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Articles

An introductory approach to study the relationship between protracted mobility and diaspora: the Haitian experience

Planteamiento introductorio para estudiar la relación entre movilidad prolongada y diáspora: la experiencia haitiana

Luis Alfredo Arriola Vega[a]* https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7571-3759

[a] El Colegio de la Frontera Sur, Unidad Campeche, Campeche, Mexico, e-mail: larriola@ecosur.mx

Abstract

The article sets forth the following thesis: there is a close connection between protracted mobility and the formation and ensuing growth of the Haitian diaspora. This relationship, one that has deep historical roots, intensified in the aftermath of the earthquake that devastated Haiti, in January 2010. The catastrophe triggered a massive exodus of its population in the Americas, an ongoing process up until the present. The empirical grounds to outline the ideas presented here come from interviews carried out in Tapachula, Chiapas. Findings contribute to sketch a framework to study further protracted mobility, including phases of immobility (that is, pauses, delays, waiting periods, etcetera), *vis-à-vis* a diasporic experience. Furthermore, results point to the need to explore the connection among onward migration, and the temporary and permanent destinations that make possible the Haitian diasporic experience in the Americas.

Keywords: protracted mobility, diaspora, Haitians.

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* Corresponding author:
Luis Alfredo Arriola Vega.
E-mail: larriola@ecosur.mx

Resumen

Este texto plantea la tesis de que existe una relación cercana entre un proceso de movilidad prolongada y la formación y crecimiento de una experiencia diaspórica haitiana. Este nexo tiene una larga historia, pero toma mayor relevancia a partir del éxodo causado por el terremoto que azotó Haití en enero de 2010, con una dispersión de su población que continúa actualmente a lo largo del continente americano. La base empírica para esbozar este planteamiento proviene de entrevistas realizadas con sujetos haitianos en Tapachula, Chiapas. Los resultados contribuyen a trazar un andamiaje que permita continuar estudiando la movilidad prolongada, incluidos sus momentos de inmovilidad (es decir, pausas, demoras, esperas, etcétera), *vis a vis* la experiencia diaspórica. Asimismo, se señala la necesidad de estudiar

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las articulaciones entre la reemigración y los lugares de destino temporales y permanentes que forman parte de la experiencia diaspórica haitiana en las Américas.

Palabras clave: movilidad prolongada, diáspora, haitianos.

Introduction

This work seeks to answer the following question: How does a protracted mobility approach contribute to analytically revealing (that is, offering clues or certainty) the current Haitian diasporic experience? Protracted mobility (see Ahrens & King, 2023) does not include only long-term displacements; from a strictly circumscribed viewpoint, refers to temporal mobility. When discussing protracted or extended mobilities, the endurance of dynamics in a spatial dimension, which can be and often are—for reasons that will be made explicit later—discontinuous. Diaspora arises from the conjunction of historically accumulated processes, critical situations (see next section), and international migration. The latter is the main type of mobility—among others—that sustains a diasporic experience (Van Hear, 2014). The Haitian case is illustrative in this regard.

It could be tentatively posited that different kinds of mobility —voluntary and forced—contribute to the growth of the diaspora and vice versa, that is, that they reproduce each other through a symbiotic relation. The study of the Haitian experience offers many insights into this connection. In today's world, the increasing number of people who seek international protection measures—notably refugees—contributes to the formation and growth of diasporic communities. In countries such as Mexico, the number of people from Haiti in search of protection has increased exponentially in recent years. Official statistics from the Mexican Commission for Refugee Aid (Comar, Spanish acronym of *Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados*) show that almost 51 076 Haitians applied for refugee status in 2021 (Comar, 2022). The total number of applicants reached the 17 218 mark in 2022 and spiked to 44 201 in 2023 (Comar, 2024).

This paper begins with a brief explanation of the reasons behind Haitians' displacement, emigration and expulsion due to geopolitical, environmental, social and economic factors (Audebert, 2017, p. 62). The second section offers insights to contribute to the debate on the conventional notion of diaspora; it is proposed that this concept acquires multiple meanings and cannot be conceived as a universal formula for all diasporic groups. The following part of the paper questions the alleged "integral" ties that some scholars find between transnationalism and diaspora. It questions, among other things, the methodological bidirectionality (origin-destination) assumed in transnational studies, something that restricts an adequate explanation of protracted and multinational mobility involving migrant collectivities, such as Haitians.

Having established a scaffolding for analyzing the diasporic experience at large, the following section of the paper reveals the unique particularities of the Haitian diaspora in connection to Haitians' extended mobility, and in the context of Latin America. For example, Miranda's (2021) use of a rhizome as a metaphor to describe the Haitian diaspora holds great analytical potential; however, this formulation needs to be further explored and developed. After succinctly presenting the methodological route followed by the author to carry out his research work, the penultimate section

shows data resulting from a brief ethnographic work carried out in Tapachula, Chiapas, and from which it is possible to glimpse into the way Haitians' extend mobilities—both through time and space—sustain the diaspora. To be clear, this study offers only a cursory glimpse into a topic that requires more robust empirical support. Hence, the closing comments emphasize the need to continue deepening this nascent theoretical framework; is necessary to further look into and address the role pauses and immobility play in the trajectories that are part of protracted mobility and diaspora. The section also points out the need to study the connections between diverse types of mobilities, notably re-emigration, and places people "move into",[1] temporary and permanent destinations that are part of the diasporic experience of the Haitian pan-community in the Americas. Last, but not least, researchers need to outline the way a "horizon of expectations" (Montagna et al., 2021) constitutes one driving force that simultaneously propels protracted mobilities and diasporas.

Contextual elements to comprehend Haitians' mobilities

Critical political conditions (failed governance, instability), socioeconomic difficulties (violence of various kinds, insecurity, high poverty rates), and environmental problems (catastrophes, degradation of natural resources) are part of the problems that have persisted for a long time and continue to afflict Haiti. These conditions have led some authors (Feldmann & Montes, 2008) to consider Haiti a collapsed country, a nation that experiences what amount to, figuratively speaking, a situation of chronicity (Vigh, 2008). Various forms of mobility, including displacement, removal and flight, result from such multifactorial "expelling" causality.

To trace the drawn-out mobility-diaspora nexus, one has to look at the history of migration, re-emigration and other mobilities (for example, displacement) that span temporally and spatially over a century, processes that peak at certain times, that is, moments that see increased collective mobility. There is evidence that Haitians arrived in Cuba and the Dominican Republic in 1919, went to France in 1946, and thereafter headed to the Bahamas (1956), Mexico (1957), the United States (1959), Africa (1962) and Canada (Anglade, 1982, cited by Joseph, 2019, p. 232). The first large group of Haitian migrants went to South America in the 1970s (Joseph, 2019). At the beginning of the 21st century, a wave toward South America took a turn toward the north of the continent, including Mexico.[2] The large Haitian presence throughout the continent forms a strong and growing diasporic pan-community, as evidenced by data from four countries. Despite the existence of deep-rooted xenophobic sentiments towards Haitians in the Dominican Republic, it is estimated that more than 750 000 people of Haitian descent live there (Landazábal Mora, 2021, p. 143). Brazilian government sources indicate that between 2011 and 2020 almost 100 000 Haitians were

[1] The term *move into* is used in quotation marks throughout the article in order to cross-examine the limited meaning that Audebert et al. (2023) ascribe to settling in reference to the current "mobilities of negritudes". One cannot assume that all Haitian refugees and other migrants arrive and settle. Many people simply pass through, others are forced to stay, either for short or long periods. Settling happens after people have fully moved into, a phase within a much more complex process, one outlined in footnote 9.

[2] Joseph (2019) reports Haitian presence in countries such as Ecuador and Chile since the beginning of the 21st century, but the bulk of recent mobilities occurred after the earthquake that struck Haiti in 2010.

settled as residents in Brazil (Cavalcanti et al., 2021, p. 58). Chile's official sources registered 182 000 Haitians residing in that country, as of December 31, 2020 (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas y Departamento de Extranjería, 2021, Table 4. Foreign population residing in Chile by country, 2018-2020, p. 24).

As for Mexico, Haitian presence began to show up in government sources since the mid-2000s, at that time in low numbers. This situation changed after the 2010 earthquake. According to Landazábal Mora (2021, p. 150) between June and September 2016, around 17 000 people arrived in Mexico, practically all coming from Chile and Brazil. There is no way of knowing how many Haitians currently reside in Mexico. Although such figures may exist, they are not widely and publicly known. Nonetheless, the number of applications for refugee status, as noted in the "Introduction", offers an idea about the magnitude of the situation. Certainly, Tapachula includes a high percentage out of the total number of applications for the entire country (Landazábal Mora, 2021).[3] The following sections offer a general conceptual framework to explain the Haitian diaspora as shaped by its past and present circumstances, with a critical look at the relation between diaspora and the transnationalism paradigm, to give specific details of the Haitian diasporic experience vis-a-vis protracted mobility.

Annotations to the discussion concerning the multiple meanings of diaspora

The definition of diaspora has generated much debate. To show the nuances of this discussion, some of the core elements of a conventional formulation are presented, including the concept: "A dispersed population across more than one territory having a durable and salient relationship (consisting of a set of claims, practices and/or loyalties) to a common origin, identity or homeland" (Bartram et al., 2014, p. 48). This is the "classic" model of the Jewish and Armenian diasporas, for example (for additional approaches cf. Brubaker, 2005; Cohen, 1997; Cohen & Fischer, 2019; Safran, 1991; Sheffer, 2003, among others).[4] Yet, the variability of definitions and uses of the concept has been widely questioned (Bartram et al., 2014, p. 49).

A first step to move away from the classical models is to acknowledge that the characteristics listed in them do not empirically correspond to certain contemporary diasporic groups. That is to say, the enunciation of diaspora as a mode of categorization with typologies that homogenize all populations (Kalra et al., 2005, p. 11) leaves out groups that have experienced other types of diasporic processes. The multiple reasons or causes that give rise to mobility (that is, whether it is voluntary or forced, or caused by structural or circumstantial reasons) can also give rise to a diaspora (Van Hear, 2010, p. 37); this is a second differentiating element. Recently, the large number of people seeking international protection (refugeehood, complementary protection,

[3] Although there is no breakdown of the percentage of Haitians who were claiming refugee status to the Comar office, official data indicate that 77 469 applications were received in 2023, equivalent to 54.92% of a total of 141 053 in all of Mexico (Comar, 2024).

[4] Lack of space does not allow for a broad discussion on theoretical, critical counterproposals on diaspora from other fields of study, such as cultural studies, postmodernism (for example, Clifford, 1994; Gilroy, 1991; Hall, 1990) and other perspectives (Anthias, 1998; Bauböck & Faist, 2010, for example).

asylum, among others) has led to the formation and growth of diasporas in the world (for example, Afghans in the 1990s, Syrians more recently). Haitians are arguably part of these groups for reasons already stated.

The so-called return to a place of origin (Dufoix, 2008, cited by Bartram et al., 2014), or to an ancestral reference (see, among others, Cohen, 1997), or "… the idea of a shared past, of heritage and memory, and feelings of nostalgia and longing for a 'lost' homeland…" (Griffiths et al., 2013, p. 27) is a traditional element in the conceptualization of diaspora that has triggered a particular re-signification of the term—and yet, it might seem contradictory to take it up again precisely because it carries such ancestral reference—. Griffiths et al. (2013, p. 6) propose the possibility of a diasporic timescale in which subjects in the diaspora share a collective memory and common ancestry. Such timeline looks toward the past but at the same time "entails [the possibility of] an imagined future", one that requires the reconstructing or remaking of the temporalities associated with migratory trajectories, especially for those who have become part of the diaspora in recent times, that is, the second and third generations (Griffiths et al., 2013), the people whom Çağlar (2016) calls post-migrants.[5] At the same time, this memory is affected by the binomial dispersion-distance. For Nina Glick Schiller, this evocation can ultimately simulate "different experiences, sensibilities, affective states, desires and ideologies of belonging" (Glick Schiller, 2011, p. xxi). In the diversity of these experiences, "the longing for shared identity and community" can emerge (Glick Schiller, 2011, p. xxi). Memory as simulacrum keeps alive the idea or the hope of belonging to, even if belonging is merely symbolic. Diaspora, then, reveals the connection-at-a-distance among Haitians:

> The distance of diasporic connection was and continues to be a product of the various ways being Haitian varies across divisions of age, gender, class, skin color, as well as the length of time away from Haiti, the generation of migration, and the locality of settlement… (Glick Schiller, 2011, p. xxviii)

To wrap up her argument, the same author continues with the following: "The analyses of diasporic multiplicities, relationalities, diasporic differences and disenchantments... make it possible to understand why the geographies of the Haitian diaspora are a space of communality, as well as distance" (Glick Schiller, 2011, p. xxix). Thus, on the one hand, the diasporic narrative has served to advance an agenda of those collectivities dispersed in various places that link political movements in the territory of origin with migrants who do maintain a nexus with the "homeland" and post-migrants of Haitian descent who do not have a direct relationship with the island. According to Glick Schiller (2011, p. xxviii), this happens through religious or family relationships. On the other hand, Glick Schiller unequivocally situates the diaspora as part of a transnational experience. It is counter-argued that it is problematic to assume the intrinsic existence of such a link, an issue that deserves to be unpacked at some length.

[5] The post-migrant concept refers, basically, to the histories, connections and practices of migrants' descendants that are set against the experiences of their parents and grandparents (Çağlar, 2016, p. 954); this category is useful in overcoming the notion of second generation, which has proven conceptually problematic.

A critical approach to the relationship between diaspora and the paradigm of transnationalism

Transnationalism refers to the diffusion and extension of social, political and economic processes between and beyond the jurisdictions of national states via migrant subjects. Organizations and groups based on societies of destination where migrant populations have arrived and which maintain links with the place of origin play a central role in transnational processes. Accordingly, migrants' continuous exchanges and travels (from destination points to localities of origin, and vice versa) constitute one of the essential features of transnationalism. This synthesis does not do justice to all the rich insights bequeathed by this perspective, but it serves to situate the critical position expressed here.

Although there are points in common between the experience of diasporic groups and what have been called transnational communities, some clarifications are necessary. Beyond the connections between transnationalism and diaspora, there are important substantive differences. First, the paradigm of transnationalism is based on what Sperling (2014, cited by Ahrens & King, 2023) calls "methodological binationalism", that is, an approach that considers only one origin and one destination, something that "does not adequately reflect the complex lifeworlds…" of onward migrants (Ahrens & King, 2023, p. 7), as is the case of Haitians. The unilaterality of links and movements between the country of origin and the country of destination, as the transnational model asserts, does not fit with the presence of diasporic communities in multiple places migrants "move into".

Secondly, transnationalism brings together diverse and numerous actors, including those who are part of a diasporic community; this assortment of agents does not necessarily assume a common identity or purpose that binds them together. A transnational group does not share such a collective character, whereas diasporic subjects do (Bartram et al., 2014, p. 51). Moreover, diasporic communities comprise diverse generational groups, a trait rarely present among transnational subjects (Bartram et al., 2014, p. 51).

Another debatable point is that certain "transnational practices", such as sending remittances (monetary and otherwise), are not always and necessarily part of the repertoire of diaspora subjects for reasons beyond their control. Likewise, not all those who leave and remain abroad as part of an alleged transnational collectivity have the possibility of making constant trips between their place of origin and the place they have "moved into" or even settled in; yet, they do maintain this link at a distance with their relatives. This coming and going may have been feasible some decades ago, but many contemporary migration policies make it increasingly difficult, as explained next.

Due to a process of global securitization of migration and borders (Balzacq, 2011; Buzan et al., 1998; Huysmans, 2000; Léonard, 2010),[6] transnationalism pays little or

[6] Reference is made here only to some of the most prominent authors in the discussion of this category since its emergence, at the turn of the 21st century. The literature on the subject continues to grow and become more specialized. For example, De Renó Machado (2020) analyzes how the migration laws implemented in Brazil as of 2016 tightened restrictions for migrant populations, a measure derived to a high degree from the arrival of many Haitians after the 2010 earthquake. This kind of restrictive legislation made Haitians migrate again.

no attention to—and thus does not adequately account for—policy-relevant issues that impact the movement of people between countries, namely the policies of control and regulation that enable or constrain moving from one place to another (Kivisto, 2011; Pries, 2008; Mountz & Mohan, 2022, p. 64). Securitization's imprint limits transnational "spaces" and practices without impeding neither diasporas' formation and their continuous growth, nor protracted mobility. Haitians encounter many of the aforementioned constraints in countries they "move into", namely Brazil, Chile and to a certain extent Mexico, in addition, they have endured harsh and uncertain economic conditions, racism and vulnerable migratory conditions that make quite difficult for Haitians to establish relationships of a transnational nature.

A glimpse into Haitians' contemporary diaspora

Rather than setting a typology with universal attributes, a classification that arguably allows for generalizations across groups that are different from each other, the perspective on diaspora this article sets forth echoes Anthias' (1998) call to study diasporas as heterogeneous processes, which may denote a social condition, or entail a certain type of "consciousness" (Anthias, 1998, p. 558). Diaspora is, therefore, a constantly evolving experience. Diaspora's dynamism is marked by spatial dispersion sustained and reproduced through a long time. As mentioned above, a heterogeneous approach also suggests that diaspora has multiple meanings (cf. Vertovec, 1997; Kalra et al., 2005).

Two formulations (there may be more) exemplify the plurality of possible glosses related to the Haitian diaspora. The first comes from a foreword to a well-known volume about Haiti:

> It is in the crises of a natural disaster, police brutality, or collective stigmatizations such as the AIDS epidemic that the diaspora as a shared community of pain, suffering, nostalgia and aspirations for a future better comes into being. At a time of national disaster, such as the [2010] earthquake, people may embrace a diasporic membership they would otherwise eschew (sic). (Glick Schiller, 2011, p. xxii)

A threat or a catastrophic event can trigger this diasporic collective imaginary. The year 2010 represented a turning point in the context of critical systemic conditions in Haiti, exacerbated by the effects of the January earthquake, the outbreak of a cholera epidemic a few months later, and problems arising from the presidential transition of that year (Landazábal Mora, 2021, p. 140). In fact, diaspora has been a commonly used term for the last five decades. Initially, the term was used to refer to Haitians in New York who opposed dictator Jean-Claude Duvalier, back in the 1980s. Afterward, diaspora took on a different and more widespread meaning, inside and outside Haiti, as Haitian anthropologist Handerson Joseph's work illustrates.

Joseph's research (2015, 2017) exemplifies a second gloss within several possible ones. Joseph offers a detailed explanation of how the Haitian diasporic experience contains unique elements that lead to interrogate (even dislocate) conventional notions of diaspora. Joseph, who has worked with compatriots in countries such as Brazil, Suriname, French Guiana and Haiti, bases his analysis on data obtained from people

who have emigrated, as well as relatives of emigrants and people who never left Hispaniola. Joseph formulates a gloss on diaspora from what in anthropology is called an emic viewpoint, that is, from the way people conceive it. Among Haitians, regardless of origin and class, and whether they are migrants or individuals who have never left Haiti, *dyaspora*, in Kryol, is a category used to designate people, actions and things (for example, remittances, houses built with those remittances).

Generally speaking, *dyaspora* identifies those who live abroad, return for a visit to Haiti, and then re-emigrate again (Joseph, 2015, p. 53). The word can be used as a noun and adjective; there are *dyaspora* objects and people. According to Joseph, among Haitians the term encompasses four levels or hierarchies. *Dyaspora lokal* designates a tourist, that is, someone from the middle and upper classes who is able to travel. *Ti dyaspora* is an individual subject who migrates to an emerging or an undeveloped country, that is, one with little or no prestige (for example, the Dominican Republic or Brazil). *Gwo dyaspora* refers to people who go to an important, developed country where they are expected to earn a lot of money, for example the United States, Canada and France. *Dyaspora entènasyonal* is the person who can move across different hubs of the diaspora. The emigrant who has achieved prestige by being a permanent resident of a large (*gwo*) country can move to and from destinations, spend and hand out money, and show off when returning to Haiti, and so forth.

This hierarchization reflects the differences within said community abroad, whose diasporic members may be set at odds among different groups inside the "homeland", and abroad: those who go to the United States acquire a greater reputation than those who have been to Brazil; in other words, the diaspora has an elitist dimension (Joseph, 2015, pp. 65-74). In the end, mobility linked to a diasporic experience shapes relationships between individuals, that is, between those who leave and those who stay, as well as across generations and different degrees of kinship, in such a way that it (diaspora) constitutes a "central fact of the Haitian universe" (Joseph, 2019, p. 233). Echoing the paradox noted by Glick Schiller (2011), for Haitians being or aspiring to become a *dyaspora* person does not mean leaving Haiti in oblivion; rather, it entails maintaining close ties "at a distance" (Joseph, 2019, p. 255).

Joseph's approach makes at least two important contributions to further thinking about the notion of diaspora. First, Joseph's categories advance the internal differentiation that Haitians have made of their experience, endowing with nuances to name a complex phenomenon that is consciously assumed (and perhaps generalized?) among Haitians. Second, this researcher reveals categories imbued with a "native" sense, or ethnographic meaning, as Joseph himself calls them (Joseph, 2017, 2019), which reformulate prevailing theoretical discussions based on academic models from the global north.

Four arguments focused on a better understanding of the Haitian diaspora are submitted for future and thorough deliberation. First, some authors speak of subjects in processes of extended migration who set up a "new center", one that differs from the point of origin or home (whether real or symbolic). In this regard, reference can be made to Voigt-Graf (2004) and Ahrens and King (2023). The latter makes the following reflection: "This was the case for some Indo-Fijian twice migrants who, after migrating to Australia, regarded Fiji as their 'new centre' because they no longer maintained strong kinship ties to India" (Ahrens & King, 2023, p. 11). A similar explanation could be posited for Haitians who re-emigrate with their descendants, for example Brazilian-Haitians and Chilean-Haitians as part of their continental diaspora. That

"new" center may now be Brazil, Mexico or another country because ties are strengthened or become more important in places outside Haiti.

Second, and as a corollary to the previous point, an alternative perspective to conceive the diasporic community is to visualize it as a rhizome-like structure in which, although Haiti may constitute the primordial reference, the mobilities that occur across different "poles" do not necessarily pass through Haiti, that is, that point of origin or primordial reference (Miranda, 2021, p. 113), or any other "new" center. Cape Haiti, Rio de Janeiro and Miami, to mention a few places, are part of the rhizomatic web in terms of a continuous mobility of migrants, the circulation of social and economic capital and the flow of data through information and communication technology applications. Because the current trajectories of diasporic subjects are increasingly intricate at the regional and global levels, their journeys on the rhizomatic grid are multiplying and becoming multifaceted.

The third argument is that, as Miranda (2021, p. 112) states, the 2010 earthquake was a natural disaster that catalyzed the conditions that led to today's Haitian diasporic experience, particularly in light of the exodus the seismic event provoked. Progressively, subjects in the diaspora established connections between cities of recent arrival as distant as Santiago de Chile and Tijuana (Miranda, 2021, p. 114) with cities that have been part of the diaspora much longer, such as Boston or Montreal, in this rhizome scaffolding. For Audebert and Joseph (2022, p. 30), these links represent what they call the multi- and inter-polarity of the Haitian diaspora, all part of a process in which dissimilar types of mobility, such as the transit to a desired destination or the experience of waiting before moving again.

Notably, the interruption of mobility trajectories and projects that has been one of the aspects that have most complicated the present-day Haitian diaspora, in turn leading to long-term stagnation, even to the emergence of a liminal condition (for approaches to this category, see, for instance, Wyss, 2019; Yahya, 2021) among migrant groups. Thus, Haitians adapt their spatial and temporal mobility according to the conditions they face. These circumstances include the climatic events already referred to, increasingly restrictive migration regimes (as happened in Chile after 2018),[7] heightened border controls, complicated family situations (for example, reunification)[8] and economic hardships. Miranda (2021, p. 121) mentions, for example, that while in 2016 it took Haitians about three months to get from southern Brazil to Tijuana, by 2019 that time span had extended to almost a year.

Up until 2019 a so-called *salvoconducto* (safe-conduct; in official terms, an '*oficio de salida del país',* notice of departure from the country) allowed for the relatively easy mobility of Haitians within Mexico (Instituto para las Mujeres en la Migración et al., 2021, p. 31). After the government revoked this regulation, the prospects for unimpeded mobility among Haitians turned increasingly difficult. Mounting difficulties to move around caused Haitians and other migrants to embark on longer and more dangerous

[7] Mobility controls are contributing decisively to the diasporic experience and to long-term mobilities. Two clear recent examples are the regulations known as the Migrant Protection Protocols (MPP) (United States Department of Homeland Security [USDHS], 2019) and Title 42 (Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020), implemented by the U.S. government in 2019 and 2020, respectively, as these provisions forced people to remain stranded.

[8] At least five of the people interviewed for this research indicated that they left children in Haiti or the Dominican Republic. Although not directly asked if they wished to return to Haiti, the respondents implied in their responses that family reunification was a desired goal, a binding element to the diaspora.

journeys by land and water. The obstacle that makes these journeys to North America more complicated is the Darién Gap. This is an expanse of jungle, approximately 100 kilometers in length, one that must be crossed on foot and in which migrants face many risks and dangers, both natural (fast-flowing rivers, dangerous animals) and "social" (criminal gangs). Lack of space limits further discussion of this topic, but the growing literature on the subject shows the mark this experience leaves among migrant populations and how places such as the Darién contribute to more protracted and difficult trajectories (see, among others: International Organization for Migration, 2021; Miraglia, 2016; Miranda, 2021; Zamorano, 2021).

Thus, migrants adopt different strategies and plans according to the challenges they encounter along their journey, (re)configuring new routes and their directionality. Consequently, a multinational and protracted trajectory has no unilinear dynamic, as different types of mobility can converge. It is a combination of controls, restrictions, (in)mobility, new opportunities and the subjects' agentive capacity what shapes the diasporic experience, all fueled by protracted re-emigration (Arriola Vega, 2024), and as part of processes that are spatially and temporally fluid (see also Jung, 2023, p. 174; Miranda, 2021, p. 124).

Empirical data contributing to the discussion on diaspora and expanded mobility: Haitian migrants in Tapachula

Based on results from a brief period of fieldwork in Tapachula, several elements to understand the multiple ways one ought to comprehend the Haitian diasporic experience and its relation to protracted mobility will be presented. Twelve interviews were conducted in June 2021 with five women and seven men of Haitian origin, all adults. These interactions took place in the streets of Tapachula's downtown. In some cases, they were supported by an interpreter (Spanish-Kryol); in others, the interview was conducted in Portuguese, and one was conducted in English. To maintain participants' confidentiality and respect their decision to answer or not answer certain questions, an informed consent form was requested from all the collaborators. The contents of the interview comprised three main, very broad, themes: the first part covered the experiences and context of the person's life in Haiti; the second part inquired about the person's migratory experiences, where they had lived and for how long, as well as their reasons for re-emigration; the last section dealt with aspects related to people's journey to Mexico and their arrival in that country, their legal situation at the time of the interview (specifically, whether they had claimed refugee status and the stage they were at in this procedure), as well as their expectations and plans for the future. A review of the specialized literature on the central theoretical concepts developed in previous sections complemented results from field research.

It is acknowledged that this article suffers from a certain imbalance between the theoretical discussion and the empirical basis supporting the arguments. On the one hand, this disparity is due to the exploratory profile of the research project. On the other hand, the analysis contained in another text on the multinational and continuous mobility of Haitians in the Americas (Arriola Vega, 2024) offsets the shortcomings of the present article. That paper presents a more detailed analysis of a multinational mobility framework, one embodied in the trajectories of Haitians who have

gone to South America and subsequently moved on to Mexico. That large "arc" of multinational mobility includes several processes, including onward migration (Ahrens & King, 2023), staggered mobility (Paul, 2011; Schapendonk, 2010), serial migration (Wee & Yeoh, 2021), instrumental and transitory settlement (emplacement [Arriola Vega, 2024]) and the intention to re-emigrate (Chabé-Ferret et al., 2018). It is argued (Arriola Vega, 2024) that these processes are shaped, to a greater or lesser extent, by the agentive capacity people exert, the aspirations and opportunities they may encounter throughout various phases of their journey(s). These experiences seen as a whole and from a protracted analitical lens—namely, long-lasting and spatially enlarged—influence and add complexity to the multifaceted Haitian pan-community diaspora. For example, it is through transient and instrumental emplacement that many Haitians try to "move into"settlement, regardless of their intentions, or possibilities, for settling, and, or, place-making (Castles & Davidson, 2000 formulated one of the first approaches to this notion).[9]

The case of Didí (pseudonym) may be illustrative in this regard. She had emigrated from Haiti to the Dominican Republic, where she lived, had children and settled for several years. She and her spouse decided to re-emigrate to Chile around 2018. The couple remained for three years in that country. Didí recounted that they attempted to regularize their stay in Chile, something that proved impossible. They were "making their home" in Chile, but immigration regulations forced them to look for a destination elsewhere. They decided to go to Mexico. After three months of having arrived in Tapachula, Didí set up a street sidewalk stand in the city's downtown. She started as a merchant with 20 USD; with that initial investment Didí bought eggs and bananas, which she then resold. With the profits from that first venture, she purchased more products and successively expanded the number and variety of goods she offered to customers. At the time of the interview, she and her partner were seriously considering settling in Mexico. To establish themselves economically and achieve some economic stability, they contemplated the idea of buying merchandise that they would then send to Haiti for resale by relatives (personal communication, June 26, 2021). Didí did not completely abandon the possibility of seeking another destination, as did other interviewed compatriots of hers, with all the "traces and scars" (Louidor, 2020) that a journey imprints on people, including provisional emplacement, all of which contribute to widening the diaspora.

Episodes of re-migration also show how the Haitian diaspora is in constant (trans) formation. Participants in this study are referred to as repeat migrants because their mobile trajectory was protracted through time (several years) and space (they had crossed several countries before they arrived in Mexico). Four interviewees lived for some years in the Dominican Republic and Chile, and one in Venezuela and Brazil before continuing to Mexico. The rest resided in Brazil for one to four years before continuing north. At least three of them openly expressed that they intended to continue moving to the United States and another to Canada. Almost all had family

[9] From the point of view of this article, moving into represents a first step process, one that can evolve into to "settling" [semi-permanent stay] to then proceed to the possibility of "settling down" [more durable stay]. This may not be a unidirectional, straight process. Crucial to decide whether to stay, be emplaced, to engage in home-making, and/or move on are some of the following factors: Throughout these phases, having a place to live, access to means of subsistence and the support of family members and other agents (friends, networks of acquaintances in other "poles" and places people "move into", civil society organizations working with migrants or churches, among others) are decisive.

members or acquaintances in different parts of the continent, notably the United States. The factors and motivations that sustain protracted mobility, and in turn keep alive the diaspora and the aspiration to become a *dyaspora* person, are revealed through the experiences recounted by one particular interviewee. Urié (pseudonym) was a 23-year-old man who had completed two years of a university-level degree in agronomy; he spoke Kryol, French, a good deal of English and understood Spanish. His mother died in the earthquake that hit the capital, Port-au-Prince, in 2010. His trip to Brazil included stops in the Dominican Republic, Panama and French Guiana. He stayed in Brazil for approximately one year (2020-2021). An aunt living in Miami, among the several relatives he had in the United States, helped him with money to go from Brazil to Mexico. When asked how he planned to repay these funds, he surprisingly answered that the transaction was not a loan he was obliged to repay. Urié would pay back the support he had received by offering a similar kind of sponsorship to other family members, once he got firmly established and with a solid financial income. In other words, the intention was to help others leave Haiti. He decided to re-emigrate due to adverse economic conditions in Brazil. It took him two months to get to Tapachula from Manaus (in the Brazilian Amazon). Once Urié obtained refugee status, he planned to go to Mexicali or Tijuana. Urié was considering the idea of staying in Mexico but most likely would go on to the United States (personal communication, June 27, 2021).

Based on the above testimony, four elements help us understand, for now in very simple terms, the logic and dynamics of protracted mobilities. First, the existence of a family bond is part of the framework that makes up the figurative rhizome alluded to by Miranda (2021). The second element is critical both in the affective and the material spheres because relatives usually provide the monetary remittances that make subsequent re-emigrations possible. The third point, perhaps the least known, yet not less important, is the implicit moral covenant that Urié assumes to draft a horizon of expectations (Montagna et al., 2021, p. 13) for potential future migrants, and would-be diasporic individuals. Finally, Urié testimony reveals the vibrant, incessant mobilities that Haitians have undertaken throughout the American continent, which may or may not necessarily end in Mexico.

Concluding remarks

The ideas expressed in this paper lay the groundwork to pursue a line of research that needs to be explored further in the context of contemporary mobilities in Latin America. Due to the conciseness of the article's empirical scaffolding *vis-à-vis* its theoretical framework (that is, one still under construction), its scope remains limited. By way of wrapping up these final remarks, three elements of a methodological order are proposed when analyzing protracted mobilities: *a*) the study of drawn out mobility requires a long-term approach, that is, to focus on trajectories, not only on compartmentalized events and processes (transit, arrival, among others); *b*) it is essential to pay attention to the mobility background of the migrant's family because this allows a full understanding of individual trajectories, paths that are influenced often by decisions

made within the family group; and, *c*) it is important to examine the different cycles or stages and turning points (such as moments of immobility) within migratory trajectories as a whole, that is, from a panoptical perspective.

To zoom in on (im)mobility implies that protracted trajectories include pauses and interruptions. Many determinants—personal, structural, circumstantial even fortuitous—lead to the (transient) suspension of the migration project. These ruptures, framed as part of an extended trajectory, may result in people's decision to settle in a destination not initially intended as such, and thus become one of the elements, among others, that lead to the formation of a diaspora. It is argued that protracted mobility projects eventually contribute to strengthen the Haitian diaspora. The mobility scenarios of Haitians in their journeys throughout the Americas are constantly evolving and include many probable destinations ("multipolarity") (that is, they are dynamic).

The various types of mobility in which the subjects embark (re-emigration, circularity, even the possibility of return) also connect people with relatives and compatriots in different territories through "new centers", places people "move into" and destinations, whether they are temporary or permanent. People look for these "new" centers, because they allow them to maintain proximity at a distance with a "decentered" Haiti. Before heading to Mexico, some interviewees tried to stay in countries such as Chile and Brazil. The presence of firmly established Haitian communities in these countries is part of the dispersion process, a constitutive element of the diaspora. Whether the Haitian pan-community has managed to settle partially or fully, or even achieved a certain degree of integration in societies they "move into"—events that can vary considerably—are issues that remain beyond the scope of this paper, and in need of a separate discussion.

The decision to remain immobile, move into, settle, or move on was determined among those Haitians, in 2021. By certain conditions have to be examined as part of the extended temporal framework of Haitian mobility. In the first place, and unlike what happened in the 1980s—when politically persecuted people made up the diasporic community—in recent times the group of those who flee, emigrate, or are displaced is more heterogeneous: rural and urban folks, young and adult, men and women, family groups, and others with very different levels of formal education.

Second, after the 2010 earthquake, Hatitians dispersed in a south-southbound pattern to later resume the south-northbound historical trend (toward the United States, specifically); in the process, the diaspora has spread to and reached many parts of the American continent. Third, Haitians have recently embarked on a journey that is quite dangerous, longer in duration, and more precarious than in the past. It is an extremely hazardous journey because Haitians reportedly cross between eight and ten countries in Latin America where they are likely to be preyed upon by criminal actors, particularly at the Darién Gap. The crossing becomes lengthier because it takes up to two months to travel from Chile or Brazil to Mexico, a trip in which Mexico does not necessarily is the intended final destination for many Haitians. The journey turns increasingly precarious because in addition to the sacrifices and suffering Haitians face while in-transit through Central and South America, there is the uncertainty that

comes with not knowing if they would be granted protection measures in Mexico, or if they would have to wait for a long time while applying for asylum in the United States. In the latter scenario, Haitians fall into a sort of liminal condition.

Finally, subjects engaged in any type of mobility do so with the aim of improving their offspring's chances for a better future. This desire constitutes a strong motivation to continue moving, and it is part of the horizon of expectations alluded to by Montagna et al. (2021). Expectations, plans and dreams make up the driving forces that sustain protracted mobility and, in turn, the diaspora.

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Luis Alfredo Arriola Vega
Guatemalan-Mexican. Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Florida. He is a researcher and professor in the Academic Group Studies of Migration and Cross-Border Processes of El Colegio de la Frontera Sur, Campeche Unit. Research lines: human mobility and the Mexico-Guatemala border. Recent publication: Coraza de los Santos, E. & Arriola Vega, L. A. (2022). *Crises and migration. Critical perspectives from Latin America*. Springer.