

ARTICLE

revista

Geo   
USP  
espaço e tempo

ISSN 2179-0892

Volume 28 • n° 2 (2024)

e222457

# The importance of migratory and solidarity social networks in Haitian immigration to São Paulo

Priscilla Pachi<sup>1</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Universidade de São Paulo, Programa de Pós-graduação em Geografia Humana, São Paulo, SP, Brasil  
E-mail: priscillapachi@gmail.com

**How to cite this article:** PACHI, P. The importance of migratory and solidarity social networks in Haitian immigration to São Paulo. **Geosp**, v. 28, n. 2, e222457. 2024. <https://doi.org/10.11606/issn.2179-0892.geosp.2024.222457en>



This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

# The importance of migratory and solidarity social networks in Haitian immigration to São Paulo

## ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze the importance of migratory and solidarity social networks in Haitian immigration to the metropolis of São Paulo. How these networks are articulated, what information is disseminated and the relations of power that are developed during the migration process will be addressed. In addition to the theoretical framework used, the applied methodology was based on quantitative data from the Federal Police and the Migration Observatory (OBMigra) and, the analysis of interviews, with a semi-structured script, carried out with 35 Haitians between April 2017 and June 2018 in the Glicério neighborhood, in São Paulo. Based on the data obtained and analyzed, it can be seen that networks are generally beneficial, but they can also have negative aspects in the migration process.

**Keywords:** Haitian immigration. Migratory network. Solidarity social networks.

## A importância das redes migratórias e sociais de solidariedade na imigração haitiana para São Paulo

### RESUMO

Este artigo tem por objetivo analisar a importância das redes migratórias e sociais de solidariedade na imigração haitiana para a metrópole de São Paulo. Serão abordadas as formas de articulação dessas redes, as informações que são disseminadas por elas e quais são as relações de poder que se desenvolvem durante o processo de migração. Além do aporte teórico utilizado, a metodologia aplicada pautou-se em dados quantitativos obtidos da Polícia Federal e do Observatório das Migrações (OBMigra) e, na análise de entrevistas, com roteiro semi-estruturado, realizadas com 35 haitianos entre abril de 2017 e junho de 2018 no bairro do Glicério, em São Paulo. Com base nos dados obtidos e analisados entende-se que, geralmente, as redes são benéficas, mas podem também apresentar aspectos negativos no processo migratório.

**Palavras-chave:** Imigração haitiana. Rede migratória. Rede social de solidariedade.

## La importancia de las redes migratorias y sociales solidarias en la inmigración haitiana a São Paulo

### RESUMEN

Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar la importancia de las redes migratorias y sociales solidarias en la inmigración haitiana a la metrópolis de São Paulo. Se abordarán las formas de articulación de estas redes, la información que es difundida por ellas y cuáles son las relaciones de poder que se desarrollan durante el proceso migratorio. Además del referencial teórico utilizado, la metodología aplicada se basó en datos cuantitativos de la Policía Federal y del Observatorio de Migraciones (OBMigra) e, en el análisis de entrevistas, con guión semiestructurado, realizadas con 35 haitianos entre abril de 2017 y junio de 2018 en el barrio Glicério, en São Paulo. De los datos obtenidos y analizados se desprende que las redes suelen ser beneficiosas, pero también pueden tener aspectos negativos en el proceso migratorio.

**Palabras clave:** Inmigración haitiana. Red migratoria. Red social solidaria.

## INTRODUCTION

The 2010s saw significant shifts in global migration patterns. Environmental disasters, stricter entry restrictions by developed countries in the Northern Hemisphere, and the aftermath of the 2007/2008 economic crisis have reshaped the trajectories of migrants seeking new opportunities. While many still aspire to reach European countries, the USA, and Canada, they are increasingly charting new routes, intensifying South-South migration flows (Pachi, 2019).

Regarding the rise in migratory flows along this axis, data from the 2021 OBMigra report reveal that, aside from migrants from the United States, the five nationalities with the highest presence in the national territory are from Southern Hemisphere countries, as shown in Table 1 (Cavalcanti; Oliveira; Silva, 2021).

**Table 1** – Classification of countries with the highest number of immigrants in Brazil between 2011 and 2020.

Countries	Residents	Temporary*	Total
Venezuela	8,933	163,373	172,306
Haiti	99,669	49,416	149,085
Bolivia	3,540	52,100	53,802
Colombia	2,727	51,075	53,802
USA	5,420	32,295	37,715

\*Temporary immigrants are in Brazil and are supported by various legal agreements.

Source: OBMigra Report (Cavalcanti; Oliveira; Silva, 2021). Data compiled and organized by the author (2022).

Based on this evolving scenario, Brazil has emerged since 2010 as a promising destination attracting diverse migratory flows, primarily from the Southern Hemisphere. The country offers job opportunities, streamlined entry processes, access to documentation, and a free education and healthcare system.

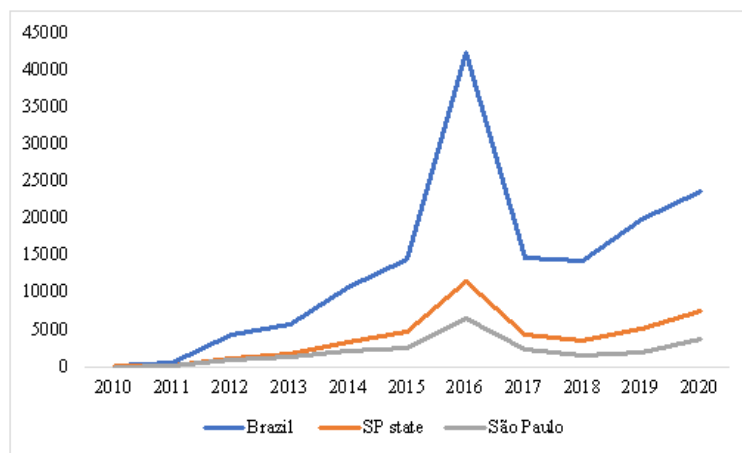
Regarding Haitian migration, between 2010 and 2020, the Federal Police recorded the entry of 150,464 Haitian immigrants into Brazil. São Paulo state received 42,837 of these migrants, with the city of São Paulo alone receiving 22,706 (Universidade Estadual de Campinas, 2022). “This influx reflects shifts within global capitalism, particularly changes in migratory preferences away from traditional Haitian destinations like the United States and France” (Magalhães; Baeninger, 2016, p. 238).

Sassen (2016) posits that the present era is characterized by social expulsion, suggesting that a global perspective on these severe conditions in affluent nations can be gleaned by examining major international displacement trends from impoverished countries in recent years. Factors such as poverty and political conflicts independently drive global expulsion dynamics. Furthermore, the disproportionate impact of environmental disasters on impoverished populations worldwide exacerbates displacement, particularly toward neighboring regions of affected areas.

In this context, the surge in Haitian migration to Brazil is frequently linked to the devastating earthquake that struck Port-au-Prince, Haiti’s capital, in 2010, severely compromising the survival and livelihoods of its residents.

Cotinguiba (2014) highlights that Brazil’s involvement in the Haitian immigration route is not a recent development and has been ongoing for at least a century. However, it has gained prominence in the past decade due to the significant increase in the number of Haitian migrants entering Brazilian territory in recent years. This influx also marks the first substantial movement of Black immigrants to the country since the abolition of slavery in 1888.

To better visualize the evolution of the numbers of records made by the Federal Police regarding Haitians who applied for registration to issue a National Migration Registry (RNM) in Brazil, Graph 1 shows the growth curve of this immigration from 2010 to the country, the state of São Paulo and the municipality of São Paulo.



**Graph 1** – Evolution of Haitian registrations by the Federal Police in Brazil, the state of São Paulo, and the municipality of São Paulo from 2010 to 2020.

**Source:** São Paulo Migration Observatory (OBMigra), Ministry of Justice and Public Security, SISMIGRA (Federal Police). Data compiled and organized by the author (2022).

It’s noticeable that all three curves exhibit a similar pattern, showing an upward trend starting around 2011, with a peak in 2016 followed by a decline and stabilization in subsequent years. The data for 2020 shows a renewed growth, indicating that these destinations have firmly established themselves within the Haitian migration route, despite fluctuations over time.

Considering that this migratory flow to Brazil has gained significant prominence in recent years, marking a milestone in the treatment of national migration issues (Pachi, 2017), this article aims to analyze the pivotal role played by migratory and social solidarity networks in the migration of Haitians to Brazil, focusing particularly on the metropolis of São Paulo.

To enrich this study, in addition to theoretical contributions, quantitative data from the Federal Police and the Migration Observatory (OBMigra), along with findings from a Master’s research defended in 2019, were utilized. This research analyzed Haitian immigration to São Paulo from 2014 to 2018 and included 35 participants (30 men and 5 women) who participated in semi-structured interviews conducted between April 2017 and June 2018 in the Glicério neighborhood. This approach facilitated a comprehensive analysis of Haitian immigration, as detailed in the following sections.

## MIGRATION AND SOCIAL NETWORKS OF SOLIDARITY

There are various situations and contexts in which the term “network” is employed, but it consistently involves two common components: expanded connectivity and the circulation of diverse flows, including information and people.

Santos (2012) describes the concept of network by suggesting, “[...] it can be admitted that the term falls into two major matrices: one that only considers its material reality, and another that also takes into account social data” (Santos, 2012, p. 262).

Based on material reality and social data, this article focuses on analyzing social networks<sup>1</sup> of solidarity and migration. It is important to distinguish between these two types of networks, as Santos (2012) suggests they encompass social, political, and economic dimensions, supported by the information circulating within them that gives them substance. The social network of solidarity precedes the migratory network, playing a pivotal role in nurturing and reinforcing the latter. Thus, solidarity networks stimulate and facilitate migratory movements by disseminating information that generates new migratory flows, thereby positioning individuals within the framework of human mobility (Pachi, 2019).

Assuming that migration is a historical and social phenomenon that has existed for a long time, it can be said that,

Centuries ago, international migration flows already formed networks that served as conduits between societies of origin, transit, and destination. While these historical networks differed significantly in content and modes of communication from those of today, they undeniably existed as a social reality [...] scholars studying immigration note that many elements from the past persist in contemporary migration dynamics, including chain migration and family reunification (Sassen, 2010, p. 166 *apud* Dutra, 2016).

Furthermore,

The network comprises individuals interconnected through interpersonal relationships, friendships, or camaraderie, fostering expectations of trust and loyalty. More than being related to those outside the network [...] individuals establish relationships based on the obligations they agree to by forming alliances and supporting each other. They submit to the laws of symbols that are created and circulated, thereby producing their individuality, community, and the social framework in which their competition unfolds (Caillé, 1998, p.18-19 *apud* Dornelas, 2001).

Regarding migratory processes, it is crucial to highlight that the social relations established within networks often hinge on bonds of camaraderie and trust between individuals, as underscored by Dornelas (2001).

Truzzi (2008) defines migratory networks as “[...] complexes of interpersonal ties that link migrants, previous migrants, and non-migrants in the areas of origin and destination, through ties of kinship, friendship, and containment” (Massey, 1988, p. 396 *apud* Truzzi, 2008).

---

<sup>1</sup> The terms will be used in this article to refer to social relations established by individuals in society, rather than the more common recent usage related to the Internet. We have opted to focus on analyzing the term social network(s), but we acknowledge that the term is also employed for the same concept, in line with the preferences of other authors and works.

And he adds that they are:

[...] groups of individuals who maintain recurrent contacts with each other through occupational, family, cultural, or affective ties form complex formations that channel, filter, and interpret information. They articulate meanings, allocate resources, and control behaviors within their networks. (Kelly, 1995, p. 219 *apud* Truzzi, 2008).

Solidarity social networks in migration, formed alongside family ties, serve as crucial references for migrants in their destination. They often indicate better reception conditions, including accommodation and employment opportunities. These networks not only stimulate solidarity among migrants but also enhance the overall migratory flow. They facilitate the circulation of vital information—both positive and negative—across borders, guiding migrants on their chosen itineraries.

For Póvoa Neto (1997), social networks are essential in the migration process:

The enduring presence of these contact networks, cultivated over decades of migration, helps elucidate the persistence of significant population movements even amid stark income and living condition disparities. These networks function as dynamic social catalysts, creating vital “bridges” between locations through which information and individuals flow, thereby transforming geographical mobility into a primary survival strategy. (Póvoa Neto, 1997, p. 22).

Therefore, these networks exemplify the social structure inherent in the migration process, facilitating the coordination of individuals to establish support hubs at their destinations. These networks play a crucial role in providing access to job opportunities, housing, and assistance in overcoming emotional, financial, and cultural challenges essential for adaptation to a new society. Established primarily through family and friends at the destination, these migratory and solidarity networks offer potential migrants a sense of security through reliable information, thereby reducing risks and increasing the likelihood of successful ventures (Pachi, 2019).

It falls upon the initial immigrants to pioneer the migration route and pave the way for subsequent migrants. These trailblazers not only establish new connections within the community but also serve as anchors for newcomers, easing their transition and encouraging further migration flows (Pachi, 2019).

In addition to networks established in the destination country, maintaining contact with the origin—whether for emotional support or financial remittances—facilitates attraction and creates opportunities for new migrants, spurred by familial or community connections, to embark on migration projects.

## **Migration and social networks of solidarity in the immigration of Haitians to São Paulo**

In order to provide empirical data for this study on the significance of social networks of solidarity and migration in the immigration of Haitians to São Paulo, specific data from the master’s research defended in 2019 by the researcher will be

PACHI, P.

utilized. The research analyzed the immigration of Haitians to the metropolis of São Paulo from 2014 to 2018.

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, the significant increase in Haitian immigration over the last decade has sparked discussions in migratory studies. Researchers, politicians, the press, civil society, and immigrants themselves have highlighted the urgent need for changes in migration treatment and public reception policies in Brazil (Pachi, 2017). This need for change led to the enactment of the new Migration Law 13.445/17, replacing the Foreigner-Law Statute 6.815/80, a relic of the military dictatorship that viewed foreigners as a threat to national security rather than through a human rights lens, as advocated by current legislation. In the city of São Paulo, the focus of the master's research and a historical immigrant destination since the late 19th century, Pachi (2017) illustrates various necessary changes that were also identified with the arrival of Haitians. These changes encompassed reception, services provided by the city hall, advocacy for immigrant rights, among others, resulting in the establishment of Municipal Law No. 16,478, the first municipal migration law in the country.

Returning to the analysis of Graph 1, in addition to observing the evolution of the migratory flow, it can be noted that regardless of the routes taken by these immigrants through Brazil, the city of São Paulo received a significant number of Haitians. They found a better reception structure in the capital, despite the initial unpreparedness observed in the early 2010s. São Paulo served as a starting point for their journey through the national territory. Therefore, São Paulo is also considered a temporary and transit city for many Haitians who later moved to other regions of the country, primarily for work purposes. These migration patterns were largely influenced by information shared within a migratory network established from 2010 onwards.

Handerson (2015, p. 182) describes the existence of a familial logic in Haitian migration, evident in “[...] the decision-making process to depart and in the organization of the journey, considering the resources mobilized, aspirations, and above all, obligations and responsibilities to those left behind—children, siblings, parents, friends, etc.”

The migratory movements from Haiti are integral to the country's history in Central America, characterized by longstanding political and social challenges. Situated in a geographically strategic location for trade and shipping (centrally positioned in the Americas with direct access to the Atlantic Ocean and, consequently, Europe), Haiti has experienced multiple invasions and occupation attempts. These events have led to political and economic instability exacerbated by environmental disasters, prompting significant emigration.

Based on the premise that migratory movements follow the history of Haiti, recent research by Cotinguiba (2014), Magalhães; Baeninger (2016) and Joseph (2017) describe that, from the twentieth century, it is possible to identify four large migratory flows of Haitians abroad (Dominican Republic, Cuba, United States and Brazil), as shown in Table 2 below.

Being the focus of this article, the fourth migratory flow, which is towards Brazil, serves as the basis for the analyses in this study.

It is important to mention that during the master's research defended in 2019, we sought to understand why the flow of Haitian immigrants remains constant to Brazil, even after the beginning of the economic and political crisis of 2014 that culminated in the impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff. For this purpose, semi-structured interviews were carried out

**Table 2** – Migratory movements of Haitians from the XX.

Period	Destination	Causes
1912-1924	Dominican Republic	occupation of Haiti by the American armed forces.
1913 - 1931	Cuba	migration based on work in sugarcane plantations.
from 1941	United States	influence of the American presence in the Caribbean.
from 2010	Brazil	Greater selectivity is observed for access to countries in the Northern Hemisphere, partly due to the sequence of natural disasters* that have affected Haiti.

\*On January 12, 2010, a strong earthquake struck Haiti, resulting in approximately 300,000 fatalities and the destruction of the city of Port-au-Prince. In 2012, the country was impacted by Hurricane 'Matthew', and in 2016, by Hurricane 'Sandy'.

**Source:** Cotinguiba (2014), Magalhães and Baeninger (2016) and Joseph (2017). Data compiled and organized by the author (2023).

between February 2017 and June 2018 with 35 Haitian immigrants (30 men and 5 women), aged between 21 and 40 years, in the Missão Paz<sup>2</sup> and in the Glicério neighborhood, a region of the city where the headquarters of the USIH (Social Union of Haitian Immigrants) is also located.

The Glicério neighborhood has been historically known since the nineteenth century for hosting groups of immigrants of various origins in the city of São Paulo, primarily Europeans, and in the first decade of the twentieth century, the Japanese.

As Fernandes (2021) points out,

The housing characteristics, centered on affordable rental options such as tenements and small apartments, have long been and continue to be a significant draw for immigrants. This aspect serves as a historical continuity, defining Glicério as one of the areas earmarked for immigrants within the city.

Since 2010, the neighborhood has increasingly seen the arrival of Haitian immigrants near the Missão Paz space in São Paulo's capital. This influx has led to the emergence of evangelical churches conducting services in French, Haitian restaurants, businesses, and numerous shared residences within the area. The Nossa Senhora da Paz church courtyard, as part of the Missão Paz, has become a crucial meeting point for the community, facilitating information exchange and offering refuge and various services to immigrants, both those new to the city and those already integrated into social solidarity networks. Additionally, the Union of Haitians in São Paulo (USIH) plays a pivotal role, providing support, information, and fostering community cohesion among Haitians in Brazil. Together, the USIH and Missão Paz exemplify key components of the solidarity and migration network supporting Haitians in São Paulo.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen because this model is based on a set of questions previously developed in line with the research objectives. This format enables the researcher to introduce additional questions during the conversation to better gather the information they deem pertinent for the investigation.

The choice of the interviewees took place in the courtyard of the church and in the space of the Glicério neighborhood, there was no pre-established selection, and, with this,

<sup>2</sup> Missão Paz is a project run by the Missionaries of São Carlos – Scalabrinians – that provides various support services to immigrants.



we sought to obtain a heterogeneity in the profile of the interviewee group in terms of gender, level of education and place of origin in the Haitian territory.

Based on fieldwork and interview analysis, it can be observed that the studied migratory phenomenon<sup>3</sup> is characterized by labor immigration, predominantly involving men of working age. This underscores the significance placed on employment opportunities as a driving force behind this migration flow.

As Sayad (2000, p. 21) points out:

Work is the immigrant's *raison d'être*, validating their presence in the eyes of the National State's rationale. Without this purpose, their presence would seem absurd. The concept of work embodies the essence of the migratory phenomenon, encompassing both emigration and immigration. Without it, the phenomenon would be incomprehensible and intolerable from intellectual, ethical, economic, cultural, and political perspectives.

Therefore, an analysis of Haitian immigration to Brazil must consider the processes of capitalist reproduction, as labor issues are crucial for the integration of these immigrants (Pachi, 2019).

[...] it is through these networks that work can be understood as essential to defining the migrant's identity, not only within the host society but also crucially in relation to their country of origin. Income derived from work, along with remittances sent home, serves to justify their departure from and sustained ties to their place of origin. These remittances or investments in the homeland justify the migrant's role: supporting family land, improving living conditions, acquiring modern amenities, purchasing property, and building homes. (Dornelas, 2001, p. 8).

Therefore, work is crucial for sustaining the lives of immigrants, their families, and dependents back home. Networks play a pivotal role in circulating information about job opportunities, even if temporary, ensuring the survival of these individuals in the metropolis.

For Sayad (1998), the absence of work renders the immigrant invisible because their existence hinges on economic necessity. However, despite economic and political crises affecting both Brazilians and immigrants alike, the continued flow of Haitians to Brazil can be attributed to the information disseminated through migratory and social networks of solidarity. These networks likely circulated information about specific opportunities, economic conditions, and the relative stability or prospects in Brazil compared to Haiti or other countries. Such information, crucially shared within these networks, could justify migrants' decisions to continue migrating despite challenging economic circumstances.

---

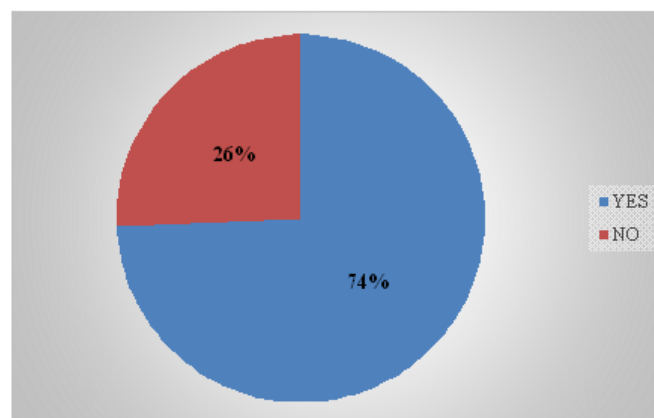
<sup>3</sup> Part of the Haitian migration phenomenon stands out here because the study carried out does not allow the results to be generalized to all Haitian immigrants.

The primary reasons identified by the 35 Haitians interviewed for their emigration were the severe economic, social, and political conditions in Haiti, coupled with high levels of violence. The lack of job opportunities to sustain family life in their home country, along with the opportunity to come to Brazil with regular documentation granted through humanitarian visas by the Brazilian government, were decisive factors for most migrants. Moreover, possessing regular documentation enabled these immigrants to continue their journey, facilitating easier access to other South American countries such as Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile. Consequently, Brazil also became a transit route for those aiming to reach countries in the Northern Hemisphere, particularly the USA and Canada, to pursue their aspirations.

For the Haitians interviewed who opted to remain in Brazil, their expectations centered primarily on securing employment, anticipating an improvement in the country's worsening economic crisis, the prospect of resuming studies, and enhancing their overall living conditions.

At that time, there was a keen interest in gauging the interviewees' understanding of the situation in Brazil to comprehend why the influx of Haitians persisted despite the crisis affecting Brazilians and causing increased unemployment. Therefore, they were queried about whether they had relatives and friends in Brazil and what information they received from them about the country. This inquiry aimed to assess their awareness of the challenges they might encounter.

Despite the acknowledged significance of networks formed by family and friendship ties, the survey revealed, as shown in Graph 2, that 74% of the 35 interviewees indicated having a pre-existing network of relatives and friends already established in Brazilian territory, while 26% stated they did not know anyone and embarked on their migratory projects alone.



**Graph 2** – Percentage of the 35 Haitians interviewed who had relatives or friends in Brazil before they migrated.

**Source:** Prepared by the author (2019).

It is important to emphasize that in migration, the initial network and foundation of relationships stem from family ties. Upon arrival at their destination, new personal

connections assume significant importance, leading to the formation of new arrangements, albeit with the possibility of conflicts and the breakdown of relationships.

Although 26% of the interviewees did not have pre-existing networks of family and friends, and in some cases had limited information about the country, all were aware of the welcoming nature of the Missão Paz. Upon seeking out the institution, bonds of solidarity and friendship emerged through interactions with fellow immigrants of the same nationality. New networks formed, uniting previously isolated immigrants in a collective effort for survival. They exchanged vital information, gained strength together, and supported each other in their quest for employment. The support from individuals of the same nationality provided them with the conditions to remain in their destination and overcome the daily challenges they faced.

Based on Handerson's (2015) conception that Haitian emigration is deeply rooted in Haiti's historical context, the field research revealed that Haitians migrating to São Paulo typically had family and friends residing in other countries. These contacts played a crucial role in disseminating essential migration information, including opportunities in the job market and the challenges of life abroad. This network of relationships served to motivate or discourage other Haitians from embarking on similar migration journeys.

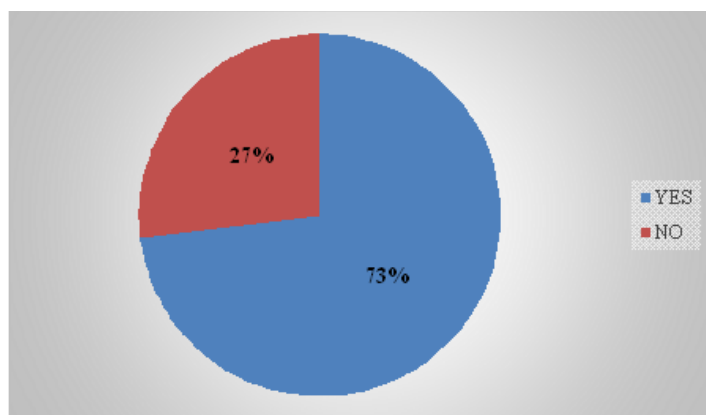
By disseminating information about work opportunities, these individuals actively support mechanisms of capital accumulation, thereby facilitating the arrival of other migrants. However, due to often working in informal or poorly paid jobs, they inadvertently contribute to the ongoing exploitation of their fellow countrymen's labor (Pachi, 2019).

Therefore, it is possible to affirm that Haitian mobility is thought and practiced collectively, networks are formed from the beginning, are dynamic and play a fundamental role in migration processes.

For Haitians who stayed in Haiti,

[...] having relatives abroad often signifies the possibility of future travel or relocation. However, having family members in the diaspora does not automatically ensure mobility for those who remain. Achieving mobility requires both internal factors (such as an individual's ability to mobilize networks) and external factors (such as available resources) [...] There exists a close relationship between those who migrate and those who stay behind, particularly in the differentiated relationships between migrating husbands and staying wives, and vice versa, as well as between fathers and sons, uncles and nephews. Mobility shapes the internal dynamics of families within a context of constant movement. From a young age, children experience the mobility of their peers or neighbors, witnessing departures and travels. Mobility is a foundational aspect of daily life for Haitians. (Handerson, 2016, p. 98).

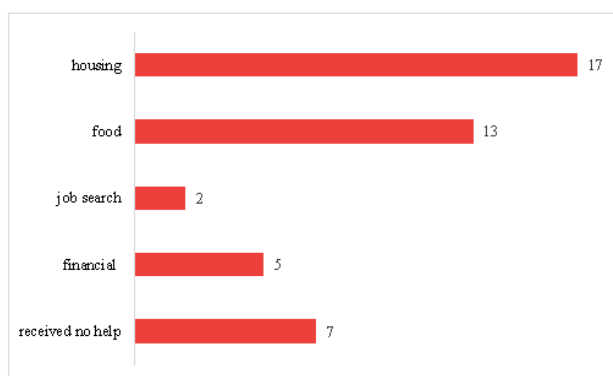
Since Haitian immigration operates as a collective project built on networks, Graph 3 illustrates that 73% of the 35 Haitians surveyed received some form of assistance from established support and solidarity networks (including relatives and friends). Interestingly, not all Haitians who reported having relatives and friends in Brazil received support from these networks upon their arrival in the country. This observation suggests that migratory networks are not uniformly prepared or willing to aid and support to those in need.



**Graph 3** – Percentage of the 35 Haitians interviewed who received help from the migratory **network** in Brazil.

**Source:** Prepared by the author (2019).

The type of aid received basically refers, as can be seen in Graph 4, to housing and food. Few received financial and job search help<sup>4</sup>.



**Graph 4** – Forms of aid that the 35 interviewees received from the migratory network.

**Source:** Prepared by the author (2019).

Asked about the information they received from Brazil while they were still in Haiti, not everyone provided an answer. Among those who did, the responses tended to be more positive than negative, although some individuals received no information at all. Concerning the challenges, such as finding employment or adapting to the new environment, it is believed that these difficulties are often omitted. This omission may stem from the collective and familial nature of the decision to migrate, where failure is not typically considered, as it would signify a collective setback.

It was found that the information received before migrating to Brazil was limited and often vague. Regarding the economic and political crises faced by Brazil at that time, many Haitians had little awareness of the severity and believed that migrating to Brazil would offer better opportunities for work and success compared to Haiti. Some felt deceived because the positive information they had received about the country did not align with the reality

<sup>4</sup> Some interviewees cited more than one type of help.

they experienced upon arrival. Only a few interviewees reported being informed about Brazil's situation through news and social media pages<sup>5</sup> of Haitians already living in Brazil.

Commonly, most studies on migration address the positive role of social networks and solidarity in the migration process but rarely recognize the negative aspects, as highlighted in this work.

It was also verified through field observations, comments, and conversations with immigrants in São Paulo that networks are not necessarily formed by family members and acquaintances. Instead, networks are formed by individuals of the same nationality who meet in the destination location and start interacting with each other to provide mutual assistance. However, it was observed that within these new networks, relationships of subordination develop as a result of the assistance and favors received.

Longer-term Haitian residents in Brazil, who lost their jobs due to the economic crisis, returned to the Missão Paz seeking new job opportunities. They formed alliances with newcomers, who accepted shared housing arrangements under the promise of mutual assistance. In exchange for favors or food, newcomers accrued "debts," leading to a dependency on their compatriots. This situation compromised any potential earnings from work, as these contracted "debts"<sup>6</sup> were disguised as acts of solidarity. As Soederberg (2014) argues, contemporary wages do not solely determine social production relations, given their extreme precariousness, with workers perpetually indebted and repaying debts.

One solution Haitians found to escape dependency and debt with their compatriots was seeking jobs that offered on-site housing. This approach aimed to eliminate debts and pave the way for a new direction in the migrant's life in the metropolis.

Furthermore, field research has revealed that many Haitian immigrants often find themselves working for their compatriots, enduring long hours in precarious conditions and receiving minimal pay. Importantly, it is through information disseminated within networks that Haitians access the labor market. This situation not only mediates labor relations but also perpetuates a cycle of exploitation, as these individuals feel compelled to accept "any"<sup>7</sup> available work to settle debts owed to their fellow nationals.

Therefore, it is considered, based on reports, interviews, and field observations, that not every social network of solidarity formed in Brazil is supportive. On the contrary, in some cases, it exploits the vulnerability of individuals who are unemployed and lack the support of family and friends.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

This article aims to demonstrate the importance of social networks of solidarity and migration in the realm of human mobility, specifically focusing on the immigration of Haitians to São Paulo in the past decade. Based on theoretical foundations and interviews conducted with 35 Haitian immigrants between April 2017 and June 2018 in the Glicério neighborhood of São Paulo, it was found that family plays a crucial role in the migratory decision-making process, which is often collective in nature. Additionally, social networks

---

<sup>5</sup> In this case, Facebook.

<sup>6</sup> It was decided to place the word 'debt' in quotation marks in this paragraph, as it encompasses not only financial obligations but also moral indebtedness and the need to repay favors received, which often coerce immigrants into being trapped in certain situations.

<sup>7</sup> The term "any" is being used in this context to refer to precarious and poorly paid work.

of solidarity among immigrants are shown to be highly significant, dynamic, and complex, facilitating mutual support and assistance among people of the same nationality, albeit sometimes revealing conflicts and rivalries.

These networks provide less economically privileged individuals with opportunities to enhance their lives, serving as a survival strategy where bonds of solidarity and obligations are forged to navigate the challenges of life, particularly in a foreign land. Notably, not all interviewees had established networks in Brazil, and some arrived from Haiti independently. Upon arrival in São Paulo, they sought assistance from religious institutions catering to immigrants and refugees, such as the Missão Paz, where they received support with accommodation, documentation, and job searches.

Given their dynamic nature, these networks can adapt and form new arrangements based on economic interests during the migration process. They foster a sense of solidarity at both local and global levels, yet dialectically may also expose power dynamics, exploitation, and dominance. While many Haitians benefit from existing family and friend networks in Brazil, some arrived without such support, particularly those who came between 2016 and 2017 and were unaware of the country's crises and the challenges of finding employment.

In conclusion, despite the undeniable importance of social networks of solidarity in Haitian immigration and migration studies, this article underscores that these networks are not always as "solidary" as perceived. In addition to not always conveying accurate information, they can involve specific interests of various parties and perpetuate precarious conditions and ongoing exploitation of new migrant flows, which became more apparent following the political and economic crises of 2014, leading to significant shifts in the Haitian migration flow to Brazil.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This study was financed in part by the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior - Brasil (CAPES) - Finance Code 001.

## REFERENCES

- CAVALCANTI, L.; OLIVEIRA, T.; SILVA, B. G. **Relatório anual 2021: 2011-2020: uma década de desafios para a imigração e o refúgio no Brasil**. Brasília: Observatório das Migrações Internacionais, Ministério da Justiça e Segurança Pública, Conselho Nacional de Imigração, Coordenação Geral de Imigração Laboral, 2021.
- COTINGUIBA, G. C. **Imigração haitiana para o Brasil: a relação entre trabalho e processos migratórios**. 2014. Dissertação (Mestrado em História e Estudos Culturais) – Universidade Federal de Rondônia, Porto Velho, 2014.
- DORNELAS, S. M. Redes sociais na migração: questionamentos a partir da pastoral. **Travessia Revista do Migrante**, São Paulo, v. 14, n. 40, p. 5-10, 2001. <http://doi.org/10.48213/travessia.i40.814>.
- DUTRA, D. Migrantes haitianos e mercado de trabalho no Distrito Federal. Uma análise sociológica a partir da perspectiva das relações sociais de gênero. In: CAVALCANTE, L. *et al.* (ed.). **A imigração haitiana no Brasil: características sociodemográficas e laborais na região Sul e no Distrito Federal**. Brasília: OBMIGRA, 2016.
- FERNANDES, C. As espacialidades migratórias na "Baixada do Glicério", centro da cidade de São Paulo. In: ENCONTRO NACIONAL DE PÓS-GRADUAÇÃO EM GEOGRAFIA, 15., 2021. **Anais [...]**. São Paulo: ANPEGE, 2021. Evento virtual.
- HANDERSON, J. A historicidade da (e)migração Internacional Haitiana: o Brasil como novo espaço migratório. In: CAVALCANTE, L. *et al.* (ed.). **A imigração haitiana no Brasil: características sociodemográficas e laborais na região Sul e no Distrito Federal**. Brasília: OBMIGRA, 2016.

- HANDERSON, J. Diáspora: sentidos sociais e mobilidades haitianas. **Horizontes Antropológicos**, Porto Alegre, v. 21, n. 43, p. 51-78, 2015. <http://doi.org/10.1590/S0104-71832015000100003>.
- JOSEPH, A. A historicidade da (e)migração internacional haitiana: o Brasil como novo espaço migratório. **Périplos: Revista de Estudos sobre Migrações**, Brasília, v. 1, n. 1, p. 7-26, 2017.
- MAGALHÃES, L. F. A.; BAENINGER, R. Imigração haitiana no Brasil e remessas para o Haiti. In: BAENINGER, R. *et al.* (ed.). **Imigração haitiana no Brasil**. Jundiaí: Paco Editorial, 2016.
- PACHI, P. A importância da imigração haitiana na concepção da nova lei municipal (São Paulo) de migração. **Travessia Revista do Migrante**, São Paulo, n. 80, p. 93-104, 2017. <http://doi.org/10.48213/travessia.i80.283>.
- PACHI, P. **A precarização na base da mundialização contemporânea: a imigração haitiana na metrópole de São Paulo**. 2019. Dissertação (Mestrado em Geografia) – Faculdade de Filosofia Letras e Ciências Humanas, Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, 2019.
- PÓVOA NETO, H. Migrações internas e mobilidade do trabalho no Brasil atual: novos desafios para a análise. **Experimental**, São Paulo, n. 2, p. 11-24, 1997.
- SANTOS, M. **A natureza do espaço**. 4. ed. São Paulo: Edusp, 2012.
- SASSEN, S. **Expulsões, brutalidade e complexidade na economia global**. São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 2016.
- SAYAD, A. **A imigração ou os paradoxos da alteridade**. São Paulo: Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 1998.
- SAYAD, A. O retorno: elemento constitutivo da condição do imigrante. **Travessia Revista do Migrante**, São Paulo, v. 13, n. esp., p. 1-36, 2000.
- SOEDERBERG, S. **Debtfare states and the poverty industry: money, discipline and the surplus population**. New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2014. <http://doi.org/10.4324/9781315761954>.
- TRUZZI, O. Redes em processos migratórios. **Tempo Social: Revista de Sociologia da USP**, São Paulo, v. 20, n. 1, p. 199-218, 2008. <http://doi.org/10.1590/S0103-20702008000100010>.
- UNIVERSIDADE ESTADUAL DE CAMPINAS – UNICAMP. **SISMIGRA: Sistema de Registro Nacional Migratório**. Campinas, 2022. Disponível em: <https://www.nepo.unicamp.br/observatorio/bancointerativo/numeros-imigracao-internacional/>. Acesso em: 22 nov. 2022.

## Article editor

Rodrigo Ramos Hospodar Felipe Valverde

Received: Feb. 29 2024

Accepted: May 22 2024