

MUDHA: History of Haitian and Dominican-Haitian Women's Organizing in the Dominican Republic

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Abstract

This thesis examines how women members of the Movement of Dominican-Haitian Women (MUDHA) have created an alternative model of development for poor Dominican-Haitian and Haitian women living in *batey* communities on sugar cane plantations in the Dominican Republic. MUDHA's alternative model of development is manifested in their activities providing health clinics and health promoters; small schools, and free legal advocacy. The data examined includes historical texts, publications of non-governmental organizations, media coverage of MUDHA's activism and my personal travel to Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. I place MUDHA's organizing activities in the historical context of women's organizing in Haiti and the Dominican Republic in order to offer a comparative examination of the social, political, and economic forces that have shaped women's organizing.

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The soul of my Master's thesis springs from my experiences growing up with strong, passionate women who faced down the barriers in their lives. My mother, Charlotte Pessoni, serves as an ongoing example to me and as a champion for children and families in her community. The social and political activism of many of my women colleagues in the Latin American Studies Master's program at KU have further inspired me to use academics to pursue social justice. This thesis is dedicated to women worldwide whose strength forms the *poto mitan*, the central pillar, of their communities.

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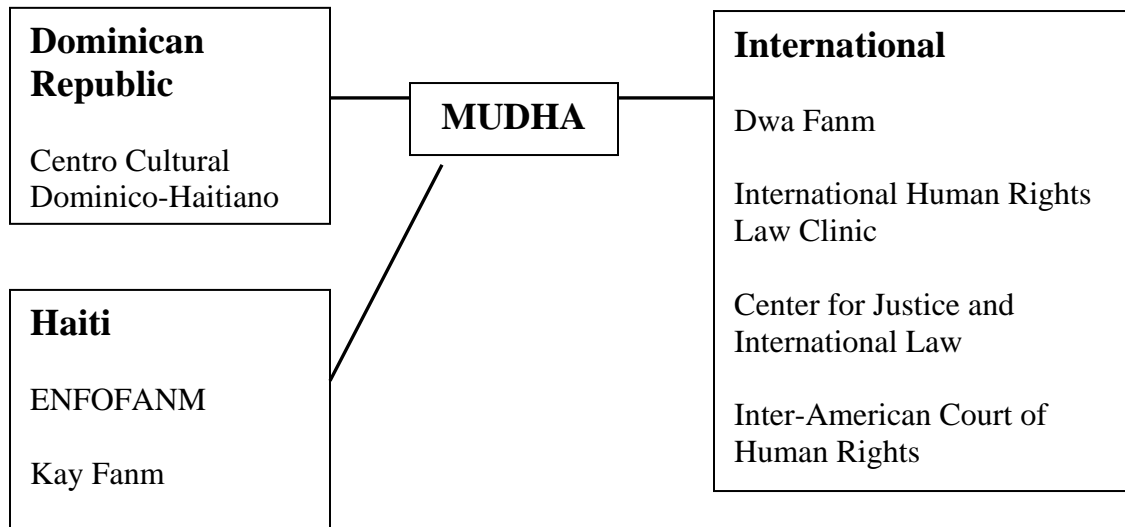


Figure 1: Haiti and the Dominican Republic

Directory of Organization Acronyms

ADOPLAFAM: Dominican Association for Women's Development
CCDH: Centro Cultural Dominico-Haitiano
CEDAW: Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CEPAC: Community Development Education Center
CEPAE: Center for Ecumenical Planning and Action
CESR: Center for Economic and Social Rights
CIAC: Cultural Support and Research Center
CONAP: National Coordinator for the Defense of the Rights of Women
COTEDO: Dominican Ecumenical Planning and Action
DAWN: Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era
ENFOFANM: National and International Center of Documentation and Information about Women in Haiti
FLACSO: Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencia Sociales
IACHR: Inter-American Commission on Human Rights
IDAC: Community Development Institute
IWRAP: International Women's Rights Action Watch
KOFIV: Commission of Women Victims for Victims
MOSCTHA: Haitian Workers Socio-Cultural Movement
MUDHA: Movimiento de Mujeres Dominico-Haitianas
OAS: Organization of American States
OIM: Organización Internacional par las Migraciones
RAFA: Rally of Haitian Women
SOFA: Women in Solidarity with Haiti
UFAP: Union of Patriotic Haitian Women
UN: United Nations
UNIFEM: United Nations Development Fund for Women

Figure 2: MUDHA's Organizational Affiliations



Chapter 1: Introduction

Haitian women have faced entrenched poverty and a history of political instability and violence through individual strength and solidarity with each other. Throughout the 1957 to 1986 rule of Françoise Duvalier and then his son, Jean-Claude Duvalier, Haitian women continued feminist and peasant organizing under real threat of violence. Women mobilized mass protests in the early 1980s against the scarcity of food and violence against women. They formed their own agricultural associations, marketing associations, and women's groups, and they worked to mobilize Haitian voters preceding the 1990 elections. That election was the first time most Haitian women had the opportunity to vote.

My thesis examines how women members of the Movement of Dominican-Haitian Women (MUDHA) have created an alternative model of development for poor Dominican-Haitian and Haitian women living in *batey* communities on sugar cane plantations in the Dominican Republic. Haitian women migrate to the Dominican Republic for a variety of reasons and seek employment in a variety of urban and rural occupations, but MUDHA focuses on advocating for poor rural women in *bateyes* because the organization thinks *batey* women are the most marginalized in the ethnic Haitian community. MUDHA's alternative model of development is manifested in their activities providing health clinics and health promoters; small schools, and free legal advocacy. I place MUDHA's organizing activities in the historical context of women's organizing in Haiti and the Dominican Republic in order to offer a comparative examination of the social, political, and

economic forces that have shaped women's organizing. The guiding theoretical framework for my thesis is alternative model of development.

Literature Review

Literature in various disciplines such as anthropology, sociology and medical studies about Haitian and Dominican women and their activities and organizations can be found on the Internet. Scholars and activists have also compiled testimonies and oral histories from Haitian women about their experiences organizing in democratic movements, as peasants, and as survivors of violence.

Beverly Bell facilitated Haitian women sharing their experiences living through the 1991 to 1994 presidential coup by making audio recordings of their stories and compiling *Walking on Fire: Haitian Women's Stories of Survival and Resistance* in 2001. In it, women recount forming their own agricultural associations when men would not listen to their input, using their position as market women to spread information about the political party Lavalas and its candidate Jean-Bertrand Aristide before the 1990 election, surviving violence, and continuing political women's organizing during the coup. Bell had encountered journalism, reports and development literature that portrayed the ways Haitian women had been victimized by poverty and violence without also offering them a voice to display their courage and determination to improve their lives. She wrote the book to offer Haitian women the chance to tell their own story in a way, she hoped, that would encourage the international community to work with Haitian women to improve the country's situation.

Marie Racine (1999), a Haitian woman organizer who at one time went into exile in the United States to escape political violence, compiled the experiences of Haitian women organizing for democracy in the book *Like the Dew That Waters the Grass: Words from Haitian Women*. In Racine's book, women tell of organizing for a democratic government through the Liberation Theology movement in the Haitian Catholic Church led by the priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide. A common theme in their stories is the need to flee into exile in order to escape attempts by anti-Lavalas political forces to kill them. Haitians with money could flee to the United States, though it was more common for most people to flee into the backcountry of Haiti or across the border into the Dominican Republic.

Haitian women scholars living in exile also contribute to the literature on women's organizing. Carolle Charles, a sociology professor at Baruch College, examines the importance that women in exile had in supporting women's organizing in Haiti with money and organizing strategies during the last years of the Duvalier family dictatorship in the early 1980s in her article "Gender and Politics in Contemporary Haiti: The Duvalierist State, Transnationalism, and the Emergence of a New Feminism, 1980-1999" (1995). Charles asserts that Haitian women living in the United States and Canada during the 1970s organized both for their needs as immigrants and to call for international condemnation of the despotic rule of Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier. After developing skills in grassroots organizing within their communities, these women began to network with women in Haiti to organize against the Duvalier regime. When Duvalier fled to Paris in 1986, leaving the

government to military rule, a democratic space opened up for the first time since his father, Francois Duvalier, came to power in 1957. It was this period of new democratic possibilities, that many Haitian women returned home from exile and put their organizing experience to work with grassroots women's groups (Charles 1995).

Activist, stateswoman and writer Myriam Merlet publishes on issues affecting Haitian women (2001). Merlet is co-founder of the National and International Center of Documentation and Information about Women in Haiti (ENFOFANM) and is appointed the chief of staff of Haiti's Ministry for Women. Merlet left Haiti in the 1970s but returned with Duvalier's exile in 1986 to work as political activist. Her essay "Between Love, Anger and Madness: Building Peace in Haiti" draws parallels between the years after the 1991-1994 coup that deposed Jean-Bertrand Aristide to the aftermath of war, in which women are left traumatized and struggling despite the end of formal combat (Merlet 2001).

International aid organizations provide a rich literature on women and their human rights organizing. The United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights published observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (2001) that outlines women's legal rights and the failure of the Dominican government to protect those rights. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, a division of the Organization of American States, also outlines failures of the Dominican government to enforce laws against workplace discrimination, rape and domestic violence.

The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) has produced a *Gender Profile on the Conflict in Haiti* that outlines the human rights impact on women of political violence that followed the 2004 exit from the presidency of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and installation of a UN mission running the country (2006). Sanitation and health infrastructure that existed were almost totally destroyed in the upheaval and the rape of women and children increased again. The UNIFEM report also documents women's "peace building activities" citing the work of Haitian grassroots organizations such as Kay Fanm, Klinik Fanm and Women in Solidarity with Haiti (SOFA) to combat rape and other violence. UNIFEM provides funding for the National Coordinator for the Defense of the Rights of Women (CONAP), CRAD and Fanm Yo La during the 2006-2007 funding cycle. MADRE also regularly publishes Online materials about Haitian grassroots organizations it partners with such as the Commission of Women Victims for Victims (KOFAVIV) that works with survivors of rape.

In the Dominican Republic, which has enjoyed greater political stability, a stronger economy and less political violence than Haiti, women's organizing has evolved with a slightly different focus. While formally guaranteed more legal rights to land ownership and government support than Haitian women, Dominican women face a legal system that often fails to protect their rights. Women have organized to end job discrimination and gain protection against sexual harassment in their workplaces. This results from a society that views women as supplementary wage earners even when they bear primary responsibility for taking care of families (Safa

1995). The Free Trade Zones that house multi-national factories producing for export are a major employer of women and also the site of women's labor organizing.

Dominican feminists and other scholars have documented the history of the women's movement and discrimination against women in their workplaces, especially in agriculture. Ramón Alberto Ferreras (1976) and Tomás Báez Díaz (1980) offer histories of Dominican feminism and women respectively that discuss history of the suffrage movement, challenges to education and also social conditions and sexism that have been barriers to women achieving legal rights. Early intellectual and upper class women at the head of these movements receive the most coverage as feminists, while issues of class and race are explored more in works by Dominican women feminists and authors of labor studies.

Angela Hernández (1985), Hernández, Miguelina Crespo and Luz M. Abreu L (1986), Clara Báez (1985), Belkis Mones and Lydia Grant (1987), and Margarita Cordero (1985), produced works that explored in more detail the economic and racist forces at work in gender discrimination, especially in connecting women's activism in the agricultural sector to economic subordination. In *Why are Women Fighting?* (1985) Angela Hernández calls on feminists to work with poor women to address their economic and social needs and move away from the historical tendency of Dominican feminism to ignore the sharp divides between middle and upper class, lighter skinned women and the masses of poor and Afro-descended women. Frank Moya Pons (1986) and Francis Pou (1987) write about the socioeconomic condition of women workers and rural women and development, respectively. Barbara Finlay

(1989) studies women agricultural laborers, their families and rural development in the province of Azua.

Women who emigrate from Haiti to the Dominican Republic or are born in the Dominican to Haitian parents face challenges different from those of Dominican women. While most Dominican women face a limited number of options for earning money that include vending, working in free trade zones, agriculture, and tourism and, increasingly, the sex tourism market, Haitian women are faced with even fewer options. Even as the Haitian immigrant community is feminizing, meaning there are more women immigrants relative to men and they are seeking paid work, the Organización Internacional para las Migraciones (OIM) reported in 2004 that Haitian women are rarely hired to work in free trade zones, that they typically can't find work as domestics unless living in a border town, and that tourism jobs may be out of reach for them.

In her study of the sex tourism industry in the northern coastal town of Sosúa in the 1990s, *What's Love Got to Do With It? Transnational Desires and Sex Tourism in the Dominican Republic*, Denise Brennan documents that although Haitian women are stereotyped by Dominicans as more sexually available and spreaders of sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS, the vast majority of sex workers were Dominican and that women in both groups reported the same safe-sex practices. The Organización Internacional para las Migraciones (2004) reports that Haitian immigrants are shifting from rural to urban work as the sugar industry declines, creating a situation where many Haitian women find urban work in

construction and public works, formal and informal vending and resale of imported items and tourism.

Unemployment and lower wages make Haitian women immigrants less able than Dominican women to access health care and education and legal assistance for themselves and their families. The Movement of Dominican-Haitian Women, Human Rights Watch and other international groups have documented the widespread illegal denial of birth certificates to ethnic Haitian children born in the Dominican Republic, and those children's resulting inability to access education and health services.

The existing literature on Haitian women's non-governmental organizations covers their organizing in Haiti, especially on issues of health, education, reproductive services, poverty reduction and sexual assault. Literature on women's non-governmental organizations in the Dominican Republic focuses activism on labor rights, sexually transmitted diseases, prostitution and tourism, and domestic violence. Yet only a limited amount of literature, often in the form of short Internet descriptions of NGO projects that have received funding, is available about organizations formed by Haitian and Haitian-descended women living in the Dominican Republic. This information is often scattered among Websites of various NGOs and is not readily available to researchers searching for information on NGOs of ethnic Haitian women in the Dominican Republic.

My thesis contributes to the existing literature on NGOs in the Dominican Republic because I explore the historical context of MUDHA's organizing activities

in depth, drawing from NGO reports, media accounts of their activities and written and audiovisual interviews. MUDHA is a truly unique NGO because of its membership base in poor Dominican-Haitian women from *bateys* and because of its successful strategy of bringing legal claims before the Inter-American Human Rights Court. Moreover, women in MUDHA confront the needs of poor ethnic Haitian women living in *bateys* through a gendered lens that acknowledges that sexism, in addition anti-black racism and national discrimination in the form of anti-Haitianism, makes ethnic Haitian women more vulnerable than Haitian men or Dominican women.

Theoretical framework

Haitian women in Haiti and the Dominican Republic are organizing in order to create models for development based in women's needs and their local culture. This grassroots vision of improving their lives and the lives of everyone in their community is often different from macro-level projects for economic development created by organizations such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, or the Inter-American Development Bank. These lending institutions have envisioned and implemented plans that frequently view development in purely economic terms and that require austerity measures in the form of structural adjustment programs that have profoundly impacted the lives of poor women in Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

While these powerful lending institutions, as well as foreign governments, conceive of development as the process of industrializing and producing export

products to sell on the world market with the aim of eventually bringing in more capital, grassroots women organizers often envision an alternative model of development. Having received only limited benefits from these macro-level economic plans, women's groups view development as changes in economic situations that improve people's wellbeing, their human and civil rights, health, education and natural environment. In my thesis I use an alternative grassroots model of development as a framework to explain the activities and vision of Haitian women immigrants' non-governmental organizations.

Long left out of macro-level development planning, women's organizations in the Third World are weighing in with their visions for their futures. The women of DAWN, or Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era, a non-hierarchical coalition of Third World women scholars and activists, articulate that strategies designed to empower Third World women must be created by the women themselves, although solidarity support from women of the wealthy nations creates powerful alliances. Gita Sen and Caren Grown of DAWN (1987) write that women from the poorest and most oppressed sectors of society have only recently been recognized as strong people who are active participants in changing their lives. As part of its alternative strategy DAWN women see a strategic need for organizing to empower individual women and build movements for social change at the grassroots level. Their vision is especially applicable to grassroots organizing of Haitian and Dominican-Haitian women, who experience poverty in conjunction with exploitation

from the government and employers because of their illegal, or perceived illegal, status.

Michael Edwards defines development as “a process of enrichment in every aspect of life” and critiques conventional development research that privileges the technical training of outside “experts” over the local knowledge and experiences of the people being “developed” (Edwards 1993; 78). General solutions created far away are often not useful when applied to the complex and real-life issues of the place targeted for development. Norman Long and Magdalena Villareal (1993) join in Edwards’ critique of the disconnection between the theory and practice of the sociology of development, calling for a “better integration of theoretical understanding with practical concerns.” To demonstrate that outside development workers may often not understand the reality of people they are trying to help, Long and Villareal site a study conducted in the Dominican Republic in which farmers trusted agricultural advice they received from small-scale traders more than they trusted advice from agricultural extension workers, because they had at one time received plants from extension workers that did not sell (Long & Villareal 1993; 152). They site this study to show that intimate knowledge of local realities is key for development, as in this case where agricultural knowledge could be better distributed through traders than through extension workers.

Braidotti, Charkiewicz, Hausler and Wieringa write that as more visions of alternative development are created and put in action, one clear trend is that people who have been marginalized by development processes are redrawing the lines and

creating their own methods for solving their problems (Braidotti et al. 1994; 115). They site as an example communities in the global South who are reviving old methods of farming as a way to lessen dependence on Western seeds and fertilizers and break from cultural imperialism. While applauding the work and vision of DAWN to work from “micro-level experiences of poor, rural and urban women living in the South and linking these to the macro-economic level” they also question whether DAWN’s work can truly be rooted in the perspectives of poor women when they themselves are from urban, middle-class backgrounds, albeit from the South (Braidotti 1994; 121).

However, MUDHA is unique in that its members are all Dominican-Haitian women who themselves experienced poverty, racism and national discrimination growing up in *bateys* in the Dominican Republic. Although Haitian women migrants to the Dominican Republic find employment and housing in a variety of urban and rural settings, MUDHA works predominately with poor *batey* residents – while working to a lesser degree with Haitian and Dominican-Haitians living in urban areas – to establish priorities for their community’s needs. MUDHA members learn about the needs of *batey* residents to obtain to medicine, education and birth certificates for their children from their constant presence in those communities.

To assist with these community-articulated needs, MUDHA operates health clinics and schools for *batey* children, while also providing free, and thus accessible, legal representation for people who want to pursue their legal right to citizenship through the Dominican and international court systems. MUDHA remains

accountable to the communities because MUDHA women are rooted in these communities and their outreach activities and services such as schools and clinics are physically located within these communities. This grassroots focus of MUDHA is very much compatible with priorities of alternative development as articulated by DAWN, Edwards, Long and Villareal, and Braidotti, et al.

Methodology

In this thesis I rely on a review of relevant literature which is supplemented by my own observations during a brief visit to the Dominican Republic. I traveled to Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, to visit MUDHA's office in the summer of 2006 with the assistance of a Summer Field Research Grant from the Center of Latin American Studies at the University of Kansas. During my short stay, I located the office of MUDHA in the Gazcué neighborhood near the historic city center and was invited to speak to the only member working at the office on that Monday. She did not have time to conduct an interview, and explained that I would need to speak to director Solange "Sonia" Pierre before speaking with other members. She explained that the staff of MUDHA was extremely busy conducting outreach work in *bateyes* and Pierre was not present at the office that day, so she would have an American intern working with the organization that summer contact me to set up an appointment. Unfortunately, my travel arrangements dictated that I was already gone before Pierre was able to schedule an interview.

I wanted to get a feel for the situation of Dominican-Haitians and Haitians living in *batey* communities and the living conditions there, so it was important for

me to get a sense of how NGOs work in *bateyes*. I gathered information about a variety of NGOs working in *bateyes* and for Dominican-Haitian and Haitian workers through contacts I obtained at CONECTA, the HIV/AIDS prevention program funded by USAID in the Dominican Republic. Tito Coleman, director of the Proyecto CONECTA program, generously offered me the use of his home as a residence during my field work in Santo Domingo. CONECTA is funded by USAID to assist with overhauling and strengthening the Dominican Republic's HIV/AIDS programming, reproductive health and child survival. I was able to collect information about HIV/AIDS awareness in the Dominican Republic from the CONECTA office.

Although Coleman was not in the Dominican Republic during my fieldwork, he communicated with me through email and put me in touch with Elizabeth Conklin, a U.S. woman living permanently in the Dominican Republic who had lived and worked extensively in *bateyes* and worked in CONECTA's outreach programs in *bateyes*. Conklin provided me contacts for all the Dominican NGOs partnered with CONECTA, and especially for those she felt were most effective and included participation of Dominican or Dominican-Haitian women; the Community Development Education Center (CEPAC), the Dominican Ecumenical Work Commission (COTEDO), the Center for Ecumenical Planning and Action (CEPAE), the Community Development Institute (IDAC), the Haitian Workers Socio-Cultural Movement (MOSCTHA) and the Cultural Support and Research Center (CIAC). In addition, Tito Coleman provided me with contact information for two other groups

working with CONECTA, the Batey Relief Association and ADOPLAFAM, the Dominican Association for Women's Development, which provides microcredit loans and business training for women.

I was able to learn from other people about the situation of Haitians in the Dominican Republic during the trip, which was invaluable to me as a first-time visitor to the country. One telling lesson was the incredulity in people's responses when they asked why I was visiting Santo Domingo and I responded that I wanted to learn more about Haitian immigrant women. Why would I want to travel so far to learn about Haitians, people asked? Even the MUDHA member who graciously sat with me as I described my interest in the organization initially asked me, with surprise, how had I come to be interested in Haitians? Rather than flagrantly racist or nationalistic comments that I had expected to hear from Dominicans when talking about Haitians, their response was often one of total disinterest, as if Haitians were a non-issue. However, Haitian immigration is visibly an issue in Santo Domingo.

The MUDHA office is located in a leafy neighborhood several blocks from a compound of government office buildings and shares a block with other buildings that were once homes and now house governmental and non-governmental organizations offices. While waiting for a Haitian man to unlock the front gates at the MUDHA office, I watched as several Haitian men holding hand clippers knelt on the lawn of an office across the street, slowly clipping the lawn by hand. Several times I walked the more than hour-long walk from the city center back to the western suburb where I was staying. On those walks I heard Creole spoken on the sidewalks

by passing children, by women waiting in the checkout line of a rather upscale grocery store, and at a massive government construction project seemingly staffed entirely by Haitian immigrant men as I neared the suburb of gated compounds in which I was staying. The Haitian presence in the nation's capital was entirely greater than I had expected.

And despite very real and pervasive anti-black and anti-Haitian racism documented in the country, I had several conversations that demonstrated a more nuanced reality of the ways in which many Dominicans' lives are intertwined with those of Haitians'. While driving me to the airport at 3 a.m. the day of my departure, a taxi driver –the friend of a Dominican woman I befriended – chatted with me about my interest in Haitians. He had grown up “near the border” himself and said that as a kid he had played with Haitians the same as Dominicans and asserted that everybody is “the same thing” in that part of the country. Surprised that I had studied Creole in a United States university, he began to quiz me in Creole as we zoomed through the humid night along the ocean.

In addition to my personal observations in Santo Domingo, my thesis uses historical material about Haitian women's organizing in Haiti and their experiences as immigrants to the Dominican Republic and about Dominican women's organizing. The women of MUDHA have not organized in a social vacuum. Rather, the history Haiti as the land of their birth or their parent's or grandparent's birth, and the history of the Dominican Republic and the Haitian immigrant experience there have created the necessity of organizing and framed their approaches to organizing. I

also examine the history of feminist and women's organizing in both countries, as they are not the same thing for all organizations, to show what women's organizing preceded and developed in conjunction with Haitian and Dominican-Haitian women's organizing in the Dominican Republic.

My thesis draws heavily from information published by women's organizations and other governmental and non-governmental organizations that work in conjunction with women's organizations, to provide an up-to-date picture of organizing activities. The Internet provides an affordable publishing method for Haitian women's organizations operating on low budgets, and many create Web sites of their own or are able to distribute information about their campaigns, calls to action, financial needs and their demands of both the Haitian and Dominican government through press releases and stories published on Web sites of better funded NGOs. It was through a Google search of "women and Haiti" that I originally came across MUDHA's Web site, which outlines the goals, history and current organizing efforts of the group, as well as providing contact information and links to other Haitian women's organizations (MUDHA 2001). The Center for Economic and Social Rights in Brooklyn published an announcement for a gala fundraising event in 2003 asking supporters of Haitian and human rights to donate money to MUDHA in a time when dire financial need could have caused it to close (CESR 2002). The fundraising announcement is an example of the strong ties of support with international activists and academic institutions, such as Columbia University, that MUDHA has established.

Field research dispatches published Online by students of the International Human Rights Law Clinic at Boalt Hall at the University of California, Berkeley, proved a rich source of information on the methods MUDHA used to collect data for their successful legal case before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights on behalf of two Dominican-Haitian girls who were denied birth certificates. The Boalt Hall students, some of them recipients of Tinker Field Research Grants, worked as interns with MUDHA gathering data to compile the case, and eventually served as co-counsels when the case was argued before the IACHR in Costa Rica in 2005 (Altholz 2005).

Media published Online is also an invaluable resource for this project. Wordpress.org reported on Dec. 19, 2006 that MUDHA director Solange Pierre had been awarded the 2006 Human Rights Award by the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human Rights. Wordpress correspondent Jeffrey Zahka quoted Pierre as saying;

“In my country, Dominican children of Haitian descent suffer discrimination from the moment they are born. The Dominican Constitution established that all who are born in the Dominican Republic are Dominicans. However, the authorities refuse to issue birth certificates to the children of Haitian immigrants born in the country” (Zahka 2006).

Zahka explains that since MUDHA won a “right to a nationality” case at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in 2005, the Dominican government has ignored the ruling, saying it infringed upon national sovereignty, denied it illegally denies Dominican-Haitians their rights, and accused Pierre of stirring up ethnic tensions. The official Web site of the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for

Human Rights also reported in detail about Pierre's life story and her leadership within MUDHA (RFKMCHR 2006). Through the Kennedy Center, I followed links to press coverage of Pierre's award, reports by the U.S. State Department, and a film made on the sugar industry.

Online publications of local media have been useful, as WBAI, New York, 99.5 FM Pacifica Radio reports Online that the Brooklyn based group Haitian Women for Haitian Refugees was working with MUDHA to send relief supplies to Haitian communities living in both Haiti and the Dominican Republic following massive flooding that killed at least 1,000 people.

My thesis is divided into the following sections; introduction, history of the Dominican Republic and Haitian immigration, history of Haiti and women's organizing activities, MUDHA: Haitian and Dominican-Haitian organizing in the Dominican Republic, and conclusions.

Chapter one, the introduction, has presented a literature review relevant to Haitian, Dominican, and Dominican-Haitian women, my theoretical framework, and my methodology for research.

Chapter two, the History of the Dominican Republic and Haitian Immigration, examines Haitian immigration through the colonial, Independence to Twentieth Century, Trujillo dictatorship and Post-Trujillo time periods.

Chapter three, the History of Haiti and Women's Organizing Activities, examines the colonial, U.S. Occupation, Duvalier dictatorships, and Post-Duvalier time periods.

Chapter four, MUDHA: Haitian and Dominican-Haitian Organizing in the Dominican Republic, examines Dominican women's organizing, causes of Haitian women's migration, status of Haitian women migrants, and the case study and analysis of MUDHA.

Chapter five, Conclusion, presents an overview, the limitations of my research, and directions for future research.

Chapter 2: History of Dominican Republic and Haitian Immigration

The experiences of contemporary Haitian women immigrants and Dominican-Haitians in the Dominican Republic are negatively impacted by a long history of conflict between the neighboring nations and an extreme anti-black racism against Haitians that developed in the Dominican Republic. In this chapter I examine the history of the Dominican Republic in the colonial, Independence to early Twentieth Century, Trujillo dictatorship and post-Trujillo time periods with special focus on Haitian immigration and settlement for the purpose of finding employment in the Dominican and the development of anti-Haitian sentiment as an element of Dominican identity

The unique relationship between the Dominican Republic and Haiti is rooted in geography. The Dominican Republic occupies the eastern two-thirds of the island of Hispaniola (Little Spain), while Haiti occupies the western third. A spine of lush mountain ranges running north to south has served as the historical division between the nations. In today's terms, the Dominican Republic is viewed as a stable and non-threatening nation, while Haiti is unquestionably mired in political, environmental and social upheaval. For much of the island's history, however, the situation was reversed.

Colonial period

Spain's colony on the eastern portion of the island was economically marginal and sparsely populated throughout the colonial period. The colony of Santo Domingo, which became the Dominican Republic, was the first Spanish settlement

in the Americas. Christopher Columbus landed on the north coast of the island in 1492 and the city of Santo Domingo, on the south coast, was established in 1502. During the first years of the European settlement, indigenous Taino and Carib people were forced to labor in gold mines, but the gold ran out quickly and the natives were exterminated through violence, disease and overwork (Hernández López 2003; 74).

By 1502, Spaniards began importing black slaves to replace the dwindling indigenous population, first from Spain and later from Africa (Hernández & López 2003; 74). The economy of the colony shifted from gold mining to sugar production and cattle farming, and by the late Sixteenth Century even sugar production declined. At the opening of the Seventeenth Century, decisions of the territorial governor, natural disasters, plagues and illnesses combined to cause mass starvation and death in the colony and destroy the economy of ranching and small-scale farming (Hernández & López 2003; 77). In 1804, the armies of enslaved black people led by General Toussaint L'Overture in the neighboring colony of Saint Domingue won their 12-year battle against the French military and Haiti became the first independent black nation in the Western Hemisphere. At the time of the Haitian Revolution, the colony of Santo Domingo was sparsely populated and whites, a sizable population of free blacks, and enslaved blacks were struggling to survive.

Silvio Torres-Saillant (1998; 134) calls Dominicans' tendency to downplay their African ancestry while claiming a white or appropriated Taino Indian identity "deracialized social consciousness." The poverty that plagued the entire colony in the Seventeenth Century made many whites as destitute as blacks, breaking down

racial barriers and leading to interracial marriages, asserts Torres-Saillant (1998; 134). During this era of a growing mulatto population, the meaning of the racial category *negro* (black) shifted to describe only black people who were still enslaved or “engaged in subversive action against the colonial system,” but not free blacks or mulattos (Torres-Saillant 1998; 134). He theorizes that free blacks and mulattos eventually stepped outside an identity of blackness during this period.

The Haitian ruler Jean-Pierre Boyer invaded the Spanish colony in 1822 and claimed it for Haiti. The Dominican relationship of blackness to slavery was complex following the Haitian takeover. On the one hand, the Haitian troops that gained control of Santo Domingo in 1822 freed any black slaves they encountered and this cultivated support among slaves and black and mulatto peasants (Despradel 1974; 86). The occupying Haitian government also distributed farmland to black Dominicans across the island as part of an attempt to put more land into agricultural production to raise money for the Haitian government, which was cash-strapped after its lengthy war with France and the resulting destruction of its plantations (Derby 2003; 29). Further, black and mulatto Dominicans shared many African cultural traditions such as syncretic religion, music, dance and food with Haitians because of shared ancestry and the cultural interaction that had always occurred in the frontier region (Derby 2003; 29).

The Spanish territory remained under Haitian control until 1844 when nationalist intellectuals called La Trinitaria (The Trinity) organized a revolution and forced a Haitian retreat. Santo Domingo celebrated its independence from Haiti and

became the sovereign nation of the Dominican Republic in 1844 (Hernández & López 2003; 79). The first action of the Dominican national government was to abolish slavery because other blacks and mulattos loyal to the Spanish colony had distinguished themselves fighting for La Trinitaria's cause (Hernández & López; 79).

Teresita Martínez-Vergue posits that the extended Haitian Domination, as the period from 1822 to 1844 was popularly called, also fostered extreme resentment of Haitians (2005; 94). Dominican people who identified more with *mulatez* (brownness) than with blackness also resented the black pride ideology of the Haitian government, which they saw as racially exclusive and anti-European (Martínez-Vergue 2005; 95). This last trait was more problematic for white merchants and intellectuals who, in step with discourses of scientific racism of the day, wanted to emphasize the nation's white, Hispanic and Catholic influences, and minimize what they saw as savage and uncivilized African influences. It was from this sector of society that the Trinitarian nationalist movement emerged. Its January 1844 manifesto was more an anti-Haitian document than a clear assertion of what an independent Dominican nation would be (Martínez-Vergue 2005; 98).

Martínez-Vergue presents three explanations for development of anti-Haitianism from 1830 to 1916. First, as elites strove to remain at the top of the colonial hierarchy, the popular - and often darker-skinned - Dominican classes also tried to remain higher than some other social class. Haitians, overwhelmingly of dark skin color and charged by elites with rejecting of Catholicism, speaking an uncivilized Creole of the French language and general "African primitivism," were

that group the Dominican popular classes could look down on (Martínez-Vergue 2005; 98). Second, lacking a prosperous colony, Dominicans defined themselves nationally by what they were not – Haitian – rather than what they were. Third, the rise of world capitalism had created a more unequal society in the plantation economy of colonial Haiti than it had in the subsistence economy of the Dominican Republic, leading to a sense of relatively “more harmonious race relations and possibly more egalitarian society” in the Dominican Republic (Martínez-Vergue 2005; 98).

Independence to Twentieth Century

About 30 years after Dominican independence from Haiti, Dominican elites and a an influx of foreign investors began acquiring large tracts of land and establishing sugar cane plantations on which to grow and mill sugar (Martínez 1995; 37). During the following two decades world sugar prices dropped and many plantations stopped producing. The plantations that did flourish predominately employed Dominicans who owned land but worked in wage labor part of the year to earn cash (Martínez 1995; 37). By the end of the Nineteenth Century, price inflation deterred poor Dominicans from taking this wage labor because sugar plantation owners wouldn't raise wages to compensate for inflation (Martínez 1995; 38). Estate owners began to seek out other labor sources and in the 1890s organized to recruit workers from other countries, especially Puerto Rico and the West Indies islands of St. Kitts, Nevis, Anguilla, Antigua, Montserrat and St. Martin (Martínez 1995; 38).

Despite most West Indian workers being paid very low wages, thousands traveled to the Dominican each year to work as sugar cane cutters. They had the advantage of being able to speak English with North American plantation bosses and some found better paying employment working on the docks in the port of San Pedro de Macorís or working in the sugar mills (Martínez 1995; 40). By the late 1920s, decreasing numbers of West Indians went to the Dominican Republic because of falling wages (Martínez 1995; 40).

In the meantime, plantation owners had begun to turn their gaze toward Haiti as a source of labor. Haitians had begun to emigrate on their own to work on sugar plantations in large numbers after 1900, but it wasn't until 1915 that the Dominican government began regulating labor recruitment of Haitians (Martínez 1995; 42). Haitian immigration increased to meet the harvest needs of increasingly huge sugar plantations. The sugar companies continued to expand their land holdings by contesting the "titles of customary landholders," the historical system of land use in the Dominican Republic in which many people farmed and grazed cattle on land they held in common. This process was supported by the United States government after the Marines invaded the country in 1916 and established control of the banking system and ports.

Maria Elena Muñoz (1995) notes that there have always been discrepancies between the number of officially counted Haitians laboring in the Dominican Republic and the numbers resulting from population or census reports. She uses as an example counts from the 1920s, in which the First National Census reported

30,000 Haitians were living in the country, while at the same time the government migration office – in charge of tracking agricultural migrants – reported only 2,000 (Muñoz 1995; 129). The first number accounts for contracted (legal) and clandestine labor, while the second reports only migrants legally contracted to work as laborers for the sugar plantations.

As Haitian immigration increased, so did Dominican fears that the country was under cultural assault from black Haitians. In order to limit the number of Haitian workers entering the country, the Dominican National Congress passed a series of laws from 1912 to 1919 that stipulated people “that are not of pure white race” from any country needed to obtain permission to migrate prior to entering the Dominican Republic (Muñoz 1995; 117). The Executive Order No. 5 of January 1920 further stipulated that all approved “colored” migrants entering the country were required to enter through the border towns of Comendador, Las Lajas and Dajabón, a stipulation clearly targeted to keeping track of entering Haitians and not all migrants (Muñoz 1995; 118). By 1920, Haitians had surpassed other migrants in number, provoking a national press stance against the perceived Haitian racial threat (Muñoz 1995; 120, 123). Lauren Derby asserts that the contracting of Haitian and West Indian workers to cut sugar cane on the plantations was the first time that Haitians were associated with degrading, slave-like work, as Haiti had previously controlled most of the islands’ wealth (Derby 2003; 35).

Trujillo Dictatorship

The modern state-sanctioned and popular anti-Haitian discrimination that became an integral part of Dominican national identity intensified and reached a bloody peak during the dictatorship of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo from 1930 to 1961. Trujillo was a man of mixed European and African ancestry from a lower class, rural family whose career was launched working as an armed guard on a *batey*. The *batey* is the Dominican term for the basic living quarters constructed by sugar companies or the government to house sugar cane cutters. Although *batey* housing was intended as temporary, it became permanent housing for many Haitian cane cutters. When the United States Marines invaded and began to train a Dominican national military, Trujillo joined their officer training corps and steadily rose through the ranks to become a general (Turits 2002; 603). In 1930, General Trujillo seized control of the government.

Trujillo initially adopted a friendly-neighbor approach to relations with Haiti and even toured the rural areas near the border where Haitians lived alongside Dominicans within Dominican territory, encouraging ethnic Haitian school children to perform “Dominican” identities by telling him they were loyal to his regime (Turits 2002; 609). But his tenor quickly changed as he embarked on a campaign to promote an official national identity of *dominicanidad*, or Dominicanness, as white, Catholic and Hispanic; and as the reverse of Haitianness as black, Voodoo-worshiping and African (Torres-Saillant, 1998)

As Trujillo consolidated power in the 1930s, the wages of Haitian cane cutters were halved, anti-Haitian sentiment grew and the Dominican National Congress passed laws in 1934, 1935 and 1938 aimed at reducing Haitian immigration, which required all businesses to employ at least 70 percent Dominicans (Martínez 1995; 44). In 1937, Trujillo unleashed a genocidal attack in which he ordered National Guard troops to massacre approximately 20,000 Haitians, Dominican-Haitians and even black Dominicans in the frontier region. National Guardsmen rounded up Haitians and massacred them with machetes, bayonets and shovels (Turits 2002). Dominican men watched as soldiers massacred their Haitian wives and children. Women, who were often weighed down by carrying many children as they fled, were reportedly less successful at escaping the massacre (Turits 2002; 615).

Haitians attempting to flee back into Haiti were ambushed along the aptly-named Massacre River and shot and dumped into the river. In the border region along the north coast of the island, soldiers threw Haitians into the sea. Most of the atrocities during the seven-day period of the main campaign of the massacre occurred in the northern frontier region. Yet even after Trujillo officially halted the slaughter, more isolated killings continued for months in the southern border region. Significantly, Haitians living in *bateyes* were not touched, sending the message that *bateyes* were the only safe place for Haitians in the country.

The massacre occurred at a time when Trujillo's government was attempting to dramatically alter the cultural landscape of the country, and his decision to kill

women and children might have served a special role in achieving that goal by terrorizing the population and destroying bi-cultural families in the border region. Trujillo's decision to include women in the Haitian massacre was part of a cultural context that idealized white women and equated them with the nation, while devaluing African-descended women, both Dominican and Haitian.

The massacre deeply affected the nation and its international relationships. Trujillo never publicly accepted responsibility for the massacre, instead insisting that the massacre was initiated by Dominican farmers who were tired of Haitians coming to their country and stealing valuable farm land. People living in the border region could see this was a lie; the region had always been sparsely populated with Dominicans and most nearby centers of commerce were in fact across the border in Haiti. Trujillo's message resounded more with Dominicans unacquainted with the border region. Haitians and Dominican-Haitians who were not killed also fled to Haiti, further depopulating the region. And once news of the massacre reached the Latin American and United States press, Trujillo faced condemnation. Haiti's president threatened to cut state relations, but the United States and Mexico mediated an agreement in which the Dominican Republic agreed to pay damages to the Haitian government.

Both Trujillo and his minister of foreign affairs, Joaquin Balaguer, subscribed to scientific racist ideas and worked to "whiten" the predominately mulatto country through several immigration campaigns. Dominican intellectuals found in Trujillo support for consolidating the nation-state with a Hispanic culture and for enacting

“whitening” policies that tried to attract European settlement, especially in the frontier areas near Haiti. Trujillo’s whitening projects in the 1930s met with limited success. In the wake of the massacre and facing scrutiny from the United States, Trujillo offered to allow thousands of Jewish refugees fleeing Hitler to settle in the Dominican Republic and become citizens (Roorda 1998; 143-146). Although several colonies of Jewish settlers were established along the north coast and in the frontier region, the settlers were unhappy with the lack of infrastructure and tropical climate and most settlers moved on to other countries within several decades (Roorda 1998; 143-146).

Despite the massacre, Haitians continued to work in the Dominican sugar industry. Beginning in 1952, Haitian sugar workers were hired in contractual agreements signed by the governments of Haiti and the Dominican Republic (Muñoz 1995; 132). The Haitian government would then advertise for and hire the agreed-upon number of workers and transport them to the border, where they were picked up by Dominican authorities and taken to various sugar plantations. This kind of immigration was considered legal, though workers very often were not given immigration paperwork. Similar contracts followed in 1959 and 1966 (Muñoz 1995; 129).

Post-Trujillo

Following Trujillo’s assassination in 1961 conditions remained much the same for Haitian workers. Joaquin Balaguer, the former minister of foreign affairs,

became president and made anti-Haitian racism part of official government discourse during his presidencies from 1960-1962, 1966-1978 and 1986-1996.

By the 1980s the number of economic activities in which Haitian migrants to the Dominican were employed had diversified beyond sugar cane. Sherri Grasmuck reports that up to 80 percent of coffee pickers in the southwest, which borders Haiti, were Haitian in 1980 (1982; 372). Most Haitians in coffee production were employed to weed and clear fields, tasks at which they earned several dollars a day less than Dominican workers doing the same job (Grasmuck 1982; 372). As in sugar production, Dominican coffee growers were increasingly unable to keep up with falling prices for their product on the world market and adopted the strategy of seeking cheaper and cheaper labor (Grasmuck 1982; 372). Through the 1980s and 1990s, Haitians would continue to enter more economic niches beyond sugar production as the Dominican's economy underwent structural adjustment to meet IMF and World Bank loan conditions.

As the jobs open to Haitians diversified, Haitian immigrant women living in *bateyes* and other Haitian communities also had more opportunity to earn money. Haitian women had not historically found paid labor in sugar plantations because Haitian men almost exclusively were hired as cane cutters. However, a limited number of women had found work cutting cane. The International Women's Rights Action Watch reports that today five percent of cane cutters are women and they receive half the pay of men (IWRAW report, 2003; 9). Haitian women could also sell prepared foods in the *bateys* and trade goods in the border regions of the

Dominican Republic. And whether they worked for money or not, Haitian women had become vital elements of *batey* life, where the reality was that many Haitian men became permanent residents and created families with women immigrants. In some *bateyes*, generations of families lived in deep poverty in the precarious housing.

Samuel Martínez, one of the few authors to write about Haitian women migrants, shows that during the 1980s women were a relatively small percentage of immigrants – roughly 10 percent – but they were numerically important because tens of thousands lived in *bateys* and agricultural towns (1995; 118). Martínez conducted his field research in the Dominican sugar plantation Ingenio Santa Ana, in Yerba Buena, and in the southeast Haitian town of Cayes-Jacmel. Despite the fact that there was little paid employment for women in the *bateys*, Martinez found that 79 percent of Haitian women who lived permanently in Yerba Buena “earned incomes of their own rather than depending solely on the support of husbands and grown children” (1995; 120). Women had migrated to the Dominican Republic as international traders, in order to follow spouses or children or as single women with economic goals (1995; 123).

Martínez notes that while both Haitian women and men are stigmatized because of their poverty, Haitian women face specific forms of discrimination, “In particular, popular opinion links female migration to the Dominican Republic with involvement in prostitution, and women risk a heavy social stigma when they decide to immigrate” (1995; 126).

Martínez concludes that most Haitian immigrants – both men and women – chose to seek work in the Dominican Republic as part of a short-term strategy for finding cash that they need to maintain their family or land in Haiti. His conclusion contrasts with migration scholars who think Haitians immigrate to the Dominican *bateys* because life is so bad at home that they have nothing to lose. In fact, the relatively high cost of financing a trip to the Dominican *bateys* means that most Haitian migrant workers are small landholders and not members of the very lowest economic rung of Haitian society, the landless, urban poor.

Anti-Haitian discrimination and violence continues in the Dominican Republic and has captured international attention in the last 20 years. Organizations such as Human Rights Watch have repeatedly condemned the poverty and discrimination Haitians face, yet the Dominican government has responded several times to international condemnation by instituting mass deportations of Haitians and Dominican-Haitians in violation of international law (HRW 2002). The most famous incident occurred during the 1996 presidential election campaign, in which a black Dominican candidate, Jose Francisco Peña Gomez, was leading in the polls and facing blatantly racist attacks from his opponent, Joaquin Balaguer. In the weeks before the election the Dominican military rounded up and summarily deported 5,000 people to Haiti. Although international black and human rights organizations condemned the racism to which Peña was being subjected and the racist deportations, Peña lost the election, which is widely agreed to have been falsified.

Chapter 3: History of Haiti and Women's Organizing Activities

Hanging over the clinic door of the Commission of Women Victims for Victims (KOFAVIV) in Port-au-Prince is a sign that reads simply “Gen Espwa,” “There is hope.” Founded by Haitian women who suffered brutal rape during the 1991-1994 military coup as punishment for supporting democratically-elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, KOFAVIV works to provide medical, psychological and legal hope for rape victims (MADRE). This contemporary organization continues a rich history of Haitian women responding to poverty, political instability and brutality and limited legal rights by organizing to *bat teneb*, a Creole phrase meaning to “beat back the darkness.”

In this chapter, I examine the social, economic and political forces that have shaped Haitian women's organizing in order to contextualize the organizing activities of MUDHA in the Dominican Republic. I follow Haitian women's organizing activities through the colonial, U.S. Occupation (1915 – 1934), Duvalier dictatorships (1957 – 1986) and the post-Duvalier eras.

Colonial period

France colonized the western portion of the island in the late Seventeenth Century and called it Saint Domingue (Francois 2003; 99). Members of the French aristocracy settled in the colony and established expansive sugar cane plantations that brought them, and France, amazing wealth (Francois 2003; 101). It was sugar production in this “Jewel of the Antilles” that helped fuel capitalism in France and Europe. Sugar cane plantations required enormous expenditures of human labor and

the French imported African slaves to perform this labor. Many mulattos, the name given at that time to children born of white fathers and black enslaved mothers, were granted or bought their freedom. The colony's Black Code of 1685 recognized mulattos as free people and allowed them to own property, including slaves (Francois 2003; 101). White society, both the aristocratic plantation owners and the *petit blanc*, or poor whites, still looked down on mulattos and denied them social status (James 1963). At the time of the Black Code's passage, 91 percent of the colony's nearly 300,000 inhabitants were enslaved blacks, whites comprised a mere 7 percent of the population, and freed mulattos only 2 percent (Francois 2003; 101).

From 1791 to 1804, Saint Domingue's slaves waged ongoing uprisings designed to rid the colony of slavery and ultimately of its allegiance to France (James 1963). Haitian women's history of political organizing has typically been omitted from history, but women slaves organized and participated in slave uprisings. Women maroons who had fled into the island's central mountain range participated in *mawonag*, the Creole term for their raids on plantations. They fought with men for emancipation from slavery and in the Independence of 1804, when Haiti became the first sovereign black nation in the world.

Under the direction of the black General Toussaint L'Overture, Napoleon's troops were defeated in 1804 and the sovereign nation of Haiti became the first black nation in the Western Hemisphere. Through the course of the independence struggle, most white French fled the island and returned home or to other colonies, leaving most property in the hands of mulatto merchants. This social stratification between a

small, mulatto, French-speaking and property-owning elite and masses of impoverished, black, Creole-speaking peasant farmers has shaped both Haiti's history and the Dominican Republic's perception of Haitians.

U.S. Occupation (1915 – 1934)

The first women's groups in Haiti organized to resist the U.S. Occupation of 1915 to 1934. On February 22, 1934, some of these women intellectuals, professionals and community leaders formed the Ligue Feminine d'Action Sociale, the Feminine Social Action League, which campaigned for access to higher education and the right to vote (N'Zengou-Tayo 1998; 130). The League published magazines titled *Women's Voice* and *The Female Sower* to advocate for their causes (N'Zengou-Tayo 1998; 131).

Women active in the League largely belonged to the French-speaking, educated, mulatto elite, and did not focus on changes that would have helped poor women. This first Twentieth Century example of women's political organizing excluded poor, non-French speaking women and caused a long disconnect between feminist ideals and the women who most needed feminist organizing, the poor. Language politics also influenced the women's movement at this time because most poor, black women only spoke Creole, a colonial linguistic mixture of French and the West African languages of the slaves. In the 1930s, and until 1990, French was the language of all formal education, of literature and of the international activist community. The inability to speak and read French alienated poor women from the

literature of the European women's movement and from translations of the English and Spanish-speaking feminists of the day.

The Feminine Social Action League secured the women's vote in 1950 and, several years later, the right of women to attend universities. However, widespread women's illiteracy and male opposition to their female family members' voting prevented most Haitian women from participating in the electoral process.

Duvalier dictatorships

In 1957, a popular country doctor named Francois Duvalier who had previously been a writer in the *negritude* literary movement was elected to the presidency. Duvalier asked Haitians to refer to him informally as "Papa Doc" rather than President. He had the support of the United States government because the country feared his presidential opponent had Communist sympathies, and the resulting election that favored Duvalier is widely believed to have been rigged. Duvalier, a black-skinned Haitian who did not originate from the old, mulatto elites, faced stiff opposition from members of his new government and the business and religious communities. His method of eliminating this opposition was to exile or kill mulatto elite politicians, intellectuals and students, and clergy from the Haitian Catholic Church who opposed his presidency. He closed the universities for a time, calling them a hotbed of opposition politics. He exiled foreign-born and mulatto clergy and replaced them with black clergy. He introduced speaking Creole, in addition to French, into the government and in 1961 recognized Creole as an official state language.

At the same time, Duvalier began treating women with the same barbarity that he used on men, beginning the policy of subjecting women to political oppression or gendered violence such as rape. During this time women's groups such as the League went underground and most of the movement's leaders went into exile (N'Zengou-Tayo 1998; 131). He began to silence anti-Duvalierist women such as journalist Yvonne Hakime-Rimpel, who in 1958 was kidnapped, beaten and raped by Duvalier's volunteer militia, popularly called the Tonton Macoute (Charles 1995). The idea behind the Tonton Macoutes was that they would do Duvalier's bidding and replace the previous army, which had been trained by the U.S. Marines during the occupation. Duvalier did not want to risk an army that could turn against him, because he knew the mulatto elites who had been installed as generals and lower officers by the Marines did not want him in power. His presidency turned into a dictatorship when he would not step down from power at the end of his term.

Because Duvalier's government did not pay the Tonton Macoute a salary and they were technically volunteers, they supported themselves by demanding "protection" money from citizens and from stealing from citizens and the government. Duvalier allowed the Tonton Macoute to extort money and to torture and kill citizens, as long as they supported his government. The Macoute were also able to abuse and rape women, and steal money from women, especially those who worked in public places such as the markets, or on farms. Duvalier also created a female section of the Macoute named after Marie-Jeanne, a hero of the Haitian War of Independence, to create the appearance of gender equity. Duvalier appointed Mrs.

Max Adolphe as chief of this Macoute corps and she was well known for her cruelty (N'Zengou-Tayo 1998; 132).

Duvalier died in 1971, but he left his regime to his 19-year-old son Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier. Jean-Claude Duvalier essentially continued his father’s methods of running the government. Yet unlike his intellectual father, Jean-Claude Duvalier was more interested in lavish living than in government affairs and openly squandered money from the national treasury on cars and parties. He did not defend the regime through the use of black power and economic reform ideologies that his father had used to defend himself against international criticism for his human rights record. When world gas prices skyrocketed in the 1970s, Duvalier’s theft from the national treasury became even more shocking to the Haitian population because of the devastated economy. This economic deterioration spurred the formation of some of the early women and peasants groups in opposition to Duvalier’s economic policies.

Haitian women were at the forefront of the mobilization to overthrow “Baby Doc” Duvalier by the 1980s (Charles 1995). Carolle Charles, a Haitian exile and Professor of Sociology at Baruch College, asserts that the emergence of women’s organizations and feminist groups in exile in the 1970s helped launch the formation of such groups within Haiti in the 1980s and changed the political landscape of the 1990 election (Charles 1995; 2). Haitian women exiles organized in broad coalitions of leftist-oriented and nationalist groups opposed to Duvalier’s regime. Women living in Montreal formed RAFA (Rally of Haitian Women) in 1973 and the group

later changed its name to Neges Vanyan (Valient Women) in 1979 (Charles 1995; 8). This group opposed the dictatorship and organized women to build community programs based on collective work and attention to women's issues. In New York, Haitian women founded UFAP (Union of Patriotic Haitian Women). This group emerged from the Haitian Communist Party and saw a new Haitian revolution as the only way to form a basis for women's liberation (Charles 1995; 8).

These early women's groups influenced the formation of women's groups within Haiti in the 1980s, groups that quickly expanded and incorporated a wider variety of working class women as opposition to Duvalier grew. In 1984, women helped organize food riots and a year later protests against the high price of fuel and gasoline (Charles 1995; 9). More than 30,000 women, encompassing at least 15 women's groups and organizations, took to the streets on April 3, 1986, demanding jobs, full political rights and elimination of prostitution and gender discrimination (Charles 1995; 9). Later that year, Jean-Claude Duvalier fled to Paris.

Post-Duvalier

Women's critical role in these protests turned an economic struggle into a gendered political struggle. A democratic space opened after Duvalier was exiled that allowed women the opportunity to enter the political arena for the first time in national history. In addition, women who had been in exile returned to Haiti and brought with them their experience in women's organizations, which they used to start such groups in Haiti. At least 60 percent of the members in the groups that formed during this period such as Fanm D'Ayiti (Women of Haiti), Comite Feminin

(Feminist Committee), SOFA (Worker Solidarity with Haitian Women) and Kay Fanm (Women's House) had at one time lived in exile (Charles 1995; 9). Charles sees women's entrance into activism as motivated by a desire to move beyond the dynamics of the Duvalier regime's gendered state-violence against them.

Rural women in Haiti had become active in religious, community-based, cultural and peasant organizations by 1986 (Charles 1995; 10). Women were included in the leadership of two important peasant movements that worked for land reform and bringing basic infrastructure to rural communities, Tet Kole (Put Our Heads to Work) and Tet Ansanm (Let's Unite Our Heads), were also instrumental in the organizing work of the Papaye Peasant Movement. A member of the Tet Kole national executive committee said "Tèt Kole works with the smallest peasants, not even the medium-sized ones, because even within the peasant sector, enemies of the peasant use middle peasants to attack other peasants. We are organizing for life, for survival, to move from absolute poverty to social change" (Tet Kole). Women played an important role at all levels of this organization, becoming active as members of agricultural and production collectives, and as political organizers for a democratic government in Haiti. The group instituted agricultural and production collectives, called *konbit* in Creole. The organization created a democratic internal structure, with local elections held in each village, all the way up to the level of provinces. The group had branches in nine provinces in 1996, ten years after its formation (Charles 1995; 10).

Haitian women, like women across Latin America, became active in the religious movements of liberation theology that advocated restructuring religion to empower the poor (Levine & Mainwaring 2001; 203-240). In Haiti, women formed a powerful base of support for liberation theologian priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide from the beginning of his ministry, and especially after he was moved to St. John Bosco church in Port-au-Prince. Aristide became a symbol of hope and of resistance to the neo-Duvalierist dictatorships in the late 1980s through his role as a priest who defied the hierarchy of the Catholic Church (Dupuy 1997; 71).

Aristide's vision of *tilegliz*, a Creole term meaning literally "the little people's church," or the church of the poor, corresponds to the Latin American understanding of liberation theology. In Latin America "struggles within religion have intersected with deep social and political transformations to create new legitimizations and structures of protest" (Levine & Mainwaring 2001; 204). In addition to challenging living conditions for the poor and affirming or opposing a government's treatment of the poor, liberation theology churches have reworked cultural categories like hierarchy, equality, activism, passivity and how authority is called into question (Levine & Mainwaring 2001; 204). In Haiti, as in many Latin American countries that experienced a movement of liberation theology, these questions led to a reevaluation of the situation of women within these hierarchies and cultural systems.

Haitian women felt a connection with Aristide not only because of his promotion of *tilegliz*, but also because he explicitly acknowledged economic and

social problems that made life disproportionately miserable for many women. He acknowledged Haitian social problems, such as physical and sexual abuse of women, male abandonment of women and their children, and women's primary economic responsibility for their families, which church clergy had often not confronted.

The years following Duvalier's exile were marked by an unparalleled number of government turnovers. The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (1990) reported that the November 29, 1987 presidential elections to replace Duvalier began with vandalism and violence that escalated until the Electoral Council cancelled the elections. On that election day, armed civilians and uniformed soldiers "killed defenseless civilians who were waiting in line to cast their votes" (IACHR 1990). About 200 people died in that violence, while many more were injured.

After the failed election, the National Governing Council dissolved the Electoral Council and set new elections for January 17, 1988. Fearful of another violent outcome and distrustful of many candidates closely associated with the former Duvalier government, Haitian citizens widely boycotted the 1988 election, which the Commission concluded contained "numerous and serious irregularities" (IACHR 1990). From this rigged election, Leslie Manigat, a candidate strongly linked to Duvalier, became president. But military officers in the Armed Forces accused Manigat of being involved with drug trafficking and on June 20, 1988, staged a coup (IACHR 1990). Lieutenant-General Namphy announced on television that day that the military had taken control of the country.

General Namphy tried three times to assassinate Aristide, who had by that point gained a large following of supporters. One of those attempts, the 1988 massacre at St. John Bosco church, solidified poor people's support for Aristide. The event would later be a reference point for many Haitians preparing to vote in the 1990 election. Haitian activist and community organizer Mariya T. D. Bolyè was inside the church on September 11, 1988, when politically-connected opponents of Aristide stormed the church grounds and massacred the people there (Racine 1999; 17). Twelve parishioners were killed and 80 were wounded in the attack, which was orchestrated by Francks Romain, a former Port-au-Prince mayor and Tonton Macoute (IACHR 1990).

Bolyè said church members had been protecting Aristide all week because of an assassination attempt the previous Sunday and thought they were prepared for an assault on September 11, 1988 (Racine 1999; 17). But when Romain signaled to his supporters outside the church, the attackers advanced on the churchyard gate shooting and once inside met up with *attaché*, a Creole term for hired spies or killers, who had already infiltrated the church. Parishioners were able to help Aristide escape from the pulpit, but many parishioners died from gunshots, machete attacks and the fire the *attaché* set in the church (Racine 1999; 18).

Aristide's survival of the St. John Bosco massacre, and two other attempts, paired with his religious message of resistance against oppression, began to make him look like a prophet to many women (Dupuy 1997; 88). For not only was he willing to stand up to the despots who ruled the country, but he was able to avoid

every harm they sent back to him. It was partially from his position as a potential religious prophet that Aristide solidified his power.

Political turmoil continued when, six days after St. John Bosco, a military coup deposed Namphy and installed retired General Prosper Avril, a Duvalierist (IACHR 1990). A year and a half later, on March 10, 1990, Avril resigned and was transported by the U.S. Air Force to Florida. Women's rising influence in the sphere of politics was evident in the appointment three days later of Supreme Court judge Ertha Pascal-Trouillot as interim president, making her the nation's first woman president (Meintjes, Pillay Turshen 2001; 161). Pascal-Trouillot organized the 1990 election with the assistance of and under the supervision of international monitors.

Aristide declared his candidacy at the last minute in 1990, sending Haitians scrambling to obtain identification cards in order to vote. Not only were women active in supporting Aristide's run for the presidency, but across the country they jumped in and themselves ran for a variety of public offices. Of the 2,032 candidates for all levels of government in the 1990 election, 164 were women, and these women ran mainly for offices at the local level. While this number is still a very small percentage of total candidates it was the first time ever women had run for political office in Haiti. Only three women ran for the Haitian Senate, and none won a seat. But 13 women were elected as deputies in the parliament and 34 women were elected as mayors (Meintjes, Pillay Turshen 2001; 161).

Aristide took power and during his first seven months in office, women began to make strides toward participation in a democratic government. Women

were elected as deputies and mayors across the country. Aristide's government appointed women to high offices, such as ministers, members of the presidential and ministerial cabinets, and directors of public services (Meintjes, Pillay Turshen 2001; 161). At a grassroots level, women no longer had to live in fear of meeting together, organizing community projects or protesting. During this period of time, violence subsided and women no longer had to worry about how street violence affected them and their children.

A democratic reality for Haitian women didn't last long. On September 30, 1991, the Duvalierist military factions and Haiti's elite would no longer tolerate Aristide's presidency and a military coup forced him out of the government and into exile in the United States. General Raoul Cedras stepped into power and ruled the country with a brutal hand from 1991 to 1994. During this three-year period, Haitian women who had been active in directly Lavalas, the coalition of political parties that supported Aristide and named their movement "The Cleansing Flood", or who had been involved in women's consciousness-raising groups, peasant collectives and other economic justice or human rights groups became the victims of a coordinated effort to silence Haitian women and return them to their traditional, non-political position in their homes.

A discussion of the atrocities women suffered during this coup period, and the methods they used to continue their activism under the radar of the Tonton Macoute militants and other thugs working in coordination with Cedras' government, is important for understanding the ground women gained in the late

1980s, and were unwilling to let go of during the late 1980s. Women active in grassroots or political organizations bore the brunt of the violence and were specifically targeted as victims of military gang rapes and forced rape by male relatives, and of other brutal physical violence.

Myriam Merlet, founder of the Haitian women's organization ENFOFANM, the National and International Center of Documentation and Information about Women in Haiti, asserts that the gendered political violence directed at women supporters of the Lavalas political coalition during the coup is comparable to the devastation that confronts women in the aftermath of war, when women are used as economic and social shock absorbers who bear the brunt of war's costs (Meintjes, Pillay Turshen 2001; 38). The focus on women as victims of the organized violence has taken attention away from the very organized resistance techniques they employed to resist the coup government, and this focus on women's victimization often diminishes their role as activists or comrades in the coup resistance (Meintjes, Pillay Turshen 2001; 38). Thus, women's resistance to their violent victimization during the coup years should be seen as an extension of their activist strategies that began during the 1980s period leading up to the 1990 election.

After three years of pressure from Haitian groups and international human rights groups, the administration of President Bill Clinton arranged for the withdrawal of Cedras' government and the reinstatement of Aristide as the president. One of Aristide's first activities upon returning as president was to establish the Ministry on the Status and Rights of Women on November 8, 1994 (Bell 2001; 157).

Aristide asked Lisa-Marie Dejean to be the woman's minister three times, and each time she declined because she initially didn't see herself as a minister. But the last time he asked, Dejean accepted, and was sworn in as the country's first Minister of Women on November 10, 1994. The establishment of the Women's Ministry was the fulfillment of a demand women's groups had made after Aristide's initial victory in the 1990 election (Bell 2001; 157). Dejean reflected on women's participation in Aristide's presidency;

“One of the big demands that we made in '91 when Aristide came to power was that not only should women participate to change the color of this state, we must also be around the table where the decisions are made. That's how we came to participate en masse in the elections. We participated in the campaigns to such a point that men felt the necessity of putting women up for offices of mayor around the country” (Bell 2001; 157).

The Aristide government in 1994 gave the Women's Ministry the building that had been used by the military headquarters during the coup as their new women's headquarters. Dejean said the women saw the building as a powerful symbol of transforming institutions of hate into institutions of nurturing and life (Bell 2001; 159). The ministry established services to help women's organizations and formed a network for receiving complaints from women about various issues that affected them (Bell 2001; 160). Members of the ministry saw poverty as the largest impediment to women realizing their potential in the country. Therefore, the ministry began searching for ways to provide women with bank credit so that they could enter the formal economy as farmers, sellers and other small business owners. Dejean hoped to establish a Grameen Bank, a bank for the poor, in Haiti (Bell 2001;

160). The ministry also wanted to provide justice to women and reparations for the abuses against them during the coup. The ministry participated in training the new police force and trained officers in how to deal appropriately with violence against women (Bell 2001; 161). The ministry had also hoped to provide at least decent maternity care for all women and better public education for girls in the country.

The women's ministry had its opponents in men who were against the idea of women's issues being raised in the government and in women who weren't happy with Dejean's leadership or the ministry's slow progress. During Dejean's appointment as minister, women staged two large protests outside in front of her office. In the first, demonstrators demanded the Women's Ministry provide bank credit for women to start businesses (Bell 2001; 161). Later, mothers demand the Ministry provide an affordable way to send their children to school. As a result of these protests, Dejean was able to negotiate 1,000 scholarships from the Ministry of Education, which was a modest start at helping children in grinding poverty attend school (Bell 2001; 162).

Unfortunately, the Women's Ministry was dismantled soon thereafter when the government decided there wasn't enough money in the budget to fund it. Yet, Dejean said the Women's Ministry was a success because women were beginning to demand their rights.

“Women are beginning to represent themselves as people with rights. It's a beautiful gain. When a person is psychologically ready to defend herself as a human being, that's a big victory...I believe that's the most positive result, when adult women tell you they are happy they didn't die before they experienced that” (Bell 2001; 162).

After presidential elections in 1996 that resulted in Aristide-supporter René Preval taking office, women continued to be excluded from centers of power. Despite their absence as policy makers, the women's movement successfully pushed the parliament to ratify in 1996 the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women, or Convention of Belém do Pará (Merlet 2001; 162). The parliament also declared April 3 the national day of the Haitian Women's Movement. The Belém do Pará convention defines violence against women as 'any act or conduct, based on gender, which causes death or physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, whether in the public or private sphere' (Merlet 2001; 165). With this as a guide, Haitian women's organizations began recording and cataloguing violence against women (Merlet 2001; 166).

In the intervening years Aristide was re-elected and then deposed a U.S. coup in 2004 and during the two years of brutal military rule that followed until the February 2006 re-election of René Preval. The Commission of Women Victims for Victims (KOFIV) is an example of a new grassroots NGO providing crucial services to women who have no support from government institutions for their protection.

Haitian women's grassroots NGOs also work in solidarity with diaspora organizations of Haitian women. KOFIV works through Dwa Fanm in Brooklyn to spread the word about continued sexual violence against Haitian women and children. Dwa Fanm stages workshops and fundraising efforts to help support

KOFAVIV. In addition, Dwa Fanm supports Haitian immigrants in New York that may be survivors of rape in Haiti or experiencing rape or domestic violence in communities in the United States (Dwa Fanm 2007).

In addition, MUDHA carries on the long tradition of Haitian women's grassroots organizing from the perspective of Haitian women immigrants. MUDHA has become a manifestation of Haitian women's organizing in the Dominican Republic. There MUDHA members work predominately with poor ethnic Haitian women who live in bateys and face discrimination because of their gender, race and national origin.

Chapter 4: MUDHA: Haitian and Dominican-Haitian Organizing in the Dominican Republic

“What keeps me going is the children. So many children live in fear thinking their mother or father could be deported at any time...Those of us of Haitian descent can be voices. And we’re gathering more voices to continue fighting to be acknowledged and integrated” (Christian Aid).

Solange Pierre, director, MUDHA

In this chapter I use the Movement of Dominican-Haitian Women (MUDHA) as a case study in exploring the history of organizing strategies of Haitian nationals who have migrated to the Dominican Republic and ethnic Haitian women born in the Dominican Republic. First, I explore the history of women’s organizing in the Dominican Republic and their legal rights. Then I explain the factors that cause Haitian women to migrate to the Dominican Republic and then the contemporary status of migrant women. Finally, I focus on the history of MUDHA in depth and provide an analysis of the factors or forces that have been influential in helping the emergence of this women’s NGO.

Dominican-Haitian and Haitian women’s organizing is part of the larger fabric of Dominican women’s organizing. Although as a minority group ethnic Haitian women face some issues of race and national discrimination that Dominican women do not, women in both groups also share many reasons for organizing. Dominican women have formed organizations to advocate for their labor rights in free trade zones and agriculture, for reproductive health care, enforced protection from domestic violence, HIV/AIDS prevention and compassionate treatment, and for rights of women who work in prostitution. A large number of international aid

agencies work in partnership with Dominican women's organizations, including UNIFEM, the United Nations, USAID, and Oxfam.

Dominican women's organizing

Women's organizing was quelled in the Dominican Republic during the 30-year dictatorship of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo (1930 to 1961), who employed repression against feminists while at the same time ostensibly supporting "women's issues" (Mohammed 1998; 16). Trujillo's government instituted women's suffrage and a protective labor code but at the same time maintained a patriarchal structure that provided pensions for prolific mothers as part of a state whitening effort to increase the population of light-skinned Dominicans. The Mirabal sisters, Minerva, Patria and Maria Teresa, opposed Trujillo's dictatorship and formed the Movement of the Fourteenth of June, within which they were called the Butterflies. The Mirabal sisters became icons of the Dominican women's movement because Trujillo tried to silence them first through imprisonment and rape and ultimately he assassinated them in 1960 (Mohammed 1998; 16). Patricia Mohammed notes that organized feminist action did not resume until after Trujillo's assassination in 1961.

The Dominican poor entered a new phase of economic hardship in the late 1970s when early structural adjustment measures were implemented during the 1978 to 1982 administration of Antonio Guzman (Espinal 1995; 66). His successor, Jorge Blanco, expanded the adjustment measures despite running on a platform supported by leftist groups that believed he would redistribute wealth. Instead, Blanco implemented austerity measures and negotiated with the International Monetary

Fund for a controversial package signed in 1983 that enacted sales tax, slashed public subsidies, reduced the money supply and let the Dominican peso float free (Espinal 1995; 66). This structural adjustment hit the working and middle classes hard as consumption and investment declined, real wages declined and unemployment rose (Espinal 1995; 66). In April of 1984, poor women and men took to the streets in food riots to protest the economic austerity measures (Espinal 1995; 71).

As the Dominican economy was restructured the traditional plantation system of cultivating sugar cane declined while new Free Trade Zones (FTZs) that housed factories sprang up to produce textile, electronic and other goods to export. Factories at FTZs have looked for a majority female workforce, creating an opportunity for Dominican women to earn money while also bringing exploitation and legal violations. The precarious human rights situation of Dominican women working in FTZs became cause for national demonstrations in 1986 when a Korean manager in a FTZ factory kicked a pregnant woman named Raphaella Rodriguez, causing her to miscarry (IWRAW 2003; 13). The Dominican military was mobilized to protect Koreans in the FTZ as demonstrators marched on the factories in protest. These demonstrations produced unions in the FTZ, however, as foreign investors threatened to pull out due to the unionization, the Dominican government barred all union organizers from entering the FTZ (IWRAW 2003; 13). Despite some improvements in the FTZs, the International Women's Rights Action Watch reports that doctors employed by the factories are there to perform pregnancy and sometimes

AIDS tests, which pregnant women are routinely fired and that sexual harassment remains a common complaint (IWRAW, 2003, 14).

Laura Reynolds finds that women's wages average only 57 percent of men's wages in the Dominican Republic (1998; 9). Despite the rising numbers of women employed in FTZs and other export-oriented industries, Reynolds found that women were initially hired in large numbers "because Haitian immigrants were unavailable and local men refused the poorly paid jobs," but that after local men found the pineapple jobs desirable because of worsening local economic conditions, the plantation began replacing some of those women with men (Reynolds 1998; 9, 24).

The rights of women to live free of gender discrimination in their homes and places of employment have been protected by law but not by the practice of the Dominican government. Dominican judges and law enforcement officers often disregard law and refuse to extend protections to women. Women are entitled to the following protections under Dominican law;

Article 8(15) of the Dominican constitution establishes within it protections for the maternity of Dominican women, saying women enjoy the "protection of government authorities" and that married women have "full civil capacity" and property rights.

The Labor Code of the Dominican Republic specifically protects pregnant women and punishes discrimination against them in articles 233, 234 and 235.

Article 47 prohibits sexual harassment of women workers by employers.

Law No. 24-97 protects women and families from domestic and family violence.

Law on Agrarian Reform, last amended in 1972, now “includes women in the distribution of plots, giving them the same rights as men over land adjudicated by the agrarian reform, since under the new law the family is represented by both partners whether married or unmarried” (IACHR 1999; Ch. 10).

In addition to national laws that formally protect women, the Dominican Republic is also party to the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women and the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

However, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights reports that Dominican judges and law enforcement officers do not enforce the law, citing an example of a violation of Law No. 24-97 when “the Commission was told of the case of a woman who went to lodge a complaint that her former husband had beaten her; the National Police refused to receive the complaint” (IACHR 1999; Ch. 10).

Causes of Haitian women’s migration

Haitian women migrate to the Dominican Republic because of factors that push them out of Haiti. Among the push factors are extreme poverty, political instability and violence and rape. Attractions that pull them to the Dominican Republic are the Dominican need for labor and a range of job opportunities open to immigrant women and more educational and health opportunities, despite

widespread discrimination. In addition, the presence of family members already in the Dominican Republic may motivate women to cross *aba fil*, “under the wire,” or cross the border clandestinely.

Haiti is the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere and its poverty is deepening. Most multinational agricultural operations have closed, such as U.S. jute production for rope, and FTZ factories have been closing since the early 1990s. The desperate search for income-generating work has contributed to forests being cleared to burn into cooking charcoal and Haiti is in many places completely deforested and its soils degraded. Contributing to this poverty and environmental degradation is ongoing political upheaval and political violence that has contributed to the destruction of already abysmal water and sewage infrastructure existed in most parts of the country (UNIFEM 2004). Hospitals, clinics and other social services are looted and emptied.

Haitian women face even more precarious economic situations than do men. Haitian law does not recognize common-law marriages or long-term partnership and thus does not offer property rights to women who have lived with male partners who own land or other assets (UNIFEM 2004). This despite the fact that the majority of Haitian couples never legally marry. Thus if a land-owning man dies or abandons his family, his woman partner has no right to inherit or remain living on land they worked together. Women not legally married who don't themselves already own land are always vulnerable to losing family land and being forced to migrate to cities. Most women in Haiti work in agriculture or in market vending, which has also

become more dangerous as women in the open markets are more vulnerable to rape and violent attack (UNIFEM 2004).

Following the 2004 forced exit of Jean-Bertrand Aristide by the U.S. military and the installation of UN forces, a chaotic political situation with gangs and political parties committing violent attacks on each other and on civilians increased. One element of this violence is high incidence of rape of women and an increase in rape of children, often even in public places during daylight hours (UNIFEM 2004). Rape of politically active women or women relatives of politically active men became a widespread silencing tactic during the 1991 to 1994 period when Aristide was deposed the first time. For Haitian women it has brought physical, psychological and economic devastation.

All these factors combine to provide Haitian women with many reasons to leave Haiti if they can. Some Haitians flee in boats in an extremely dangerous attempt to reach land in Florida and gain entrance to the United States and some manage to buy air passage to the United States. Both of these options typically require more money than the poorest Haitians can gather together. A more accessible option for many Haitians is to cross the border into the Dominican Republic to find work, using long-established networks of migrants from their province in Haiti and family connections. This option, which still requires money for transportation, bribing guards at the border and food, is yet beyond the possibility of the very poorest Haitians, who might migrate from the countryside to Port-au-Prince, but not further.

While these factors push Haitians out of Haiti, it is still their home and their family and cultural connection. Many leave because of factors pulling them toward the Dominican Republic, which include a demand for labor in key Dominican industries and the relatively higher standard of living and access to education and health care.

Status of Haitian women migrants

The status of Haitian women immigrants to the Dominican Republic is shifting significantly as the economy of the country shifts from an agricultural export-oriented country to a service economy open for foreign trade (OIM 2004; 12). Dominicans have migrated out of their country in large numbers as a result of this shift, creating room for foreign – namely Haitian – laborers to fill increasingly urban jobs. More and more of the Haitian workers filling these jobs are women who in large part are traveling alone with the goal of earning money rather than following husbands or relatives (OIM 2004; 16). They work as domestic workers, employees in tourist industries, and are self-employed as food sellers or traveling vendors (OIM 2004; 16).

In the report resulting from their 2004 population study of Haitian immigration, the Organizacion Internacional para las Migraciones (OIM) and the Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencia Sociales (FLACSO) call this trend the “feminization of immigration” in part because women more often than men intend to stay for the long term and often arrive to jobs already arranged for them through their social network (OIM 2004; 16). These changes are interrelated as the variety of

options available for women's employment correspond the diversification of jobs created by a changing economy and Dominican outward migration.

Haitian migrant women and men increasingly find work in urban areas building public works projects and housing, working in tourist industries and street vending, or in rural areas in non-traditional agriculture (Silié, Segura and Dore Cabral 2002; 66). Laura Reynolds found that although Haitian women migrants compete with Dominican women for low-paying jobs in some sectors, they are legally barred from working in the non-traditional sectors such as the processing of export agricultural goods such as tomatoes, beans, frozen okra, condiments, and tropical fruits (1998; 155).

Free Trade Zone employers typically do not hire Haitian and Dominican-Haitian women (OIM, 2004). Human Rights Watch reports employers in the FTZ and tourism industries often test women employees for HIV/AIDS as a condition to work, in violation of Dominican law (HRW 2004; 1). Women who test HIV positive are regularly fired and women even rumored to be HIV positive have been fired, according to the report. Although the OIM report doesn't explain why Haitian women are typically not hired at FTZs, stereotypes about Haitian women being infected with HIV may be the answer (Martínez 1995; 126). Dominican stereotypes of Haitians as carrying HIV can be traced to the U.S. medical theories from the early 1980s that hypothesized Haitians were responsible for the HIV/AIDS epidemic (Farmer 1992). HIV/AIDS is the leading cause of death of Dominican women age 15 to 49 (HRW 2004; 12).

Rubén Silié, Carlos Segura and Carlos Dore Cabral found that the jobs available to immigrants require more male labor than female labor in general (2002; 76). The 2004 OIM report on Haitian migrants reports that of the women they interviewed, the largest percentage (29.7 percent) report working as vendors of food, drinks, and clothes (2004; 81). The next most common jobs were traveling vendor (19.1 percent) and domestic employee (14.6 percent). Work as informal merchants, employees of private businesses and in construction each represent about three percent of the Haitian immigrant female workforce. A mere 1.2 percent work in FTZs, 1.7 in tourist industries and 2 percent in agriculture other than sugar cane. Five percent of the women responded that they work in “other” employment..

Silié, Segura and Cabral’s interviews reveal that one difference between contemporary and traditional Haitian immigration is;

“the workers’ liberty to move about according to their particular interests. They aren’t subject to the controls placed on residents of the old time *bateys* that operated like detention centers and from which one had to get special permission to leave” (2002, 97).

Haitian migrants circulate widely through different jobs and also to different physical locations within the Dominican Republic (Silié et al. 2002; 97). While sugar plantation owners may not compel Haitians and Dominican-Haitians to remain in *bateys* as frequently, Haitians and Dominican-Haitians risk apprehension by Dominican police and possible deportation when not in the *bateyes*.

MUDHA: Case Study and Analysis

MUDHA is a grassroots women’s non-governmental organization whose members are Dominican-Haitian women that grew up in *batey* communities in the

Dominican Republic. The organization has adopted a broad agenda to counteract sexism, racism and anti-Haitianism that permeates much of Dominican society in order to defend the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural and human rights of Dominican-Haitians and Haitians of both genders (MUDHA 2001). The organization has been extremely effective at advocating for the ethnic Haitian community through grassroots strategies and international alliance building. In this section I describe the history, organization, and goals of MUDHA, and its advocacy activities of operating clinics, schools and conducting gender seminars, and sponsoring legal cases.

Women originally founded MUDHA in 1983 as a branch of the Centro Cultural Dominico-Haitiano (CCDH), the oldest Haitian rights organization in the country, to address the discrimination from the Dominican Republic government and Dominican society (MUDHA 2002). The organization was officially registered in 1995 and Solange “Sonia” Pierre has served as director since that time. Speaking to an interviewer with the British Broadcasting Corporation, Pierre commented on film about the situation of women in *bateys* and the need for MUDHA;

“We had no civil rights. We weren’t considered as individuals. We existed as the property of men despite the fact that we support the family and community as a whole. We didn’t have any rights; the right to health care, the right to own a house, the right to an education” (Christian Aid).

Although MUDHA’s office is in the leafy Gazcué neighborhood near the center of the capital city, Santo Domingo, the MUDHA women focus their activities in *batey* communities, some of which lie not far beyond the city. The front patio of the modest building that houses MUDHA is decorated with posters of Haitian women with slogans like “A nationality for everyone.” From within this modest

office MUDHA members have generated groundbreaking advocacy strategies that have international implications.

MUDHA recognizes that Dominican-Haitian and Haitian women experience sexism in many areas of their lives that create challenges different from those facing men in their communities. Ethnic Haitian women are stereotyped as promiscuous, without sexual morals and likely to work as prostitutes as part of Dominican racist stereotypes of Haitians (Martinez 1995; 126). These stereotypes combined with their lack of protection from Dominican police results in them being vulnerable to sexual exploitation and rape by Dominican men (RFKMCHR 2006). In addition, domestic violence occurs in Haitian families as in Dominican families, so Haitian women must combat violence within their own community as well. Women also face insecurity in housing and thus dependency on relationships with men in the *bateys*;

“Since women are not supposed to be in the *bateys* in the first place, they are not entitled to shacks on their own, or to health or other services, unless they have a son old enough to cut cane, or provide sexual favors to the delegated authority (often Dominican-Haitians who have acquired a degree of seniority)” (IWRAW 2003; 9).

MUDHA also recognizes that ethnic Haitian women lack access to critical pre-natal and maternal health care, and health care in general, due to poverty, racism and anti-Haitianism. When the Dominican government began to privatize many *bateys* in the 1990s many of the *batey* barracks were abandoned by the government, almost eliminating services there (RFKMCHR 2006). Lack of doctors and health clinics in the *bateys* is a serious problem for women, who are “particularly susceptible to high blood pressure, tuberculosis and gynecological related cancers”

(IWRAW 2003, 9). MUDHA advocates for Haitians and Dominican-Haitians by establishing health clinics and training health care workers and health promoters who can work in their communities (BBC).

Accompanying the extreme poverty in the *bateys* is a lack of educational opportunities. In Batey Palmarejo, where people live in extreme poverty, MUDHA runs a pilot school that is the only education available to 200 elementary school children (RFKMCHR 2006). The International Women's Rights Action Watch reports that "the government claims it has provided schools in some long-term settlements, but MUDHA claims that these are inadequate, without educational materials or trained teachers" (IWRAW, 2003; 8).

Children without Dominican birth certificates cannot obtain Dominican national identification cards and are often denied their constitutional right to enroll in public school, or if they are allowed to enroll, are not allowed to graduate. From 1995 to 2001 at least three-quarters of the organization's applications for Dominican identification documents on behalf of Dominican-Haitians have been denied (HRW 2001; Ch. 5). Several of MUDHA's legal challenges to the denial of birth certificates have garnered international press attention and rallied support for Dominican-Haitian's human and civil rights. The following are two legal cases regarding access to education that MUDHA has pursued.

The case of teenager Claubian Jean Jacques, a Dominican-born child of Haitian immigrants, served as an important national consciousness-raiser about immigrant's rights to education in the late 1990s, but ultimately ended without

Claubian's rights being recognized by the government. Claubian was allowed to enroll in primary school although his parents did not have papers proving his Dominican citizenship. He continued into secondary school as an exemplary student receiving high grades (HRW 2002; Ch. 6). Although he attended high school, school administrators warned him that without proper Dominican identification, he would not be allowed to graduate.

At this point MUDHA offered Claubian legal representation to petition the Dominican courts for his birth certificate. MUDHA petitioned the central registry office to obtain his birth certificate, and the case was pending for more than two years before it was denied (HRW 2002). Without his birth certificate Claubian was not allowed to graduate – despite the fact that he was honored nationally for obtaining the highest exam grade of any student in the country in 1998 – and was not able to attend college to become a doctor.

After the Dominican courts refusal to recognize Claubian's right to a nationality, MUDHA set international legal precedent by taking a nationality case to an international legal body and winning. On October 7, 2005 MUDHA won the *Yean and Bosico v. the Dominican Republic* case before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, a case on behalf of two Dominican-Haitian girls who were refused birth certificates because of their Haitian heritage. The Inter-American Court ruled that the Dominican Republic had “violated the rights of children of Haitian ancestry and rendered them stateless by refusing to issue their birth certificates because of their race” according to a press release from the International Human Rights Law

Clinic, University of California, Berkeley, School of Law, the Center for Justice and International Law and MUDHA (IHRLC 2005).

The case began in 1997 when a MUDHA lawyer accompanied parents to the civil registrar's office to request birth certificates for their children (Altholz 2006). The civil registrar rejected the children's applications for the stated reason that their parents were Haitian and that they had not fulfilled other requirements necessary to obtain the certificate (Altholz 2006). Most of these requirements were not legal requirements needed to prove place of birth, but were instead intended as obstacles to keep Dominican-Haitians from obtaining birth certificates. One of the most difficult requirements of the parents was that they submit their Haitian national identity and electoral cards, documents that most Haitians do not have and cannot obtain while they are residing in the Dominican Republic.

When appeals on behalf of the children failed, the mothers of two girls, aged 11 months and 13 years at the time, decided to pursue the case in the international legal arena with the representation of MUDHA (Altholz 2006). In October 1998, the families filed a petition on behalf of the girls before the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights. They were represented by a legal team provided by the International Human Rights Law Clinic at Boalt Hall School of Law at University of California, Berkeley, the Center for Justice and International Law, and MUDHA.

The case was unusual because it "presented legal issues not often considered by international tribunals such as interpreting the scope of the right to nationality and

education” (Altholz 2006). It was also unusual because 30 law students from the IHRLC at Boalt served as co-counsels and spent their summers as interns at MUDHA compiling evidence, and then presented oral arguments before the Inter-American Commission and researched and drafted legal pleadings (Altholz 2006). When the court ruled in their favor, the girls were 13 and 20 years old.

One of those Boalt Hall interns, Timothy Griffiths recorded his experiences as a summer intern for MUDHA in an online *Summer Dispatches from the Field* report posted on the Website of the University of California, Berkeley. Griffiths spent hours reading through case background materials in MUDHA’s office before he had the opportunity to meet the older girl being represented in the *Yean and Bosico v. Dominican Republic* case. Griffiths describes the dwellings of wood and scrap tin, packed dirt streets and abundance of plastic tubs and buckets used to haul and store water in the batey that Daniela (not her real name) lives in. Griffiths and MUDHA staff member Mariela met with Daniela and her family in the courtyard of their home, and he wondered what she thought of the case that could set international precedence. He describes Daniela’s story:

“Daniela was born and grew up near Sabana Grande de Boya, close to the center of the Dominican Republic. Miranda, her mother, is Dominican. Her father, who no longer lives with the family, is Haitian. Though she did not have the required birth certificate, the teachers at the local school allowed her to attend anyway. Then, in 1997, Daniela’s family moved to their present home near the capital. This time, when Daniela went to enroll in the local school, the administrators said no. Without a Dominican birth certificate, they could not permit her in the classroom” (Griffiths 2002).

The Inter-American Commission of Human Rights, created by the Organization of American States, is one of legal bodies that monitor and enforce

human rights in the Americas. The courts rulings are final and binding, and although the Dominican government's compliance with the ruling isn't assured, rejecting the ruling can have important political repercussions for the country. Internationally it was the first ruling that states cannot deny the right to nationality based on race (Altholz 2006).

MUDHA has also denounced illegal deportations of both Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent who are consistently abused by the government. For example, MUDHA coordinator Solange Pierre testified in August 2000 before the Inter-American Court on Human Rights that the government conducts forced repatriations where "people are loaded on to buses without being able to communicate with their families, without warning, without being able to take any of their belongings with them, and above all, without being able to present themselves before any competent authority" (Pierre, 2001). Pierre also testified that the criteria for deportation are skin color and "mode of speaking" and that cases of sexual violation have occurred in the context of the expulsions.

MUDHA director Solange Pierre has received international recognition for her advocacy work on behalf of Haitian and Dominican-Haitian women and on Nov. 16, 2006 she was awarded the 2006 Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award (RKMCHR 2006). Pierre herself confronted poverty and discrimination as a child and has based her activism on these experiences.

Pierre was born in the Dominican Batey La Lecheria to a Haitian mother

who worked cutting sugar cane, a job that normally was not given to women because of the extreme physical strength required (RFKMCHR 2006). Her mother raised 12 children in a one room section of the *batey* barrack. Pierre was 13-years-old in 1976 when she started organizing against the human rights violations that she and fellow *batey* residents had experienced. Pierre has been director of MUDHA since 1995, when the organization was officially recognized after 10 years of grassroots action. She and her children have received threats on her life for the advocacy work she participates in.

An analysis of MUDHA's advocacy projects shows them to be compatible with the grassroots alternative theoretical model of development presented at the introduction to this thesis (DAWN, Edwards, Long & Villarreal and Braidotti et al.). Women members of MUDHA are not middle class, educated women who have become interested in advocating for the Dominican-Haitian and Haitian community. They are instead women who grew up fully immersed in Dominican-Haitian communities in the Dominican Republic and experienced the poverty, sexism, racism and anti-Haitian discrimination that they work to counteract through the advocacy of MUDHA. In this way they fulfill the best case scenario that the DAWN collective outlined in 1987 of Third World women creating their own organizations to advocate for the needs that only they know they have. While urban, educated or First World women can work in solidarity with poor Third World women, the organizations they lead cannot be truly grassroots because they don't come from the base experience of women who have lived the issues.

Because MUDHA's members, like Solange "Sonia" Pierre, grew up impoverished *batey* communities, they can directly relate to the needs that women community members articulate; a gendered approach to health care, education and legal representation. MUDHA not only works with marginalized *batey* communities, but the most marginalized people within those communities, who are women. As women from these *batey* communities, MUDHA members have access to women in their families and family networks and have legitimacy with women in the communities. Women can see that even if MUDHA members managed to move out of the bateys, they have remained dedicated to helping women in their home communities.

One of the extraordinary accomplishments of MUDHA's work is the strong ties the women have developed with Haitian women's organizations in Haiti and in the United States diaspora community. Recognizing that conditions for women in Haiti lead them to migrate to the Dominican Republic in the first place, MUDHA works with Haitian women's organizations addressing women's rights, rape and other political violence, and domestic violence. ENFOFANM and Kay Fanm (Women's House) are two of the Haitian women's organizations that provide mutual support with MUDHA's projects. In the United States, the women's organization Dwa Fanm (Women's Rights) based in Brooklyn provides legal and community services to Haitian women immigrants, especially involving protection and healing from domestic violence and rape (Dwa Fanm 2007). Women members of Dwa Fanm, including co-found Farah Tanis and Carolle Charles, have lead fundraising

campaigns to benefit MUDHA. In 2002, a Brooklyn-based Committee in Support of MUDHA held a gala dinner to raise emergency funds in order to keep MUDHA's office open in Santo Domingo. These relationships with Haitian women's organizations places MUDHA in a coalition of grassroots organizations all working toward political, civil and human rights for Haitian women, wherever they live. This is a strong organizing mechanism.

MUDHA has also sought partnerships with First World advocacy groups and law clinics in order to build solidarity relationships and bring their cause of Haitian immigrant women's rights to the international arena. Partnering with the Human Rights Law Clinic at Boalt Hall School of Law at Berkeley and the Center for Justice and International Law has provided MUDHA with a legal resource that helps win cases before the Inter-American Human Rights Court while also providing valuable international law training for students at the clinic as well as an education in the particular situation facing Haitian women migrants.

Boalt Hall law student Tim Griffiths records in his Online research journal that in addition to assisting MUDHA gathering evidence and testimony for the Education Case, he translated their 35-page Strategic Plan into English to help them fundraise in the United States and Europe, conducted a survey to show the impact or lack of impact of the September 2001 government policy change allowing children without birth certificates to attend Dominican schools, organizing the reunification of a husband who was separated from his wife and children when they were suddenly and arbitrarily expelled from the country, arranging "safe passage" documents for a

man and his family who were expelled from the country and analyzing and reporting on the current status of a constitutional challenge before the Dominican Supreme Court to an Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruling (Griffiths 2002). This one Boalt Hall intern thus provided MUDHA with an enormous amount of assistance toward their legal advocacy mission during the summer of 2002. MUDHA thus gains legal support while creating more international alliances and educating the international community about the issues they face.

Conclusions

As the Dominican economy struggles and the poor are further stressed, it is the most marginalized – undeniably the ethnic Haitian population – that live in the most grinding poverty with the least protections from the state. Dominican-Haitian and Haitian women experience sexism and gendered violence in addition to the poverty, racism and anti-Haitian discrimination that impact men in their communities. The Movement of Dominican-Haitian Women combats this discrimination from a gendered perspective in order to empower the most marginalized community members, women. Women members of MUDHA have created a grassroots alternative model of development for their communities by empowering women through education and health care initiatives and by providing legal advocacy to face discrimination.

Overview

Haitian women have a long history of activism, stretching from their participation in revolutionary slave uprisings during the era when the country was colonized by France through the 30-year dictatorship of Duvalier and expanding during the 1980s when they were able to actively participate in democratic movements for the first time in the history of Haiti. Haitian women's organizations continue to provide vital support for the thousands of women victims of rape and sexual assault who survived the 1991-1994 coup and the two years following the 2004 exit of Jean-Bertrand Aristide from his second presidency.

As Haitian women have migrated to the Dominican Republic in increasing numbers to work and escape violent political instability, they have been subjected to racism and anti-Haitian discrimination that also violates their human rights and leaves them particularly susceptible to exploitation. Haitian women migrants to the Dominican Republic join the existing Dominican-Haitian community, many of whom are children or grandchildren of Haitian workers who toiled in the Dominican sugar cane fields.

Limitations of the research

My thesis presents a history of Haitian women's organizing focusing on the activism of Dominican-Haitian and Haitian women living in the Dominican Republic. I provide a history and analysis of the factors and forces that have contributed to the organization the Movement of Dominican-Haitian Women (MUDHA) and the various activities of this organization. The research is limited however by the lack of interviews with general coordinator Solange Pierre and other members of MUDHA, as well as by lack of interviews with women living in batey communities who have received assistance from MUDHA or participated in the organization's gender seminars. These interviews could provide a rich understanding of the evolution of the goals and strategies of MUDHA, of the impact of the organization on individual women's lives, and of the members' vision of the future of their activism.

My research could also be enriched by data on the number of women participating in MUDHA, the number of schools and clinics it runs, the number of

health promoters trained and teachers hired, and the number of women who conduct gender seminars. These statistics about MUDHA's organizing activities are not readily available to me from within the United States. A comparison of this data from 1995 to the present to gauge MUDHA's long-term impact on *batey* communities would also enrich my project. Certainly the organization has gained national and international notoriety with its high-profile "right to a nationality" cases brought before the Inter-American Human Rights Court based in Costa Rica, especially *Yean and Bosico v. the Dominican Republic*, 2005.

Directions for future research

I see numerous opportunities for future research on MUDHA and grassroots organizing of Haitian and Dominican-Haitian women in the Dominican Republic that can enrich understanding of women and grassroots organizing in the Dominican Republic and in Latin America. MUDHA is only one manifestation, albeit one of the most well-known, of Dominican-Haitian and Haitian women's activism in the Dominican Republic. Organizations such as the Haitian Workers Socio-Cultural Movement (MOSCTHA), the Centro Cultural Dominico-Haitiano (CCDH), and a host of organizations that work within *batey* communities are addressing to different degrees the needs of women Haitian immigrants. Future research regarding these organizations could develop an understanding of the networks between Dominican-Haitian and Haitian organizations within the Dominican Republic.

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