 23, 2007.

countries, limiting the possibility of cordial alliances and continuing a longstanding hostility between Haiti and the Dominican Republic since the early nineteenth century.⁹

Despite this contentious past, oral history among Haitian feminists and their families consistently maintains that when Alice Garoute and Madeleine Sylvain sat down to draft their plans for the first Haitian women's political organization, an unnamed woman from Dominican Republic's feminist movement was present.¹⁰ In this account, Alice and Madeleine invited the woman to share her experience in the Dominican women's movement and after sharing her thoughts she encouraged her hosts to start a similar organization in Haiti. Whether they were prompted by a member of the Dominican women's movement, or inspired by their work with women from throughout the region, in the winter of 1934 Alice and Madeleine formalized the plans for a new organization called, *La Ligue Feminine d'Action Sociale* (The Women's League for Social Action).

The *Ligue Feminine d'Action Sociale* (LFAS) had a rough start. In February, Madeleine invited a select group of women to discuss the organization. After several meetings Sylvain and the group developed an organizational philosophy, operational structure, and political platform. The overarching philosophy of the collective was to seek the "improvement of Haitian women's economic, intellectual, social and political conditions."¹¹ By March, the structure of the organization took shape with the election of an eight member executive committee. The remaining membership, which was estimated

⁹ See Michelle Wucker, *Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians and the Struggle for Hispaniola* (New York: Hill and Wag, 1999).

¹⁰ Ghislaine Charlier, Interviewed by author, September 23, 2010, Montreal, Canada.

¹¹ Sylvain-Bouchereau, *Haiti et ses femmes*, 82.

at near 100 within the first three weeks, was divided into six sub-committees.¹² The executive committee and sub-committees then developed an ambitious platform which included: 1) the physical, intellectual and moral improvement of Haitian women's condition in order to improve their awareness of their social obligations; 2) the protection of children, women, and the elderly and the improvement of domestic life; 3) the fight for civil and political equality for the Haitian woman.¹³ At the end of March, the organization had a governing body and clear goals, but they were missing government authorization.

When the LFAS leadership submitted the petition for authorization the women likely suspected it be a few days before the government approved the organization. The women were particularly confident because many members of LFAS were well acquainted with the transitioning executive administration. Sténio Vincent, who was elected president in May 1930, was a friend and activist compatriot of the Sylvain and Garoute families.¹⁴ As friends, Madeleine and Alice lived and socialized in the same elite and intellectual circles as Vincent. Alice and her family were even known to host the Vincent family, the president and his sister Resia Vincent, at their Jérémie home.¹⁵ As activists in the 1920s, the women had worked with Vincent during the anti-occupation movement and canvassed the streets to collect money for Vincent's travel expenses to Washington, D.C. so that he could present the nations' grievances to the U.S. Senate. Vincent's trip had not been a complete success, but the anti-occupation movement, with

¹² Sylvain-Bouchereau, *Haiti et ses femmes*, 82-83. The exact membership numbers and demographics at this point in the organization's history are unknown.

¹³ Sylvain, 82.

¹⁴ Charlier, Interviewed by author, September 23, 2010, Montreal, Canada.

¹⁵ Charlier, Interviewed by author, September 23, 2010, Montreal, Canada.

the support of elite, working-class, and peasant women, ultimately garnered enough international attention to pressure the United States to leave Haiti.

Vincent was popularly elected president four years before the occupation's end. He initially appeared to be an ideal choice for president given his previous anti-occupation activism and membership in the *l'Union Patriotique*. As historian Matthew Smith has shown, Vincent's nationalist sentiments had wide appeal early in his presidency.¹⁶ However, as the physical oppression from the U.S. marines subsided, Vincent became paranoid that he may lose his political popularity that was attached to his image as the nation's savior from U.S. imperialism.¹⁷ Although Vincent was an old family friend and a comrade to LFAS members in the nationalist movement, as the U.S. marines were leaving, the new president became suspicious of former allies. Vincent used his executive power to monitor organizations, unions, and social and religious gatherings.¹⁸

Vincent was particularly anxious about the younger generation of nationalist activists who were gradually turning away from the philosophies of nationalism espoused in the 1920s, and towards a radical Marxist philosophy of governance for the country.¹⁹ Among these newly minted Marxist were LFAS founder Thérèse Hudicourt's nephew and brilliant attorney, Max Hudicourt, and noted writer and poet Jacques Roumain. In 1927, Hudicourt and Roumain, along with writers and scholars Emile Roumer, Étienne Charlier, Arthur Holly, and Jean Price-Mars, founded an intellectual newspaper titled, *La*

¹⁶ Matthew Smith, *Red & Black in Haiti: Radicalism, Conflict, and Political Change, 1934-1957*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, (2009), 28. Also see David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour, and National Independence in Haiti*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996), 165-166.

¹⁷ Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier*.

¹⁸ Matthew Smith, *Red & Black in Haiti*, 15 & 28.

¹⁹ Smith, 15.

Revue Indigène.²⁰ Drawing from the literary indigenous movement started by Holly and Price-Mars, the group of both black and *milat* intellectuals celebrated Haiti's African ancestry, and encouraged a cultural and intellectual renaissance that studied *vodou* and the creole language.

Although powerful in discourse, by 1933 proponents of the indigenous movement (*indiginisme*) had not developed any politically oriented action.²¹ Thus Hudicourt, Roumain and others turned toward other philosophies. Through their study of Marxism, communism, and radical leftist thought, the young intellectuals began to promote a political agenda that focused less on color and culture, and more on the economic disparity within the country. They wanted to rebuild the nation by reviving the civil and economic productivity of the nation's masses. President Vincent, however, saw Marxist activism as a threat to his liberal nationalism. In order to insure his executive control, Vincent initiated violent campaigns of surveillance and imprisonment against Marxists and their sympathizers. Under this repression, Jacques Roumain and Max Hudicourt were arrested and imprisoned in 1933.²²

The end of Roumain and Hudicourt's four-week incarceration coincided with Madeleine, Alice, Thérèse's petition for organizational authorization. Vincent certainly recognized the names on the petition and likely reflected on the founders' familial and social affiliations. Perhaps he even remembered his visits to the Garoute home and the collection of books and newspapers that included Marxist material.²³ Whatever his musings—perhaps the mention of a women's labor department or improvements to

²⁰ Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier*, 159; Smith, 8.

²¹ Smith, 26

²² *Ibid*, 18.

²³ Charlier, Interviewed by author, September 23, 2010, Montreal, Canada. Charlier described her grandmother's library. The books in the library were Charlier's first introduction to leftist thought.

women's roles in domestic and family life—the petition flagged the brewing of more radical intentions and his government rejected the petition. Denied authorization, the initial formulation of LFAS dissolved in April 1934.²⁴

In her account of the first attempt to start the LFAS, Madeleine Sylvain identifies two reasons for the demise of the organization. First, she maintains that the Vincent government “took offense” to the aggressive agenda of the organization. According to Sylvain, Vincent and his administration were particularly offended by some of the detailed goals of the organization, specifically citing: “the construction and development of public secondary schools for girls, economic independence for married women, equal salary for equal work, women’s suffrage, freedom to establish a women’s labor department, and a prohibition on brothels.”²⁵

Second, she explains that political and experiential differences among members created divisions within the organizations.²⁶ In her assessment of LFAS’s false start, Sylvain characterizes the two factions that emerged within the organization. On one side, Madeleine explains, there was a majority of “timid and conservative” women who did not want to be on the wrong side of the government. On the other side, there was a small group of “enthusiastic and dedicated” women who were relentless warriors in the cause for women’s rights, but were unable to develop a political platform that would have wide national appeal.²⁷ For those “timid and conservative” women the cause of women’s rights was admirable, but the threat to their safety and that of their families was a legitimate concern. Women were not exempt from arrest and the men in their families were not

²⁴ Sylvain-Bouchereau, 83.

²⁵ Sylvain-Bouchereau, 83.

²⁶ Sylvain-Bouchereau, 83.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 83.

exempt from political or legal action in response to women's actions.²⁸ In this way, Vincent taking offense to the organization's platform combined with his administrative turn to violent repression was a deterrent.

The LFAS call for economic independence, equal pay, and a women's labor division may have reflected Marxist sympathies, but Vincent's attention to these "offensive" points in the LFAS platform reflected the president's preoccupation with radical social thought. Madeleine makes no overt connection between the repression of leftist thought by the Vincent administration and the rejection of the LFAS's first petition for authorization. However in her account of the approximate one hundred members of the first instillation of LFAS, she only mentions one member by name, "Mme. Pierre Hudicourt."²⁹ Sylvain explains that Thérèse Hudicourt was instrumental in developing the organization, and as a result of her experience in social work and familiarity with national politics, she was elected president.³⁰ Hudicourt's presidency, however, may have put the young organization at risk.³¹ Although the founding members of LFAS never established an official alliance with any political party or ideological movement, the familial connection between Hudicourt and her Marxist nephew, and to a lesser degree her husband, had the potential to trouble the Vincent government.

Despite the initial set back, the "enthusiastic and dedicated" women immediately went back to work. On May 10, 1934, Madeleine Sylvain along with Alice Garoute, Thérèse Hudicourt, Fernande Bellegarde, Olga Gordon, Marie Corvington, Alice

²⁸ See Michel Trouillot's essay *Color and Class in Haiti*. Trouillot gives particular attention to the historical shift in Haitian politics during the rise of François Duvalier that no longer exempted women from physical political repression and violence.

²⁹ Sylvain-Bouchereau, 82.

³⁰ Sylvain-Bouchereau, 82-83.

³¹ Interview by author, May 9, 2011, Pétionville, Haiti. In an anonymous interview with a prominent member in both the Haitian feminist and communist movements explained that Hudicourt was extremely influential in the philosophical underpinnings and governing of the organization.

Téligny Mathon, Esther Dartigue, Maud Turian, and Georgette Justin led a group of women teachers, attorneys, doctors, journalists, and social workers to develop a more palatable agenda for government authorities and founded a new LFAS. The organization carried the same name, but it had a revised platform that was structured around the mission to address issues of poverty, hygiene, childcare, and the moral, physical and intellectual conditions of women in all social classes. The Vincent government was satisfied with the LFAS's more moderate initiatives and granted the organization legal authorization with "little difficulty."³² Although much of the mission of the first interaction of LFAS was incorporated into the second formation, the philosophical articulation of the organization was more philanthropic. The women also situated the organization as a research unit that would collect information about women that would be useful for government service projects. Madeleine Sylvain later wrote, "The founders thought that feminism, more than a movement of political liberation, was above all a movement for social improvement, and it's this feminism that the women inaugurated."³³ The founders surmised that an altruistic mission would appease the government and appeal to a larger audience of women and men.³⁴

After they established their mission, the first priority was to expand the LFAS membership and situate themselves within the nation in order to advance their women's rights agenda. In order to draw support for the LFAS had to disseminate a message of multi-class women's rights and unified Haitian womanhood. A simple concept in theory, the leadership make-up of the organization, however, suggested that the organization was at least a social club for elite women and at most a patronizing philanthropic organization

³² Sylvain-Bouchereau, 83.

³³ Sylvain-Bouchereau, 84.

³⁴ Ibid, 84.

with little understanding of the experiences of the majority of women in the nation. The leadership's educational and career credentials marked them as members of an elite class. Madeleine, the president of the organization, was an attorney. Alice, the vice president, was an intellectual and wife of a high court justice. Thérèse Hudicourt, the organization's treasurer, was a social worker from a prominent family. Fernande Bellegarde, the organization's secretary general, was the daughter of the former French Ambassador and future U.S. Ambassador Dantés Bellegarde. Madeleine's sisters, Yvonne, Jeanne, and Suzanne, were all prominent members of the organization, and were also respectively the first female doctor, certified social worker, and anthropologist in the country. And the list went on.³⁵

The founders of LFAS were certainly pioneers in the professional history of Haitian women, but their educational and intellectual advances represented a small fraction of Haitian women or society writ large in early twentieth century. Moreover, in 1934 the public perception of the women's class and cultural competence was central to their organizational success. Specifically, in post-occupation Haiti political organizing was increasingly articulated through class and color rhetorical divisions. For example, the growing contingency of leftist activists argued that the fundamental problems of the nation were class based rather than based on color. While Marxist leaders like Roumain acknowledged color prejudice and conflict, they saw political ideology based on color divisions as a veil, masking the real issue of unbalanced wealth distribution in the country.³⁶ This standpoint significantly differed from a group of young intellectuals

³⁵ Sylvain-Bouchereau, 169-181. In *Haiti et ses femmes*, Sylvain-Bouchereau dedicates a large section to enumerating the professional and scholastic achievement of Haitian women. Most of the women mentioned were also officers and members of LFAS.

³⁶ Smith, 20.

known as the *Griots* who studied the work of Arthur Holly and Jean Price-Mars, and believed that color prejudice was the central problem of the nation. This group included Louis Diaquoi, Lorimer Denis, and François Duvalier.³⁷ The men expanded the ideological concepts of *indiginisme* into an explicitly anti-liberal and nationalist rhetoric, known as *noirisme*.³⁸ In addition to celebrating African traditions such *vodou*, folklore, and dance, *noiristes* further argued that darker skinned people had an “ancestral heredity” that was from the founding fathers of the nation, and as a result, they were more authentic Haitians and the rightful leaders of the country.³⁹

Although the full political impact of these political ideologies on national politics was not yet clear in the early 1930s, as LFAS worked through their inaugural year, the divisions articulated by these groups had significant barring on the women’s political approach. The organization’s membership was racially diverse, but the leadership’s social prestige made them *milat*, a reminder of the exclusionary social practice of people in their economic and professional status that could deter many women from participation. To this end, the women repeatedly articulated that the *Ligue Feminine d’Action Sociale* was for “Haitian women of all social classes.”⁴⁰

WORKSHOPPING FEMINIST IDEOLOGY

In June the LFAS leadership showcased the organization in order to win the “favorable public opinion” of the nation.⁴¹ From June 13 to July 14, LFAS sponsored its first major event in a four-week lecture series on Haitian feminism. These workshops,

³⁷ Nicholls, 168. The men were known as *les Trois D*.

³⁸ Smith, 26.

³⁹ Nicholls, 169.

⁴⁰ Sylvain-Bouchereau, 84.

⁴¹ Madeleine Sylvain-Bouchereau, “La femme haïtienne lutte depuis vingt ans pour obtenir les droits égaux,” *La Semeuse: Revue Mensuelle* (February 1, 1957: 3-6), 4.

which would turn into regular sessions for the organization, were designed to bring social and cultural awareness to the community and promote heated discussion on current events. Moreover, through the workshops LFAS leaders sought to address the most pressing philosophical debates of the nation, and then “take them out of the domain of the abstract” into action. The gatherings were advertised as a “democratic” space where participants were free to discuss their vision of representative governing and illustrate their competence as engaged citizens through concrete plans for then nation’s future.⁴² As a group the workshop attendees determined whether or not an issue deserved further intellectual attention or political action.

At an entry fee of 2.50 *gourdes*, guests were encouraged to join members of the LFAS and their distinguished lecturers each Wednesday at the Port-au-Prince Union Club, where the month’s topics were “Feminism and Women’s Education,” “Haitian Women in History,” “The Modern Organization of Education,” and “Feminism in France.”⁴³ The workshop topics were compelling and previewed the organization’s evolving identity, but the topics, alone, did not draw participants to the sessions.

The distinguished lecturers heightened the workshops’ appeal. The workshop speakers were Jean Price-Mars, the “architect of *indiginisme*”; Dantès Bellegarde, foreign ambassador and senator; and Maurice Dartigue, educator and future Minister of Education. In 1934 there were few men, as publicly known as Jean Price-Mars, Dantès Bellegarde, and to a lesser extent, Maurice Dartigue. The presentations were not recorded, but the men’s public record and prior positioning in intellectual debates

⁴² Madeleine Sylvain, “Séances d’études de la L.F.A.S.,” *La Voix des Femmes*, vol 6, no 46 (February 1940), 2.

⁴³ “Ligue Feminine d’Action Sociale,” *La Nouvelliste*, June 12, 1934, p 4.

suggests that the lectures were animated and likely controversial. In particular, Price-Mars and Bellegarde had developed a reputation as sparring partners.

In a 1916 Price-Mars gave a lecture to a group of elite women entitled, “Women of Tomorrow.” The speech, which became an iconic representation of Price-Mars’ forward thinking and brutal honesty, reflected his interest in women’s rights as a component of his philosophic commitment to *indiginisme*. In his studies of rural culture and society, peasant women’s lives captured his attention and led him to critical analyses of the intersections between class, gender, cultural, and color in Haiti.⁴⁴ Parsing Haitian women into two categories of peasant and elite, Price-Mars argued that despite their differences poor and elite women were ultimately bound by their shared African ancestry. Coming from Price-Mars, this assertion was not a surprise. However, he further advised his audience of elite women that they were further removed from this ancestry, but that through relationships with peasant women they could mend this divide and reclaim a more authentic Haitian womanhood. He delineated that peasant women’s bodies and work, “still in the primitivity of African traditions,” were the interlocutors and “witnesses” to their pure African past.⁴⁵

As ancestral sisters, Price-Mars also asserted that poor and elite women were also connected in their role as women in a patriarchal society. Price-Mars asserted that Haitian women were Haitian men’s “tools.”⁴⁶ That is, peasant women were literally tools of agricultural and market labor, while pious, well-dressed, elite women were ornaments for elite men’s construction of their social identity, respectability, and masculine

⁴⁴ Price-Mars, *Vocation d'élite*, 1919. Price-Mars was particularly critical of elite women and men’s material consumption and “mutual vanity.”

⁴⁵ Price-Mars, *Vocation d'élite*, 99.

⁴⁶ Price-Mars, 97.

reputation. In order to recuperate their true femininity and defeat patriarchy, Price-Mars implored the women to stop “sucking the marrow of Christian traditions,” that was leaving women with “intellectual poverty.”⁴⁷ He encouraged the women to be “impregnated in their brains” with cultural and civic education in order to help Haiti move prosperously into the twentieth century.⁴⁸ Price-Mars’ endorsement of intellectual conception in replace of immaculate conception, which he argued kept young Haitian women consumed with social appearances rather than personal development, was a direct attack on the Catholic Church and the elite conservatives.

At the LFAS workshop, Price-Mars facilitated the discussion on “Haitian Women in History.”⁴⁹ However, if he presented any portion of his previous lectures, his words would have had significant impact on the workshop audience and organizers. His participation likely served two roles for the budding organization. First, Price-Mars’ presence reflected LFAS leaders’ willingness to openly critique class, cultural, and color privilege. Price-Mars was a respected ethnographer and intellectual, but he was also a dark-skinned man with clear beliefs about privileging Haitian Africaness as a cultural legacy of the nation. While the celebration of African ancestry did not necessarily equal the absence of color prejudice, Price-Mars’ construction of Haitian femininity and solidarity through a shared African past provided the predominately *milat* LFAS leadership with a discourse to bridge the gap between themselves and their less economically stable and darker skinned sisters. In Price-Mars’ formulation, poor women embodied a cultural authenticity that leaders of LFAS had to respect and include in their feminist practice in order to develop a unified women’s movement. As a result any

⁴⁷ Price-Mars, 122.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 122.

⁴⁹ “Ligue Feminine d’Action Sociale,” *La Nouvelliste*, June 12, 1934, p 4.

national women's movement had to seriously incorporate and celebrate a platform of cross-class, cross-cultural, and rural-urban organizing.

Second, Price-Mars' vision addressed the commonality and intersection of women's lives not only as African, but also as women. His attention to Haitian women's intimate relationships with men identified a shared oppression in a patriarchal society. In his assertion that women reject their objectification through the pursuit of critical education, Price-Mars identified scholastic achievement as the means by which women could overcome domestic mistreatment, the trappings of consumerism, and limited civic involvement.⁵⁰ This formulation not only unified Haitian women as leaders of the home, but could have also validated the LFAS leadership's educational and professional achievements. Paradoxically, Price-Mars provided women with a response to patriarchy, but he was less demanding of Haitian men. In particular, in the area of marriage and monogamous relationships, Price-Mars excused men's infidelity as a cultural trait of African ancestry. His suggestion to men in 1916 was to be more discrete.⁵¹ However, in 1934 the continued absence of a critical engagement with men's sexuality in the patriarchal society would unify women to push for legal reforms to family laws.

Anchored in African ancestry and the importance of women's education, Price Mars' lecture was complimented by professor Maurice Dartigue's lecture on "Modern Organization of Education." At the time of the summer workshops, Dartigue had recently finished his studies in education at the Teacher's College at Columbia University in New York.⁵² When he returned to Haiti, he continued to work as an educator and

⁵⁰ Price-Mars, *Vocation d'élite*, 122-123.

⁵¹ Price-Mars, *Vocation d'élite*, 99.

⁵² Esther Dartigue, "Chapter Five: Haiti, (Part 1/1931-1934)," unpublished manuscript, John Dartigue Personal Archive.

developed a reputation as an expert in rural and industrial education. During the summer break Dartigue's wife and LFAS founding member, Esther Dartigue, likely invited her husband to share his thoughts with the organization.

Several years before the workshops, Esther Dartigue, also a graduate of Columbia's Teacher's College, had given a lecture of her own regarding education. However, her remarks were seen by some critics as an outgrowth her U.S. education—inapplicable and condescending toward Haitian women.⁵³ As a result Esther invited her husband, who was well respected for his work in rural education, to express their shared understanding of education in Haiti. As she later wrote of her husband's legacy, Esther admired Maurice's insight toward Haitian education, which supported teaching in Creole, establishing a core curriculum around Haitian, Latin American, and North American culture, and discarding of French textbooks. However, Esther was frustrated by elite's slow response to her family's call for improvement in rural education. In particular she supported her husband's advocacy of industrial education for Haiti's poor masses.⁵⁴ Like Price-Mars, Dartigue also believed in mending the gap between peasant and elite women through education. It was, as Dartigue saw it, necessary to educate the peasant class in order to create an informed citizenry and improve the national economy.

Dartigue and Price-Mars both presented education as a gender equalizer. Through education women would maximize their contribution to the nation and as a

⁵³ "L'éducation féminine en Haiti," clipping from John Dartigue Personal Archive.

⁵⁴ In the years leading up to his appointment as Minister of Rural Education under the Élie Lescot administration in 1941, Dartigue studied education throughout the region. During his tenure in the United States, he traveled to Alabama and studied the Booker T. Washington educational style and the inner workings of the Tuskegee University "Machine." For more on Dartigue and education, see Millery Polyné, *From Douglass to Duvalier*: 78-79. Millery Polyné points out however, Dartigue's approach to education of the peasantry was "inherently paternalistic." Thinking civically." As "Elites preferred paternalistic conceptions of the state," because they could shape access to state power. "Haitian and U.S. Black elites advanced Western ideals of government—and supported mechanisms of the state, such as schools, because these fundamentals gave the appearance of an orderly, reasoned and civilized relationship between centralized authority and its citizenry."

result they would earn political rights based on their value as productive citizens. Certainly the injustice in this equation was that men were not held to the same standard of citizenship. However, in the 1930s the concept that women of any class could be formally educated and considered intellectual experts in a field of study was a radical proposition.⁵⁵

Price-Mars and Dartigue's political and professional sentiments were on the extreme and moderate end of the political spectrum compared to those of the final workshop speaker Dantès Bellegarde. By the 1930s, Bellegarde's list of accomplishments and accolades was extensive. He had served as Haitian Ambassador to both France and the United States, spoken at the second Pan-African Congress, helped lead the anti-U.S. occupation movement, written two books on Haitian history and culture, and befriended some of the leading thinkers and activists of the early twentieth century including, African Americans W.E.B. DuBois and Rayford Logan, and his countryman and fellow workshop speaker Jean Price-Mars⁵⁶ Bellegarde, however, was far more conservative in his philosophies of Haiti than his friend and intellectual sparring partner Price-Mars. Bellegarde recognized the power of African descended people uniting for civil rights throughout the world, but he was cautious of *indiginisme* and not interested in celebrating an African past. He believed in Western liberal thought and ultimately desired that Haiti and black people in the region move away from their African past and integrate into Western society as equals in the dominant white-Anglo culture.⁵⁷ Dantès concept of "Feminism in Women's Education," corresponded with his more conservative beliefs.

⁵⁵ Esther Dartigue, "Chapter Five: Haiti, (Part 1/1931-1934)."

⁵⁶ Dantès Bellegarde Collection, Series A, Box 1, Mooreland-Springharn Archives, Howard University, Washington, DC.

⁵⁷ Nicholls, 176. Nicholls calls Bellegarde one of the "prophets of political liberalism." In particular, maintained that, "it is to France that Haiti owes its cultural debt, not Africa," see Smith, 27.

From this standpoint, Bellegarde and Price-Mars were publicly characterized as ideological enemies.⁵⁸

The philosophical discord between Bellegarde and Price-Mars was, perhaps, the impetus for their invitation. Bellegarde's daughter and LFAS secretary general, Fernande Bellegarde, was aware of the differences in political thought between her father and the other workshop speakers. But the rivalry between the thinkers had the potential to draw large crowds to the LFAS event.⁵⁹ Apart from inciting ideological banter, historian Patrick Bellegarde-Smith explains that the iconic debates between Bellegarde and Price-Mars throughout the twentieth century were an outgrowth of larger questions of Haiti's modern history, which were, "Who are we?" and "What does it mean to be Haitian in the modern world?"⁶⁰ Haitian feminist were grappling with these same questions. To this end, Price-Mars', Bellegarde's, and Dartigue's prospectives on Haitian feminism provided incite to a group of women who claimed to represent half of a nation in a modern identity crisis.

At the end of the month series, the common thread in each workshop was education. As outlined in their goals for the events, the participants were left with the decision on how they would act. However, if education was the avenue to equal citizenship the paths for women were not the same or equally accessible. Although Price-Mars' and Dartigue's projections for Haiti's future included culturally enriched education, in the 1930s Europe inspired and Catholic infused education, as supported by Bellegarde, was the most respected and desired by poor, working, elite, and middle class

⁵⁸ The differences between Bellegarde and Price-Mars were likened to the public characterization of W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington as political and philosophical enemies.

⁵⁹ Urban newspapers regularly discussed opinions on *indiginisme* versus liberalism. See *Nouvelliste*, June 11, 1934, p.2

⁶⁰ Patrick Bellegarde-Smith, "Haitian Studies Association Plenary Address: 22nd Annual Conference, Brown University," *The Journal of Haitian Studies*, Volume 17, no 1, (2011), 232.

women.⁶¹ Industrial education could harness the physical labor that many poor women were already putting into their individual plots of land or market businesses. Yet industrial education was based on the premise that there were appropriate students for this education. Elite women were not among this applicant pool. Similar to the debates on industrial education for African Americans in the United States, the emphasis on women's physical labor had the potential to intensify class divisions by further demarcating the labor pool into semi-skilled trade and professional workers.⁶² Within Dartigue's plan the LFAS could justify an uplift and philanthropic approach to feminist practice, but how would this approach be developed in an inclusive feminist framework?

The ideas espoused during the LFAS workshops encouraged Haitian women, poor and elite, to consider how they would craft their politics and further insert their gender identity into cultural debates of the time. The philosophical standpoints regarding Haitian national identity, social practice, and economic productivity articulated at the inaugural workshop series were also the same lines that were drawn in national politics of the 1930s and 40s. Alice and Madeleine's choice of speakers was an intuitive acknowledgement that they would have to contend with these issues for the duration of LFAS's existence and their political lives. Yet the workshops also illustrated that women could frame the parameters of these debates to benefit their feminist agendas. As architects of this feminist forum, LFAS was one of the first organizations in the post-occupation period to establish a regular home for public dialogue. The Haitian Communist Party (PCH), *les Griots*, and other political and philosophical groups certainly

⁶¹ Esther Dartigue, "Chapter Five: Haiti, (Part 1/1931-1934)," unpublished manuscript. Also see Carolle Charles, "Popular Images of Gender and Sexuality," *The Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean*, ed. Linden Lewis, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2003),175.

⁶² W.E.B. DuBois, "Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others," *The Souls of Black Folk: essays and sketches*, (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1903).

gathered to discuss national issues, however LFAS attempted to bring all political perspectives for debate. Moreover, as Madeleine expressed, in other public showcases, the purpose was to talk and obtain political power. The LFAS was clear about their mission to act and shift the parameters of power through social change.

The political success and longevity of the organization and their fight for women's rights hinged on their ability to address, maneuver, and sometimes ignore the issues raised at the first workshop series. As these concepts were funneled through an elite feminist lens, LFAS members turned to education. How could elite women be reeducated to the sensitivities of their poor and working class sisters and how would these women be incorporated in the national structure of education? The path toward reconciling these goals would be blazed over the following decade through written media and social work.

LA VOIX DES FEMMES

After the summer workshop series the LFAS's organizational focus was women's education. Under the umbrella of education the members included scholastic, civic, social, and sexual education. As trained professionals the LFAS leadership modeled the benefits of scholastic education. LFAS routinely applauded their leadership for their academic achievements and encouraged them to multiply their academic pursuits.⁶³ In this respect, LFAS President Madeleine Sylvain and her three sisters, commonly known as the "Sylvain Sisters," were a perfect example.⁶⁴

In the mid-1930s Madeleine Sylvain and her sisters had come a long way from the

⁶³ See congratulatory notes and newspaper clippings celebrating LFAS members, Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain Papers, Box 1, Folder 4, "Scrapbook personal belongings," Stanford University Archives, Stanford, California.

⁶⁴ Esther Dartigue, "Le Feminisme en Haiti 'Il était une fois quatre sœurs,'" *Bulletin de l'Association France-Haiti* (May 1985:7-8), 7.

days of accompanying their parents to protests and anti-occupation programming meetings. Madeleine had, however, observed the influence her activist mother and father had over their sympathizers and studied their public personas. When her father, George Sylvain died in 1922, she witnessed thousands of people line the streets of Port-au-Prince to catch a glimpse of their respected leader's casket.⁶⁵ As Madeleine started to establish her own political resume, her family's reputation may have helped her cultivate certain political alliances, however, she could not carry a movement on the coattails of her parent's legacy. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, Madeleine's voracious hunger for education and professional advancement established legitimacy for her as a leader, for LFAS as a respected organization, and ultimately for the women's rights movement.

Madeleine began her work with women and children at the age of 22 when she founded the social support agency *Pupilles des Saint-Antoine*. The center provided basic needs for women and their children such as clothing and food. After receiving her bachelor's degree, Madeleine enrolled in law school in 1930 and earned her degree in 1933.⁶⁶ As Madeleine practiced law and led LFAS, her sister Yvonne became an obstetrician. As a specialist in venereal disease she had many patients who suffered during the rise in syphilis diagnoses in the first half of the twentieth century.⁶⁷ And in the 1920 and 30s, her experience was tested as she negotiated the devastating effects of the nationwide yaws epidemic.⁶⁸ Moreover as the demographic landscape of the country

⁶⁵ Letters of condolence and obituaries after Georges Sylvain's death in 1925, in Georges Sylvain, *Dix années de lutte pour la liberté, 1915-1925*.

⁶⁶ Dartigue, "Le Feminisme en Haiti 'Il était une fois quatre sœurs,'" 7.

⁶⁷ Brochure produced by LFAS after 1946.

⁶⁸ Emily Greene Balch, ed., *Occupied Haiti*, (New York: The Writer's Publishing Company, 1927), 86-89. According to this report, 75% of the medical cases in the country were syphilis and yaws cases. This yaws epidemic is the same health crisis that Dr. François Duvalier studied during medical school in Haiti and later at the University of Michigan. Duvalier earned his nickname "Papa Doc" for his work with yaws patients in the Haitian countryside.

changed with rural to urban migration following the U.S. occupation, Yvonne's work was affected by the poor sanitation conditions of overcrowded urban neighborhoods that facilitated the spread of bacterial and parasitic diseases, like tuberculosis and malaria. These diseases routinely led to prenatal death, and infant sickness and mortality. Working at the epicenter of women's urban healthcare, Yvonne became concerned about women's living conditions as a public health crisis.⁶⁹

Similarly, Jeanne's experiences as a social worker gave her exposure to women's domestic conditions across social classes. In letters to her sisters, Jeanne frequently wrote of her exhaustion given the overwhelming number of clients in need of her services.⁷⁰ While Madeleine, Yvonne, and Jeanne's careers provided an understanding of law, medicine, and social work, Suzanne's work wove all of these aspects of Haitian life together. As an anthropologist, Suzanne spent weeks, months, and years studying the African origins of Haitian culture and language. Noted for her comparative work on West African coastal languages and Haitian Krèyol, Comhaire-Sylvain was praised by regional scholars such as African American historian Carter G. Woodson as, "one of the most intellectual people of Haiti."⁷¹ Suzanne's scholarly focus was linguistics and storytelling in Haitian and West African languages, but her time in the Haitian countryside among the majority peasant population gave her insight into the multiple articulations of Haitian

⁶⁹ Comhaire-Sylvain Papers, Box 1, Folder 4, Scrapbook personal belongings, (SUA).

⁷⁰ Comhaire-Sylvain, Box 13, Folder 4, (SUA).

⁷¹ Carter G. Woodson, "Review of *Le Creole Haitien* and *Les Contes Haitien* by S. Comhaire-Sylvain," *Journal of Negro History*, vol 22 (July 1937: 369-372). Comhaire-Sylvain wrote the first Haitian Creole language dictionary, *Le Creole Haitien* (Port-au-Prince, 1936). In an obituary Comhaire-Sylvain was remembered as a leading scholar in "African and Afro-Caribbean scholarship." Comhaire-Sylvain Papers, Box1, Folder 1, "Obituary: Suzanne Comhaire," (SUA).

culture, practices of marriage, and women's public and private work.⁷²

With this education and cultural exposure, the Sylvain sisters, led by Madeleine, represented a multilayered professional expertise that would have cross-class relevance for their feminist agenda. Unlike her father's campaign for national sovereignty, however, Madeleine's concern for women's rights was slow to gain the attention or concern of the nation. For the majority of those who were aware of the movement they opposed it because feminism seemed to be a foreign import from Europe or North America. Even for those agreed with the premise of equal rights, many saw the reality as one critic explained, "Equality of the sexes is a pipedream. It will never become a reality."⁷³

Despite the conditions, Sylvain was determined to share the LFAS vision and re-educate the nation about women. To do this, the Sylvain sisters and other members of LFAS documented their experiences, showcased their work, and discriminated their thoughts and scholastic achievements through the LFAS newspaper, *La Voix des Femmes*. *La Voix des Femmes* was established during a popular surge in print media, however, it was the first of its kind in Haiti.⁷⁴ Women had never owned and operated a newspaper with an explicit mission to address women's issues. From the first publication issued in October 1935, the newspaper was essential to LFAS's growth as it expanded the organizational reach, and established women, and members of LFAS in particular, as creative

⁷² Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, *Contes du pays d'Haiti* (1938). *A propos du vocabulaire des croyances paysannes* (1938). Créole haïtien, morphologie et syntaxe, (1936). Book manuscripts and field notes, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.

⁷³ "Autour du Feminisme," *Le Nouvelliste*, no. 13652, (July 30, 1935: 1& 6.), 1.

⁷⁴ Print media was heavily monitored during the U.S. occupation and many journalists and writers were imprisoned for their criticism of the intervention. See Layle Lane, "An American Woman in Haiti," Box "Layle Lane Additions," Layle Lane Papers, Moorland-Springarn Archives, Howard University, Washington, DC. In "A Visit to Prison," Lane writes that she visited several journalist who were held for months because of their unfavorable editorials about President Louis Borno (1922-1930) and the U.S. Marines!

researchers and rigorous intellectuals.⁷⁵

By February of 1936, *La Voix des Femmes* contributors had a firm editorial footing and strong handle on periodical prose and contemporary national events.⁷⁶ The content of *La Voix des Femmes* ranged from editorials on politics to articles about international affairs. As a monthly publication, a small portion of the pages were concerned with advertisements and social activities, but the majority of the periodical included historical and sociological essays about women. Additionally, the ethnographic research printed in the newspaper provided unprecedented documentation of working class and peasant women.⁷⁷ Jacques Roumain, Jean Price-Mars⁷⁷ and other intellectuals had written books and essays on the condition of peasant life, however, no periodical shared peasant women's daily lives with the nation. The newspaper issues exposed the country to the multiple life experiences of Haitian women and emphasized women's shared experiences by joining their stories on the printed page.

The newspaper was a space for women to engage in critical self-reflection and social analysis, while producing and publishing original research on Haitian women that grounded their feminist theories. The editors Alice Garoute, Madeleine Sylvain, Jeanne Perez, and Cléante Desgraves Valcin characterized *La Voix des Femmes* as the microphone for the oppressed: "*La Voix des Femmes* will denounce injustices and abuses and will unite all Haitians in a common love for the country."⁷⁸ Situating themselves as social justice brokers Madeleine explained, "*La Voix des Femmes* wants to be the trade union between all

⁷⁵ Newspapers were distributed throughout the nation irrespective of urbanity.

⁷⁶ The evolution of technology also made this media more feasible and economic. Radio became well known in the urban centers of the country in the 1930s, but for the most part the countryside and majority of the country received their news through word of mouth or large public government proclamations.

⁷⁷ From 1936 to the late 1940s, various members of LFAS conducted extended field research in rural towns and in Port-au-Prince documenting women's work routines, cultural practices, and family structure.

⁷⁸ Madeleine Sylvain Bouchereau, "Nous revoici," *La Voix des Femmes* (January 1947), 1.

Haitians who do not know enough. [*La Voix des Femmes*] will try to connect with all women throughout the world, free or oppressed, to work for women's emancipation."⁷⁹

Unable to serve in national government positions or vote in elections, LFAS used the newspaper as their ballot. Through *La Voix des Femmes* the LFAS situated themselves as key voices in the press core of Haiti and the "intellectual family" of Latin America.⁸⁰ They were not just *women* journalists, instead they were critical thinkers on topics that concerned them and the nation. It is difficult to accurately identify the newspaper's distribution numbers and readership. However, the newspaper had full circulation in the major cities of each region including, Cayes, Cap-Haïtien, and Jacmel.⁸¹ In these areas it is most likely that the core readership were elite and middle-class women. Within that milieu the journal was celebrated for its scholarly rigor and style, and during the Paris Exposition in 1937 the writers of *La Voix des Femmes* were awarded a journalism prize for excellence in reporting.⁸²

The international recognition for the newspaper and the editors was important because LFAS members used *La Voix des Femmes* to establish themselves as the shepherds of Haitian feminism. Although the editors were well known to the elite and intellectual class of Port-au-Prince and Jérémie, in the first years of LFAS their national popularity was less established. The women used the newspaper as a marketing tool to craft their own celebrity. Their public personas were shaped through vivid imaging in their writings and through photography. For example, the newspaper routinely displayed images of Sylvain, Garoute, and other leaders in authoritative positions, dressed in professional

⁷⁹ Bouchereau, "Nous revoici," 1.

⁸⁰ Madeleine G. Sylvain, "Message Aux Membres du Congrès de la Presse Latine," *La Voix des Femmes*, (Feb 1936), 2.

⁸¹ Sylvain, *Haiti et ses femmes*, 85.

⁸² The international recognition was an honor to the newspaper editors, Madeleine Sylvain, Alice Garoute, Jeanne Perez and Cléante Desgraves Valcin.

clothing or draped in academic regalia.⁸³ Until *La Voix des Femmes* monthly images of Haitian women did not exist. Rather, the primary images of women presented to the nation were through newspaper advertisements with images of white women and men from France and the United States.⁸⁴

Through the newspaper, LFAS constructed alternative public images of womanhood and educated beauty. The women were not beautiful because of cosmetic appeal, but rather because of their scholastic and professional accomplishments. LFAS leadership presented the image of the ideal Haitian woman as universally attainable through education. Although visual images also reinforced the image of class difference, and drew attention to national disparities in wealth, in their prose and short stories LFAS used the pages of *La Voix des Femmes* to experiment with alternative representations of women and their experiences as mothers, daughters, lovers, and leaders.

‘SHOW THEM WHAT CONSTITUTES BEAUTY’:
SPORT, DANCE, SOCIAL WORK & WOMANHOOD

The diverse vision of Haitian women represented in *La Voix des Femmes* was primarily drawn from LFAS members’ research and philanthropic service. In order to develop an inclusive feminist practice, the LFAS conducted investigative projects and held “study sessions” in order to understand the conditions of women in the country.⁸⁵ An outgrowth of the inaugural workshops, combined with the scholarly intent of the *La Voix des Femmes*, the study sessions were designed for in-depth research on topics related to Haitian women. In November 1939 the first two “problems” submitted to the group for

⁸³ *La Voix des Femmes*, October 1935.

⁸⁴ See *Le Nouvelliste, Maintenant, Le Matin*.

⁸⁵ Madeleine Sylvain, “Séances d’études des la L.F.A.S.,” *La Voix des Femmes*, vol 6 no 46 (February 1940), 2.

review were: 1) Haitian women's legal status; and 2) recreation and leisure time.⁸⁶ The first subject of study was the organization's original subject of interest and the primary focus of the LFAS for the duration of the century. As we will see later in the chapter, the women developed a sophisticated suffrage campaign and women's rights agenda to gain gender equality in marriage and divorce laws, childcare laws, and citizenship rights.

When the LFAS was not lobbying the president or senators for support on legislation, the organization was preoccupied with the second issue of "leisure." Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain's work was the template for the organization's research in this area. Aligning her research with the concerns of LFAS, Suzanne used her ethnographic training to collect information about women's conditions in the country in order to more affectively develop the organization's social work agenda.

In 1939 Comhaire-Sylvain conducted a year-long study in Port-au-Prince interviewing over 1,000 poor and working class girls between the ages of 9 and 16 years old about how they spent their leisure time. Her study was grounded in the assumption that leisure time activities had the potential to corrupt a girl's social respectability and as a result this unaccounted for time needed observation.⁸⁷

Comhaire-Sylvain found that many of the girls she interviewed were servants in elite homes and as a result, spent over 98 hours a week working. A small percentage of these girls were enrolled in school full-time, but the large majority were part-time students and of those many missed school frequently. With work, school, and responsibilities at home Suzanne found that young girls in the urban center had little time for leisure activities. When they did take time to play, they often did the same thing that elite girls

⁸⁶ Sylvain, "Séances d'études des la L.F.A.S.," 2.

⁸⁷ Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, "Les Loisirs des Fillettes de Port-au-Prince," *La Voix des Femmes*, no. 46 vol 6, (February 1940), 10.

did, talk with friends, dance, and play games. She asserted, “Rich or poor, our young girls of Port-au-Prince are highly social.”⁸⁸ The character of their social lives, however, lacked structure. According to Suzanne the first solution to this problem was providing an alternative place for children to get scholastic education if they missed schools. For this Sylvain suggested that LFAS open a weekend library.⁸⁹ Although she supported scholastic education, she also suggested, “However if we want to raise the intellectual and moral level of the Haitian woman it is not enough to improve the level of studies, we must also introduce a little understanding of art in children’s leisure time.” Qualifying her statement she explained, “*Introduction* is not the appropriate word, it exist at an embryonic state in the love of singing, of storytelling, and of dance, which are admittedly very well developed.”⁹⁰ However at an embryonic level, art could go array.

From Comhaire-Sylvain’s observations girls’ artistic energy needed to be cultivated in adult supervised social gatherings where young people saw theatrical productions, art exhibits, and educational films. She further instructed her LFAS sisters and readership that they—the educated and socially cultured women of the nation—must teach the less educated class and “show them what constitutes beauty.”⁹¹

Comhaire-Sylvain proposed that young women’s education in aesthetics begin with leisure activities that focused on girls’ physical health. In response to this suggestion co-editor of *La Voix des Femmes*, Cléante Desgraves Valcin provided a list of ideal sports for women. Each sport including, volleyball, cycling, and swimming, emphasized strengthening the body without disrupting the feminine physique. Valcin’s description of

⁸⁸ Comhaire-Sylvain, “Les Loisirs des Fillettes de Port-au-Prince,” 10.

⁸⁹ Comhaire-Sylvain, 10.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 10.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 10.

these activities included length of play as well as physical or mental ailments that could be cured by the activities.⁹² Comhaire-Sylvain explained, “We should definitely consider placing our young girls in all sorts of sports organizations to improve the beauty and vigor of the race.”⁹³ Fitness as a response to girls’ leisure time was an explicit concern for what young women were doing with their bodies and how that behavior represented women within a familial, community, and national context. Although Valcin and Comhaire-Sylvain discussed athletics at length, their interest with sports was less about athleticism and more about monitoring young girls bodies. According to the LFAS, a fitness campaign would keep young girls occupied and away from the trappings of sexual promiscuity and prostitution.⁹⁴ The study of leisure time was in fact a way to address elite women’s concern for young girls’ comportment and public behavior.

The LFAS’s interest in teaching the elements of and improving upon the beauty of the race was also evident in their attention to dance. In her research, Comhaire-Sylvain wrote extensively about the girls who said they danced samba, lambeth walk, the tango, rumba, and the Charleston. The young women also told Comhaire-Sylvain that they spent any extended periods of leisure time at dance events. However, when she asked them about other forms of dance, such as carnival, “in general there was a reluctance to admit.”⁹⁵ She continued that, “many children also deny attending *les veillées*.”⁹⁶ The girls’ denial was certainly an act of self-preservation. In the 1930s and 1940s all acts that were associated with vodou including, *les veillées* (evening vigils), sacred dance, spiritual songs, and ceremonial paraphernalia, could place a family or whole community at risk. In 1935,

⁹² Simone W. Hippolyte, “Les Loisirs de la Jeunesse Feminine,” *La Voix des Femmes* vol 6, no 46 (February 1940), 8.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 10.

⁹⁴ *La Voix des Femmes*, 1940 (Port-au-Prince).

⁹⁵ Comhaire-Sylvain, 9.

⁹⁶ Comhaire-Sylvain, 9. *Les veillées* are vigils often held at night, and are associated with vodou ceremonies.

President Vincent passed the 1935 *décret –loi* that prohibited *les pratiques superstitieuses*. This law known as the anti-superstition campaigns was a renewed aggression by the government and the Catholic Church against vodou that included the prohibition of ceremonies, dances, and spiritual meetings. Any act that appeared to “serve the lwa” could be responded to with prison time, legal fees, invasion and destruction of one’s home.⁹⁷

At the same moment of this government aggression against vodou, the government also celebrated popular culture as a national product. In her study of vodou and the law historian Kate Ramsey shows that: “The negation of ‘superstition’ through this tightened penal regime produced the positive category of ‘popular dance,’ constructed by the state during the early 1940s as a sign of official national particularity.”⁹⁸ Ramsey further argues that, “the post-occupation state constructed popular practices, and particularly ritual dance, as indices of official Haitian identity and modernity.”⁹⁹ Members of the LFAS built on the celebration of popular culture as a sign of modernity to also craft young women as embodiments of national authenticity and unify women along culturally familiar lines. In this way the women drew from Price-Mars assertion that *indiginisme* could create national unification in order to establish gender unification.¹⁰⁰

As a result, the LFAS created spaces where women could dance. For example in the summer of 1940, the LFAS had several events where young women were the entertainment. At one show in June, Jeanne Sylvain recounted that girls danced to vodou songs and “negro spirituals” that were particularly moving, “The girls were dancing and

⁹⁷ Kate Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law: Vodou and Power in Haiti*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 182. *Indiginiste* sympathizers, Marxists, and *noiristes* all argued that the anti-superstition campaigns were an attack on Haitian the poor and working class.

⁹⁸ Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law*, 217.

⁹⁹ Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law*, 181.

¹⁰⁰ Ramsey, 181.

laughing. The drum vibrating. A young 8 year old girl was singing, dancing, laughing, and her whole body was shaking. A commanding rhythm engulfed the room.” Sylvain explained that after the performance an older woman was angry and exclaimed, “What! Parents are paying for their children to learn this stupidity?” Before Sylvain could reply the instructor defended the performance, “I love everything about it. It’s that simple, it’s Haitian and it’s beautiful at the same time.”¹⁰¹ Through a reappropriation of spiritual dance LFAS adopted dance, as the interlocutors between women of all classes, Haitian culture, and women centered feminist practice.

In their celebration of education and the multiplicity of the Haitian woman, LFAS adopted the philosophy that knowledge and intellect had an aesthetic currency. The ability to discern beauty would result in the capacity to change the standard and quality of life. In this way, they eye had to be sculpted. If the process was effective social intellect and valued Haitian womanhood was attainable for all. Their social and scholastic knowledge sculpted an image of the Haitian women. Crafting a collective Haitian female aesthetic then became central to Haitian feminists efforts to establish commonality and unify Haitian women.

Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain’s research illustrated the kind of research that supported and justified LFAS’s work.¹⁰² Excelling in this area of study also illustrated feminist activists’ intellectual grasp on modern philosophies through empirical data. The LFAS saw girls’ idle time as a niche to draw young women into their feminist agenda and act on their goals of education and social improvement.

¹⁰¹ Jeanne Sylvain, “Marassa, Eh You!,” *La Voix des Femmes*, vol 5 no 48 (May 1940), 1.

¹⁰² Social behavior was also used as a measure of demarcation between classes of women. Poor women were often characterized as having fewer social graces and as a result were less identifiable as modern Haitian women. Across social class, a primary belief was that Haitian girls should maintain their honor through appropriate public behavior, which largely included establishing a public image of chastity and sexual naïveté. To this end elite women were particularly concerned with young women and girls and their use of leisure time.

Upon Comhaire-Sylvain's suggestion and the additional research that came from the study sessions, the LFAS founded two libraries in Port-au-Prince and Port-de-Paix, and organized night courses in history, home economics, and Haitian culture in the various LFAS chapters throughout the country.¹⁰³ The curriculum was vast, including grammar, foreign language, and writing classes, but the core courses were in childcare and home management.¹⁰⁴ In 1943, the LFAS also opened a women's community center, *Le Foyer*. The center offered classes in childcare, language, and cooking. The center also provided space for another library and extracurricular activities such as folkloric singing, dance, and sports.¹⁰⁵

At each of these locations the LFAS spread their feminist message. Feminists had to be "tormented by the need to help." Helping women meant teaching them the cultural aesthetics of modern womanhood. Elite activists believed that monitoring these boundaries of culture and comportment would improve poor and working class women's existence. This process justified an aggressive philanthropic agenda. In particular, the leaders of the movement had an approach to altruism that was heavily informed by North American concepts of social work.

The organization's feminist approach through social work was evident early in the organization's formation. In the occupation period LFAS founders befriended some of the early architects of American social work including Emily Balche Greene. Greene made advances in her career through her observations, research, and suggestions that she presented to the Haitian and U.S. governments following her trip to Port-au-Prince in

¹⁰³ Sylvain, *Haiti et ses femmes*, 85.

¹⁰⁴ Letters from Madeleine Sylvain-Bouchereau to Suzanne Comhaire Sylvain, Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain Papers, Stanford University Archives.

¹⁰⁵ Jeanne Sylvain, Letter to Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, January 27, 1944, Box 13, Folder 4, SUA. *Le Foyer* was also called the *Le Foyer Ouvrier*.

1926.¹⁰⁶ The significance of social work as a pillar of elite women's concept of feminism was also clear in the leaderships' professional decisions. Although Jeanne Sylvain was the professional social worker of the Sylvain sisters and the organization, Madeleine Sylvain decided to expand her professional resume. In 1940 she was admitted to Bryn Mawr University to complete her doctorate in Social Work with an emphasis on women's labor.¹⁰⁷

While Madeleine was away studying, Alice Garoute and others picked up her presidential duties and kept her informed on the activities of the LFAS by mailing her copies of *La Voix des Femmes*.¹⁰⁸ In her reading, Madeleine would have certainly been impressed with Suzanne's report on girls and young women in Port-au-Prince. Her comrades would have also detailed the political events of the country including the inauguration of the new president Élie Lescot in May 1941.

The historical record casts President Lescot (1941-1945) as a light-skinned member of the elite who neglected the needs of the poor and working mass of the country in order to appease wealthy businessmen, the Catholic clergy, and U.S. investors.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Emily Greene Balch, *Occupied Haiti*. African American activist, Addie Hunton, accompanied her on this 1926 research trip.

¹⁰⁷ Thérèse Hudicourt and Esther Dartigue were also trained social workers. When Sylvain arrived in Pennsylvania, the condition of the Philadelphia negro had not changed significantly since W.E.B. Dubois' study at the turn of the century. The condition of the black majority in certain corners of the West and North districts of the city may have even reminded her of the conditions of the women, children, and men she saw during her LFAS work in Port-au-Prince or Kenscoff. Bryn Mawr was the first school in the United States to have a doctoral degree in Social Work. The women's liberal arts college was also one of a few private majority white universities in the United States that accepted Black students. In 1940 Bryn Mawr was well known for its socially and politically active student body. See W.E.B. Dubois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996). The study was originally published in 1899. Also see Suzanne Sylvain-Comhaire Papers, Stanford University; Suzanne Sylvain-Comhaire, "Courtship, Marriage, and *plasaj* at Kenscoff," *Social and Economic Studies*, vol 4 (Mona: University of the West Indies, 1958): 210-233.

¹⁰⁸ Each of the Sylvain sisters travelled and studied outside of Haiti at some point throughout the 1940s and 1950s. During this time the sisters and their brother avidly wrote to each other and collected newspaper clippings, wedding announcements, and other information about events in Haiti to send to their respective siblings. See Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain Papers, Stanford University Archives.

¹⁰⁹ Patrick Bellegarde-Smith, *Haiti: The Breached Citadel* (Toronto: Canadian Scholar's Press, 2004), 15.

Moreover his legacy is marred by the violent anti-superstition campaigns that occurred during his presidency. Most recently, however, historian Matthew Smith has presented a more nuanced image of Lescot that suggest the president's record has to be considered within the framework of the second World War, and a complicated renaissance in class and color politics. Despite his ultimate political demise, in which he was the enemy of most left wing activists and organizers, Haitian women made many of their most influential legislative advancements toward equal rights under the Lescot regime.

FAMILIES AND MARRIAGES

In the early 1940s the LFAS lobbied for legislative changes to correspond with the problems they witnessed in their research on Haitian women. Madeleine Sylvain returned home just in time to lobby for the major legislative victories of the 1940s.¹¹⁰ On January 11, 1944 women won the right to hold their own wages. And on April 19th of that same year women were granted the right to serve in all government positions except president. Although women still could not vote or run for president of the republic, the ability to hold government positions provided them with the possibility to influence government policy and laws. Madeleine Sylvain was encouraged by the legal amendments. When she informed her sister Suzanne she wrote, "Good news, a constitutional revision was announced that makes women eligible to hold all offices except president of the republic. We didn't get the right to vote, but it will come later, in any case there are no elections during the war. We have time to for other victories."¹¹¹ As they waited for the war to end,

¹¹⁰ Sylvain, *Haiti et ses femmes*, 89. In October 1942, LFAS managed to achieve several historic legislative gains in the early 1940s. The law of August 1907, which stipulated that women who married a non-Haitian citizen would lose their citizenship was modified on October 23, 1942 allowing women to remain citizens.

¹¹¹ Madeleine Sylvain-Bouchereau, Letter to Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, April 15, 1944, Box 13, Folder 4, SUA.

Madeleine and Alice campaigned vigorously for women's rights. They made announcements on the radio, wrote articles in *La Voix des Femmes*, and met with senators and politicians to gain support for the vote.¹¹²

After earning the right to candidacy in government elections, the LFAS met with the president in the national palace and listened to Lescot's thoughts on the legislation. Madeleine recounted to her sister, "The president received us and gave a long lecture sharing his feminist ideas. I believe that he will give us all that we ask for—that's to say civil rights. He said that on his last trip he was struck to see women's contribution to the war effort and that he would like to include women in his government."¹¹³

As the president considered the women that he would incorporate into his administration, it is likely that he was most interested in educated and socially elite women. The LFAS camaraderie with Lescot and the details of the legislative victories made the differences in women's social and economic status more obvious. The relevance of the April 1944 law was contingent upon one's relative access to social and economic power. Most Haitian women did not have the education or means to run for office. While a major legislative victory, it did not convey that the LFAS was in touch with the needs of the majority of women. In many ways, this helped sustain the popular opinion that the LFAS was interested in legislative changes that help elite women advance their political and professional careers with little influence on the majority of women's lives.¹¹⁴

The organization's excitement regarding women's right to hold their own wages

¹¹² Madeleine Sylvain-Bouchereau, Letter to Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, April 15, 1944, Box 13, Folder 4, SUA.

¹¹³ Madeleine Sylvain Bouchereau, Letter to Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, April 25, 1944, SUA.

¹¹⁴ Many of the women who were affected by the marriage law were women like Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, who in her studies at elite schools and private commerce in Port-au-Prince and travel throughout the United States, Latin America and Europe was exposed to international elite friendships and companionships, met non-Haitian men like her Belgian born husband, Jean Comhaire.

was certainly justified. Economic independence meant that women had power to negotiate their domestic and public existence. For some women the financial agency may have provided them the opportunity to leave unhealthy or abusive marriages. Statistically this law was more relevant for elite and middle-class Haitian women who were more often married in legal marriage for which they were obligated by law to submit their income to their husbands. The records are unclear on the exact percentage of married women in the 1940s. However, during her research on marriage in the Haitian countryside, Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain found that the majority of marriage unions in rural areas of the country were not legal.¹¹⁵ Instead women were in common law marriages known as *plasaj*, or in open relationships with partners for whom they were not legally bound. Moreover, as market women, many working and poor women were already self-sufficient and governed their finances.¹¹⁶

On Christmas day 1944, the national senate passed a law that authorized research for paternity and gave children born out of wedlock the same rights as children born in marriage.¹¹⁷ In the same holiday season on January 15, 1945 the marriage tax was repealed. As Lescot explained in his message to the nation the law would, “promote, as much as possible, the high and noble institution of marriage, while at the same time ensuring civil status to the children born in our country.”¹¹⁸ The President further explained that without a marriage tax more peasants would get married. Similar to the way the LFAS earned the support of the previous president, the LFAS leadership

¹¹⁵ Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, unpublished manuscript, Box 1, Folder 3, Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain Papers, SUA.

¹¹⁶ Sidney Mintz, “Market Women,” Clipping, Box 1, Folder 8, Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain Papers, SUA. Many peasant women had governance over their wages and in fact often chose to maintain open marriages such as *viv avek* or *plasaj* in order to maintain economic independence.

¹¹⁷ Republique d’Haiti Departement de la Justice, *Statut des enfants naturels et etat civil des paysans*, (Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie de l’etat, 1945)

¹¹⁸ Élie Lescot, *Bulletin des lois et actes*, Republique d’Haiti Departement de la Justice (Port-au-Prince, 1945).

matched their reforms with Lescot's assessment of the nation's needs. The LFAS also encouraged marriage as long as women had rights within the institution. Women of the LFAS encouraged their male senatorial allies to help them shape the family aesthetic of the nation through marriage and motherhood. In reinstating children out of wedlock as equals to children born within marriage, and simultaneously arguing for the repeal of the marriage tax, the women's movement used reform to force the image of family and civility and to establish value of women and their children's status.

However, as Lescot explained the context for the law in more detail the intentions of the law had the potential to further alienate poorer and working class women. He clarified, "We have decided to combat polygamy among the peasants which is the source of the astonishing growth of our population and creates what some call overpopulation."¹¹⁹ Although Lescot made the distinction between "polygamy" and "debauchery", explaining that one was condoned out of financial need, while the other was simply uncontrolled sexuality, his association of poor familial unions with the overpopulation and subsequent decline of the urban centers was misplaced. First, as a result of poor sanitary conditions and general health, infant mortality among the poor class meant that they were not having significantly more children than middle or elite class families in the urban centers.¹²⁰ Thus, illegitimate childbirth alone could not have been the cause for overpopulation. Second, as Comhaire-Sylvain asserted in her research, *plasaj* was a respectable and "relatively stable union."¹²¹ Thus, a plan to combat

¹¹⁹ Élie Lescot, "Extrait du message adresse au peuple haitien par son exc. le president de la republique le 1^{er} janvier 1945," *Statut des enfants naturels et etat civil des paysans*, (Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie de l'etat, 1945), 3.

¹²⁰ James Allman and John May, "Fertility, Mortality, Migration in Family Planning, *Population Studies* 33, no 3 (Nov 1979: 5050-521): 513-517.

¹²¹ Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, unpublished manuscript, p. 109, Box 1, Folder 3, Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain Papers, SUA.

polygamy, which in this case was addressed towards *plasaj*, was a direct assault on poor and working class family structures.¹²²

The LFAS was also in favor of making children born outside of marriage legitimate. However, Lescot's justification for the laws again segregated poor and peasant women. Lescot argued that if more peasant children were legitimate they would be able to inherit the family land when their parents died, and in turn they would stay in the rural districts. According to Lescot the cities were becoming crowded because illegitimate children could not inherit their parents' wealth and as a result moved to the city in search of work.¹²³ While the constitutional amendment was presented as a diplomatic decision of national civility,¹²⁴ However, Lescot's primary concern was the economy, intra-national migration, and civilizing the poor.

Historian Eileen Findlay identifies a similar government strategy on the part of the U.S. in order to get Puerto Rican couples to legally marry at the turn of the twentieth century. Findlay found that the more lenient marriage reforms actually encourage more divorce than marriage.¹²⁵ Similarly, in Haiti, the repeal of the marriage tax likely made legal marriage an option for certain couples. In fact, legal marriage was seen as a sign of social mobility. Although legal marriage was seen by working class, poor, middle and elite women as the ideal union, it was not always a wise decision to make in order to remain

¹²² Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, unpublished manuscript, p. 133, "Le plaçage is always a polygamous union."

¹²³ Élie Lescot, *Bulletin des lois et actes*, Republique d'Haiti Departement de la Justice (Port-au-Prince, 1945), 2..

¹²⁴ Republique d'Haiti Departement de la Justice, "Extrait du message adresse au peuple haitien par son exc. le president de la republique le 1^{er} janvier 1945," *Statut des enfants naturels et etat civil des paysans*, (Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie de l'etat, 1945). Lescot maintained that the law was a relic of the nation's colonial past. That the nation no longer needed a law that would make citizens born outside of marriage second class citizens.

¹²⁵ Eileen J. Suárez Findlay, *Imposing Decency: The Politics of Sexuality and Race in Puerto Rico, 1870-1920* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 120-125.

economically independent and in charge of one's home and children.¹²⁶ However, money was not the only reason why couples chose not to get legally married. In her work on sexuality in Haiti, sociologist Carolle Charles has shown that historically certain poor and working class women have also chosen not to marry as a "counter-power" so that they may maintain control of their bodies and wages.¹²⁷ In these cases, Charles explains that women were celebrated for their decision to remain unmarried.¹²⁸ There is no evidence to suggest this decline occurred. In fact, sociological studies from the 1940s through the 1970s consistently show that about 50% of the rural population was in *plasaj* unions.

Poor and working class women were not the only women to recognize the power negotiation in the forms of familial and sexual unions. Elite socialization around marriage and polygamy were evident in the lives of the feminist and their families. Alice Garoute's granddaughter, Ghislaine Charlier, was raised under these social complexities and illustrates the intersection these beliefs and the influence of Haitian feminists influences and discourse on traditional elite social practice. When her husband Etienne Charlier, the leader of the Popular Socialist Party (PSP), proposed marriage, she proclaimed that she would prefer a *plasaj* union. She explained that in *plasaj* everyone would be free to do what they wanted. Although her interpretation of *plasaj* possibly revealed some naivité about gendered power relations even in common law marriage, her statements illustrated the ways in which women were thinking about the construction of marriage. Ghislaine was playing on the social sensitivities of the time. The idea that Ghislaine would propose

¹²⁶ . Carolle Charles, "Discourses on the Use of Their Bodies," in *The Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean*, 175.

¹²⁷ Charles, "Sexual Politics and the mediation of class, gender and race in former slave plantation societies," in *Social Construction of the Past: Representation as Power*, ed. George C. Bond. (London: Routledge, 1994), 45.

¹²⁸ Carolle Charles, "Discourses on the Use of Their Bodies," in *The Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean*, ed. , 177.

a non-legal or non-Christian form of marriage was evidence of her class and the social expectations on women. But it also may have been a last effort to address the performance of elite marriage. Ghislaine may have wanted the opportunity to entertain the pursuits of other men, or she may have been being coy, however it is most likely that she was using the concept of *plasaj* to gain control over what she already suspected would be a union with double standards.¹²⁹

This legislation on family revealed the strengths and weaknesses of the LFAS conceptualization and application of feminism. The LFAS support of the marriage tax was a conservative application of feminism. Interestingly, the law did not legitimate children born out of wedlock if the father was married. This left a whole sector of mothers without legitimate children. Moreover, as an organization in support of families, there is no record to suggest that LFAS made a statement about the children who remained illegitimate. Addressing this absence in the law would force the women to address not only peasant polygamy, but the multiple partnerships of middle and upper class men and women. The concept of marriage could not be separated from the practice of polygamy and the discourse of sexual morality. The triangulation between these concepts was at the foundation of the 1944 and 1945 laws.¹³⁰

In spite of the contradictions the LFAS celebrated the legislative reforms. However, Sylvain-Bouchereau was discouraged by what she saw as the slow progress of the movement. The LFAS was receiving regular donations for the Foyer and their libraries,

¹²⁹ Ghislaine Charlier, Interviewed by author, September 23, 2010, Montreal, Canada. “Etienne liked women [...] And women liked him.”

¹³⁰ Activist Suzie Boisrond explains this sexual tiered relationship, which often left children ranked among each other. An illegitimate child could not make claims on property, maintain social hierarchy. In this way class was not the only barrier to social mobility, sex and sexual relationships could inform access to further power.

but the money was not sufficient to serve the 50 women registered in their courses and the approximate 100 unregistered women that the organization served.¹³¹ Sylvain Bouchereau also wanted to see more participation and membership growth from the working and poor class. However, for many women the LFAS message of suffrage, marriage, and social comportment was not relevant. Moreover, with the economic downturn of the nation's finances and travel among the LFAS leadership it became increasingly difficult to maintain regular operation of the *La Voix des Femmes*, and regular operation of the paper stopped in 1942.¹³² Madeleine and Jeanne Sylvain, for example, spent hours of their week preparing for class and fundraising to keep the facilities available to women. The centers also housed the intimate encounters and conversations between women of varying classes allowing each to witness each others' lives and immediate needs.

Madeleine expressed her disappointment, "Right now, for no reason, I am going through a wave of pessimism. Fortunately the war will be over soon and I hope a wind of love will pass over the world, but I fear after the war with all of its destruction and misery that it will require a lot of dedication, endurance, and above all justice!"¹³³ World War II slowed interest in the movement. As a result, Sylvain decided to contribute her services to the war effort hoping that her work could insure the peace she hoped for. During the final year of World War II she was chosen to work in the principal welfare office for the UN in Germany.¹³⁴

¹³¹ Sylvain Bouchereau, Letter to Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, December 17, 1943, SUA.

¹³² Madeleine Sylvain Bouchereau, "Nous revoici," *La Voix des Femmes*, vol 9, no. 1 (Port-au-Price: January 11, 1947), 1.

¹³³ Sylvain Bouchereau, Letter to Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, June 26, 1944, SUA.

¹³⁴ Esther Dartigue, "Le Feminisme en Haiti," 8.

When the war ended, Haiti was entering into its own political *guerre*. The inner-war period had not been a favorable time for Lescot's popular image. The anti-superstition campaigns haunted his presidency and his failed attempt to draw U.S. investors to the nation made it worse. At the same time the budding radicalism of the 1930s blossomed in the 1940s. Black nationalists, Marxists, intellectuals, and the popular masses were all disenchanted with the president. In early January all of these factions came together to end the Lescot presidency. In the first days of the month a group of students who were affiliated with the leftist organization *La Ruche* began a protest against the government. After days of rioting, the students gained the support of the urban masses and activist community. Despite their legislative gains during the Lescot administration, the LFAS was among the groups of activists and intellectuals that challenged the president.¹³⁵ On January 11, 1946, Lescot and his family fled the country. The riots and overthrow of the president was the 1946 Revolution.¹³⁶ Out of this pivotal moment, Dumarius Estimé emerged as the first black president since the end of the U.S. occupation, and as a national leader that represented the majority of the country.

THE 1946, LEFTIST LEANINGS, AND THE POLITICS OF SEX

After the revolution and into the inaugural months of president Estimé's administration, another window of opportunity opened for women to have their legislative concerns met by the government. In the summer of 1946 the administration held a Constitutional Convention. On August 9, 1946 the topic for debate was women's

¹³⁵ Sylvain-Bouchereau, *La Sameuse*,

¹³⁶ The events of the 1946 Revolution have been analyzed by several scholars including, Matthew Smith, *Red & Black in Haiti: Radicalism, Conflict, and Political Change, 1934-1957*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, (2009); David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour, and National Independence in Haiti*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996); Michel Rolph Trouillot, *Haiti, State Against Nation*

suffrage.¹³⁷ Led by Alice Garoute, members of LFAS including, journalist Yvonne Hakime Rimpel, Marie-Therese Poitvien, writer Cléante Desgraves-Valcin, and Madeleine Sylvain-Bouchereau entered the Constitutional Assembly to show their support for new voting rights. The women were encouraged by the changes in the international climate regarding human rights. In 1945, at the United Nation's Conference on International Organization in San Francisco, the conference issued a decree that women and men had equal rights. Although no nation was required to adopt the policies of the conference, elite Haitian women maintained that any modern nation interested in participating in the geopolitics of the region would follow the example of the conference. With this argument and others, the LFAS leadership prepared themselves to debate changes to the law at the 1946 Constitutional Convention. While suffrage was the primary issue for discussion, the historical record of the day suggests much more.¹³⁸

In particular, the political climate of the post 1946 revolution seeped into the debates on women's rights. Of course any debate would reflect the political factions of the period, however in August the rhetorical and political divisions between political factions were extreme. More specifically *noiristes* and socialists were vying for power in the Estimé administration. After Lescot's exit, several radical activist organizations and political parties joined together to form a political bases against conservative elites or Lescot supporters. This group of activists established the Front Revolutionnaire Haitian (FRH). FRH had a mixed membership of black nationalists and Marxist groups, but it was primarily led by *noiristes*, such as FRH president Emile St-Lôt.¹³⁹ Several months into the

¹³⁷ They debated Article 8 of the Haitian Constitution, which maintained that "All Haitian of 18 years old had the right to politics..."

¹³⁸ The narration of these events is drawn from the

¹³⁹ Other members were *noiriste* sympathizers such as labor organizers and FRH vice-presidents, Daniel Figolé and Juste Constant.

organization's existence the primary non-*noiristes* organization the Parti Communiste Haitienne (PCH) withdrew their membership from the FRH.

In June 1946, the mixed-race PCH temporarily aligned themselves with the predominately *milat* and elite Parti Socialiste Populaire (PSP). The PSP was founded in late January 1946, by Max Hudicourt, Étienne Charlier, Max Sam, Jules Blanchet, and Anthony Lespès. Established during the same time as *noirist* groups such as the Parti Populaire Nationale and the FRH, the PSP as Matthew Smith explains, “represented the most stark contrast to the *noirisme* of the other [political] groups.”¹⁴⁰ Smith further explains that when the PCH chose to collaborate with the PSP in mid-1946, “the *noiriste* assault on the PSP was harsh and personal.”¹⁴¹

No more personal were the attacks made during the debates on women's rights. The discourse on gender and women facilitated debate in which men attacked the most intimate aspects of each other's lives. Most notably the majority of the pro-feminist in the assembly were also members of the socialist and communist parties, where as the most aggressive denunciations of feminism came from some black nationalists. Assembly members on both sides of the discussion used concepts of national modernity, revolutionary nostalgia, moral character and sexual honor to mediate radical leftist politics through their respect understandings of feminism.

The leadership of the LFAS had close relationships with politicians and intellectuals from the left since its inception. Within the first year of the LFAS, the women asked several men to join a special committee to study Haitian women's legal and

¹⁴⁰ Smith, 87.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. 92.

constitutional rights. These men included Dantès Bellegarde and Étienne Charlier.¹⁴² The liberal conservative, Bellegarde had shown his support for the women's movement since the beginning and his support would continue throughout the twentieth century. By the summer of 1946 Étienne Charlier and Alice Garoute were family. In the 1930s, Étienne had married Alice's granddaughter, Ghislaine, and he had proven to be a steady supporter of women's rights. In addition to Charlier, the LFAS also had a long-standing organizational relationship with Max Hudicourt.

When the suffrage law was brought up for debate the assemblymen honored their prior support of the women activists. The debate immediately divided the senators. Those in favor of the amendment included Rossini Pierre Louis, Max Hudicourt, and Philip Charlier. The most vocal opponents of the amendment were senators Emile St-Lôt and Castel Démesmin.¹⁴³ The lines of division that were drawn between these senators were cast as feminist versus anti-feminists, but the lines also reflected the political divisions.

Senator Rossini Pierre Louis established his support for women's rights by drawing on the nation's collective memory of the Haitian Revolution. He reminded his male colleagues that, "Women were our companions for the Revolution," and as a result in a contemporary context, "We must bring them into party politics." Pierre-Louis' evocation of the 1804 Revolution was significant in the months following Haiti's Second Revolution. The men in the 1946 assembly likened themselves to their national revolutionary heroes and sought to continue that tradition. Constituent Luc Stéphan added to the nostalgia by arguing that Alice, Madeleine and the LFAS, "continued the line of Marie-Jeanne, Claire Heureuse, Défilée la Folle." In honor of these daughters of

¹⁴² Sylvain-Bouchereau, 87. Other men included Léo Joseph, Georges O'Callaghan, and Javigny Vauges.

¹⁴³ Castel Démesmin was député from Léogâne

the revolution and “of women of all colors” Stéphan argued that their descendants should reap the reward of their ancestors’ contribution to the nation.¹⁴⁴ Stéphan’s and Pierre Louis’ support of women’s suffrage was a claim for social justice and a call of responsibility to the tenants of humanity espoused by their foremothers and fathers. As such, Pierre Louis closed his remarks by establishing, “In the name of the Revolution, I demand that we grant women the right to vote.”

While Pierre Louis and Stéphan made claims for women’s rights through revolutionary nostalgia, PSP leader Max Hudicourt attached his support for women’s suffrage to the tenants of socialism, the 1946 Revolution, anti-government oppression. Hudicourt asserted, “My position, as the result of my socialist beliefs, obligates me to be in favor of the civil and political equality of women.” He continued, “If we want to establish a proletarian government, we must make it with our other half, with the women who know how to read, write and think, these petites bourgeoisie. Can we logically refuse the right to vote to our daughters?” As Hudicourt unapologetically explained, the issue of women’s rights fell under the larger need for an equalized social, political and economic national government. In this context women’s equal rights would serve a particular goal—to establish an informed and active citizenry. For these reasons Hudicourt clarified, “I want women to vote, because she is part of the education of our children.”¹⁴⁵

While Hudicourt established the socialist support for women’s rights other constituents and women’s rights sympathizers supported the amendment as a step in the direction of national modernity. When Senator Lanoix added his contribution to the

¹⁴⁴ Madeleine Sylvain-Bouchereau, “Les Droits des Femmes et la Nouvelle Constitution,” *La Femme Haitienne Repond aux Attaques Formulées Contre Elle à L’Assemblée Constituante*, (1946), 5.

¹⁴⁵ Madeleine Sylvain-Bouchereau, “Les Droits des Femmes et la Nouvelle Constitution,” *La Femme Haitienne Repond aux Attaques Formulées Contre Elle à L’Assemblée Constituante*, (1946), 5.

debate he asserted, “In every country, women have the right to vote. The international conventions demand it. Are our women inferior to the women of other countries?” Lanoix’s concern for Haitian women’s value was in part about women, but it was also a question about the value of Haiti in an international context. Constituent Stéphan later inquired the impact of women’s rights on Haiti’s international reputation as a modern nation, “The institutions of a country have never progressed in ignorance of the trends of neighboring countries.” Stéphan explained that Haiti was not formed in isolation and nor had the founding fathers established the doctrine of the nation without understanding the doctrines of other nations.¹⁴⁶

The strong dependence on revolutionary rhetoric and socialist vision left supporters of women’s rights vulnerable to the counter arguments of constituents against women’s rights. The two most prominent opponents were senators St-Lôt and Démesmin. The senators were not swayed by the comparisons between the 1946 constitutional convention and the 1804 crafting of the constitution. Senator Démesmin sternly maintained that the assembly was gathered to handle the pressing issue of the nation, “Not for sentimentality. Reasonable affairs must dominate. The affairs of emotion must be neglected.” He continued, “The reality of Haitians proves that all the problems of the country come from women. They corrupt male politicians, senators, and deputies. Women drive the country to ruin.” It is unclear how Démesmin abruptly arrived at the conclusion that women were the downfall of the nation, however his comments elicited protests from the women in the gallery. Despite their verbal protests, Démesmin continued arguing that women had too many alliances with non-Haitians and that if

¹⁴⁶ Madeleine Sylvain-Bouchereau, “Les Droits des Femmes et la Nouvelle Constitution,” *La Femme Haitienne Repond aux Attaques Formulées Contre Elle à L’Assemblée Constituante*, (1946), 4.

women were given the right to vote, the nation would fall into the hands of foreigners. Démesmin was not questioning women's capability, but rather their loyalty and commitment to the nation.

Démesmin's assertion that Haitian women traitors who caused the nation's problems was an explicit attack on the LFAS leadership. As argued in the previous chapter, Haitian women developed their feminist thought and practice through framework of international and national alliances. Cautious of foreign alliances given Lescot's over investment in U.S. companies, Démesmin believed that Haitian sovereignty was being threatened and compromised by the influx of foreign interests groups including feminist organizations. However, Démesmin was not only questioning the women's international alliances, he doubted the sincerity of their national alliances. Démesmin maintained that, "95 percent of the women of the masses will not claim these rights, they will not profit from them. It's certain women, certain scheming women who will benefit from suffrage. These women will say to them [the masses]: you are some stupid savages."¹⁴⁷ This accusation was particularly hurtful, as the LFAS had worked for a decade to establish themselves as a mixed-class movement.

Despite their efforts, it was clear that the organization was still perceived as an elite organization with little relevance for the majority of women. This perception was not dispelled later during the assembly debates when a market woman tried to enter the constitutional hall. When the woman requested entry a guard stopped her and escorted her out of the debates. Members of the LFAS along with other members of the crowd protested the woman's removal, but the guard continued to dismiss the woman.

¹⁴⁷ Madeleine Sylvain-Bouchereau, "Les Droits des Femmes et la Nouvelle Constitution," *La Femme Haitienne Repond aux Attaques Formulées Contre Elle à L'Assemblée Constituante*, (1946), 3.

Démesmin used the incident as fodder for his argument, “A sign of what I am saying, the peasant women will always be rejected by these women.” The senator’s accusations towards women of LFAS were an indictment of the women’s class and *milat* status. As a *noiriste*, Démesmin claimed his constituency to be the poor masses. According to him, elite women, like men of the same class, were incapable of effectively representing the mass of women even if they were granted the right to vote.

While the attacks on elite Haitian women’s authenticity as representatives of Haitian women and accusation of disloyalty to the nation were disheartening to the LFAS leadership, the most offensive attacks were not against elite women alone or about their capability to serve in office, but were rather against Haitian women writ large and their character.¹⁴⁸ Démesmin and St-Lôt accused Haitian women of being prostitutes, corrupting politicians, and leading the nation to financial and social ruin, “They steal and drain the society.” St-Lôt also asserted that Haitian women were bad mothers and “dictators of the confessional” and as a result could not be trusted because they would allow white foreign clergy to govern the nation.¹⁴⁹ St-Lôt’s final argument against women’s right to vote was that “Working and peasant women would not have the time to vote. Those that would: their sense of aesthetic has been distorted, they are all in love with actors from films, not heroism, not racial pride.”¹⁵⁰

It is unclear how Démesmin and St-Lôt developed their harsh analysis of Haitian women. However, the men were certainly familiar with the feminist practices of the LFAS. The accusations of theft, prostitution, and poor sense of aesthetic each, not

¹⁴⁸ St-Lôt accused women of not contributing anything to society, “they steal and drain the society.” Sylvain responds with litany of things that LFAS had done since 1935 which included... .

¹⁴⁹ Discuss *noiristes’* conflict with clergy. See Smith, 117.

¹⁵⁰ Madeleine Sylvain-Bouchereau, “Les Droits des Femmes et la Nouvelle Constitution,” *La Femme Haitienne Repond aux Attaques Formulées Contre Elle à L’Assemblée Constituante*, (1946), 4.

coincidentally, corresponded with the platform of the LFAS regarding economic independence, equal rights in marriage, and education in the arts, languages, and theater. The leadership of LFAS sat in the gallery and listened to the character attacks. Toward the end of the debate the women refused to listen to any more and they walked out of the assembly hall before the end of the session. Although statistically inaccurate, Démesmin and St-Lôt's arguments won enough supporters to reject the amendment.

When they left the Constitutional Convention the women immediately began to write their experiences from the assembly. In a twenty-five page pamphlet Madeleine Sylvain-Bouchereau, Alice Garoute, Yvonne Hakime-Rimpel, Marie-Therese Poitevien, and Cléante Desgraves-Valcin wrote, edited, printed and distributed *La Femme Haitienne Repond aux Attaques Formulées Contre Elle à L'Assemblée Constituante* (Haitian women respond to the formal attacks against them at the Constitutional Assembly). The collection of essays and prose began with a statement from Madeleine Sylvain-Bourchereau who described the events of the August 9th assembly as “slanderous” and “grotesque.”¹⁵¹ She and her fellow editors used the pamphlet to confront their primary accusers and political adversaries, Démesmin and St-Lôt. The women also used the moment of counter-offense to address any misconceptions about the movement for women's rights and feminism in Haiti. But before clarifying the movement, the women responded to Démesmin and St-Lôt's attacks point by point.

Similar to their male allies Sylvain-Bouchereau and Garoute drew on the significance of humanity and equality established at the turn of the 19th century. In response to the argument that the platform for universal gender equality made at the San Francisco conference was not relevant to the particular conditions of Haiti, Sylvain

¹⁵¹ Madeleine Sylvain-Bouchereau, “Les Droits des Femmes et la Nouvelle Constitution,” (1946), 3.

responded, “The Charte de San Francisco guarantees the respect of the rights of man and the happiness of essential liberties without distinction of sex, race, etc. It is in the name of these liberties that the Revolution of January was made.” In this same vein Sylvain challenged the constituents’ practice of democracy, “At the beginning of the Revolution it was the *mulatre* who was the cause of all the problems in the country, now it’s the woman!” She continued, “These so called democrats do not have any respect for human rights. Their democracy leaves out more than half of the population.”¹⁵²

Garoute extended the significance of the revolution as a contemporary guide for justice, by invoking the legacy of enslaved women. She argued that Haitian women cared for the nation’s children under barbaric conditions and supported the independence efforts by fighting, mending wounds, and strengthening the morale of the soldiers. Haitian women’s participation in the revolution, according to Sylvain and Garoute, led to the ultimate independence of the country and the nation’s entrance into the modern world. Moreover, Garoute questioned the Senators’ true commitment to the nation’s evolving modernity if they were not willing to adopt the concept of gender equality that had been accepted by other countries in the region, “Despite what our honorable members say, we want to belong to the civilized world and we are bound by laws and international treaties.”¹⁵³

As Haitian women laid claim to their rights as descendants of the revolution and demanded the human rights and equality espoused during Haitian independence, the women also addressed the attacks on women’s character. Since the 1920s elite women’s activism had been defined by reconstructing and restoring the image of Haitian women’s

¹⁵² Sylvain-Bouchereau, “Les Droits des Femmes et la Nouvelle Constitution,” 4.

¹⁵³ Sylvain says that the Organization of the United Nations can deem Haiti a anti-democratic nation through a vote of its assembly.

character. As a result these attacks were an assault on the philosophical grounding of the movement. Sylvain cynically wrote, “In no country in the world has one ever asked for a certificate of morality from those who go to the polls. If this principle were adopted in Haiti a good number of the parliamentarians would not sit in the gallery.” Sylvain continued by methodically explaining and affirming Haitian women and their domestic and sexual practices. Sylvain then turned to the scientific data the LFAS had recorded over the past decade. She maintained that from the organizations rigorous research she could testify that there was no more prostitution in Haiti than in any other society. She then went on to explain the components of Haitian women’s sexual practice that may have been unclear or misunderstood by the assemblymen. Sylvain gave particular attention marriage unions. She explained, “*Plaçage* is a form of marriage recognized in peasant society and also completely respectable from the sociological point of view as civil marriage.”

Although Sylvain established the sociological context regarding *plasaj*, her next comments suggested that the attacks on Haitian women’s sexuality particularly disturbed Sylvain. In their study sessions and research, the LFAS had also identified what they called the “double standard.” Women not only experienced a double standard of excellence in their expectations as citizens. That is they had to be moral, sexual pious, and loyal to their families, but they also had to remain silent as men were allowed to explore their sexuality, and physical and economic power over them. Sylvain probed, if women are all prostitutes and sexually loose, “what about the young domestic girl who is trying to earn a living but is seduced by a man, likely her boss, is she a prostitute?” Sylvain pushes her rhetorical questioning further, “And the petite bourgeoisie woman abandoned by her husband. Who is responsible for her downfall?” She answers, “Here

the man is responsible for both. He can get away with satisfying his passions without accepting the responsibility of paternity.”¹⁵⁴ In this series of questions it became clear that Sylvain was troubled by the blatant disregard for women’s condition under the patriarchal system and women’s emotions. This concern was not about legal representation or rights. Sylvain’s questioning was about public shame. In this regard, the differences in class and color did not apply. Haitian women lived under a social system that held women to a double standard, where men’s actions shamed women who may have worked hard to maintain the high standard of civility and womanhood placed on them.

With or without civil rights, a woman’s most precious commodity and social marketing tool was her reputation and public image.¹⁵⁵ In her analysis of Haitian sexuality Carolle Charles explains that in the mid-twentieth century, “the sex/gender ideology prais[ed] the male’s sexual prowess.” She continues to state that middle class and poor men compete with each other to obtain multiple mistresses.¹⁵⁶ The evidence of this articulation of male sexuality was well-known and acknowledged based on Max Hudicourt’s comments during the 1946 debate. In an attempt to defend women against Démesmin and St-Lôt’s accusations of Haitian women’s hypersexuality Hudicourt pointed at men, “In this country there are a multitude of children who do not know their father. Each Haitian is father of a string of children that he does not know. In each corner of the countryside you will meet a mother who will educate five children who do not

¹⁵⁴ Sylvain-Bouchereau, “Les Droits des Femmes et la Nouvelle Constitution,” *La Femme Haitienne Repond aux Attaques Formulées Contre Elle à L’Assemblée Constituante*, (1946), 7.

¹⁵⁵ Carolle Charles, “Popular Images of Gender and Sexuality: Poorer and Working Class Haitian Women’s Discourses on the Use of Their Bodies,” in *The Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean*, ed. by Linden Lewis (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2001: 169-189),

¹⁵⁶ Carolle Charles, “Sexual Politics and the Mediation of Class, Gender and Race in Former Slave Plantation Societies,” in *Social Construction of the Past: Representation As Power* edited by George C. Bond, (48.

know their father. I do not know what the statistics say, but in the education of children, the woman dominates. She can only give the education that she receives. This cannot continue. We must liberate her, educate her.”

Confronting this practice of male sexuality, Sylvain expressed her desire to shelter women from heartache and public humiliation. She recounts, “We want women to be better protected in her honor and her freedom. We want all seducers to be restricted by the law to a punishment proportional to the damage that he caused. It is not only legislation that must be modified: it is the prejudices that must be erased, it’s the education that must be reformed. We want young girls’ education to be more sound and straightforward, that it will prepare them against the perils that will menace them and that it will give them the moral strength to resist entertaining their instincts.” “We demand that mothers have the right to also ensure the education of purity for their girls when the father is not there to ensure the point.” Sylvain then comments, “If we are given the right to vote we will fight more than men combat immorality.”

Several years later in her book *Haiti et ses femmes*, Sylvain Bouchereau wrote that the 1946 debates reignited the LFAS and the women’s movement. In this moment of newfound energy the women seemed to be most transparent about their political goals. ¹⁵⁷The LFAS pamphlet to the Constitutional Congress was the women’s movement’s delayed manifesto. In the collection of writings, the women produced a document that provided the greatest clarity and precision to their cause and meaning of feminism since the beginning of their movement for women’s rights a decade before. The LFAS was interested in the right to vote and civil rights, but the organization was equally concerned with their humanity. On this matter, of respect and protection of their homes and

¹⁵⁷ Sylvain-Bouchereau, *Haiti et ses femmes*, 83.

families, the LFAS articulated a feminist message that temporarily transcended social divisions. In this way, sex and gendered practices of sexuality were a class and color contact point. In fact many women often made arrangements with mothers of illegitimate children regarding payment for clothes, school and food.¹⁵⁸

The 1946 Constitutional Convention also revealed the profundity of gender discourse in Haitian national politics. During the Convention the battlegrounds that would congeal and then dissolve themselves in the coming winter months were delineated during these constitutional debates on gender equality. Most notably, the Convention proved that the LFAS had strong allies in the socialist party. Several months later in response to a lecture titled, “The PSP and the Liberation of the Haitian Woman” Sylvain- Bouchereau was asked if she was a communist. She replied that she was not a communist because she did not share all of the opinions of the PSP, but that she appreciated the goals of the party.¹⁵⁹ In the coming years, this ambiguous relationship with the LFAS and leftwing organizations would put the organization and its members in the middle of violent political battles.

Women’s claims to civil rights drew out other complex social dynamics within the country—dynamics that were transforming the nation and leading to one of the most infamous periods in the nation’s 20th century history. LFAS members had not achieved their goals at the assembly but they were developing a new and important relationship with the new presidential administration. In the final contribution to the pamphlet feminist writer Yvonne Hakime-Rimpel admonished the senators in an open letter aptly

¹⁵⁸ Sexual affairs and the management of multiple children and families outside of marriage or a civil union was a common theme in the oral histories that I conducted with women, despite class or color.

¹⁵⁹ “Conference au PSP,” *La Voix des Femmes*, (August 9, 1947). Here, the literature situates communism and the PSP together. In this contest she is referring to the PSP and not the PCH. *La Voix des Femmes* was reinstated in 1947.

titled, “To those who insult us.” In her concluding statement she reprimanded the senators for such horrible assertions about women who could be their daughters, sisters, or mothers. Rather than humiliating women publicly they should “Bow at the feet of the sex of your Mother.” With these words the women concluded the pamphlet.

Alice Garoute encouraged the LFAS regarding their constitutional defeat, “We have lost the first battle, but the fight must continue, it must continue without failure and without fear until the final victory.”¹⁶⁰ Despite the reality that the most aggressive opponents of women’s rights during the 1946 constitutional convention were *noiristes* and Estimé supporters, in the years following the constitutional assembly President Estimé became an ally for the elite leadership of the women’s movement. For much of the country, Estimé emerged from the 1946 Revolution as a leader of the black majority. Many of his supporters were *noiristes* and *authentiques* who supported black advancement in political and economic realm of Haitian society. Yet, not all *Estimistes* were *noiristes* or *authentiques*.¹⁶¹ Estimé’s broader appeal to those less concerned with his racial rhetoric was his discourse on democracy and justice. In this way, elite women leaders of the LFAS identified an ally for gender equality.

Estimé and his wife were beloved by the black middle class in Haiti and in the United States. Lucienne Estimé’ was also concerned with women’s rights. As a result, soon into her husband’s presidency she became an official member of the LFAS. Her membership was important for drawing more national attention to the women’s cause.

¹⁶⁰ Alice Garoute also wrote an open letter to the President, Vice-President, members of the constitutional assembly and to Haitian women. Later she reveals a contradiction in her class-blind feminist politics says, “They had the sad courage to suggest that women like us are more ignorant than peasant men.” She asks why the assembly feels that arguments that relate to the private lives of women are relevant to her ability to serve and vote; men are never asked these questions. Discuss history of elite women in women’s movements situating themselves against poor men or the societal other.

¹⁶¹ Smith

Lucienne's membership also revealed the political savvy and maneuverability of the women's movement. In the midst of extreme racialized tensions and ideological polarization, leaders of the Haitian women's movement managed to organize women who represented all levels of society and ideological standpoint. Over the course of three presidencies the LFAS managed to maintain attention and support of each president.

Unlike many of the other movements of the period, the women's movement gained more clarity, cohesion, and collaboration with other groups concerned with women's rights after the upsurge in radical leftist politics of 1946.¹⁶² With legislative reforms throughout the 1940s the women focused on the battle for women's suffrage. In this way the movement gained clarity by placing all other concerns as secondary issues in relation to the vote. With this goal after 1946 the LFAS platform was simple and palatable to most women and drew women from all sectors of society. This cohesion encouraged further collaboration. The most unique of these collaborations was with the *Bureau d'Action Feminine* (Office of Women's Action) led by Carmen Jean-François Figiolé. The *Bureau d'Action Feminine* was the women's arm of the labor party MOP led by Carmen's husband, popular orator and political activist Daniel Figiolé. Although Jean-François Figiolé's husband was political adversaries with the husbands and family members of some of the leaders of the LFAS, the women found solidarity in their concern for the condition of women. On November 14, 1946, Carmen Figiolé followed the

¹⁶² While the 1946 Revolution was a success in overthrowing the Lescot government. The sustainability of the movement was in question almost as soon as Lescot was escorted out of the country. The multi-purposed and philosophically based collective of Black nationalists, *indiginists*, labor and Marxist movements almost immediately retreated back to their own agendas and philosophical concerns. Moreover different factions within movements were splintering off in an effort to fill the vacuum of power left empty in Lescot's departure. See Smith, Trouillot, Nicholls

precedent of the LFAS and *La Voix des Femmes* and founded *La Famille*, the journal of the *Bureau d'Action Feminine*.¹⁶³

With a growing national coalition the women decided to plan the First Haitian Women's National Congress. The Congress was a success in drawing the attention and participation of the hemisphere.¹⁶⁴ When the conference came to a close the women had earned the support of President Estimé and fully expected to win the right to vote within months. However, weeks after the Congress, on May 10, 1950 President Estimé was ousted from the presidency. It may have seemed that the women's hopes of suffrage were cut off at the moment of Estimé's coup, but the women refused to give up. Out of the convention the women gained momentum that could not be harnessed by a political coup.

In August, Sylvain-Bouchereau wrote a public letter to the leader of the Junte Government, Paul Eugene Magloire. She admonished the military for not granting women suffrage in 1946 following Lescot's failed presidency. Then, she encouraged the military administration to grant and enforce women's right to vote.

La Ligue Féminine d'Action Sociale has the right to assume that the elected government will finally abolish the discrimination that has weighed on the Haitian woman since independence. How can you talk of the Free People of a completely democratic state and universal suffrage when more than half of the population is left out! We hope that the members of the junte will not let themselves be influenced by the subversive ideas only to commit the same grave mistake of further slowing the evolution that is already slow in our dear Haiti. We hope that they will be deaf to the voice of those who say that Haitian women are not prepared to exercise their rights.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶³ Sylvain-Bouchereau, *Haiti et ses femmes*,

¹⁶⁴ In her journal from the Women's Congress, African American U.S. Socialist Party member, Layle Lane, wrote that she was excited about the conference because she heard that the organizers (the LFAS) were communists. See Layle Lane, *Haiti Journal*, Layle Lane Papers, MS.

¹⁶⁵ Alice Garoute, Madeleine Sylvain-Bouchereau, Lydia Jeanty, Yvonne Hakime Rimpel, "Ligue Feminine d'Action Sociale Proteste Toujours; Aux Membres de la Junte de Gouvernement," Port-au-Prince, Haiti, August 1950, Sophia Smith Archives.

As the Junte Government prepared for their transition out of power it was impossible to ignore the cries of the women activists who were gaining momentum as they joined with new women's organizations and formed strategic coalitions.

As the coalition gained more strength and supporters after the Women's Congress convention, the leaders were concealing a secret and potential momentum breaker, their leader was fatally ill. In the early hours of October 2nd Alice Garoute died. The news of her death sent women into the streets. The spontaneous march and reaction of grief and political solidarity among women of all social standing in Port-au-Prince was a testament to Alice's life of accomplishments.

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During the first days of October 1950, Madeleine Sylvain Bouchereau and other leaders of the LFAS met in a Port-au-Prince cemetery.¹⁶⁶ The women convened at the grave of Alice Garoute, the second president of the *Ligue Feminine d'Action Sociale* and the "mother" of the Haitian feminist movement. In the early hours of October 2nd, Garoute, succumbed to months of illness and died in the countryside of Port-au-Prince. Garoute's closest friends and comrades had made their way to her grave. The women's immediate attention was focused on their shared grief, but they were equally consumed with the work of the movement and how they would proceed without their leader. Encircled around Garoute's final resting place, the women made a vow to fight until women achieved their full rights as Haitian citizens.¹⁶⁷

Many of the women who made the pledge over Garoute's grave had also stood by

¹⁶⁶ Madeleine Sylvain-Bouchereau, *Haiti et ses femmes*, (Port-au-Prince: Henri, 1954).

¹⁶⁷ Sylvain-Bouchereau,

her in her last moments of life as she declared, “We will have the victory,” and, “on the day when women vote for the first time, I hope that a delegation will come and place flowers on my grave.”¹⁶⁸ The graveside gathering in the fall of 1950 was not the victory delegation come to adorn Garoute’s grave—seven more years would pass before that delegation arrived to celebrate Haitian women’s first journey to the polls. Instead, the feminists came to have a moment of solace away from the queries of the press and onlookers who questioned the future of the movement without Garoute. Standing in the company of their closest comrades, the women likely summoned Garoute’s spirit of perseverance, bravery, and benevolence as they reflected on their collective history.¹⁶⁹

The decade and a half of organizing had certainly taken a toll on the women. While advancing their own careers and projects, often caring for children and extended family, Garoute and her comrades ushered a nation from a time where “feminism was unknown” to a moment where every major political organization and citizen was forced to reflect, even if briefly or negatively, on women’s role and impact on Haitian society, politics, economy and national identity.¹⁷⁰ The resonances of Garoute’s influence on the country could be felt within hours of her death when a spontaneous “feminist demonstration” entered into the streets of Port-au-Prince. Women of all classes walked in solidarity and mourned the fallen leader.¹⁷¹

Under the junte government a Constitutional Convention was held in Gonaives. The women planned marches and established a coalition of the women’s organizations called the *Comité des Droits de la Femme*. The *Comité des Droits* included members from

¹⁶⁸ Manigat, /*Memoire de femmes*,

¹⁶⁹ Sylvain, 96.

¹⁷⁰ Sylvain, 82.

¹⁷¹ Sylvain, 96.

LFAS, the *Bureau d'Action Feminine*, and other prominent women's organizations. The coalition of these women's organizations was evidence of the evolution and progress in the movement. First, elite women who founded LFAS had evolved from the polarizing definitions of "timid and conservative" and "determined" women. The coalition included women with a range of women-centered practices, from philanthropists, to emerging politicians. Second, the membership of the organization had in fact been a success in unifying Haitian women. Leaders and members of the coalition were the wives, sisters, and friends of political enemies, men who would not have been seen in the same room together, let alone create a coalition. Although the women followed particular political doctrines they were concerned with women's rights. On November 4, 1950 the Constitutional Assembly ratified the 8th Amendment, granting women 21 years or older the right to vote in all national elections. Alice, Madeleine, Thérèse, Lucianne, Carmen, and countless other women achieved legislative victory.

Paul Eugene Magloire was elected president five weeks after Alice Garoute died. At the outset of his presidency it appeared that Magloire was an ally, even if fragile, of the women's movement. A decade later, it did not seem that Magloire was particularly deaf to the rights of women, as much as his concern for his own political praise muffled their call for democracy. Magloire was slow to enact the suffrage legislations was somewhat surprising. As Magloire assumed power he demonstrated public concern for the poor masses of the country and often spoke of himself as the nation's "Bon Papa." As his administration evolved in to the mid 1950s, Magloire was more concerned with his popular image. He became enthralled with performing his presidential authority to international audiences through official state dinners, ticker tap parades, and a litany of

honorary degrees.¹⁷² Yet, by 1955 Magloire's open rejection of the leftists, labor, and black nationalist movements of the 40s, reenergized political descent against the president. In particular his black nationalist critics accused him of turning to the old guard of the Lescot years—a system that had been conceptually dismantled by Estimé's rise to power in 1946. He reestablished strong ties with the Catholic Church and catered to the old political and business elite. Sentiments of descent were rising and LFAS members were among them. LFAS viewed Magloire's apathy as a direct assault on their civil liberties.

While women waited for the constitutional amendment of 1950 to take affect, they returned to the issues that affected the day-to-day lives. In particular issues of education, social culture, blackness, and sexual practice were issues that impacted and informed concepts of Haitian livelihood and social meaning. Confronting these issues post-1950 was a time when political rhetoric around class, color, culture and gender relations began to fume again. The election of 1956 made political divisions more clear. When Duvalier was elected his real and perceived political opponents became targets for retribution. Gone were the days of public battles and sharp name-calling in the name of equality. Comments like “Bow at the feet of your mother” given by Yvonne Hakime Rimpel in 1946 would incite violent consequences and even death after 1956.

¹⁷² “Magloire Visit” RG 76, Haiti Visits, Ottawa, Library and Archives Canada.

PART II

It was in the mountains. Another house, the house of the uncle gone far away. The little girl did not like that house where the furniture, and the dressers full of clothes, the smoothly stretched bedspreads, everything pointed to a hasty departure.¹

-- Jan J. Dominique

All the struggles in the country are on the woman's body.²

-- Marjorie Villefranche

¹ Jan J. Dominique, *Memoir of an Amnesiac*, translated by Irlin François (Coconut Creek, FL: Caribbean Studies Press, 2008), 77.

² Marjorie Villefranche, Interviewed by author, June 2, 2010, Montreal, Canada.

On January 7, 1958 the front page of *Le Nouvelliste* stunned the members of LFAS and the nation.³ It read:

Mme. Yvonne Hakime hospitalisée. In the night between Sunday and Monday, Madame Yvonne Hakime Rimpel reports that her house on Rue Camille Léon was invaded by a half a dozen armed men who violently attacked her and her two daughters Rose May and Gladys. Madame Hakime was then taken in a car in the vicinity of Delmas where she was found the next day in an extremely bad condition. She had to be hospitalized at the St. François de Sales Hospice. We ask that the police lead a serious investigation into this event, into not only of what happened on the day above, but to find the culprits and we send our sympathies to Madame Hakime and her daughters.⁴

As details of the attack were revealed and spread among family and close friends, Yvonne's colleagues from LFAS wrote a joint letter of condemnation.⁵ The letter was signed by thirty-six women including Madeleine Sylvain Bouchereau and published in the Catholic newspaper *La Phalange*.⁶ The letter did not name any specific assailant, but the women suspected that the attack was orchestrated by the newly instated president, François Duvalier (1956-1971).⁷ In the weeks before her attack, Yvonne wrote an editorial that criticized Duvalier's ascension to power and his public musings that the colors of the national flag should be changed from blue and red to black and red in order to represent the black majority.⁸

³ Clorinde Zéphir, "Dictator Duvalier Orders the Torture of journalist Yvonne Hakime Rimpel," Haitian women between repression and democracy, (Port-au-Prince: ENFOFAMN Editions, 1991), 23. Pressoir Pierre, *Témoignages: 1946-1976, l'espérance déçue*, (Port-au-Prince: Deschamps, 1987).

⁴ "Mme Yvonne Hakime hospitalisée," *La Nouvelliste*, no 24 323 January 7, 1958.

⁵ The letters did not name any specific assailant, but there was little confusion about who was suspected of the attack. The risk of further retribution would have been too great to openly name the president.

⁶ *La Phalange*, January 11, 1958; Zéphir, *Between Democracy and Repression*, (Port-au-Prince: ENFOFAMN Editions, 1991), 26.

⁷ Zéphir, *Between Democracy and Repression*, (Port-au-Prince: ENFOFAMN Editions, 1991); Elizabeth Abbott, *Haiti: A Shattered Nation*, (London: Overlook Duckworth, 2011), 93. See also *Abbott, Haiti: The Duvaliers and their Legacy*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1988).

⁸ Red and black were the colors of the national flag during Dessalines' presidency.

Yvonne was released from the hospital two months after her attack. When she emerged from her recovery the writer and activist went into isolation. Yvonne made no public appearances or statements until 1962, when *La Nouvelliste* published an open letter from the former editor and chief of *L'Escale*. In the statement she reiterated that she could not identify her attackers and emphasized her certainty that they were not the president or members of his personal police. If Yvonne could not identify her attackers it would be unlikely that she could definitively claim that they were not members of the president's personnel, but most people understood that she was making a public statement in order to reduce the prospect of further harm to her family. Yvonne also wanted to quell any further rumors or humiliation. Thus she further maintained that she was never raped.⁹ This statement publically absolved the president of responsibility. It was also Yvonne's final public communication.¹⁰

The severity of the attack on a well-known woman was unprecedented. Until 1957, women were perceived as "innocents" exempt from direct political violence.¹¹ However, under François Duvalier's presidency (1957-1971) and that of his son, Jean-Claude Duvalier (1971-1986), women were specifically targeted for political assault and

⁹ Marie Sassin, Interviewed by www.teleimagnetvshow.com, March 2012, Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Rimpel's daughter, Marie Sassin, says that her mother maintained that she was not raped, despite the rumors that suggested otherwise. Sassin explains that there is the possibility that her mother was raped, but she did not share the details of that night because she wanted to spare her children further humiliation.

¹⁰ Most people believed that Yvonne's attackers were Duvalier's secret police. Yet no one could or was willing to prove otherwise. Zéphir, "Dictator Duvalier Orders the Torture," 27.

¹¹ Haitian women have always been victims of political violence, but open state-sanctioned violence against women was uncharacteristic of Haitian politics before the Duvalier presidencies. See Carole Charles, "Gender and Politics in Contemporary Haiti: The Duvalierist State, Transnationalism and the Emergence of a New Feminism, 1980-1990," *Feminist Studies*, vol 21, no. 1 (Spring 1995: 135-164), 137; Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Haiti, State Against Nation: The Origins and Legacy of Duvalierism*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990), 161.

retribution.¹² The invasion of the Rimpel home was a testament to this shift in gendered application of state violence. The attack on the home was also accompanied by a fear that other homes and young women could face this type of domestic invasion. Yvonne's daughter, Marie Sassin, remembers that when she finally returned home her mother was horribly bruised. After a pregnant moment of silence, Sassin explains that despite being severely injured during the attack, her mother was more angered and humiliated that she was unable to protect her two daughters.¹³ Yvonne was not alone in this regard.

Alexandra Philoctète, Marjorie Villefranche, and Marlène Joseph were all children when their peers Rose May and Gladys' home was invaded.¹⁴ They all heard of the attack at different moments, but they were each acutely aware of the threat to themselves, their families, and their homes. While Yvonne maintained that she was not raped, many women after her were.¹⁵ Under the Duvalier regime, young girls and women were targeted by the paramilitary police, the *Tonton Makout*, to be the policemen's girlfriends and sexual servants. Some families, like the Rimpels, responded with silence and self-imposed isolation. For others, the threat waged against their daughters was the catalyst for moving their families to new homes in the country or mountains. This practice of "contemporary marronage," and urban-to-rural migration, however, was short lived.¹⁶

In the years that followed the invasion of the Rimpel home, women's increased vulnerability to state-sanctioned violence with Duvalier's demolition of the prior state

¹² Carole Charles, "Gender and Politics in Contemporary Haiti: The Duvalierist State, Transnationalism and the Emergence of a New Feminism, 1980-1990," *Feminist Studies*, vol 21, no. 1 (Spring 1995: 135-164), 139-140.

¹³ Marie Sassin, Interviewed by www.teleimagnetvshow.com, March 2012, Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

¹⁴ In order to insure the interviewees anonymity the name Marlène Joseph has been used.

¹⁵ Marie Sassin, Interviewed by www.teleimagnetvshow.com, March 2012, Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

¹⁶ Chantalle Verna, identifies the movement that many families made to protect themselves as "contemporary marronage." "Haitian Migration and Community-Building in Southeastern Michigan, 1966-1998," in *Geographies of the Haitian Diaspora*, 168.

codes of violence, combined with a steadily declining national economy and developments in North American immigration policy, many parents with the means chose to divide their families and send their daughters away.¹⁷ Young girls and elite and middle-class female activists were among the first contingent of the over 500,000 Haitians who migrated to North America in mass numbers after the late 1950s. Upon their arrival in cities such as Miami, New York, Paris, Kingston, and Montreal, these women organized with anti-Duvalier nationalist movements while also participating in the anti-racist and immigrant rights movements in their new countries and cities of residence.

This mass migration of women and families has led many scholars to surmise that the women's organizing ended with the Duvalier regime.¹⁸ Yet as women migrated out of the country in record numbers the LFAS continued to build. In 1962, the same year the nation last heard from Rimpel, LFAS bought a home. Named after their deceased leader, The Foyer Alice Garoute was a boarding school where girls from the rural areas of the country came to live and receive social, domestic, and academic training.¹⁹ In the wake of political aggression and physical movement and migration, the Foyer was also a monument and a mainstay—marking a place for the memory and resurgence of feminist activism in the country. In the coming decades the Foyer would be one of the only remaining structural representations of the LFAS's physical presence.

Yet this construction could not hold or protect the majority of the LFAS membership or those they served. After the Rimpel attack much of the membership

¹⁷ Michel Rolph-Trouillot rightfully maintains that state-sanctioned violence in Haiti has been a central component of the Haitian state since independence. However, Trouillot argues that the Duvalier's unlike the heads of state before them, broke the code of state-sanctioned violence which exempted women, children and the elderly from political attack. This new articulation of state sanctioned terror defines the uniqueness of Duvalierism.

¹⁸ Charles, "Gender and Politics in Contemporary Haiti," 136. Chancy,

¹⁹ "Foyer Alice Garoute," Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA.

limited their activity or turned to rural projects that were not as closely monitored by the centralized urban government. Other members joined the thousands of women who left the country in search of safety and professional opportunity. This migration transformed the future of the women's movement.

Part II of *La Voix des Femmes* studies the evolution of the Haitian women's movement and activists' lives through their experiences and interpretations of home and migration. Through documenting the violence of the Magloire and Duvalier presidencies and its impact on families, particularly young girls, I consider the impact of migration on the evolution of Haitian activism and articulations of Haitian feminisms after 1957. In particular I look at the evolution in the function of the Haitian women's movement and feminisms provoked by physical threats to young women's bodies. To accomplish this, I pair the history of home invasion and family separation in migration with the construction of new nationalist domestic spaces and diasporic kinship relations—youth communist organizing, black power rhetoric, and feminist philosophy and practice.

The growing hostility towards women and girls coincided with migration to produce a generational shift in the women's movement. These threats inspired migration of the youngest generation of the nation's women. In the experience of migration and isolation from home and family young women satiated a new desire for kinship relations and cultural continuity and belonging with Haiti and the African diaspora, as well as developing a profound sense of independence and authority over their lives. This seeking of kinship and new independence led many women into political organizing, and their experiences in different collectives promoted an evolved feminist consciousness. As well as exposure to education and the political and social milieu of the societies to which they migrated, ultimately arriving and being informed by and informing Montreal society. In

their movement or displacement from structural and national home these chapters narrate Haitian women's "migratory subjectivity" to "account for the ways our identities are formed in movement" and in the multiple border crossings and overlapping diasporas.²⁰ In considering the ways in which the home was violated, moved, rebuilt, and rearticulated after the mid-1950s, I illustrate the changing meaning and purpose of the women's movement.

²⁰ Carole Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 20-21.

CHAPTER 4

VIOLENCE, MIGRATION, AND HOME, 1951-1970

A COURT CASE, A CAMPAIGN, AND THE RISE IN POLITICAL VIOLENCE

On November 21, 1956, the *Ligue Feminine d'Action Sociale* sued the Haitian government.¹ Six years after their suffrage legislative victory, women had not voted in a national election.² Still waiting for their first national electoral experience, women did vote in municipal elections for the first time in January 1955. In their inaugural voting experience eight women were elected as city mayors and government officials.³ In preparation for these local elections LFAS had developed a thorough civic education campaign to help women understand the voter registration process. A year later they transferred this strategy to prepare women to register for the national election that was scheduled to begin on November 18, 1956.

However these preparations came to a halt on October 5, 1956, when the local Port-au-Prince government issued an announcement that “Male citizens of the municipality of Port-au-Prince benefiting from the electoral process are invited to

¹ *La Nouvelliste*, November 21, 1956, 1 & 6; *La Nouvelliste*, November 17, 1956, page 1; Madeleine Sylvain-Bouchereau, “La femme haïtienne lutte depuis vingt ans pour obtenir les droits égaux,” *La Semeuse*, (1 Fevrier 1957), 3, SS; Also see Verna interview with Paulette Oriol, *Journal of Haitian Studies*

² Although women could not vote in national elections, they could vote in municipal races. For these elections, LFAS developed an aggressive civic education campaign to help women understand their electoral rights. In January 1955 Haitian women participated in their first municipal elections. In their first voting experience eight women were elected as either mayors or city officials. During this initiative they also prepared them for the process of registration for the national election. Madeleine Sylvain-Bouchereau, “La femme haïtienne lutte depuis vingt ans pour obtenir les droits égaux,” *La Semeuse*, (1 Fevrier 1957), 3. Also see *Between Democracy and Repression* (Port-au-Prince: ENFOFAMN Editions, 1991).

³ Sylvain-Bouchereau, “La femme haïtienne lutte depuis vingt ans,” *La Semeuse*, 3.

register.”⁴ Women were not included. Recognizing this bureaucratic attempt to deny women their civil rights, Lydia Jeanty, then president of LFAS, along with former president Madeleine Sylvain-Bouchereau, and fourteen other co-defendants sued the municipal government of Port-au-Prince for failure to apply the suffrage amendment within the three-year time frame stipulated by the 1950 constitution.⁵ In a written statement LFAS leadership asserted that as defenders of women’s rights they, “found it necessary to act in the name of the Haitian woman, and to sue the municipal government that is trying to steal the political rights recognized by the constitution of 1950 and the electoral law of 1954.”⁶ The lawsuit should not have come as a surprise to the government.⁷ Sylvain-Bouchereau repeatedly warned the government that she and her fellow activists expected the suffrage legislation to be taken seriously.

When the women brought the case before the Civil Court in November LFAS members had every expectation that the hearing would be quick and the verdict would fall in their favor. Yet, the lawsuit proceedings drew out for weeks as the attorney for the government, André Chérilus, tried to stall the proceedings with claims that LFAS followed improper procedures when they filed their suit. Although the presiding judge, Roger Charmant, feigned an interest in following procedure, it was clear that the government was using the bylaws of procedure to draw out the hearings beyond the voter registration period and ultimately thwart women’s opportunity to vote. Yet, after two decades of legal confrontation with the government, LFAS was well represented by

⁴ *La Nouvelliste*, November 21, 1956, 1.

⁵ Suzy Castor, 22.

⁶ *La Nouvelliste*, November 17, 1956, page 1; *La Nouvelliste*, November 21, 1956, 1 & 6; Madeleine Sylvain-Bouchereau, “La femme haïtienne lutte depuis vingt ans pour obtenir les droits égaux,” *La Sameuse*, (1 Fevrier 1957), 3.

⁷ Signed Alice Garoute, Madeleine Sylvain-Bouchereau, Lydia Jeanty, Yvonne Hakime Rimpel, “Ligue Feminine d’Action Sociale Proteste Toujours; Aux Membres de la Junte de Gouvernement,” Port-au-Prince, Haiti, August 1950, Sophia Smith Archives.

prominent legal council including Stuart Cambronne, Franck Sylvain, Etienne Charlier, Max Sylvain Bouchereau, and Antoine Rigal.

Stellar legal representation was of critical importance as the LFAS was also facing media slander that questioned their case's legitimacy. The day after the hearings began the organization's Vice President, Madame Desvarieux released a written statement that she did not support the lawsuit.⁸ The shocking disavowal made the LFAS appear divided and unorganized while also giving opponents fodder for their campaign against women's rights. Over the course of several days a public debate arose through statements in the newspaper that ultimately revealed that the Desvarieux was not necessarily against the legislation, but that her husband had not given her permission to participate in the lawsuit. In a public assertion of his legal and patriarchal authority over his wife, Mr. Desvarieux explained that he did not support LFAS's legal actions and thus his wife had to follow his position. For many LFAS members the public reprimands of their vice president and the humiliation that it brought to the organization, was evidence of why they had to pursue the lawsuit and insist on their right to vote. Enfranchisement and the ability to hold public office would afford women the opportunity to challenge archaic laws that made women the political and social pawns for of their husbands and fathers.

Fortunately for LFAS the retraction of their vice president's support appeared to have no final impact on the courts decision. Three weeks after they filed their lawsuit, Judge Charmant decided that the municipal government was guilty of violating the constitutional and electoral laws of 1950 and 1954. With this decision the judge passed a provisional judgment so that women could immediately register to vote.

⁸ "Mme. S. Desvarieux n'est pas d'accorde avec la Ligue," *La Nouvelliste*, November 22, 1956, 1.

The legal loopholes and obstacles that the representatives of the municipal government used to inhibit the smooth legal proceedings were surprising as most people including Jeanty expected that the case would be heard and closed in one day. Yet, the efforts to stall the legal proceedings were not as alarming as the municipal government's psychological and physical scare tactics. During each session of the proceedings, LFAS members were taunted by armed military guards outside the courthouse and inside the tightly packed courtroom. As Madeleine Sylvain later reported, the unnecessary presence of the armed men were obvious "measures of intimidation" used to dissuade the women from their legal pursuits.⁹

The suggestion that government officers would pose a threat rather than protection to civilians in pursuit of a fair application of the law, reflected the political culture of the moment. At the end of November, President Paul Eugene Magloire was failing at an attempt to maintain his political power. Since his election in 1950, Magloire had been more of showman than an implementer of civil rights law. Although he inherited a declining economy, his charisma and perceived concern for the nation's masses as their "Bon Papa," and his support of the tourist industry earned him popular support. In addition to popular support, Magloire held strong ties to the business class and the Catholic Church at home and abroad.¹⁰ Like Estimé, Magloire used the performance of national prosperity through building urban infrastructure and funding elaborate celebrations of patriotism to mask the misgivings of his administration. Ultimately, the pristine image of the calm 1950s government by a levelheaded leader gave way to his frenzied attempts to maintain executive power. In his slow decline as a

⁹ Madeleine Sylvain-Bouchereau, "La femme haïtienne lutte depuis vingt ans pour obtenir les droits égaux," *La Semeuse*, (1 Fevrier 1957), 3

¹⁰ "Magloire Visit, 1955," Visit Celebrities, RG 12 Vol 1679, Library and Archives Canada.

political authority, Magloire increased his physical control over the city of Port-au-Prince and the nation as he routinely turned to exile, imprisonment, and assault to quell his opposition. Although Magloire made a shift in his political rhetoric by the end of 1955, claiming that he was a champion of black nationalist thought and the legacy of Estimé, the president whom his military coup ousted, Magloire's last ditch effort could not quell the widespread public sentiment of frustration.

At the point of their lawsuit, the leadership of LFAS had expressed public discontent with the President, placing the organization in the government's cross-hairs. As historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot asserts, the end of the Magloire presidency "presaged the era of François Duvalier" in its increased use of totalitarian governing, sanctions on organizations and the press, and a politics of personal vendettas.¹¹ It is unclear whether or not Magloire orchestrated the announcement that excluded women from voter registration, however, the newly enfranchised women's impact on the election was unpredictable and posed a threat to the president. While Magloire's involvement in voter registration was unclear, his support of the municipal government and their use of armed force to intimidate members of the LFAS is almost certain. Although the lawsuit was to the municipal government of Port-au-Prince, as the nation's capital city, the administrators of the city were intimately intertwined with national officials.¹² This show of force was indicative of the presidents "iron pants" (*kansanfè*) approach to governing in his last two years that was exemplified in his use of brutal force, a strong military presence, and politics largely driven by personal conflict.¹³

¹¹ Trouillot, 148.

¹² Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Haiti: State Against Nation*, 144.

¹³ *Ibid.*

The ill treatment was certainly personal for members of the LFAS.¹⁴ At the end of year, LFAS members were among the demonstrators from different factions of the social and political milieu who initiated a massive urban protest against the Magloire government in early December. Magloire initially attempted to imprison his critics and political opponents but within days of the protest, Magloire conceded his power to the Supreme Court and resigned as president on December 6, 1956.

As control of the country's executive position sat in the balance of military coups and provisional governments, the LFAS kept pressure on the changing governing powers to ensure that their voting rights. On January 26, 1957 the provisional president granted women the full rights of citizenship and political representation.¹⁵ As *La Semeuse* announced, "We are voters and we are eligible. And married women can vote without their husband's authorization. Glory to the Government of Mr. Provisional President Joseph Nemours Pierre-Louis!"¹⁶

Women's access to the full rights of citizenship coincided with the chaotic and politically violent election season of 1957-1958.¹⁷ The intimidation that LFAS members experienced regarding their access to registration would become normalized throughout the country as voter registration was plagued by violent attacks, tampering, and blazon intimidation tactics by all candidates.¹⁸ Despite the increasing physical attacks against

¹⁴ Sylvain-Bouchereau, *La Semeuse*, 1957; Smith 171.

¹⁵ December 13, 1956 LFAS and members of the women's collective organization, organized march and prayer vigil to be held at the Catholic national Cathedral in the center of Port-au-Prince. As the women were peacefully marching and chanting phrases and songs of equal rights, they were attacked by government military officials. The women were brutally attacked with batons and beaten with objects as they ran into the shelter of the church where the military followed them and continued their ambush. It is unclear what the motive is for this attack. While the fight for women's suffrage incited frustrations for many male politicians, intellectuals, and civilians this display of violence was uncharacteristic

¹⁶ "La femme haïtienne a le plein et entier exercice des droits politiques," *La Semeuse*, 10, Stanford Archives.

¹⁷ For detailed accounts on this period see David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier*, 1996; Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Haiti: State Against Nation*; Michel Laguerre, *Haiti and Militarization*,

¹⁸ Smith, 177.

politicians and voters, women throughout the country celebrated and prepared themselves for their first national voting experience.

Evidence of the rejuvenated political interest and participation in the women's movement was palpable on January 29, 1957, when Madeleine Sylvain-Bouchereau announced her campaign for national senate. Speaking to a crowd of some five hundred women from the rural and working class, the pep rally atmosphere of the campaign launch mirrored the enthusiasm of the crowds gathered by Daniel Figiolé in the 1940s.¹⁹ Unlike Figiolé, Sylvain Bouchereau's class status did not characterize her as a champion of the masses, but as rumored Marxists, she was not considered a foe. She incited enthusiasm in her audience as she highlighting her longevity as a champion of women's rights and explained her political platform to defend women's citizenship rights, children, and the elderly.²⁰

The presence of supporters from all classes boded well for Sylvain-Bouchereau's assertion to represent all women and it spoke to her national popularity.²¹ In her capacities as educator, attorney and social worker her public recognition as a female politician was unparalleled. Her celebrity could only be matched by her sisters, who in their own semi-stardom, gave Sylvain-Bouchereau a representative presence throughout the country. Moreover, her international work with the United Nations as a principal welfare officer in Germany (1945) and her position on the Commission of Women's Affairs (1951-52) in New York cemented Sylvain's national and international legitimacy as a competent leader. With her record of activism some supporters even suggested that

¹⁹ "Woman Seeks Haitian Seat," New York Times, January 31, 1957. Sophia Smith Archives.

²⁰ *La Semeuse*, Stanford Archives.

²¹ While all evidence points toward a genuinely enthusiastic crowd, during the 1957 election season it was common knowledge that candidates used the presence of the working and rural class to establish their authenticity as champions of the nation.

Sylvain was worthy of support from both women and men, but that women in particular should give their support as “a tribute [to Sylvain] for being a crusader in their service.”²² Sylvain, according to these supporters, “deserved the endorsement” of Haitian women because of her twenty-year commitment to the women’s movement.²³

Yet Sylvain’s record of benevolence and familiarity did not necessarily garner support. For this, Sylvain-Bouchereau had to establish an appeal and significance larger than herself. Thus, she encouraged her supporters to vote for her based on a shared identity as Haitian women and mothers of the nation, a distinction that she claimed permeated through divisions of class, color, and culture. Sylvain declared, “We must be united to continue the fight for the rights of women and children.”²⁴ In her campaign addresses and public writings Sylvain maintained that women needed to vote as a political block. In a letter in the women’s journal *La Semeuse* Sylvain emphasized that the power of women’s collective vote did not just pertain to senatorial election that she was in, but it also applied in the presidential election. Sylvain impressed upon her readers the importance and uniqueness of their citizenship as women.²⁵ She explained that women should decide and vote as a cohort for one presidential candidate. This candidate, she suggested, needed to support women’s rights, and they did not necessarily have to vote based on their class or color group. This strategy, if successful, had the potential to categorically change the political arena. No group to date had held such a defined political base.

²² “Madeleine Sylvain-Bouchereau, Candidate au Sénat de la République,” *La Semeuse*, Stanford Archives.

²³ “Madeleine Sylvain-Bouchereau, Candidate au Sénat de la République,” *La Semeuse*, Stanford Archives.

²⁴ “Correspondance 28 January, 1957,” *La Semeuse*.

²⁵ *La Semeuse*, “Letter from Sylvain to Perez,” 10, Stanford Archives.

Sylvain explained, “the color of skin does not have a place in a question of where the future of Haiti goes.” She continued, “Although we are, *noir* and *mûlatre*, we are all *nègre*.”²⁶ Sylvain strategically used *nègre* as a “framing gesture” to remove the concept of blackness away from skin color. If the women voted based on color they had the potential to divide her desired feminist block. Thus Sylvain-Bouchereau rallied women around a collective African ancestral identity. Sylvain later explained that she was concerned with “the lived application of the nation’s democratic principles without distinction of sex, class, or race.”²⁷ Sylvain’s insertion of race into her trilogy of equality was unique. For two decades Sylvain, and the LFAS leadership, had only directly addressed color several times.

However, Sylvain-Bouchereau and the LFAS were acutely aware of the color and class conflict in the nation. In the heat of the 1957 election season no one could fain ignorance. Sylvain recognized that the majority of the women that would earn the right to vote would be members of the black majority, a majority that was being heavily courted by prominent presidential candidates. By the summer of 1957 the front running candidates were Jumelle, a dark-skinned former Magloire supporter and minister of finance, Louis Déjoie a *milat* businessman, Daniel Fignoilé, a black labor activist and popular icon of the majority poor and working class, and François Duvalier, a dark-skinned *noirist* doctor, meek in stature, but skillful with his mastery of political pontificating and prose.

²⁶ This translation is drawn from various translations of the period from Haitian-English newspapers such as the Haiti Sun, and U.S. papers such as the New York Times, and Pittsburgh Courier that use “Negro” as the identifier for cultural and African ancestral blackness. Also see Brent Hayes Edwards discussion of *nègre* in Francophone African diasporic politics. Edwards explains Gilbert Gratiant’s interpretation of *nègre*, “it is the lever of an anti-imperialist rallying cry that is articulated as an internationalism; a ‘support for the cause of the persecuted’ in a more generalized sense.” Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora*, 37.

²⁷ Sylvain-Bouchereau, “La femme haïtienne lutte depuis vingt ans pour obtenir les droits égaux,” *La Semeuse*, (1 Février 1957),

Although Sylvain-Bouchereau was not running for president, the election discourses that fueled class, color, and cultural differences drew voters to candidates that they felt best represented them. If Sylvain-Bouchereau did not address race or culture in her campaign, she ran the risk of alienating women who had a heightened sensibility to national division as witnessed and experienced in campaign politics. As Trouillot explains of the 1957 election, “Control of the Executive was not merely the main issue; it was the only issue.”²⁸ Those seeking executive office were also recruiting and courting Haitian women’s vote. For example, when François Duvalier announced his official candidacy for president in September of 1956, he celebrated women’s right to vote and established a women’s department within his campaign called the *Faisceau Feminine* (Feminine Torch).²⁹ In amassing women’s support, Duvalier was also galvanizing the black middle and poor class. He situated his campaign as a continuation of the political revolution of 1946, and championed recovering the Executive offices for the black majority. Since Estimé had died a few years after the military coup that removed him from office (1950), Duvalier used his wife to solicit votes. Lucienne Estimé, the first lady who seven years prior brought the nation and international women’s movements together by appealing to their “common feelings,” was on the campaign trail with Duvalier. According to journalist Elizabeth Abbott, Madame Estimé, “supported Duvalier so wholeheartedly that she appeared beside him like an approving shadow on his entire campaign trail.”³⁰

Madame Estimé was not alone in her support of Duvalier. Many women of the black working and rural class responded to Duvalier’s promises to equalize the power differential between the majority and the minority. As one activist later explained of her

²⁸ Trouillot, 147.

²⁹ Abbott, *Haiti: A Shattered Nation*, 78; Smith 171.

³⁰ Abbott, *Haiti: A Shattered Nation*, 73.

mother, whom she defined as a feminist “in her own way,” “She voted for him because she thought he was for black people.”³¹

Duvalier however, was not only appealing to the black middle and working class. His grasp of culture, politics and international relations also earned him the respect, if not political support, of some members of the *milat* classes. For example, Alice Garoute’s granddaughter, Ghislaine Charlier recounted that early in the campaign season she supported Duvalier because he appeared to be a family man with a respect and care for the nation’s people, with a solid education. She explained that “for two years he rented a house in front of ours in Pétionville. And I saw Duvalier and his wife come and go from their home. I admired them! I saw a couple that was nice. Their children were well behaved and I never heard a person talk aggressively, or hit, or domestic violence, or say negative things to passersby. No, I never heard that. Everything was perfect.”³² Yet by the time Charlier went to cast her vote for president, she saw a different man.

Charlier’s fleeting support of Duvalier revealed her admiration for the candidate’s perceived character. Character and comportment were a centerpiece of successful campaigning in the 1957 election. Trouillot expounds on this dynamic, explaining that with party politics in a state of confusion and absentee leaders, “In 1956-1957, the candidates’ personalities dominated political discussion more than ever before [...] in part because universal suffrage had just changed the rules of the electoral game.” To this end, Charlier’s opinions were not passive observations or the opinions of a nosy neighbor. Rather, Haitian women throughout the country took their responsibility as voters seriously and made their judgments based on the quality of the candidates’ character.

³¹ Mozart Longuefosse, Interview by author, May 31, 2007, Montreal, Canada.

³² Ghislaine Charlier, Interviewed by Stéphane Martelly and author, 2010.

They discussed the candidates with friends and weighed the personal character of each candidate. It was not a given that women would vote along racial or class lines, and to insure this the LFAS and Sylvain focused on individual qualities.³³

LFAS, as was its tradition throughout their organizational history, had never advocated for or campaigned as an organization for any particular candidate. In her call for women to conceptualize themselves as African descended patriots for their country, Sylvain emphasized the need for a president who was devoted to family and leadership. She challenged women to consider whether their choice for president was “moved by the grand winds of Christian Charity?” “Did he ever attempt to sell the country?” “Does he posses valor?” The statement of course did not name any candidate because the readers were instructed to “reflect” on a candidate. However, the questions were leading and indirectly excluded certain candidates as viable options for president. These descriptions, for example, did not describe François Duvalier who used Voudou symbols, dress, and proverbs as a part of his public performance of Haitian authenticity.

Although there was no public endorsement, many leaders of the LFAS, including Yvonne Rimpel, made their way to the Louis Déjoie Women’s Bureau where they provided support to the Déjoie campaign.³⁴ At the height of the campaign season when Déjoie and Duvalier were the clear leaders of the race, a decision to support either candidate was for most women a long thought out process that considered the candidates as people. However, by mid-summer and early fall each of the candidates revealed significant flaws as the nation marched toward civil war and candidates used the election to torment each others’ supporters. Under a repressive interim military rule, largely

³³ Ghislaine Charlier, Interviewed by Stéphane Martelly and author, 2010, Montreal, Canada.

³⁴ Through oral history and limited documentation we know that the majority of the leadership supported Louis Dejoie.

supportive of Duvalier, all of the candidates were guilty of inciting riots, mob attacks, and bombings.³⁵

Despite the tumultuous political atmosphere, September of 1957 remained an exciting time as women went to cast their votes for president for the first time. In the days leading up to the election the radio waves were full of election songs for the various candidates, as children hummed the lyrics on their way to school.³⁶ One observer remembers that as a child Election Day was a thrill. She recalls that her parents were away from the house all day shuttling friends and neighbors back and forth from the polls.³⁷ Yet, many people never made it to the polls as they were physically restrained at home or threatened by Duvalier's campaigns to abstain from voting. According to Trouillot, "Duvalierist terror came into its own during the campaign, in part because of the support of the influential *noiristes* within the army," who could intimidate and mandate policy in favor of the candidate.³⁸ When the ballots were in François Duvalier was named President of Haiti on September 22, 1957.

The senatorial race results were also announced. Despite her efforts, Sylvain was unable to establish the feminist voting block that she needed to win. Her loss was disheartening, but most of her supporters were proud of her courage as the first woman to run for a nationally elected office.³⁹ In the weeks after the election, supporters also realized that the nation was winning and losing much more than elections. Immediately following his inauguration, Duvalier systematically imprisoned, tortured, exiled or killed

³⁵ The detailed events of the 1956-57 election have been extensively documented. David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour, and National Independence in Haiti*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996).

³⁶ Marjorie Villefranche, Interviewed by author. May 8, 2010, Montreal, Canada

³⁷ Marjorie Villefranche, Interviewed by author. May 8, 2010, Montreal, Canada.

³⁸ Trouillot, 149.

³⁹ Zéphir, Enfofanm.

his political enemies and their supports. In the process of these “inaugural acts of terror”, Duvalier’s armed men made their way to Rue Camille Léon and forcefully entered the Rimpel home.⁴⁰

HOME INVASION

The attack on Yvonne Rimpel was an assault on the sanctity of Haitian homes. For weeks and months, rumors and hushed conversations about the attack spread throughout the city. Was Yvonne raped? Did she know her attackers? Was the president there? Yvonne remained silent. Answering any of those questions could result in her imprisonment, further attack, or death. Even if she answered the questions, there was no legal recourse to take. In 1958 rape against women was not recognized as a serious crime under the law.⁴¹ Although her friends and supporters called for a full investigation of the event, the police, in a mutated form named the *tonton makout*, were her attackers. Moreover, if Yvonne admitted that she was raped not only would her assault be ignored by the judicial system she would also endure the public humiliation that she feared would mark her and her family. Her silence was her only means to retain dignity and safety. Yet, the physical evidence displayed on Yvonne’s body and that of her children suggested a certainty that no one could brazenly commit such a crime unless they knew they were exempt from retribution. In 1958, only the president had that level of certainty. Without knowing the details of the assault, the attention turned to *why?*

⁴⁰ “Junta, Rape, and Religion in Haiti, 1993-1994,” *The Journal of Feminist Studies in Religious*, 84.

⁴¹ Rape was considered a minor legal infraction. As a result, women did not always report the crime. The charges of rape could be dropped if the attacker married his victim. See “Junta, Rape, and Religion in Haiti, 1993-1994,” *The Journal of Feminist Studies in Religious*

In December 1957 François Duvalier announced that he would change the colors of the nation's flag from blue and red to black and red, so that the flag would resemble the flag of the independence hero Jean-Jacques Dessalines and represent the black majority.⁴² Duvalier's assertion garnered widespread criticism. Contributing to this scepticism, Rimpel wrote an article in her newspaper *L'Escale*, which harshly criticized the president's proposition suggesting that it was divisive political gesturing.⁴³ According to oral history, Yvonne was repeatedly warned to stop writing her provocative articles against the president.⁴⁴ Yet even in those cautionary directives, few people could have conjured the vision of Yvonne beaten so brutally that she almost permanently lost her eyesight.⁴⁵ The inconceivable attack on Rimpel, her daughters—Rose-Marie, and Gladys—and others who were arrested, disappeared or killed by the Duvalier regime left the nation in a psychological hold. Citizens routinely questioned their safety and negotiated their relationship to state power.

The “dictatorship of fear,” as a former supporter turned critic described the presidency, was directly related to Duvalier's invasion of private space.⁴⁶ In his analysis of the qualitative differences of the Duvalier presidencies, Michel Rolph-Trouillot asserts that bodies and spaces that were traditionally the domain of the “innocent” were targeted as sites of control and conquest.⁴⁷ The home was the nexus of women's political consciousness and organizing as well as the site of patriarchal oppression. Yet in its

⁴² Trouillot, *Haiti: State Against Nation*, 149.

⁴³ Even before he was elected president, Duvalier encouraged the military to censor the press. In this way women activists were robbed of their intellectual organs and systems of expression. In particular the activist newspapers such as *La Samuëse* and *La Voix des Femmes* were shut down and the institutions that remained were under constant surveillance. Zéphir, *Enfofanm*, 23. Marie Sassin, Interviewed by www.teleimagetvshow.com, March 2012, Port-au-Prince, Haiti

⁴⁴ Zéphir, *Enfofanm*, 25.

⁴⁵ Zéphir, *Enfofanm*, 23.

⁴⁶ Peter Kihss, “Tyranny in Haiti is Charged Here: Terrorism and Corruption Laid to Duvalier Regime by 2 Former Backers,” *The New York Times*, July 27, 1959. Box 1, Folder 4, SS

⁴⁷ Trouillot, 166 & 168.

multiple meanings, the home was a place of respect in which the woman was often understood as the “*poto mitan*.” Women physically and spiritually held up the framework of the domestic space. However, Duvalier’s control over the nation made the home a prison that could be penetrated.

As the nation learned from the invasion of Rimpel’s home, the *tonton macoute* disrupted the codes of civility, domestic sovereignty, and respect when they entered homes uninvited. Haitian author and feminist activist, Marie-Célie Agnant explains being terrified as a child when she realized the *tonton makout* could enter her home. “I remember the military coming in my house at night. They said they were searching for something [...] I remember being in my bed at night and watching the military opening the closets, searching and terrifying us.”⁴⁸ Government repression was not unique to Duvalier’s presidency. Historically, presidents who saw journalist, activists, and politicians as a threat to their governing power had punished them. However, under Duvalier, even the traditional forms of government surveillance and repression were changed. Ghislaine Charlier explains this new invasion of home and respect in her reflections on her husband’s arrests:

All of the other governments had arrested my husband several times because he said the truth in his newspaper. But the people would come they would get out of their jeep, and I would see them coming from the street and I knew that they were coming to arrest Etienne. So, each time, I would go down the steps, I would arrive at the bottom of the steps and I would say, “My husband is getting dressed.” And they would wait. They wouldn’t go up the stairs because they heard me say that my husband was getting dressed. One time, I was supposed to be going the United States, so he [Etienne] took off his watch, put it on the nightstand, and he said to me, “Give me a pen so that I can make my signature.” Because at that time a woman had to have the authorization of her husband in order to travel. Then he calmly came down the steps. He greeted the men and they followed him out. They did not walk next to him because my husband was very respected. But when you talk about Duvalier, when he arrested you, they beat your workers, they knocked your children down, sometimes they even arrested your wife, still

⁴⁸ Interview Marie-Célie Agnant.

dressed in her nightgown. They will arrest you in your boxer shorts, or completely naked.⁴⁹

Trouillot explains that Duvalier erased the concept of “respectable opponents” or civil treatment of popular figures. He further asserts that, “Duvalier violence took away that respectability by forcing the ‘notables’—judges, clergymen, physicians, prominent writers, village elders, and other pillars of civil society—to participate in the repression, either as its victims or as accomplices of the state.” Thus, the practice of humiliation and exposing the intimacy of domestic space in public, through violent apprehensions in the home or through embarrassing display of nakedness, was an articulation of Duvalierist control. Clothed only in nightclothes or the tattered clothes from the day of their arrest, men and women made the uncertain journey from their homes into the hands of the state.

The sanctity of freedom, and of self-governance in one’s living space was ruptured by the attack on private space, but it was also severed through assaults on the symbolic referents of home life—women, wives and daughters. Author Marie Vieux-Chauvet captures this dismantling of respectability and the convergence of private and public space through violence against women in her depiction of Dora Soubiran. In the first volume of her 1964 trilogy, *Love, Anger, Madness*, Vieux-Chauvet fictionalizes the trauma she witnessed as a wealthy *milat* writer during François Duvalier’s presidency. Dora Soubiran is a woman who has made “a show of [her] antipathy” for the governing president. The protagonist, Claire, narrates, “I saw Dora passing by. She hobbles along with legs spread apart like a maimed animal. What have they done to her? What awful torments has she endured that for a month now she has been unable to walk normally?”

⁴⁹ Ghislaine Charlier, Interviewed by Stéphane Martelly and author, November 5, 2010, Montreal, Canada.

Dr. Audier looks after her but he keeps his mouth shut. I saw him leave her house recently, head down, a frown on his brow.”⁵⁰

Vieux-Chauvet’s depiction of Soubiran, the woman who refused to hide her “antipathy” for the president, bears a strong resemblance to oral histories of Yvonne’s wounded body for the days, weeks, and months after her attack. Like Yvonne and her daughters, many women were forced to walk into invaded and disgraced homes after government sanctioned attacks. In Vieux-Chauvet’s construction of a Haiti that is simultaneously occupied by the United States and by a homegrown dictator who wears the infamous wardrobe of the *tonton makout*—khakis and black glasses, we are reminded that violence against women did not begin with the Duvalier regime. As Trouillot aptly discerns,

What characterizes Duvalierist violence is not the fact that it also touched women, and not even the fact that it touched many more women than preceding regimes; it is, rather, the complete disappearance of the protection traditionally conferred by femininity.⁵¹

This traditional system of protection, although patriarchal at its root provided the semblance of safety. Women had never been exempt from violence, but the disruption of traditional protections for female roles erased any concept of safety. Moreover, women, particularly those who spoke out against the government or questioned its structure in relation to civil rights, were seen as aberrations of womanhood. These women according to the new gender order no long needed protection, and had to be put back in their place. For these reasons, Yvonne and other outspoken leaders of LFAS were targets of Duvalier’s regime. Several members of LFAS were accosted and tortured, and their families disappeared. For example, Madeleine Sylvain-Bouchereau was arrested in July

⁵⁰ Marie Vieux Chauvet, *Love, Anger, Madness*, 17.

⁵¹ Trouillot, 167.

1959.⁵² After Madeleine's arrest it was clear that the organization would be perpetually terrorized.

Although the violent invasion of home space was unique to the Duvalier regime, the members of the families that were being accosted in the above examples were politicians, activists, and writers who were in open dispute and disapproval of the president. Yet in the attack on Yvonne's daughters and the experiences of the close observers to other home invasions, we see that one did not have to be openly antagonistic towards the government to experience violence. The regularity with which "innocents" were targeted by the government, deteriorated familial relationships. Providing more insight to this phenomenon, Trouillot writes that,

In indiscriminately attacking groups that were not defined in political terms, and individuals who were thought to be (and in many cases obviously were) political innocents, Duvalierist violence broke down traditional solidarities within civil society. Whereas before Duvalier an individual was protected by a claim that his or her relationship with a targeted suspect was "just" familial, friendly, religious, or social—that is, nonpolitical—Duvalierist violence recognized as legitimate targets *all* individuals who had a relationship with a political suspect, regardless of the nature of that relationship. It thus succeeded in casting a pall over most relationships. Fathers repudiated sons, sometimes publicly. Neighbors denounced neighbors.⁵³

In this way, the traditional system of protection of femininity was further compromised because of a breakdown of interpersonal relationships, and traditional gender and social roles within the home. Often the disappearance of protection manifested into silence. Keeping silent could keep you safe. However, for many young people this silence represented a betrayal in their understanding of safety and honest communication in relationships. As Agnant explained, "The silence. People would not talk about what happened. [...] I was nine-years old when they [makout] burned down a house not far

⁵² New York Times, July 11, 1959 in Port-au-Prince. From Stanford University Archives.; A list of other members can be found in Clorinde Zéphir's, "Dictator Duvalier,"

⁵³ Trouillot, 168.

from where I was living. There were people in the house, and the people died. I saw the house burning down and I saw the military in the street [watching] as the people died.”⁵⁴ After a pause she continued, “But in my family, they didn’t talk about it.” As several oral histories and memoirs recount, this silence, particularly for the generation of youth who grew up under Duvalier, revealed a withholding of vital knowledge on the part of their parents. In this way the deterioration of the home no longer required Duvalier’s men to physically enter. The threat of violence and fear of invasion was enough to elicit self-censorship.

Even when Duvalier and his men did not physically penetrate the home, families were often forced to enshrine their homes with paraphernalia that performed their allegiance to the president through photography or signage. Frantz André, writer and son of popular Haitian singer Joe Toussaint, remembered that visual representations of the president’s power could also incite physical violence. André was a young boy when Duvalier came to power. After his father refused to perform for Duvalier his parents moved to Canada for fear of political redress. They left André with his aunt and uncle so that he could continue his schooling. Although he was saddened by his parents’ absence, for the most part, he went on with his daily activities of school, play, and spending time with his extended family. At his uncle’s home the family shared a courtyard with two other homes, one of which was occupied by the mistress of a high-ranking *tonton macoute*. One day while playing soccer in the corridor, André accidentally kicked the ball in the direction of the mistress’ house where it bounced and crashed into a framed picture of Duvalier. When he told his aunt she did not punish him immediately. Instead she waited

⁵⁴ Marie-Cèle Agnant, Interviewed by author, May 27, 2007, Montreal, Canada.

for the woman to return. When the aunt was certain that the woman would hear her voice she took André outside and beat and scolded him.⁵⁵

With his childhood reasoning, André could not understand why he was being punished so severely. Later he realized that his aunt wanted to insure that the broken photo of Duvalier did not appear to be an act of political rebellion or in this context treason. In this way, not all brutality of the government was enacted by Duvalier's men or by his order. Rather the atmosphere of fear meant that citizens terrorized other citizens to preempt even worse assaults. In this sorted protection, children were often the unassuming victims.⁵⁶

This protective-assault on children and the compromise in parent-child relationships were what Trouillot might classify as the “perversion of the very notion of innocence” under Duvalier.⁵⁷ In *Memoirs of an Amnesiac*, feminist activist and author J. Jan Dominique writes extensively about the Duvalier's impact on her relationship with her “mothers” and father. Throughout her reflections she repeatedly returns to a moment where her father slapped her in order to prevent a *makout* for punishing her. “One evening, the pain struck. She has never understood what happened. She was listening to them speaking, a conversation between grown-up, with harsh words. The little girl knew that it was about those things one does not repeat, even to one's best friend.” The two men in the conversation were her father and a *makout*. When she saw the *makout*, “She moved, looked at the man. A few seconds after, the slap. Paul [her father] had struck her.” Later in the night, the father tries to explain and apologize for his actions, “I beg

⁵⁵ Frantz André, Interviewed by author, Montreal, Canada.

⁵⁶ Interview with Frantz André. J. Jan Dominique also discusses this complex process of protecting children. In her novel, Paul's father “slaps” her when she asks questions about the government. The “slap” is used as a literary tool to emphasize the trauma of being silenced without explanation as a child.

⁵⁷ Trouillot, 166.

your pardon. Try to understand, if you can. [...] You looked at him with such contempt. I saw you dead. [...] I saw in a flash that you looked at a bogeyman that way. He was killing you. You had to be protected.”⁵⁸ While Dominique’s narrative is drawn from her relationship with her family, Dominique cautions that *Memoirs* is not autobiographical because “At that time, it was the autobiographical experience of the whole country!”⁵⁹

The phantom-like power that Duvalier had over the nation’s households disrupted the nuclear governance within families. No longer were children and parents reprimanded for the rules made in their home, they were also subject to arbitrary and shifting rules from the government.⁶⁰ Disobeying Duvalier’s parental command resulted in corporeal punishment and, as André and Dominique learned, public humiliation.

As the primary provider and disciplinarian of the nation-family, Duvalier garnished those who obeyed his rules with the benefits of parental favoritism in business, security, and private education.⁶¹ Suzie Broisrond, who would later become a community activist in Montreal, explained, “I cannot talk bad about Duvalier. I know he was evil. But because of that official [who helped me], I cannot talk bad about him.” Broisrond explains that her family’s life was put under surveillance in the early 1960s when two mistress of the *tonton makout* moved next door.⁶² When the women arrived her family was afraid they were being watched so, “We whispered in the house.” At the time Boisrond could not find work, she explains, “you could not find work unless you knew someone.”⁶³ So she began tutoring the son of an official in Duvalier’s administration. The minister was extremely appreciative of Boisrond’s work with his son and for her stewardship she and

⁵⁸ Dominique, 66.

⁵⁹ Dominique, 291.

⁶⁰ Verna. Bellegarde-Smith, 129-131.

⁶¹ Michel Laguerre, Bellegarde-Smith, Trouillot.

⁶² Danny Lafferièrre, *Le Goût des jeunes filles*, 2004.

⁶³ Suzie Boisrond, Interviewed by author, March 7, 2011, Montreal, Canada.

her family were protected. When the *makout* came to “check on panties,” an insinuation of the regular sexual assault of young women and girls, they never stopped at my house. Boisrond was protected as if she were Duvalier’s daughter or wife.

Duvalier’s image as the sovereign father of the nation was crystallized in his appropriation of traditional religious tropes. For example he simultaneously portrayed himself as the Vodou *lwa* of the cemetery Baron Samedi, wearing dark glasses and carrying a *coco makak*; while also changing the words of the Lord’s Prayer the first verse of which read, “Our Doc, who are in the National Palace, hallowed be Thy name in the present and future generations.”⁶⁴ In the family context, he further exerted his power by emasculating male heads of households and crippling their ability to protect and govern their families. Men were arrested with no justification. Some were taken from their homes and never returned. Frantz André experienced this emasculating assault on his family after waking up in the middle of the night to see armed *tonton makouts* take his uncle from their home. André’s family heard nothing from the government for several weeks. Then, one day, his uncle returned—weak, emaciated, and “older.”⁶⁵

While physical assaults on the body and psyche were the historical legacy of the Duvalier regime, the fear of assault and as a result the efforts to avoid this violence through displacement from the home were equally traumatic on the country. In certain cases, this displacement occurred because the home was physically destroyed, for example in Agnant’s account of *makouts* incinerating a home and its inhabitants. In other cases, it was a forced or self-imposed evacuation.

⁶⁴ Abbott, *Haiti: A Shattered Nation*, 140. Also see Abbott, Haiti.

⁶⁵ Interview with Frantz Andre.

The assault on the home—the sovereignty of a particular family unit—was codified in the forced displacement from home and space. Although the threat of indiscriminate violence compromised interpersonal relationships, this threat also meant that families went to great lengths to protect each other from harm. This was most evident in the decision to leave home.

Many families chose to uproot their homes because they wanted to protect their children. They particularly wanted to protect their girls.⁶⁶ Violence against young women destabilized the familial and national meaning of home and citizenship. In the aftermath of Rose-Marie and Gladys' experience of violence with their mother, it became clear that children were not exempt from retribution. Instead the *tonton makout* emphasized that young girls were the property and collateral to be owned and bartered for the government's purposes. Most often, families feared that their daughters would be summoned as a mistress or sexual servant of the *tonton macoute*.⁶⁷ Agnant recalls that on the way to and from school, men with "black sunglasses" would harass the girls with sexual taunts and threats. Under these circumstances, families chose to quarantine their young girls, imprisoning them in the walls of their own homes.⁶⁸ As several women later recalled, "We were not allowed to go outside" or play with other children. When this isolation became impractical, families abandoned their homes.

For several families the first move was from the urban center of Port-au-Prince, where Duvalier was perceived to have a more significant stronghold and capacity to

⁶⁶ Myriam Chancy, *Searching for Safe Space: Afro-Caribbean Writers in Exile* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997)

⁶⁷ There is no statistical data on mistresses of the *tonton macoute*. However, a consistent disclosure in oral histories and represented in collective memory is the presence and fear of mistresses. In most contexts they are often discussed on inhibitors of the newly acquired land and homes as well as sexual servants. Yet it was these women's presence which signified a shift in safety for many families.

⁶⁸ Marie Vieux Chauvet, *Love, Anger, Madness*, (New York: Knopf, 2009).

monitor families, to the countryside or mountains where it was believed that this surveillance was not as pervasive.⁶⁹ When discussing the defining moments of her life a prominent feminist activist replied, that she was most traumatized “When we moved from the city to the mountains.”⁷⁰ The urban-to-rural move disrupted her sense of security and community. Many families became what historian Chantalle Verna calls “contemporary maroons”—moving from home to the next home, hiding, and establishing clandestine community.⁷¹

Yet many “maroon” families quickly discovered that Duvalier’s governing strength was his ability to maintain control over both the urban and rural regions of the country.⁷² It was in these more rural communities of the country that certain families realized the pervasiveness of Duvalier’s power and then chose to make a second move out of the country. Even for those who were protected through relationship with the government, the volatile and fragile line of remaining in the president’s favor was not enough to insure their peace of mind in the country. Bois remembered, “One day I was teaching my class and about forty armed men came in.” She was not clear on why they came to her class, but after this intrusion she decided, “I need to leave this country.” The

⁶⁹ The urban to rural migration during the Duvalier regime needs further research. While it is not the work of this dissertation project, there is an alternative narrative here—one that suggests that although much of the migration within the nation was rural to urban with the large majority of the migrants being peasant or working class, that during the early years of Duvalier’s presidency (likely because of the assumption that this presidency would not have the longevity that it did) elite and middle class families were apart of a urban to rural migration that found its impetus in the protection and preservation of young girls’ sexual purity, reputation, and autonomy. For more on the military dispersal between rural and urban Haiti see, Michel S. Laguerre, *Haiti: The Military and Society in Haiti*, 1995.

⁷⁰ Interview with Marjorie Villefranche.

⁷¹ In her scholarship on Haitian migrant communities in southeast Michigan, historian Chantalle Verna explains that families in Michigan were often those who had spend their lives under Duvalier moving from one home to the next, Chantalle Verna, “Haitian Migration and Community-Building in Southeastern Michigan, 1966-1998,” in *Geographies of the Haitian Diaspora*, 2011.

⁷² However, several new scholars have found that the local political dynamics of the country and mountain regions did provide more flexibility of power dynamics, as Duvalier’s rule was intertwined with previously existing politics

government official who had protected her and her family from physical violence prepared her papers for departure.

As the number of girls and families displaced from their homes grew, so did the gap between a generation of women's activists. The culture of repression, silence, and transience dislocated the continuity of the women's feminist organizing. In the face of threats to their homes, family, and girls, women activists were less vocal. J. Jan Dominique even asserts that the disruption of home culture was evident in the practice of story telling and sharing information among mothers, aunts, and daughters. She explains that because "the night had become hostile" under the dictatorship, women did not share their histories with one another. The disappearance of these women's spaces of storytelling, and broke the communication in the activist legacy of Haitian women. This assault on home space and the dissemination of knowledge created a rupture in the link between a history of women who fought for women's rights in Haiti, and a generation of girls who were forced to leave their home nation.

THE GREAT MIGRATION OF GIRLS

Alexandra Philoctète and her mother left Haiti two years before the attack on Yvonne Rimpel. Philoctète's mother could not have imagined the direction the country would take at that time, but she had some indication through the increase in political conflict and violence. The Philoctète's were natives of Jérémie like many leaders of the LFAS. Although her parents were not particularly "political" they did socialize in the more affluent circles of society. When the Estimé government fell, Paul Magloire led the military control of the government and continued to implement many of the same government restrictions on organizing and opposition forces as Lescot, Vincent, and

Estimé. As the Magloire administration lost control of the nation by the fall of 1956, the country's direction was alarmingly uncertain.

Alexandra's mother saw the move to North America as an inevitable uprooting of her family. As early as 1950, in the uncertainty of the Magloire's coup of Estimé, their family felt a difference in the country. As Alexandra remembers, "Soldiers were everywhere." And "twice I witnessed the police drag a person into the street and beat them." The increased militarization was evident to the schoolgirl who simply wanted to continue her juvenile exploration of the world around her. That world, however, was increasingly unpredictable and Alexandra reflected, "My mother was afraid." Alexandra recalls her mother lamenting, "I have four girls and one son [...] and if things continue like this my girls will probably have to sleep with a minister or deputy to have a job. And I don't want that for my children."⁷³

Her mother's presumptions were accurate. By early 1960, this exchange of sex, power, land, and protection was well reported.⁷⁴ In her writings Vieux-Chauvet captured this dynamic in her character Rose. Rose, a young girl is sent to sacrifice herself to the governing authority so that her family might retain ownership over their land and thus her father's local power. When she returns she reflects, "I am dead. Has my mother realized it? It must be awful to bury your child, but even more awful to see your child die little by little without being able to do a thing to save her. We're caught in a vicious circle. Everything's changed, everything's suddenly upside down since they took over our land."⁷⁵ Alexandra's mother did not want her daughter to join the walking dead. So in

⁷³ Alexandra Philoctète, Interviewed by author, March 2011, Montreal, Canada.

⁷⁴ Charles, "Gender and Politics in Contemporary Haiti," 139-140.

⁷⁵ Chauvet, 245-246.

late 1956, the women left Port-au-Prince for New York, two weeks before Paul Magloire resigned and fled into exile in Jamaica.

As the turbulence of the 1956-1957 presidential campaign raged between frontrunners François Duvalier, Louis Déjoie and Daniel Fignolé, Alexandra and her mother were settling into their new apartment in the Bronx. A nation away Alexandra communicated sporadically with her father and sisters and learned that her family was busy campaigning for their candidate Déjoie. When Duvalier was named President, Alexandra was only remotely concerned with the controversy over Duvalier's electoral votes or Déjoie's overwhelming win in the urban centers. Her attention was divided between home and her new country of residence. In particular, Alexandra was fixated on the newspapers and television coverage of nine black students integrating schools in "a place down south" called Little Rock, Arkansas. Alexandra was also drawn to the history of those nine children in Arkansas and began reading U.S. African American literature, history and poetry.⁷⁶

While Alexandra immersed herself in U.S. black culture, through media and prose, the African American population showed little concern for the direction Haiti was taking. The alliance that African American women cultivated through travel, literature, and women's rights organizing in the early twentieth century had all but disappeared by the late 1950s. As historian Millery Polyné explains in his history of Haitian and African American relations, "the overwhelming silence from U.S. blacks, with few exceptions, underscored the shortcomings and frailties of identity politics and racialized solidarity movements that can be rendered ineffective by uncritical loyalties to blackness and

⁷⁶ Alexandra Philoctète, Interviewed by author, March 2011, Montreal, Canada.

repressive black leadership.”⁷⁷ Alexandra, however, believed in a shared blackness with U.S. African Americans, so much so, that she openly declared to her mother, “I wanted to be American.”

Her mother was appalled by the her daughter’s cultural aspirations and sought to counter her daughter’s cultural erasure of Haiti by exposing her to conversations on Haitian politics and indoctrinating her daughter in proper behavior for young Haitian girls.⁷⁸ In this vain, Alexandra was forced to be at home on Sunday afternoons when the few Haitians in her neighborhood gathered together to discuss the state of their nation over *sauce pois*, *diri*, and *griot*.

Over time, Alexandra learned that her affinity for U.S. black culture did not translate into acceptance in that community. When she arrived at her predominately black and Puerto Rican school, her peers told her that she “acted white” because she listened to classical music and spoke French. As Alexandra sought to defend her blackness, the numbers of Haitian families grew in her neighborhood and throughout the Bronx and Brooklyn each year.⁷⁹ In her desire to find camaraderie among her peers, Alexandra sought out Haitian youth in New York. The families that were trickling into her neighborhood were from middle upper class families like her own. She recognized their cultural references and adolescent prospective of migration. Moreover as many of the families that came were separated, leaving spouses, siblings, and children behind, she learned what was happening to her generation under the new government.

⁷⁷ Millery Polyné, *From Douglass to Duvalier*, 182.

⁷⁸ Laguerre, *Haitians in Black America*; Also see Nina Glick Schiller and George Eugene Fouron, “Everywhere we go, We are in danger’: Ti Manno and the Emergence of a Haitian Transnational Identity,” *American Ethnologist* 17, no 2 (May 1990): 329-347; and Gina Ulysse, “Papa, Patriarchy, and Power: Snapshots of a Good Haitian Girl, Feminism, and Diasporic Dreams,” *The Journal of Haitian Studies*, 12, no 1 (2006).

⁷⁹ Glick-Schiller, says that the term “community” does not describe the small conglomeration of Haitians that were in New York in 1960

As Alexandra cultivated new friendships she learned that her father and sister were both assaulted because of their support for presidential candidate Louis Déjoie. The attack on her family resonated with many of Alexandra's new friends who were children of men and women who were killed or disappeared by the Duvalier government because of their alleged anti-Duvalier organizing. Her new peers were angry. Drawing from the political energy of the civil rights movement in the United States, Alexandra and her friends began to meet to discuss politics. They were particularly concerned with ideas of Marxism and Communism that came out of their country and other countries in the Caribbean. They infused their ideas about leftist thought with discussions about national liberation. Although Alexandra's mother was pleased that her daughter was finding value in her national and cultural identity, she was concerned about her daughter's new friends and intellectual interests. She knew what happened to young women when they had conflict with the Haitian government and she had no shortage of examples of what happened to young black girls in the United States.⁸⁰

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As Alexandra established her Haitian community in the Bronx, Marlène Joseph, who would later become a friend of Alexandra, and her family were being harassed by the *tonton makout's* perpetual surveillance. In 1958 Marlène and her family lived in Port-au-Prince. Like Yvonne Rimpel, Marlène's mother and father were both active in social and political life. As a child, her mother often escorted Marlène and her sister to the LFAS meetings, workshops, and events. Marlène was involved in many youth

⁸⁰ Alexandra and her mother were friends with members of the Freedom Riders of 1961 and later she also witnessed the media coverage of the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church where four young girls were killed in 1963.

organizations, including the Christian student association, the JEC, but she was particularly proud of her membership to *La Ligue des Jeunes Femmes* (LJF). The LJF was the youth arm of the LFAS. The young girls often accompanied their mothers and elders to LFAS events and public protests.

Marlène's father, Mr. Joseph was a skilled attorney and often critiqued the shortcomings of the nation's executive administration. For his outspoken politics Mr. Joseph was imprisoned several times under Presidents Vincent and Magloire. When Duvalier came to power Mr. Joseph continued his critical political analysis of the government. After Duvalier's rise to power homes that were vacated by emigrating families were purchased by *makout*. This was the case with a house across from the Joseph's. When Marlène's parents realized who their new neighbors were Marlène and her sister were not allowed to exit the front door. A week after the men moved next door, her family moved out of the neighborhood. Her parents feared the threat of sexual assault against their young girls. When they moved to their new neighborhood in Bois Verna they no longer went out and rarely visited with their neighbors.⁸¹

On 9 December 1959, the Joseph family began to consider migrating. On this day Mr. Joseph was arrested again. Since Mr. Joseph had been arrested several times before and returned home, the family had every expectation that he would return home. However Mr. Joseph did not return on that night, and he did not return the next day or the next. Marlène and her family spent the following days, weeks, and months trying searching for information about their father's whereabouts. However, after a year passed Marlène and her family accepted, in fact prayed, he was dead. At a certain point they preferred he was dead rather than suffering through years of torture.

⁸¹ Marlène Joseph, Interviewed by author March 2011, Montreal, Canada.

Marlène remained in Port-au-Prince for four more years after her father's death. She applied to medical school, but she was not accepted. As the culture of secrecy was, Marlène could never be certain that she was not accepted for because her credentials were not adequate or because she did not know the right people in the government. She eventually found a position to teach at an elementary school and finally decided to apply for nursing school with her sister to a program in Montreal. In the four years after her father's disappearance, the Duvalier administration continued to evolve and recreate itself. While various sectors of society would debate on the materiality of life in the clean streets and city centers of those early years, one thing was certain: those within and outside of the Duvalier inner circle were forced to walk a thin line. By 1960 all of Duvalier's former political opponents from the 1957 election were in exile or disappeared. Those who were not were significantly muzzled. In particular, members of the LFAS such as Madeliene Sylvain, who Marlène remembered from her LJF activities, moved to Europe and then to the U.S. Marlène had arrived in the US earlier that January. Stepping off of the airplane in her finest summer suit, Marlène was rudely awakened by the bitter cold and snow that seeped into her sandals that first day in January.⁸²

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During the long days and nights that the Joseph family waited for their father to return, Ghislaine Charlier also waited for her husband. By the winter of 1959, Etienne Charlier's affiliation with the Parti Socialist Populaire (PSP) and his support of Déjoie in the election had forced the writer and intellectual into hiding. While Etienne traveled between friends' homes in Jérémie, Port-au-Prince, and his family home in Pétionville, Ghislaine cared for their children while holding small gatherings at their residence.

⁸² Marlène Joseph, Interviewed by author, March 2011, Montreal, Canada.

Ghislaine and Etienne's livelihoods as journalists were significantly compromised under the Duvalier regime. The new president swiftly and systematically dismantled the majority of popular media outlets. In his first person account of the year 1959, former journalist and author Bernard Diederich suggests that the only media outlets that remained in operation during the Duvalier regime were those operated by the president's supporters or those who had survived multiple violent governments and developed a technique for journalism that did not offend the regime. If journalists offended the President they were likely arrested, disappeared, exiled, or murdered.

Etienne Charlier was most well known for his scholarship on Haitian maroons and their role in the independence movement at the end of the eighteenth century. Ironically, by 1959 Etienne had become a "contemporary maroon." When her husband was away, Ghislaine woke up early, went to her children's room, and laid on the floor next to their beds. She would rest next to them, partially for protection, and particularly because she hid her transistor radio under the children's bed. At 6 A.M. she would place the radio on its lowest dial and listen to the news reports broadcasted in Krèyol from Cuba. Ghislaine learned what was happening in her country and around the world from these reports.⁸³

In early 1960 Etienne returned home. His brother held a position in the Duvalier administration and ensured that Charlier would be safe. However, alliances were fragile. Ghislaine witnessed how quickly one's life could change if Duvalier no longer chose to grant a family exemption. In the early spring of 1960 Etienne Charlier died from an allergic reaction to medicine prescribed for his arm, which he had injured while in hiding.

⁸³ Ghislaine Charlier, Interviewed by author, September 23, 2010, Montreal, Canada.

Although many people speculated that Duvalier played some part in her husband's death, Ghislaine maintained that it was an unfortunate accident.

Soon after her husband's death, her brother-in-law asked her to work for the Duvalier administration. She emphatically refused, but she knew that this refusal could put her and her children in danger. So in July 1960, she sent her sons to live with her Aunt Claire in Jérémie, and boarded a plane for France. A woman of personal resources, like her grandmother, Ghislaine quickly found a job as the secretary to the Belgium Ambassador. Under this position, she was sent to the politically raging Democratic Republic of the Congo. During this time Ghislaine was exposed to the revolutionary pulse of the soon to be independent African nation and its leader Patrice Lumumba. While absorbing the energy of the independence movement Ghislaine received word that her son was ill in France and was compelled to leave. When her sons health improved, Ghislaine was again presented with the question of what she would do and in 1963 she decided to go to Canada, she arrived in October.

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When Ghislaine landed in Quebec, we can imagine that the Villefranche family had already begun discussing their move. Late in the night, after Marjorie and her brother "Bob" had gone to bed, Marjorie's parents would whisper about their plans to send their two children to Canada the following year. The political condition of the nation had progressively gotten worse in the half decade since Duvalier took power. Marjorie was born in 1951 just after Magloire became president. She had a peaceful middle class upbringing as she spent many of her days after school playing in the garden and staring into the sky, "making up stories." "For me, the world was my family, my house, and the garden." She had the confidence of a young girl who knew she was loved

by both of her parents who “were really, very much in love with each other” and protected by her brother, “like a Haitian little boy is supposed to protect a sister.” Her first experience with violence was when her parents enrolled her in Catholic school when she remembered the teachers “treated [students] like slaves,” often using corporeal punishment and humiliation as their primary tools of education. Yet the brutality of the private Catholic schools that Marjorie attended paled in comparison to the horror that she and her family would soon endure.

As Marjorie advanced through primary school the city around her home changed. In Port-au-Prince, “We couldn’t play at the parks we used to play at.” And “Duvalier’s picture was everywhere.” It was in this atmosphere of late 1961, “the worst moment of Duvalier,” according to Marjorie, that her mother did not come home from work one day.⁸⁴ Mme. Villefranche had worked at home as a hair stylist, then in a mahogany factory, and later in a hotel. By 1961, she was working as a secretary at an electric company where she became known for voicing her opinion about conditions under Duvalier. When she was not expressing herself about politics, she and her family frequently held secret meetings about the state of the government and harbored political fugitives.⁸⁵

Marjorie recalled little about the day her mother did not return from work except her father’s face. A mixture of concern, fear, and longing indicated her father’s greatest nightmares. The family understood the meaning behind Duvalier’s government arrests. Marjorie’s uncle had been arrested months before and he never returned. Like her uncle, many people who were arrested disappeared with no record of their existence or final

⁸⁴ Marjorie remembered it was late 1961 or early 1962.

⁸⁵ Marjorie Villefranche, Interviewed by author, Montreal, Canada.

days. Others were severely emotionally and psychologically broken when they did return. Fortunately for Marjorie's family, and thanks to the lobbying of her employer, Marjorie's mother came home after two days in prison. However, the immanent threat to their personal safety convinced the family to move to the mountains of La Boolle.

The move provided some semblance of security from the watchful eye of the government, but the family was still distressed. In particular, Mme. and M. Villefranche were concerned about their daughter's physical well-being. Marjorie was developing into a young woman and drawing close to becoming a teenager of eligible courting age. Although the family moved to La Boolle, Marjorie continued to attend school in the city and had to make regular trips where she was exposed to the unsolicited advances of the *tonton makout*. For her parents, the insecurity for their daughter was the ultimate reason for their departure. Everyone had heard the rumors of *tonton makout* claiming young girls as their girlfriends and the family's inability to deny the *tonton makout* without putting the entire family at risk of violent retribution.⁸⁶ As writer Marie-Cèlie Agnant stated, "I remember going to school and all those men, seated on the wall against the sidewalk calling out." With the constant heckling, Marjorie explains, "My parents were afraid to have a young girl," so she was sent to Canada for boarding school with her brother in 1964.

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Within months of Marjorie and her brother's departure from Haiti and arrival in Montreal, a group of young Haitian men became the primary target of Duvalier's army back home in Haiti. The *Jeune Haiti* were no more than four dozen young people at any given moment, but their potential threat, according to the U.S. intelligence agencies, was

⁸⁶ Marie-Cèlie Agnant, Interviewed by author, May 27, 2007. Also see Marie Vieux-Chauvet, *Love, Anger Madness*

real. The young communist organizers were based in the United States where many of them had moved at the beginning of the Duvalier. They were inspired by the success of the Cuban Revolutionaries, but they were also militant about their role in rescuing their nation from Duvalier's rule. The leaders of the group had spent time in Mexico with youth communist organizers in the 1950s and brought much of what they learned and experienced to the United States. These young men settled in New York around the same time that Alexandra moved and "needed to attach myself to something." Numa went to a Bronx Merchant Academy in her neighborhood and it did not take long for their paths to cross. Alexandra attached herself to this group of about thirty young men and ten women. Over time she was indoctrinated into the organization that saw itself as a part of a Haitian contingent of a larger anti-colonial revolution that included Latin America, Algeria, and Central Africa.⁸⁷

Between late July and early August Alexandra invited her friends over for dinner at her mother's home. Alexandra's mother preferred to have her friends come to their apartment rather than have daughter out at late hours chaperoned with groups of young men. As she ate with her friends, Marcel and Louis, she was unaware of what was about to transpire. In the following days Marcel, Louis and eleven other *Jeune Haiti* members boarded a plane for Miami. From there they travelled to the Haitian southeastern coast of Dame Marie by boat, where they launched a full-armed assault against the Duvalier regime.⁸⁸ They fought for three months, losing most of the men to capture or injury. Duvalier discovered their guerrilla attack almost immediately after they landed on shore. As his men hunted members of the *Jeune Haiti* down, the president certainly had another

⁸⁷ Alexandra Philoctète, Interviewed by author, March 20, 2011, Montreal, Canada.

⁸⁸ Abbott, *Haiti: A Shattered Nation*, 129.

group of young revolutionaries in mind. Determined to publicly punish the men and thwart any further attack of its kind, Duvalier took ruthless measures. Noting that the majority of the *Jeune Haiti* members were from Jérémie, the president-for-life issued one of the most gruesome state attacks on its own people in the nation's history. He strategically captured and killed the members of the *Jeune Haiti*'s families in Jérémie. He killed mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, neighbors, siblings, and children. When the three month killing, later named the Jérémie Vespers, was over, 27 residents of the "city of poets" were dead. As a final measure, Duvalier's forces, slaughtered many of the *Jeune Haiti*'s families and friends in the town of Jérémie.

Marcel and Louis were the final members of the revolutionary front to be captured. Consequently, they were the most brutally punished. Duvalier used their punishment as a public show of his force and to instill fear into the nation. The execution was put on public display. Children were taken out of school. And the young men's final moments were televised across the nation. In her narrative of the filmed execution Edwidge Danticat writes, "On November 12, 1964, two pin poles are erected outside the National Cemetery. A captive audience is gathered. Radio, print, and television journalist are summoned [...] They are both marched from the edge of the crowd toward the poles. Their hands are tied behind their backs by two of Duvalier's private henchmen, Tonton Macoutes, in dark glasses and civilian dress...Off screen someone probably shouts, 'Fire!' and they do. Numa and Droin's heads slump sideways at the same time, showing that the shots have hit home."⁸⁹

Alexandra was at school likely struggling to stay awake because she had suffered from nightmares and sleepless nights since her friends had been captured. While she was

⁸⁹ Edwidge Danticat, *Create Dangerously*, 1-7.

struggling to concentrate, teenagers and children her age lined the balconies of the neighborhood surrounding the National Cemetery and watched her friends die. Alexandra never saw the video of the execution but the shots that rang out in Port-au-Prince travelled. Like shrapnel, the newspaper reports and oral accounts hit home and bore through Alexandra's and many other young people's sense of self and national belonging. These friends were the one's who encouraged her to speak Kreyol. When she so sincerely expressed her desire to be American, dismissed it and encouraged her to remember, "Yes, you are Haitian. You have an identity." In their death, her identity and meaning of life became nebulous. "Why did I not die? Why not me?" Although she later discovered that the group was infiltrated by Central Intelligence Agency operatives and even conceded that the young men were just children—unprepared and living in a fantasy of revolution, she still believed there was something she could have done.

These feelings and questions haunted many youth of the time, and like the children's night tales of the *tonton makout* (boogeymen), troubling thoughts crept into the imaginations of the next generation of young people. As Danticat writes, "All artists, writers among them, have several stories, one might call them creation myths—that haunt and obsess them. This is one of mine. I don't even remember when I first heard about it. I feel as though I have always known it, having filled in the curiosity-driven details through photographs, newspaper and magazine articles, books, and films as I have gotten older. Like many a creation myth, aside from its heartrending clash of life and death, homeland and exile, the execution of Marel Numa and Louis Droin involves a disobeyed directive from a higher authority and brutal punishment as a result."⁹⁰ The

⁹⁰ Edwidge Danticat, *Create Dangerously*, 5.

children of the nation were under attack from their leader. The trauma of the assault would permeate through the generation and serve, for some, as a call to action.

Alexandra was not yet ready to create or act, so she decided to move. Her decision to move to Montreal was a probable decision. When she was an elementary school student she travelled to Montreal with her mother on vacation and when she returned she announced to her siblings and friends, “I am going to move to Montreal when I get old.” Alexandra aged quickly. She had not anticipated that her move to the lovely city in Canada would be under such horrible conditions. She perceived that Montreal would facilitate some liberation from her nightmares and ruminations of her mind.

The assassination of the *Jeune Haiti* was what Ron Eyerman calls a “primal scene.” Witnessing the death of their peers, either in person, through media or in their imaginary eye, united a generation. It certainly became a cultural trauma that would shape their generation, “Cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion.”⁹¹

For Alexandra this was certainly the case. Alexandra’s experience in the U.S. had shaped much of her identity, racial consciousness and women’s consciousness as well as global concepts of communism. Alexandra arrived in Montreal on in 1963. Like Alexandra, activist Suzie Boisrond explained that moving to Paris for school transformed her political consciousness and vision of herself. Suzie had grown up in the countryside with no electricity for half of the year. Loved by her mother, who was the second woman

⁹¹ Ron Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 2-3.

to her father, she was cared for through her mother's work and selling of seasonal fruit and produce. As Suzie excelled in school she was eventually offered a scholarship/opportunity to study in Port-au-Prince where her mother sent her to study and eventually followed. It was in Port-au-Prince that Suzie received the opportunity to go to Paris in 1962. Suzie, "found France to be very racist at that time 1961, 1962, and part of 1963," but it was also the first time she could speak. "Discovered women had a voice." "I had learned how to speak."⁹² When she returned to Haiti she was changed. She could not go back. She did return and during this time she began to work for Duvalier's minister who express "you are too smart to be here." And helped prepare her immigration papers and passport. She arrived in Montreal in 1965.

Ghislaine had also been impacted by her first migration out of Haiti. In the 1960s, Duvalier's version of *noirisme* was an extension of the larger negritude and Pan-Africanist movement. While he repressed his own people, he was sympathetic to the global movements of Black independence in Central Africa. The administration permitted citizens to receive passports, immigration papers, and temporary residency in the Democratic Republic of the Congo as teachers and doctors in order to help their revolution.⁹³ In this professional exchange Haitian immigrants developed a new sense of connection to Africa. Marjorie and her brother spend the next four years in boarding school, with their parents remaining in Haiti until her parents moved to the city in 1969.

Each of the women arrived with varying degrees of political activism and feminist consciousness. Duvalier's violent government had undermined the legislative successes of

⁹² Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

⁹³ Regine Jackson, "Introduction: Les espaces Haïtiens: Remapping the Geography of the Haitian Diaspora," in *Geographies of the Haitian Diaspora* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 12.

the women's movement. Moreover, the government had severely crippled their organizational base and ideological focus. However the political conditions in Haiti as well as their new experiences in Montreal would place a new generation of women at the center of Haitian transnational feminist organizing. This is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5
‘FROM ONE ISLAND TO ANOTHER’—
COMMUNITY ORGANIZING, TRANSNATIONAL IDENTITIES & THE HAITIAN FEMINIST
DIASPORIC *LAKOU*, 1970-1980

Girlhood was disrupted by François Duvalier’s violent practice of government and oppressive gender codes. However, women who had the means to move to cities such as Montreal were also confronted with the complexity of entering a new country and culture. In particular young women had to negotiate their evolving personal and political consciousness within the context of sexism, North American racism, and diasporic citizenship. Haitian women who were growing into a new woman-centered consciousness organized for gender equality, while also working to maintain familial relationships at home. In some cases this meant insuring that their nuclear families could be reunited in Montreal. In other cases, it meant redefining the meaning of family in order to nurture their new conceptualization of individual, communal, and national identity.

In her 1930s study of families in Kenscoff, Haiti, feminist anthropologist Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain made an observation about the shared space—common entry way and sacred grounds—between Haitian homes known as the *lakou*. She wrote, “the *lacou* is a social community more than a physical ensemble.”¹ Over 80 years later Haitian scholars continue to maintain, “*lakou*’s are relational spaces” that maintain culture, establish

¹ Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, unpublished manuscript, 151, Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain Papers, SUA. This manuscript became “Courtship, marriage, and *plasaj* at Kenscoff,” *Social and Economic Studies*, vol 4 (Mona: University of the West Indies, 1958:210-233). Comhaire-Sylvain uses the French spelling of *lacou* in her writings. I use the krèyol spelling that is used in current scholarship.

community accountability, and provide structure for a familial network.² In this chapter I document the history of Haitian migration and feminist organizing between Montreal and Port-au-Prince. I show that in response to their displacement from their home country, threats of deportation from Canada, and North American racism, women established a Haitian feminist diasporic *lakou* (family compound) to protect their families and their ideals.

HAITIANS IN MONTREAL

Haitians began migrating to Montreal in small numbers in the early twentieth century. They migrated to Montreal for business and educational opportunities, vacations, and as domestic servants.³ This spotted migration created little by way of a community. In 1957 there were approximately 395 Haitians living in Canada, and roughly ninety percent of them settled in Montreal.⁴ The small number of Haitian residents in Montreal was maintained through racist immigration laws. Before 1960, “blacks” (people of African descent) were considered an undesirable immigrant population and were sparingly admitted into the country.⁵

² Charlene Desir, “Diasporic Lakou: A Haitian Academic Explores Her Path to Haiti Pre- and Post-Earthquake,” *Harvard Educational Review* (Summer 2011: 278-296), 282.

³ “Movements of Domestic Workers From Haiti,” RG 76, vol 838, Canada Immigration Division, Library and Archives Canada (LAC), Ottawa, Canada; “Students to Canada From Haiti,” RG 25, vol 3981, LAC. Also see Paul Déjean, *Les Haïtiens au Québec*, (Montreal: Les Presses de l’Université de Québec, 1978); and Micheline Labelle, Serge Larose, Victor Piché, “Émigration et immigration: les Haïtiens au Québec,” *Sociologie et sociétés* vol 15, no 2 (1983: 73-88).

⁴ Paul Robert Magocsi, ed., *Encyclopedia of Canada’s Peoples*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999). These estimations are based on Canadian Census data. The numbers are approximations because before 1971 “Haitian” was not a separate category of analysis. Haitians were included in the West Indian category that included people from the English, French, and Spanish Caribbean.

⁵ Micheline Labelle, Serge Larose, Victor Piché, “Émigration et immigration: les Haïtiens au Québec,” *Sociologie et sociétés* vol 15, no 2 (1983: 73-88), 82.

In 1955, Canadian Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, J. W. Pickersgill, explained the restrictions on immigration to individuals from Africa,⁶ the Caribbean and Asia, stating, “We try to select as immigrants those who will have to change their ways least in order to adapt themselves to Canadian life and to contribute to the development of the Canadian nation.”⁷ African, Caribbean and Asian cultures, lifestyles, and skin color were not complimentary to the predominately white, European-descended population of Canada in the 1950s.

There were some exceptions to Canada’s foreign policy regarding black people. In the 1930s through the 1950s, a number of elite Haitian families and professionals moved to Canada to pursue educational and economic opportunities. This community, as sociologist and founder of *Bureau Communautaire C Haitienne à Montréal* (BCCHM), Paul Déjean, writes, was wealthy, well read in French and European culture, and integrated seamlessly into Quebec society.⁸ In the post-World War II global market the concern with African descended peoples’ adaptability to Canadian life was overpowered by a desire to modernize the nation through increased public services and industrialization. At the same time, the steady flow of European immigrants in Canada decreased in the 1950s as post-War economies began to recover in Europe and intra-European migration increased.⁹ To compensate for the European immigrant labor shortage, the Canadian Ministry of Immigration, under the authorization of Prime Minister John G. Diefenbaker (1957-1963), passed the Immigration Act of 1962, which extended their immigration

⁶ Egypt was excluded from these immigration restrictions.

⁷ “Canada’s Immigration Policy 1962-74,” House of Commons Debates (Ottawa, 1955), 452.

⁸ Paul Déjean, *Les Haïtiens au Québec* (Montreal: PUQ, 1978).

⁹ Herard Jadotte, “Haiti Immigration to Quebec,” *Journal of Black Studies* vol 7, no 4 (June 1977: 485-500), 487.

policies to include non-European nations and initiated an influx of Haitian immigration to Canada.¹⁰

The first wave of Haitian immigrants arrived in Canada between 1957 and 1969.¹¹ Women such as Marjorie Villefranche, Marlène Joseph, and Alexandra Philoctète arrived in Quebec to escape the increased repression of the Duvalier presidency.¹² These women were welcomed into Canada and benefited from the revised immigration policies. Montreal's popularity as a site for migration was evident in the population growth. Between 1965 and 1973 this system bolstered the number of Haitian residents from roughly 400 to over 2,500.¹³

As the black population increased, the Canadian government attempted to use the new immigration regulations as a tool to erase the memory of racial discrimination from the nation's imaginary. Officials publicly congratulated themselves on having, "effectively eliminated the last vestiges of discrimination governing the eligibility of persons seeking permanent admission to Canada."¹⁴ With this, the Canadian government absolved itself of any responsibility for past discriminations and began to market the country as a multicultural, welcoming "nation of immigrants."¹⁵ This would

¹⁰ Migrants from throughout the Caribbean started to arrive in Canada, and Montreal, Quebec specifically. See Dorothy Williams, *The Road to Now: History of Blacks in Montreal* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1997).

¹¹ Labelle, "Émigration et immigration," 78.

¹² Leo Driedger and Shiva S. Hall, eds, *Race and Racism: Canada's Challenge*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000).

¹³ Labelle, "Émigration et immigration," 84.

¹⁴ "External Affairs/ Affaires Extérieures," The Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, Ottawa, Ontario, January 24, 1968, LAC.

¹⁵ This image was successfully juxtaposed against United States discrimination against U.S. Black Americans. That is, Canada did not have legalized segregation.

prove to be short lived, as the legacy of discriminatory immigration practices quickly evolved into racial discrimination against Caribbean immigrant communities.¹⁶

Haitian migration to Canada in the early 1960s was a logical arrangement for Haitians and Canadians who both saw the relationship as temporary. The Canadian need for educated and professional laborers coincided with the increased desire and economic capability of middle and upper class Haitians to flee the repressive François Duvalier government. As well-educated and fluent French speakers, elite and middle-class Haitians quickly found jobs as teachers, nurses, and business professionals in Quebec.¹⁷ This first group of immigrants were also young. As they settled into the Montreal neighborhoods of Villeray, Saint-Michel and Parc-Extension, many Haitian immigrants believed that the Canadian economy would stabilize, Duvalier would eventually die or be forcefully removed from office, and that they would return to Haiti.¹⁸ In fact, many Haitians entered Canada on temporary visitors or student visa, having no intention of staying.

The majority of the women who moved to Montreal in the 1960s were also young. Most of the women left Haiti during secondary school. From 1968 to 1975 seventy-nine percent of Haitian immigrants to Montreal were between 14 and 44 years of age.¹⁹ For the younger generation, many had been separated from their parents and families in the process of migration. They had either left their parents behind or traveled

¹⁶ Monica Boyd, Gustave Goldmann, and Pamela White, “Race in the Canadian Census” in Leo Driedger and Shiva S. Hall, eds. *Race and Racism: Canada’s Challenge*, Montreal, (Canada: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000), 41.

¹⁷ Maud Pierre-Pierre, Interviewed by author, June 7, 2008, Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

¹⁸ Pontel, Maud, “Femmes Noires Et Alors?: Des Québécoises d’origine haïtienne dissident la violence,” *Bureau de la Communauté Haïtienne de Montréal Study*, (Montreal: Université à Montréal, 2004), 16.

¹⁹ Labelle, “Émigration et immigration,” 85. Labelle notes that Haitian immigrants were significantly younger than other immigrants to Montreal.

with one or two other family members and waited to be reunited in Montreal.²⁰ Other women were young professionals and parents of school age children and teenagers. Many of the young migrants experienced the fear, grief, and anger of their parents' or loved ones' arrests, torture, disappearance, or murder. The combinations of separation and grief, as well as the process of navigating a modern metropolis, created a new sense of independence for certain women.

When Marlène Joseph arrived in Montreal she was consumed with her work in nursing school. In between classes she was developing a community among the other Haitian girls also studying. She spent the rest of her free time writing letters and to her fiancé who was living in Port-au-Prince. The two had met in her neighborhood and courted each other until her departure to Montreal. While in Haiti, their interactions were monitored by her mother and other women in the community who would report any inappropriate public displays of affection. After Marlène settled into her first years of school in Montreal, she invited her fiancée to join her in Montreal. When he came, they shared an apartment. Marlène's mother was horribly troubled and embarrassed by her daughter's decision to live with a man without being married. She was also concerned for her investment in her daughter's education. She begged her daughter to finish school before having her fiancée live with her. However, Marlène had grown up. In her first years in Montreal she was exposed to other Haitian women her age who had also come to Montreal without their parents. In this context, Marlène gained a sense of independence and personal agency with which she believed she could dictate her own life decisions. Marlène's decisions were alarming to her mother, but she was miles away.²¹

²⁰ Labelle, 85.

²¹ Marlène Joseph, Interviewed by author, March 17, 2011, Montreal, Quebec.

Migration across borders after the late 1950s created what Laguerre calls the “diasporic citizen.” This citizen was transnational in that she maintained material and ideological ties with Haiti. Transnationality in the Haitian context created “asymmetry in relations between households in the U.S. and those in Haiti.”²² Laguerre further explains that this asymmetry disrupted the authority structure of the stem home in Haiti. This disruption was a disturbance of patriarchal power within the home and over the women of the family. As Gina Ulysse explains in her auto-ethnographic montage of her feminist consciousness in migration,

I revisit the development of my feminist consciousness as a young Haitian teen in the United States in the aftermath of migration. I interpret my struggles with my parents’ patriarchal authority as oppositional to their attempt to protect their investments in us as their social capital. Indeed, it was through some of my earliest confrontations with both parents that I first learned how power is configured and the limits of gender opposition.²³

For Ulysse, as with Marlène, this confrontation with gender oppression and power manifested itself in their expression of sexuality. In Montreal, Marlène was the first member of her family to leave home and migrate to Montreal where she became a stable resource for material income and for social capital. Her mother was able to boast about her daughter’s accomplishments and benefited from the minimal wages that Marlène was able to send home. As Marlène explains, she “became the leader of the family.” It was a role that her mother held since the disappearance of her husband. The combination of violence against her family and migration propelled Marlène into both familial responsibility and personal agency.

²² Michel Laguerre, *Diasporic Citizenship: Haitian Americans in Transnational America* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 12.

²³ Gina Ulysse, “Papa, Patriarchy, and Power: Snapshots of a Good Haitian Girl, Feminism, and Dyasporic Dreams,” *The Journal of Haitian Studies*, vol 12 no. 1 (2006), 25.

“WE WERE ALL IN TOUCH WITH ALL OF THE OTHER MOVEMENTS”

When most Haitians arrived in Montreal, they were met with the clamoring of protests in the streets and bustling cafés and theatres where French Quebecers were expressing their frustration with the conservative controls of the Roman Catholic Church on government policy and welfare. These nationalists were also calling for French control of the Quebec province. Prior to the 1960s, the nation’s financial and political power was seated with the Anglo-Canadian population of the city who had strong ties with U.S. companies and capitalist ventures. Historian Sean Mills explains that many white Quebecois nationalists, labor organizers, and leftist politicians adopted a discourse of black power to articulate their identity and their political struggle. This discourse, emerging out of the United States, demanded the liberation of black people from systemic oppression, racism, and economic disenfranchisement. The condition of the Quebec poor, working class, and misrepresented intellectuals drew clear parallels with their situation and black people’s experiences in the U.S. and the world. According to these groups, they were the “niggers” of Quebec and read Black Power literature in order to appropriate the meanings for their own cause.

As white nationalists and leftists adopted Black Power, Quebecoise women were also expressing their discontent with national policy and cultural politics regarding women. When the young Haitian women arrived, the Quebec Women’s movement was in full force. These recent migrants were met with marches in the streets, pamphlets, and female peers in school and work who encouraged them to assume agency over their lives, sexuality, and homes.

When they arrived in Montreal, their experiences with government repression primed them for activism. Each day, they were met with the multiple layers of a segregated city—divided by color, class, and language. For many young women, the segue into more public activism began with their negotiation of everyday life. They had to discern their identities as migrants, adjust to their new homes within the city and educational system, and negotiate their personal friendships and sexuality as young women.

In his work on politics, social movements, and 1960s Montreal, Sean Mills illustrates that movements in the city, from Caribbean student anti-racist associations to labor organizations and Quebec nationalist movements, were all intertwined through their appropriation of anti-colonial and black power discourse and rhetoric. While the meaning of these ideologies varied based on the specific group, the political and social energy of the city was highly impacted by a shared “grammar of dissent.” Mills and other scholars have looked closely at Anglo-Afro-Caribbean communities and activism during this time, but these scholars have given less attention to Black French and Creole speaking Montreal.²⁴

The anti-colonial and anti-imperial discourse resonated with members of the growing Haitian community of the early 1960s. Canada was a second site of migration for many Haitians who first moved to the U.S., Central Africa, or France before Montreal. Duvalier imagined his black nationalist rhetoric as an extension of the Pan-African movement. When Duvalier became president he encouraged the idea of the black nation supporting other liberation movements, allowing teachers and educators to go to

²⁴ Dorothy Williams, *The Road to Now: History of Blacks in Montreal* (Montreal: Véhicule Press, 1997).

the Congo to support their newly independent nation.²⁵ This act of racial solidarity and benevolence gave many families an opportunity to leave the increasingly violent nation. At the same time, students were allowed to study in France where they were exposed to white racism, while also being introduced to students from the Caribbean and countries in colonial struggles, such as Algeria.²⁶ In both Central Africa and France, Haitian women became intimately familiar with the liberation struggles of other Afro-Caribbean and African youth. Other young women, like Alexandra Philoctète, had spent time in the United States and were intimately exposed to the Civil Rights Movement and black power activism and discourse.

Young Haitian women and men brought this black power and anti-colonial consciousness to Canada and applied it to their nationalist and feminist struggles in Montreal. As a hotbed for anti-colonial theory and practice, they transferred the anti-colonial rhetoric to one of “anti-dictator” and protested against violent, undemocratic regimes. When organizing with Quebeckers from the left, Haitians adopted an Anti-American rhetoric that was directed towards the United States’ support of Duvalier and further drawn out of their anti-racist consciousness. America was seen as the leader of North American racism. This anti-American sentiment grew stronger as certain women in activist communities began to identify with the writings and speeches of Malcolm X and, to a lesser extent, Martin Luther King. Anti-American sentiment was infused with anti-Anglo sentiment from collaborations with the French Quebec labor movement and

²⁵ Magocsi, 650.

²⁶ Suzie Boisrond, Interviewed by author, March 2011, Montreal, Canada; Fabienne Pierre-Jacques, Interviewed by author May 2007; Ghislaine Charlier, Interviewed by author, September 2010, Montreal, Canada.

the black power movement in Montreal that saw Canadian racism as an extension of U.S. racism and capitalism.²⁷

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When Marjorie Villefranche arrived in Montreal she was immediately drawn to the activist energy in the city. However in the first two years she went about her life as a teenager. In boarding school she joined the chorus and traveled around the province. In her down time, she listened to classical music and read books that explained things about her new environment. She read books on Canadian history, African American culture, and reread authors from Haiti. Her boarding school days were colored with the words of Jacques Romain's *Gouverner de la Rose*. With her books and school, Marjorie did not have a hard time adjusting to Canadian society.

In fact, Marjorie quickly began to enjoy her freedom. Her aunt lived in Troisriviere, but neither one of them made the hour-long journey to see each too often. So Marjorie explored the city around her. However, her independence was cut short when her parents decided to join their children in Canada during Marjorie's final year in school. Her late teenage sensibility of freedom did not match with her parents' expectation that she would work in their small bodega. In 1968, Marjorie was finishing her final year in boarding school when she was introduced to one of the other black girls in her class. They became friends and began sitting in on campus meetings for various organizations and clubs. The new friends stayed up late at night discussing the events of the meetings and the rapidly changing world around them—Vietnam, the Civil Rights

²⁷ Sean Mills, *The Empire Within: Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Sixties Montreal*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010),

movement in the U.S., and Communism. This friend also suggested that Marjorie attend vocational college (CEGEP).²⁸

In 1970, Marjorie enrolled in the school and her political understanding blossomed. Within a few weeks, she joined *La Lutte*, the women's arm of the communist student movement on campus. *La Lutte* was heavily involved with the Quebec Nationalist Movement. As Marjorie explains, however, all of the movements of the time were somewhat intertwined, "through that group *La Lutte*, we were in touch with all the movements...I was really close to the women's liberation movement. Everything was going on at the same time." Marjorie was also affiliated with the Movement de Liberation des Femmes.²⁹

Although many young Haitian women and men found community in diasporic communist organizations, Marxism alone, even in its multiple iterations, could not speak to Haitian women's experiences.³⁰ In particular these movements only had a handful of black participants and even fewer Haitians. While the anti-colonial and anti-capitalist movements had a strong association with black power discourse of oppression, they had little discourse of racism and systemic racial injustice. It was not long before Marjorie began to connect her communist and feminist sentiments with the conditions of her nation

²⁸ Most students in Montreal advanced from high school, to CEGEP, and then to university.

²⁹ Marjorie Villefranche, Interviewed by author, May 2010, Montreal, Canada.

³⁰ Carol Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx*, 3. Angela Davis. Living in Montreal brought the understanding of being persecuted under the arm of the red scare and communist threat. The Haitian community found refuge in communist party and organizations. However, in their respective readings they associated communist organizing with anti-capitalist and thus anti-U.S. organizing. The United States was home to capitalist and imperial aggression and anti-black racism. The experience and systemic practice of racial discrimination took on new meaning by the end of the 1960s.

THE BLACK RENAISSANCE & ANTI-DUVALIERISM

As Marlène, Marjorie, and Alexandra developed into young adults, they were incubated by the cultural climate of the city's "Black Renaissance."³¹ In the 1960s black residents were disproportionately experiencing racial discrimination in housing, social policy, and education.³² This discrimination hit a boiling point in February 1969 when a group of black students at Prince George's University accused a white professor of grading discrimination. After a two-day standoff, in which students were barricaded in a campus computer lab, the "riot" ended with the arrest of ninety-seven students.³³

The incident, popularly named the "Prince George's Affair," gained international attention and galvanized the black community in Montreal. In particular several major conferences were organized to discuss race relations in the city.³⁴ Additionally, the National Black Congress was founded and began publication of their newspaper UHURU.³⁵ Each week, approximately 3,000 people subscribed to the black nationalist paper that offered its readership to African centered culture, folklore, proverbs, and international politics. With a fourth of the black population of the city, exposed to newspaper the respective black communities of Montreal established and maintained solidarity through print media and mass mobilization.³⁶

UHURU's coverage of the Price George's Affaire drew attention to local issues of racism and education. The newspaper also connected the local events with the

³¹ Sean Mills, *The Empire Within: Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Sixties Montreal*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 97.

³² Williams, *The Road to Now*, 39.

³³ Mills, 105.

³⁴ The Congress of Black Writers, See Mills, 100.

³⁵ Mills, 97. The international supporters and conference guests included, Walter Rodney, Stokely Carmichael, and C.L.R. James.

³⁶ Additionally, as I have discussed in other work, this newspaper was also the organ for distributed the black nationalist ideas about women's role in the black community and their place in the home, which involved a revolutionary motherhood in raising the girls and boys of the African nation.

international oppression of black people. In particular, UHURU took a public stand against François Duvalier and encouraged their audience to support the growing anti-Duvalier movement. The editors wrote, “We have the greatest respect for all Comrades that have fallen victim to Duvalier’s terrors. We are confident that their human sacrifice will not be in vain. The Revolutionary struggle will continue to confront the enemy on all levels. Our forward progress must not be affected by imperialist cooperation and intimidation.”³⁷ The editors of the newspaper had been watching the political climate in Haiti and they were invested in anti-Duvalier organizing, seeing it as a component of the larger black liberation movement.

By the mid-1960s, the anti-Duvalier movement in Montreal was gaining momentum. The steadily growing transmigrant community meant that those who opposed Duvalier always had new recruits. The leaders of the anti-Duvalier campaigns were students, professors, and young professionals. Many of the participants had fled Haiti with very real intentions of returning. Thus, the movement was invested in establishing strategies to overthrow the president. Anti-Duvalier student protests increased in 1969 as rumors spread that Duvalier was planning to change the constitution to make his son, 19 year-old Jean-Claude, his successor. For example, in July a group of students ceremonially burned the black and red “Papa Doc Flag.” As an enthusiastic audience watched the flag smolder into ash, members of the crowd “hoisted the Revolutionary Haitian Flag” into the air.³⁸ This nationalist demonstration was broken up

³⁷ Police Supports ‘Papa Doc.’” *UHURU: Black Community News Service*, vol 1, no 2, (Montreal: July 18, 1969), 3.

³⁸ “Police Supports ‘Papa Doc.’” *UHURU: Black Community News Service*, 3. The flag they burned was the same red and black flag that Yvonne Rimpel critiqued a decade before.

by Montreal police officers who arrested several demonstrators and put out warrants for information on the organizers.

The threats of arrest did not deter the organizers. In fact, the anti-Duvalier activists resolve became even stronger when on January 13, 1971, François Duvalier officially asked the Haitian Congress to amend the constitution so that his son could serve as president. By Jan 22 the amendment was made, stating that a president of Haiti no longer had to be 40 years old.³⁹

In response to Duvalier's constitutional change, the *Jeunes Juristes Haitian Abroad* in conjunction with other anti-Duvalier activists organized a two-day protest. At the gathering the protesters passed out flyers. One such flyer read,

We say no to constitutional monarchy in Haiti.
We say no to one more year of dictator in Haiti.
We will not let our mother country Haiti die.
We say not to the Duvalier Regime and it's Tonton Macoute's.

The anti-Duvalier movement further declared their mission,

We are going to give our lives to fight the enemies of our country, until they finally understand that the country belongs to the Haitian people, to the working mass, to the peasants, to Haitian families, to the students, to the students, and not to a small group of mercenaries to which the only goal is to make reign a perpetual panic through the veins of the people.⁴⁰

The militancy of the pamphlet suggested a strong army. They challenged the Duvalier government saying, "We ask that the enemy be strong because we are well organized." Their statements were not idle threats. Young people like Alexandra, Marjorie, Marlène and their peers who routinely invoked the legacy of the *Jeune Haiti* led the anti-Duvalier movement. They saw themselves as continuing the movement that their deceased

³⁹ Abbott, 163.

⁴⁰ Michel-Charles Ambroise Papers, Cote: P563, Bibliothèque et Archives Nationale de Québec (BANQ).

comrades began. They also attached the anti-Duvalier movement to the legacy of the founding fathers of Haiti. Similar to the generation of their parents and grandparents in the 1940s, the anti-Duvalier movement articulated a national pride that was informed by global oppression of poor, third-world, and colonized people.

The anti-Duvalier movement had a radical nationalist discourse yet there were profound oversights in their revolutionary platform. For example, the young people chanted about “a fight to the death,” but it was never clear if the group had the ability to organize a nationalist army. In his study of Haitians in Montreal, Herard Jadotte argues that members of the anti-Duvalier movement were largely elite and middle class young people who were fixated on removing Duvalier from the presidency and had “a fantasized apprehension of political struggle in Haiti.” According to Jadotte, anti-Duvalier activism was a feudal cause because Haitians in Montreal did not have a strong base in Haiti to actualize their plans and strategies.⁴¹

In addition to an unclear strategy for action in Haiti, the anti-Duvalier movement failed to merge any of the principles of gender equality and civil rights that women had fought for during the first half of the twentieth century. While the spirit of solidarity was ripe in their speeches, chants, and literature, in which the movement organizers claimed “liberation for the youth of Haiti” and for “the working mass, the peasants, Haitian families, and students.” Anti-Duvalier activists failed to acknowledge that the large majority of these nameless groups were women. Women who, thanks to the women’s movement, had the right to vote and hold their own wages, but were still unequally

⁴¹ Herard Jadotte, “Haiti Immigration to Quebec,” *Journal of Black Studies*, vol 7, no 4 (June 1977: 485-500), 487.

represented in government, community, and domestic politics. Nowhere was this more evident than in the anti-Duvalier organizing.

A group of women began to question gender relations within the movement. Marlène Joseph recalls that women would attempt to participate in the meetings and debates, but the men would frequently overlook their hands or speak over them when they attempted to contribute to the conversations. Several anti-Duvalierists remembered being treated as servants to the male leaders, who would designate women's role to food preparation and clerical work. These women came to describe their role as "coffee makers."⁴²

In 1970, a group of women, including Marlène Joseph, established the *Point de Ralliement*. These women had participated in the anti-Duvalier rallies and meetings, but were consistently disappointed by the way women were treated as an appendage to the larger movement. In some cases women were even openly degraded. Joseph remembered being in meetings where men were discussing the complex problems of the movement and women were blamed for the disorganization of the movement. The women who organized *Point de Ralliement* had lived in Montreal for half a decade and had developed into independent and socially astute young women. As Marie-Célie Agnant, a feminist activist and author, later explained her arrival in 1970,

...when I came here in Quebec I felt there was, it was a time when they were talking a lot about women's rights [...] And I came in this country at that time, when there is all this change happening. And I felt, in fact a feeling of freedom also. What I liked was the fact that I could discover the world.⁴³

⁴² Marlène Rateau, Interviewed by author, March 17, 2011, Montreal, Quebec. Also see Ghila B. Sroka, *Femmes Haïtiennes, Paroles de Nègresses*, (Montreal: Les Éditions de La Parole Métèque, 1995), 67-68.

⁴³ Interview- Marie-Célie Agnant. May 27, 2007. Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

The freedom and sense of global discovery was bursting beyond what seemed to be the gendered confines of the anti-Duvalier movement. Thus, as more women arrived in the early 1970s, they challenged women's role within the anti-Duvalier campaign. They suggested that the role women played in the movement foreshadowed a role of gender oppression in Haiti. Maud Pierre-Pierre, a feminist activist who moved to Montreal in 1968 and was a member of these early campaigns expressed these same ideological concerns at the time. She recalls,

in the 70s, in this community, everything was geared towards opposing Duvalier. And you couldn't talk about something else. Haiti is in trouble and we're talking about the women's problem as if it was important. But if you are going to do a revolution in Haiti and you're going to leave the women out of that revolution, it is not a successful one, you know.

Pierre's challenge to the anti-Duvalierist campaign and Agnant's "feeling of freedom" were influenced by the interconnected realities of a thriving women's movement in Montreal and an expectation of new conditions for women upon arrival in Canada. These women came to Quebec believing their gendered experiences in Canada would be different from those in Haiti. Their imagined migrant reality did not include gender oppression. This "mindwork"—the cognitive construction of migration—was complimented by a vibrant Canadian women's movement that fortified these women's unwillingness to compromise their position in the anti-Duvalierest campaigns.⁴⁴ "So," Pierre-Pierre concludes,

you become militant first because you have to confront your own community ... the Haitian community didn't understand that we could embark on a movement. When you say women have to be taken into account, they look at you and say,

⁴⁴ Pessar, Patricia R. and Sarah J. Mahler, "Transnational Migration," 817. Pessar discusses the role of the imagination and "mind work" as a component of women's experience in migration. She maintains that concepts of change constructed in the imagination (cognitive processes) are one reason for women's actions of resistance to repression in the host nation.

‘No, the fight is against Duvalier and then we’ll think about the women.’ We didn’t think that. The philosophy has to be both concurrently.⁴⁵

This idea of concurrent feminism and nationalism would be the preoccupation of the next decade. The women were not only drawing from the movements around them. They were slowly establishing their own organizational base. Similar to Haitian women earlier in the century, the women began organizing with reading groups. Many of these groups like Marlène’s “Exchange,” rarely grew larger than a dozen participants. But they read books by Simon Beauvoir and prose by Angela Davis. The consciousness that emerged created a surge in women’s organizing and the evolving movement.

HAITIAN DIASPORIC FEMINISM

By the late 1960s, the work of the women’s movement in Haiti was finally baring fruit, as more women were receiving secondary and college degrees, making them eligible for migration to Canada as “individual” candidates.⁴⁶ Although more women were coming from Haiti, much of the community still anticipated a rapid return to Haiti. The uncertain conditions of their exile meant that many women and men found themselves in an in between space. They were integrating into Quebec with their sights and thoughts on Haiti. Moreover, the asymmetry of their homes and the gendered experiences of migration within Montreal and the Haitian community incited new ideas about how they imagined Haiti and its cultural norms. Within this “constant balancing act” among their multiple identities and overlapping oppressions, Haitian women in Montreal began to ascribe to a diasporic citizenship. This citizenship was a feminist place in which women

⁴⁵ Maud Pierre-Pierre, Interview by author June 7, 2008, Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

⁴⁶ Qualification for migration was based on a 100 point system. Secondary and higher education were apart of the point system. Many people were denied entrance into Canada because they did not have these crucial points.

held permanent residency and the meaning of their national identity was redefined while maintaining a fundamental concern for women, particularly those of Haitian descent.

Point de Ralliement des Femmes Haïtiennes was born out of this space. The organization believed in “advancing the fight for the improvement of the women’s condition, most specifically, Haitian women.”⁴⁷ According to its members the road to improving the conditions for Haitian women was to confront the issues of gender oppression in their community. In particular, conveners of this organization rejected what they saw as a popular sentiment in the Haitian diasporic community in which men repeatedly blamed Haitian women for the unfavorable conditions of the nation and the culture of the society.⁴⁸ Similar to the political debates of the 1940s and 1950s, certain members of the political vanguard maintained misogynistic sentiments and accusations of inhumanity towards Haitian women. Yet, unlike the two decades before, members of the *Point de Ralliement* drew support from the feminist movements around them. One member explained, “We must say that this mobilization was made possible because 1970 was a year of global mobilization of women against their exploitation and all forms of prejudices that made and kept women as second class citizens.”⁴⁹ The organization found its initial support from women’s movements such as the *Liberation des Femmes Québec* and other regional movements, but they were primarily concerned with Haitian women within Haitian society. In Montreal, this meant a confrontation with men and women in their communities. In 1970, the organization gained many people’s sympathies, but this support was often given from afar. As Longuefossee explains that showing an open

⁴⁷ Raymonde Ravix, “Entrevues avec les regroupements de femmes de Montréal,” *Collectif Paroles: Revue culturelle et politique haïtienne*, no 28 (Montreal: March/April 1984), 6.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

concern for women and their ability to earn an equal wage or have ownership over their sexuality, was seen as divisive by many in the diasporic community.

In the first years of the organization, the women had no more than fifteen members. The lack of participation was troubling for many of the leaders, but they also attributed this slow attrition rate to the social threats and constraints imposed on women. In particular, they were concerned with the ways in which women's role in the labor market prevented them from active participation. That is, as they explained, Haitian women were over stretched with responsibilities of work and home. According to *Point de Ralliement*, many women worked outside of the home and when they returned, they were responsible for its operation with little support from their husbands. These women, the membership justified, were too tired to participate in political organizing. The constraint on women's time was one of the *Ralliement's* primary concerns. They attributed the hold on women's time to Haitian cultural norms that suggested said, "a good woman who is respected, stays at home."⁵⁰ As a result, women participated in politics, but particular Haitian feminist politics were considered, "frustrated women, single." The public condemnation alone was enough to keep many away. One member provided a litany of derogatory words and taunts, nuisances, troublemakers, women looking for husbands, "[sexually] frustrated, and bad fucks."⁵¹

Their activism was associated with their deviant or inefficient sexuality, thus compromising their claims to femininity, but also undercutting their claims to citizenship. These were the kinds of women that were the problem of society. They challenged the parameters of traditional female roles and comportment. These women's militancy

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Raymonde Ravix, "Entrevues avec les regroupements de femmes de Montréal," *Collectif Paroles: Revue culturelle et politique haïtienne*, no 28 (Montreal: March/April 1984), 8.

disturbed Haitian men in the anti-Duvalierist movement, but it also disturbed women. Confronting Haitian men on the role of women within the anti-Duvalierist movement was one issue that women had to contend with. However, they disagreed on what women's participation should look like.

Nationalists accused Haitian feminists of transporting a problem that was not Haitian and that did not have a place in politics when they returned to Haiti.⁵² Men and women both felt migrant women should be satisfied with the improvements in their condition.⁵³ "Feminism", as the women's actions were described, had no place in Haiti, and with an anticipated return there was no use in adopting these ideologies. On the other hand, women like Maud Pierre-Pierre and Mozart Longuefosse saw a necessity in improving the conditions of women in the Haitian Canadian community, never losing sight of Haiti, but recognizing their local, day-to-day reality as equally important. "At one point," Pierre-Pierre recalls, "we said, 'Okay listen, we are here to stay. Even if Duvalier falls tomorrow, not all of us are going to go back.' And low and behold that's what happened. And they were saying that we are only in transit we have to go, everybody has to go back to Haiti and blah blah blah. That's not what happened."⁵⁴

Pierre-Pierre was correct. That was not what happened. In 1971, the Haitian transnational community in Quebec received a serious blow. Francois Duvalier died as expected, but his son, unexpectedly assumed his position as "President for Life."⁵⁵ The end of repression in Haiti was nowhere in sight. Jean-Claude Duvalier was nineteen years

⁵² Fabienne Pierre-Jacques, Interviewed by author, May 30, 2007, Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

⁵³ Maud Pierre-Pierre, Interviewed by author, June 7, 2008, Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

⁵⁴ Pierre-Pierre. June 7, 2008. Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

⁵⁵ The anti-Duvalier movement was well organized, but when their greatest opportunity arrived, they were unable to act and take the nation into their own hands. Duvalier died on April 21, 1971, and was succeeded by his son.

old when his father died. His youth, combined with the support of the *Tonton Macoute* and a politically savvy mother, suggested to many Haitian migrants that Quebec would be “home” for a little longer.

The winter following Duvalier’s death was unusually cold. The “storm of the century” occurred in March 1971 and the city was under snow and extreme cold conditions through the next winter, yet in the aftermath of the Duvalier’s death the feminist critics of the anti-Duvalier movement blossomed into women’s organizations. In their organizing, the reality that the women were likely not going home began to settle in. They found healing in their work of organizing on behalf of women and for their families. They also found solace in writing and knowing that other people understood their displacement. In 1971, a book of essays and letters was published that would inspire a new generation of feminists. In Angela Davis’ book *If They Come In The Morning* one of the book’s interviews, conducted in 1970 from the Women’s House of Detention, Davis speaks to the issue of black women’s role in political movements. She explains,

Let me begin by saying this: no revolutionary should fail to understand the underlying significance of the dictum that success or failure of a revolution can almost always be gauged by the degree to which the status of women is altered in a radical, progressive direction. [...]Led by women, the fight for the liberation of women must be embraced by men as well. The battle for women’s liberation is especially critical with respect to the effort to build an effective Black liberation movement. For there is no question about the fact that as a group, Black women constitute the most oppressed sector of society.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Angela Y. Davis, *If They Come in the Morning: Voices of Resistance: Angela Davis, Ruchell Magee, the Soledad Brothers and Other Political Prisoners*, (San Francisco: The National United Committee To Free Angela Davis, Inc., 1971) (New York: Signet Books, 1971), 197.

Davis' analysis of race, class, and gender resonated with young Haitian women in Montreal. Moreover, as former prisoners within their countries and exiles in Canada, the women strongly identified with Davis' activism.⁵⁷

Not everyone was willing to be subjugated to the taunts directed towards members of the *Ralliement*, women within the anti-Duvalier movement were speaking up against the injustices that they saw in the movement, but also the preservation of Haitian culture. The concept of proper female identity was also associated with an appropriation of foreign ideals and culture. Women within and outside of the anti-Duvalier movement feared that their children would lose their cultural identity. Although the length of their stays in Haiti varied, most Haitians sought to maintain some cultural connection to home.

The desire to maintain ties to home grew as the Haitian community began to swell in the 1970s. The Multiculturalism Act of 1971 and the Canadian Immigration Act of 1972 encouraged this migration. The Multiculturalism Act promoted ethnic diversity in the nation, while the Immigration Act of 1972 relaxed restrictions on "invited immigrants" to include parents and siblings. These Acts, along with Jean-Claude Duvalier's presidency, resulted in a 28 percent increase in Haitian immigrants to Montreal between 1971 and 1973.⁵⁸ With the Haitian population growing in Montreal, definition and negotiation of migrant identities became increasingly important. When they were not organizing against Duvalier, Haitians in Montreal were faced with the day-to-day reality of living as ethnic and racial minorities in a nation that only a decade earlier prohibited their immigration. What did it mean to be Haitian in Montreal (and

⁵⁷ Marjorie Villefranche, Interviewed by author, May 10, 2010, Montreal, Quebec; Marlène Joseph, Interviewed by author March 2011, Montreal, Quebec; Alexandra Philoctète, Interviewed by author, March 2011, Montreal, Quebec.

⁵⁸ Calculations from Table 1 "Destinations of Haitian Immigrants (country of citizenship) to Quebec," *Ministère de l'immigration de Québec. Direction de la Recherche. Montreal, 1975*. In Jadotte, "Haitian Immigration to Quebec, 490.

potentially a resident for a significant amount of time), while also maintaining ties to Haiti?

In 1972, one member of the community sought to answer this question through the establishment of the *Maison d'Haiti* (Haiti's Home) and *Bureau de la Communauté Chrétienne des Haïtiens de Montréal*. BCCHM was founded in November and immediately drew members of the nascent Haitian community. The center was primarily concerned with providing a community base for discussing integration into Quebecois society, as well as providing a spiritual familiarity for Christian families. *Maison d'Haiti* had a similar objective of providing an enclave for the community, as well as a location where families could continue to cultivate and indoctrinate their children in Haitian cultural practices, such as carnival, and folklore. Both organizations situated themselves as a base for political organizing and attending to the legislative concerns of the community.

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By 1971, Marjorie Villefranche finished CEGEP, married, and had her first child. Through co-workers at her husband's job as a philosophy professor, Villefranche became acquainted with Max and Adeline Chancy. The Chancy's were exiled in 1965 for their socialist political organizing and Max Chancy's assistance as a teacher to the youth movements of the period. When they arrived in Montreal, they immediately became integrated into anti-Duvalier organizing, while participating in other organizations and serving as a founding members of *Maison d'Haiti*. Chancy invited Marjorie to many of the events and she became involved immediately. As a new mother, Marjorie was searching for a place to take her daughter that would teach Haitian culture. One of the first things that Marjorie oversaw was the youth programming, which included cultural events for the children such as puppet shows and live readings of traditional Haitian stories such as

Bouki and Malis. The teenagers were less interested in the adventures of Bouki, so the women started a group for the young adults called “*Nou gen paye tou*” (We also have a country), which provided a space for teenagers to learn about Haitian culture and history, while also being able to discuss their experiences in the Quebecoise school system.⁵⁹

Although the community centers themselves did not have a feminist platform, they provided a space for women to meet one another and share their experiences of migration and parenting. It also established a network for housing and employment, as well as language assistance for those who did not speak French or English. These informal interactions gradually turned into friendships and organized meetings that evolved into women’s organizations. In 1973, women who frequented *Maison d’Haiti* and worked with women and youth at the center formed RAFA (*Rasanbleman Fanm Ayisyèn*). Similar to *Point de Ralliement*, RAFA grew out of concern for women in Haiti. Varying from *Point de Ralliement*, however, RAFA was also openly anti-Duvalier and worked closely with the male leadership of that movement. The women maintained that an engagement with “la gauche” and feminist concepts and practices were the best tools against the Duvalier regime.

The women had three major objectives. First, they were concerned with tending to the needs of the Haitian community in Montreal, addressing the needs of single mothers, recent immigrants, victims of domestic and sexual violence, as well as life as black women in North America.⁶⁰ This group of teachers, health professionals, and factory workers met once a week to discuss the books they read like Simon de Beauvoir

⁵⁹ Villefranche, Interviewed by author, May 2010, Montreal, Canada.

⁶⁰ Raymonde Ravix, “Entrevues avec les regroupements de femmes de Montréal,” *Collectif Paroles: Revue culturelle et politique haïtienne*, no 28 (Montreal: March/April 1984), 10.

and Angela Davis, and to discuss “What does it meant to be a woman?”⁶¹ They interrogated the social and cultural gender constructs within Haiti, Quebec and the world. Second, they were concerned with establishing a democratic nation in Haiti. They were particularly concerned with how they would merge their Communist and feminist ideologies with their position against the Duvalier regime and their solidarity with other activist organizations. This led them to their final objective and organizational strategy of inserting themselves into as many organizations as possible in order to bring their platform against Duvalier to the international stage. More specifically, they were interested in aligning themselves with organizations that they found had social and cultural experiences in their countries and in the global perception of them. One interviewee explained, “We think that there is a solidarity to develop with other groups of women in Québec and elsewhere in the world where our viewpoint coincide. We participated in several events of the Congress of Black Women of Canada. We are interested in the movements of national liberation of the people close to us, in Central America, for example, and in the contribution of these women to those fights.”⁶²

These objectives constituted the women’s meaning of Haitian feminism. When asked by an interview if the organization was “feminist” one member responded, “We define ourselves as a group of women who are interested in the questions regarding women [...] It is not our concern to attach ourselves to one feminism or another. We believe there is work to do with Haitian women and we do it. We do not prevent collaboration with other groups of women belonging to different feminist types. But when

⁶¹ Villefranche, Interviewed by author, May 2010, Montreal, Canada.

⁶² Raymonde Ravix, “Entrevues avec les regroupements de femmes de Montréal,” *Collectif Paroles: Revue culturelle et politique haïtienne*, no 28 (Montreal: March/April 1984), 10

we you refer to a world for women, this is not the characterization that we agree with since we are involved in a part of the community that by definition is mixed.”⁶³

Similar to women throughout the Caribbean, Latin America and U.S. black feminist theorists of the same time, Haitian women challenged the idea of a universal feminism or meaning of woman. The diversity among Haitian women alone made it difficult to situate an organizational practice that would be inclusive of all Haitian women’s experience. For this reason, members of RAFA refused to submit to the suggestion that all women are confronting the same issues and that those issues could be address through a static understanding of woman.

Yet members of RAFA and *Point de Ralliement* sought collective organizing with other activist communities. In the case of *Point de Ralliement*, many of these groups were feminists in Quebec. In the case of RAFA, however, the groups included feminist, communist, and anti-colonial organizations. In 1972, 1973, 1977 members of both organizations attended meetings for the Canadian Congress of Black Women. After weeks of participating in these meetings, RAFA members insured that their concerns about the women in Haiti were considered as a concern for the larger black women’s diasporic community. Members of *Point de Ralliement* also attended this Congress.⁶⁴ At the 1972 Congress, RAFA member Adeleine Chancy presented her research during the “Education Workshop,” where her topic was “Education in the Haitian Family.” At the 1974 Congress, one of the aims of the Congress was to “reinforce relations between French and English speaking Black women.” Additionally at the 1977 Congress, RAFA

⁶³ Ravix, *Collectif Paroles*, 11.

⁶⁴ Rosemay Eustache and Josette Pierre Louis both served on the workshop committee “Economics in the Black Family.”

member Adeline Chancy spoke as a panelist on the “Consciousness Raising—The Multicultural Black.”⁶⁵

In her statements she resolved that,

The Fourth National Congress of Black Women expresses solidarity with the struggles of people of Namibia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa for their liberation against colonialism and apartheid, and demands that the Canadian government stops any form of aid to the racist government of Ian Smith L. Vorster.

The Congress supports the struggle of Haitian people for democracy and demands that the democratic rights of political prisoners be respected, namely those of Laurette Badette and Denise Prophete, imprisoned since 1971 and 1973 without judgment and who have had absolutely no contact with their families or even a lawyer and that the Canadian government takes a stand against the isolations [violations] of human rights in Haiti.⁶⁶

The call for solidarity on the part of Haitian and Black women in Canada was well intentioned, but as the “Resolutions” report of the 1976 Congress revealed, “This workshop is very concerned about the lack of action following the five resolutions coming out of the Second Congress, especially regarding the Haitian problems and the Day Care question. BE IT RESOLVED that some follow-up action be taken by the National body following the Congress.”⁶⁷ Moreover, as one editorial in *Contrast*, a local black paper in Toronto, chagrined, “By the time the major social issues concerning Africa and Haiti came up on the agenda, little of the original enthusiasm remained. Only a small remnant of the several hundred participants denied themselves the comforts of home and the attractions of a bus tour to undergo yet another discussion period.”⁶⁸

Similar to their support from Anglo-Afro-Canadians in the late 1960s, the 1970s proved that it was difficult to maintain collaborations across linguistic lines. However, it

⁶⁵ “2nd Annual Congress of Black Women, Program,” RG 17, vol 23, LAC

⁶⁶ “Notes from Congress of Black Women’s,” RG 17, vol 23, LAC

⁶⁷ The Congress of Black Women: Resolutions Presented To Plenary Session, 3.

⁶⁸ “Fourth National Congress of Black Women,” *CONTRAST*, Thursday, August 25, 1977. *Contrast* was also not allowed to come into the 1973 Congress and wrote strongly about their concerns that the Black Congress was not truly concerned with the black community if the leading black press were not given clearance, but the *Toronto Star* and news networks the CBC and City TV were permitted access.

was also difficult to maintain collaborations within the Haitian community. Like *Point des Ralliement*, RAFA struggled with recruitment. The women developed a membership base of between twenty and thirty members. They struggled to gain more participation because there was still a strong belief in the community that there were *tonton makouts* in Canada and that speaking out against Duvalier in Canada could have grave consequences for family and friends in Haiti. Moreover, for some Haitians who sympathized with the organization, they were deterred from participation because of a fear that the anti-communist cohorts that still held power in the province would use their participation in the political organization as a way to question their residency and citizenship in the nation. These concerns were not simply an imagined paranoia. The relationship between the Haitian immigrant community and the Canadian government was consistently in flux.

“OPERATION 1500”—HAITIAN DEPORTATION

In 1965, the immigration flow from the Caribbean seemed worthy of considering opening an immigration office in the region. Two years later, an office was opened in Kinston, Jamaica, where Haitians were allowed to go to make immigration requests, or from which officers would circulate throughout the Caribbean. Between 1967 and 1973 the number of requests from Haiti increased, but the numbers remained low because most immigrants to Canada applied for permanent residence from within the country of Canada. In November 1972, the law that allowed Haitians to apply for residence within

the country was revoked and, in 1973, an immigration office was opened in Port-au-Prince.⁶⁹ That year, 2178 Haitians were residents “landed” in Canada.

The increase in applications for migration was in large part the result of the increase in violence, arrests and disappearances in the first years of the Jean-Claude Duvalier presidency. After his father’s death, Jean-Claude used even more excessive force to assault his enemies and illustrate his leadership in the face of many who questioned his capabilities to govern as a young man. Women and men in fear of violent political attack made their way to Canada where they met family and friends and could apply for citizenship. When these policies were amended, the Canadian government took it upon themselves to seek out all of those who were residing in the country on extended tourist visas. The government estimated some 1,500 Haitians residing in the country without the proper documentation. In order to identify these individuals, immigration services went on an aggressive campaign making arbitrary arrests, intimidation of family and friends, and detention stays. These tactics held a resemblance to the abuses of executive power that many Haitian immigrants experienced in their country. The deportation campaign drew Haitian’s and Canadian’s attention. From mid-1974 through 1975, the minister of immigration, Robert Andras, was bombarded with letters from throughout the country from citizens who denounced the deportation campaign. As one protester wrote, “Please listen to all of us who demand that our government not become an ‘accessory to murder’.”⁷⁰

The BCCHM started “Operation 1500” where they conducted a massive public relations campaign to inform the nation about the conditions in Haiti as well as the

⁶⁹ Letter from R.A. Button, Departmental Assistant to Robert Andras, Minister of Immigration, RG76, February 20, 1975, LAC.

⁷⁰ Letter from Paula Fletcher to Minister Robert Andras, December 12, 1974. RG76 vol 733, LAC.

dangers of sending people who virtually escaped back to the government. Their arguments sadly gained merit when it was reported that the first ninety to one-hundred Haitians who were sent back to Haiti under the first months of the deportation plan were either imprisoned, disappeared, or killed.

The deportation campaign proved that successful integration into movements and into the workforce through public education about Haiti and Haitian culture could transform national and international policy. Women who were organized through *Maison d'Haiti* took this as evidence that the same message could be exported throughout the country and that the world would respond to the conditions of Haiti and women under the Duvalier regime. The goal became to integrate themselves into as many organizations as possible.

IMPRISONMENT AND TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZING

The benefit of the women inserting themselves in multiple organizations gained more significance after 1971. Since the 1960s young people like the *Jeune Haiti*, and other groups of communist organizers such as the UPEH were fighting the anti-Duvalier battle at home. A far more dangerous form of nationalist organizing, many of these young people and their families were systematically arrested. Many of these arrests took place in the early 1970s and young people remained in prison for years. Of the young people arrested, a large percentage of the prisoners were young women. RAFA and a sister organization developed during this time called, *Famn Vayan*, saw the proper treatment and release of these prisoners as their feminist project.

The women were strongly impacted by the young women in prison. In this context, RAFA sought alliances with Afro-Caribbean women in Canada and attended

meetings and protests with these women. However, they received most of their international recognition when they traveled to Latin America. The Pan-Caribbean alliances and intra-Caribbean organizing put pressure on the Jean-Claude Duvalier government.

RAFA's international and local affiliations continued to indicate a strong appreciation for communism. Thus the women spent a great deal of time developing a platform and agenda that they took around the world to communist countries and those with communist sympathizers. "We thought that blocking all the relations they [the Duvalier regime] could have around the world would be a solution. So this is what we were looking for, having solidarity with other countries."⁷¹ Their first international trip was to East Berlin in 1975 for the *Raccont international des femmes*. They used international conferences and summits to give Haitian women a global audience. In October 1975 RAFA and another feminist organization that emerged in Montreal named, Carrefour International, arranged for former female prisoners to testify to the World Congress for the International Year of the Woman held in Berlin. At the congress, Anita Blanchard bravely told her story of home invasion, family persecution, and imprisonment.

Dear comrades, dear friends,

I am a Haitian woman, a peasant, who endured the prison of the Duvaliers and who speaks before you to ask for your solidarity with the women who are still rotting in the prisons of Haiti; solidarity with the female and male citizens of Haiti who continue to rot in the hell of the dungeons of Fort Dimanche, of the National Penitentiary, of the barracks of Dessalines; in the hell of Haiti where we continue to live in fear, insecurity, and without any rights.

Blanchard went on to explain that she was arrested by the *toton makout* in 1969, after they came to her village looking for her brother. She testified, "They accused him of being a communist. They arrested him as well as me and mother. They arrested arrested

⁷¹ Marjorie Villefranche Interviewed by author, Montreal, Canada.

everyone that they found at the house.” As she tried to describe the conditions and torture that she experienced she conceded that “I cannot find the words to help you understand the torture. There are no words strong enough to translate the suffering and the humiliation that these savage tortures force you to experience.”⁷² Despite the insufficiency of a vocabulary to express the trauma she, her family, and the other prisoners experienced, Blanchard provided vivid detail about her five years in prison, during which she was never brought to trial or formally accused of any crime.

She demanded that the Berlin audience speak out against the Duvalier administration and the tortures. As she left she reminded her audience that there were still women and men still suffering behind prison walls, like Laurette Badette and Marc Romulus. Two years later RAFA and Carrefour International attended the Regional Seminar of the International Democratic Federation of Women in Panama. There prisoner Marc Romulus’ wife, Lisette Romulus spoke to the conference. She proclaimed, “You have before you a victim of the violation of human rights in Haiti. My husband, a Haitian geologist, after finishing his studies in Canada, returned to Haiti in 1972 to use his knowledge in the service of his country.” She explained that within a year of returning to the country her husband was arrested. Romulus was among the many returnees and deportees from Canada who received similar tragic fates. As she recounted the fear and uncertainty that she and her son felt for her Marc she made her plea to the audience as a wife and mother,

I express the anguish of thousands of wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters who have members of their family in prison. Numbered among them are peasants and workers who do not have any way to tell the world about their horrid situation. Their families are in extreme distress. Their children are malnourished, suffering from

⁷² Femmes Haïtiennes, “Anita Blanchard (Anna Napoléon) Intervention au Congrès mondial pour l’Année internationale de la femme, Berlin,” 57.

tuberculosis, and cannot go to school. There are women and girls who also know the horrors of prison.⁷³

Nine months after Lisette testified in Panama her husband and Laurette Badette were released from prison. Two years after her release from prison Badette spoke at a conference organized by RAFA to commemorate the International Day of Women. In her brief remarks confirmed the success of the Haitian women's diasporic application of feminism.

I want to take this occasion to warmly thank all of the patriots who demonstrated their solidarity with political prisoners. It's thanks to their work that I regained my liberty. I am profoundly moved on this international day of women, observed by thousands of women around the world. I thank women from all over the world and particularly the women of my country on this day. I wish them courage because it takes a lot of Haitian women to fight for profound changes in our country. We must have a lot of courage in order to make Haiti a country where we can live in peace and freedom and where we can assure good quality of life for our children. [...]

While grateful for the support for her and her children she explained, "But I am eager to add that many children who are living in horrific misery in Haiti, as orphans of the father or the mother, sometimes both, who were adversaries of the regime, who were patriots, democrats, and communists. This movement of solidarity that protested on behalf of my family must extend itself to the children of the martyrs who sacrificed their lives for their country.

[...] I speak of the situation of these child victims of repression on this day of international solidarity of women because there cannot be happiness for women without happiness for her children. The fight that women lead for democratic change does not make sense if it does not target the improvement of the condition of all children.⁷⁴

RAFA recorded and published this testimony and other testimonies of female prisoners in a book *Haitian Women* published by *Maison d'Haiti*. The public dissemination of Haitian women's stories of repression, was also a testament to collective transnational activism. In particular, women of the diaspora successfully managed to manifest change in Haiti. Although many accused the diasporic anti-Duvalier movement in Montreal of being more dialogue than direction action, Haitian women's feminist practice proved otherwise.

⁷³ Femmes Haïtiennes, "Lisette Romulus, Séminaire régional de la Fédération démocratique internationale des femmes (FDIF), Panama, January 1977," 58.

⁷⁴ Femmes Haïtiennes, 61.

Through international alliances and public pressure RAFA and other women's organizations drew attention to the condition of women and men in Haiti.

Out of the campaigns to free Haitian women from prison, RAFA and other women's organizations including *Point de Ralliement*, took Badette's charge seriously.⁷⁵ Not only were they concerned with the condition of children orphaned after their parents were killed in Haitian prisons. They were also concerned with their own children who were growing up in a foreign land.

DIASPORIC FEMINIST *LAKOU*

Anti-Duvalierist campaigns continued throughout the 1970s and 1980s, yet after 1971 more activists began to examine the condition of Haitians in Montreal and consider what it meant to live between two nations. Additionally, Jean-Claude Duvalier's succession to the Haitian presidency propelled further Haitian migration to Canada. In 1973, for example, 92.9 percent of the 2,252 Haitian migrants in Quebec, the primary host province of Haitians in Canada, settled in Montreal, compared to 640 in 1970.⁷⁶

For some activists like Pierre-Pierre and Mozart Longuefosse, increased repression in Haiti and Haitian migration to Montreal meant turning inward to focus on the issues of the Haitian-Quebecois community. The polarization caused by the anti-Duvalierist campaigns left certain women disillusioned about Haitian transnational organizing and Haiti's future. While keeping their sights on Haiti, these women turned inward toward Montreal and developed activist relationships that addressed their multiple identities: Caribbean, migrant, woman and Black.

⁷⁵ They later made their way to women's conferences in Moscow (1978 & 1979) and Cuba (1978).

⁷⁶ "Destinations of Haitian Immigrants (country of citizenship) to Quebec," *Ministère de l'immigration de Québec. Direction de la Recherche. Montreal, 1975*. In Jadotte, 490

In response to Laurette Badette's charge to Haitian women activists, many women in Montreal turned toward creating safe and culturally relevant spaces for their children, families, and communities. Not all activists had experienced imprisonment of the 1970s, but most had been stripped from their homes, livelihood, and nation to escape imprisonment or safety after members of their family were imprisoned. Moreover, in exile these women experienced isolation from the familiar aspects of Haitian culture. This isolation created a profound desire to recreate and preserve the understanding of Haitian national identity. At the same time they used their multiple experiences of migration, activism and developments in personal subjectivity to conceptualize new visions of the nation. In bringing this vision to fruition these women established a diasporic feminist consciousness that was centered in recreating home. In this way the women developed a Haitian feminist practiced drawn from cultural familiarity and legacy. In the *lakou*, the community space, the space of safety, women developed the courage to fight for women's rights and for the rights of their children through a reciprocal exchange of political philosophies and methods of activist engagement.

As author and activist Marie-Célie explained about her experiences in international organizing,

For me being a feminist is being vigilant about the way I am raising my kids, about uh, the poverty women are, taking a stand for the poverty women are experiencing in our country. But I don't think that for the white women here it is the same challenge that she has to experience. For them, feminism is the right for abortion, the right for having the pill, but we don't even, we cannot even, we cannot even keep alive the kids that we are having⁷⁷

Haitian women in the respective feminist organizations shared Agnant's sentiments.

⁷⁷ Marie-Célie Agnant, Interview with author, Montreal, Canada.

The women were not only concerned that their children would be negatively impacted by the racial and cultural prejudice in Montreal, but that they themselves having arrived in Montreal as children and young adults would forget aspects of their culture. Marjorie Villefranche realized that the puppet shows and storytelling for her children “was like discovering my culture all over again.” She further explained, “I always had the feeling that something, you know that I didn’t finish something in my country. So being at *Maison d’Haiti* and being in the community was like finishing something.” The feeling of restoration that working with women at *Maison d’Haiti* provided was a sentiment that several feminist activists expressed. In particular, through song, dance, sharing jokes, and speaking Krèyol Haitian women built a *diasporic lakou*. On Sundays the women would carpool to the center with their vacuums and cleaning materials and prepare the space for the coming week. During this time they exchanged ideas about work, politics and parenting, as they literally created safe space for their community expression and feminist identities. As Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain asserted in her analysis of the *lakou* a decade before, “The *lakou* is a social community more than it is a physical space.”⁷⁸ Moreover, in this community the reciprocity of the space was central to their ideas of personal sovereignty and self-actualization. Marjorie explains, “I was useful for *Maison d’Haiti*, but *Maison d’Haiti* was really useful for me too.”⁷⁹

The establishment of this *lakou* was, as had been the tradition throughout the twentieth century, multigenerational. Feminism then was not just about keeping their children alive, but ensuring that they thrived and were fully immersed in the diasporic community. This immersion sometimes produced interesting outcomes. Villefranche

⁷⁸ Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain, unpublished manuscript notes regarding research on marriage and family, p .152, Suzanne Comhaire-Sylvain Papers, Stanford University Archives.

⁷⁹ Marjorie Villefranche, interviewed by author, Montreal, Canada.

explains that they she and the women of RAFA who by the 1980s renamed themselves Nègès Vayan, met so frequently that her children began to “play meeting” rather than “play house” or other childhood reenactments of the lives around them. She recalled that her daughters would find paper and begin, “So what is the order of the day?”

Certainly, there were different targets and strategies of activism within the black community in Montreal. However, looking at the points of intersection rather than points of divergence offer an alternative view of Caribbean activism. At these points of intersection there were women and men creating meaning and coalition around a shared African descended identity. This identity did not erase the unique experience of migration and relationship to their home country to which Haitians and West Indians were both familiar. Instead it allowed space for Afro-Caribbean women and men to negotiate and become politicized around all parts of their identity.

CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION—*NOU PA BLIYE*

On April 3, 2011, *Maison d’Haiti* held a celebration for National Haitian Women’s Day.¹ The large crowd of women and a small number of men, gathered at a café in North Montreal.² The gathering was a commemoration of the life of political activist Jean Dominique, who was assassinated on Haitian Women’s day 11 years earlier. To add to the event’s significance, it was the second major community gathering since Jean Claude Duvalier’s return to Haiti three months before. A table at the café’s entrance revealed the multiple interests that animated the assembled women: brochures about Haitian artists and upcoming concerts were displayed amidst information for social services and programming for women; copies of *The Agronomist* (the 2003 documentary about Jean Dominique); and contact sheets for those who wanted to testify to their experiences under the Jean Claude Duvalier regime in order to build a human rights violation case against the former president.³ Next to the petitions were copies of the bulletin “Political Prisoners in Haiti” produced by *Maison d’Haiti* and RAFA in the 1970s, the cover art a collage of photographs including portraits of former political prisoners Laurette Badette, Anita Blanchard, and Elizabeth Philibert.⁴

¹ I was a member of the planning committee for this event. As a result, I took photos, prepared slide shows, and recorded most of the celebration. The narration of the day come from my notes and recordings of the event.

² The celebration was “overseen” by the Arawak queen Anacaona who ruled the island before colonization. Edwidge Danticat, “We Are Ugly, But We Are Here,” *The Caribbean Writer*, vol 10 (1996).

³ Demme, Jonathan, *The Agronomist*, Clinica Estetico, 2003.

⁴ *Femmes Haïtiennes*, Montreal: Maison d’Haïti, July 1980.

As the ceremony began, the audience celebrated Haitian women and their history of activism through dance, song, historical recitation, and food. Among the celebrants were women from the community including current and former members of organizations such as *Point de Ralliement*, RAFA, the Haitian communist party, *Maison d’Haiti*, and the *Bureau de la Communauté Chrétienne des Haïtiens de Montréal*. These representatives of contemporary and past diasporic communities in Montreal gathered to celebrate and to remember. J. Jan Dominique, Jean Dominique’s daughter and author of *Memoir of an Amnesiac*, presented prose in remembrance of her father and led the audience in a commemoration of the lives of deceased feminist activists. In particular, candles were lit for leaders of the movement who died in the January 12, 2010 earthquake, 15 months earlier. As family members and feminist activists who travelled from Haiti to Canada to participate in the Women’s Day celebration lit candles placed atop tables draped in African printed cloth and garnished by roses and a bowl of water, the audience called out their names.⁵ Ann Marie Corialan. Myriam Myrlet. Mireille Anglade. Magalie Marcelin. With the candles flickering in the dimly lit room, those gathered then called out the names of the feminist activists who had their transition within the prior twelve months. Marie-Anse. Paulette Pojou Oriol.

The table of candles stood to the left of the main stage where two chairs sat. The mistress of ceremony, Maguy Metellus, hostess of the Haitian radio program “From One Island to Another,” announced it was time for testimony, a period called “Nou Pa Bliye” (We Have Not Forgotten). Two women emerged from the crowded room and sat on the stage. As the older woman started her testimony, she announced she was Elizabeth

⁵ In African ritual practices the symbolic presence of the elements of the earth is necessary for libation and to establish a sacred space. See, *Mama Lola: Haitian Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*; Colin Dayan, *Haiti, History & the Gods*

“Bella” Philibert, a former political prisoner who was arrested in the late 1960s along with Laurette, Anita and others. She recounted a story that many in the room knew, but that few had likely heard from her mouth. Bella was imprisoned by François Duvalier’s *Tonton Makout* in 1969 for her communist youth organizing against the president. When she was arrested she was five and a half months pregnant. Throughout her pregnancy, she remained a prisoner in a small cell that she shared with half a dozen other female inmates. She was not given special attention. She was beaten and tortured like everyone else with no consideration of her unborn child. As she slowly deteriorated, she willed her first child to life and eventually gave birth to a daughter. For two years, Bella reared her daughter on the morsels of food thrown to her and her daughter in their cell in the National Penitentiary. Without pre- or post-natal care, Bella depended on the sympathy, courage, and support of her fellow prisoners to protect her and her daughter. Despite the horrific conditions of their first years as mother and child, Bella and her daughter were not alone, as Bella wrote in a statement given in the 1970s, “my daughter was not the only child in the political prison.” There were so many children in the prison she explained, “it was like a kindergarten.”⁶ After two years, Bella’s daughter was allowed to leave the prison and placed in the care of her grandmother. Bella and 12 other prisoners were released in 1974, and were immediately flown to exile in Mexico. In exile, Bella was eventually reunited with her daughter who was elementary school age by then. When she arrived in Montreal in the 1980s she came with her daughter to rebuild their relationship. As Bella concluded her testimony, she reached out to hold the hand of the woman in the

⁶ *Femmes Haïtiennes*, “Elizabeth Philibert, XIe Festival mondial de la jeunesse et des étudiants La Havane, July 1978,” 59.

seat next to her. The daughter born in a “prison of death” was her forty-year old companion on stage.

As the gravity of the public testimony and visible reunion set in for the audience, spiritual leader and feminist activist Monique Dauphin guided Bella and her daughter to the center of the room. The crowd slowly began to stand as she invoked the healing spirit of the ancestors to surround Bella. One by one, the women in the room drew closer to Bella and engulfed her in hugs, encouraging words, and low hums. The embrace grew as celebrants continued to gather in the middle of the room with spontaneous outbursts of tears, screams, and singing. The public healing and cleansing was a collective release. For the past three generations women, particularly those who spoke up on behalf of their sisters in the nation, had been under attack. In the months before this celebration the wounds that, for some, were slowly healing were reopened with the death of friends and family in the 2010 earthquake and further injured by the reemergence of the man who tormented Bella and the nation for years.

Yet in this carefully crafted celebration, Haitian feminists redefined the boundaries of their physical space and the emotional moment, as they had over the previous century. Coffee tables became alters, mugs became reservoirs for liquid offerings, and the center of the café became healing—holy—ground. The emotions of grief, sorrow, and anger from the sting of oppression, violence, and exile that were palpable during Bella’s storytelling were transformed to establish safety, familiarity, support, and home. On that evening in 2011, Myriam Chancy might argue that these Haitian women were “searching for safe space”—“the space in which Afro-Caribbean women in exile reside, that space in which the balances struck are, in fact, a question of life or death in the most complex of forms.” Watching and then joining the mass that

swarmed Bella's exasperated body, the room witnessed a tangible example of what Chancy calls the "spirituality of exiles."⁷ In this space of spirituality there is a politicized consciousness that manifests "in the form of a centering in the self, in the Black female body recovered through women's language, relationships to one another, and through women's writing and words."⁸ As the story of Haitian women's activism told in the *La Voix des Femmes* shows, this search for safe space was not only the preoccupation of exiles. The delicate balance between "life and death" was an articulated concern even when Haitian women were organizing within the nation. Haitian women historically established safe space by reimagining the parameters of their immediate reality.

In the years following the early 1980s, Haitian women continued to organize in Haiti and throughout the diaspora to express their discontent with the Duvalier regime. On April 3, 1986, over 30,000 women held a public protest in the streets of Port-au-Prince against Jean Claude Duvalier and his administration. This protest, as many have documented, was a revolutionary moment in the Haitian women's movement and a tipping point for the rapidly failing government.⁹ Three months after this public march, Duvalier retreated from the country into exile. The date of the march was immediately commemorated as National Haitian Women's Day. In the aftermath of Duvalier's departure, many key actors in the Montreal women's movement returned to Haiti, including Adeline Chancy, Myriam Myrlet, Fabienne Jacques, and Monique Dauphin. Each of these women and many more participated in the formulation of several dozen women's rights and feminist organizations throughout Haiti as well as the establishment

⁷ Chancy, 5.

⁸ Chancy, 5.

⁹ Carolle Charles, "Gender and Politics in Contemporary Haiti," 153. Also see Suzy Castor

of the Haitian Women's Ministry in 1991 under the administration of Jean-Bertrand Aristide—Haiti's first democratically elected president.¹⁰

In Montreal, women in the diaspora continued to organize. Alexandra Philotete joined and became a leading member of the *Point de Ralliement* in the early 1980s. Marlène Joseph became the president of *Point de Ralliement* and started her own radio show about Haitian women and culture. Marjorie Villefranche became the director of *Maison d'Haiti* and made it a Haitian community organization with an explicit feminist orientation. And Ghislaine Charlier regularly participated in community events and became a well-known author and critic in Montreal.

By the turn of the twenty-first century, these women, in keeping with the legacy of their foremothers, established, transformed, and redefined Haitian feminism and woman-centered political practice for Haiti and the diaspora by attending to their most human needs as mothers, travelers, and patriots. As *La Voix des Femme* has shown, the belief that women had matrilineal and feminist responsibilities to shepherd the home and by extension the homespace or *lakou* was at the center of these national and diasporic feminist practices. In Viergina's mother's insistence that her daughter testify to sexual assault by U.S. Marines, or in the organization that was inspired in defense of all of the country's Vierginies, women were at the center of theorizing social and political relationships of power in the country throughout the twentieth century. As this women-centered consciousness evolved through the mid-twentieth century and into the Duvalier regimes, this construction of women as pillars of the home space ("potomitan") was politicized by the national government and also by women who sought to redefine the meaning of home. Haitian women in the diaspora and in the nation became a collective

¹⁰ Carolle Charles, "Gender and Politics in Contemporary Haiti," 154-155.

“potomitan,” gathering their shared power and producing new kinship relationships and families that were woman-centered and focused on fostering equality in familial and community space.

Despite the destruction of the physical home space under the Duvalier regime and in spite of misogynistic, sexist, and patriarchal discourses and legislation throughout the twentieth century, women transformed these violations into an opportunity to challenge traditional domestic and cultural practice. This transition was most evident in the construction of the diasporic feminist *lakou* between Haiti and Montreal. We can also see it in the early construction of the LFAS following the U.S. occupation, as well as the more aggressive legislative and suffrage campaigns of the LFAS following the repeated government repression of the post-occupation presidents. In this way, Haitian feminism, as Carolle Charles explains, is similar to feminist movements in Latin America and the Caribbean, where women have politicized their traditional roles as mothers and wives.¹¹ Yet, we can see that Haitian women not only politicized their matriarchal roles, but actually transformed the meaning of mothering and family by privileging relationships and alliances that helped them to assert their social and cultural agendas and expand the meaning of “what it meant to be a woman” and to be Haitian.¹² Similar to black feminists activists elsewhere who were wrestling with the same ideas throughout the twentieth century, Haitian feminists did not seek to completely remove themselves from men, but rather to create a feminist discourse that established humanity for all Haitians. They

¹¹ Charles, 157.

¹² Villefranche, Interview.

sought to expand the margin of possibility for both men and women in order to benefit from the healthy growth of the family and the stability of the nation.¹³

Haitian women's defense of the home, the *lakou*, and the search for safe space that can protect and celebrate the multiple spectrums of Haitian womanhood remained a continuity of the woman-centered consciousness, feminism, and activist practice throughout the twentieth century. While there were certainly moments when class informed varying definitions of what this "defense" of the home looked like, the practice of Haitian feminism remained focused on the physical, mental, and communal health of women and men. That is, in the early twentieth century for example, elite and formally educated women saw their role as activist on behalf of their families as a platform to insert conservative understandings of Haitian sexuality and meanings of marriage. However, in the late twentieth century, defending the home meant completely reconsidering woman's agency over her own body and redefining domestic and cultural space in order to survive and protest national and diasporic oppression.

The nature of Haitian feminist practice and rhetoric throughout the twentieth century represented a political milieu that maintained relative continuity when most political ideologies, parties, or organizations suffered from internal strife, failed practice, and unsustainable doctrines. In the aftermath of the January 12, 2010 earthquake it is necessary to consider the ways in which we can learn from the dynamic past of community organizing, politics, and transnational family and feminist networks in order to move into the future. At the Haitian Women's Day ceremony in 2011, women from Haiti and the *dyaspora* exemplified the promise and the history of a century long

¹³ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*.

movement. As the women sang, cried, laughed, and lectured they demanded that we remember and articulate The Voice of Women.

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* Indicates a name change in order to maintain the anonymity of the interviewee.

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