



## *Deporting Diaspora's Future?*

### **Forced Transnationalism and Generational Conflicts in the Haitian Community of Montreal**

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**Abstract:** In recent years, and particularly since 9/11/2001, more and more delinquent Haitian youth have been deported from Canada back to Haiti. In this article the author analyzes the generation-specific reactions and statements within the migrant community. Elder migrants perceive of the deportation as a threat to their home country and as an assault upon their personal migration projects. For the younger generation, in contrast, the issue is rather one of negotiating one's role within the migrant community and of coming to terms with their own life prospects in Canada. Both kinds of reactions become comprehensible if set in relation to one another. Furthermore, this article suggests examining present-day state regulative practices such as deportations not only in relation to the receiving states, but also in consideration of the consequences for the diaspora communities.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Several years ago while carrying out research in rural Haiti about the life perspectives of local youth<sup>1</sup>, I observed for the first time that the deportation of delinquent young Haitians by the US-American or Canadian governments constituted a significant part of the public debate. In the Haitian villages these *deporté*, furnished with the stigma of expulsion, were both admired and scorned as they were associated with issues of familial neglect, urban vio-

lence and organised crime. These recent phenomena were thought to come to Haiti from the outside and would eventually precipitate its ruin. In Haiti these deportees were the prototype of the failed migrant, people, who passed up the chance of successful emigration—the dream of many Haitians—and who, after their return to Haiti, lived the lives of restless bandits.

Some years later, during anthropological fieldwork among Haitian migrants in the Canadian city of Montreal, I came across the same issue.<sup>2</sup> In regular intervals the Haitian community<sup>3</sup> lived fervid debates about the practice of the Canadian government to deport delinquent Haitians back to Haiti. The following analysis will

<sup>1</sup> I spent five months in Haiti in 2000 working for the German Development Cooperation.

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centre on this association of threatened or real deportation with the younger generations. While according to US-American and Canadian law, no immigrant under the age of 21 may be transported back to his or her home country, many of those migrants who get into trouble with the law are young, and are perceived as the youthful offspring of the migrant community. A particular theme in the local debate on this issue was that the government at times failed to differentiate between those young Haitians, who had only come in Canada a few months or years ago, and those, who had arrived in Canada as small children, who had spent their formative years in the country and who simply had failed to apply for Canadian citizenship. When discussing deportation, the migrant community not only dealt with the futures and destinies of its own offspring, but also discussed questions of nationhood, citizenship and migrant's belonging in a transnational environment.

The expulsion of delinquent non-citizens back to their respective countries of origin by the target countries of international migration routes constitutes worldwide a growing and complex phenomenon. In many cases those who are expelled once emigrated together with their parents and spent their childhood and adolescence in the multicultural environment of western cities. Be it the USA, Canada, France, Germany or elsewhere, it is no secret that segmented integration (Waters 1999) can result

<sup>2</sup> The following descriptions are based on anthropological fieldwork carried in 2002 and 2003 in the Canadian city of Montreal, financed through a doctoral scholarship of Marburg University (Germany); furthermore I received considerable support from the Centre d'Études Ethniques (CEETUM) of the University of Montreal (Canada).

<sup>3</sup> In the context of Montreal the term 'migrant community' is less a territorial indicator than a political, social and cultural idea, which transcends territorial limits. Here, it refers to an imagined collectivity, constructed by social practices as well as the political fostering of an imagination of ethnic similarity and common political goals.

in structural discrimination and in limited chances for upward mobility; youth-specific crimes, such as drug abuse, thefts or robberies, but also gang rivalries and violence, occur frequently in this social context. And many of these adolescents do not realise that their status of 'permanent residency' is conditional and that conflicts with the law can result in the loss of residency status and eventually deportation—to a country that they hardly know, if at all.

However, the initiating and driving force behind the deportation wave are not necessarily, as in the case to be presented here, the state authorities of the host countries reacting to youth delinquency. Frequently parents themselves send their children back. When a family recognises that one of its members regularly gets in conflict with the law, often they decide—in agreement with the youth concerned or not—on a 'voluntary' return, in order to forestall eventual official measures and maintain freedom of travel rights. From a longer stay in the home country and the involving inculcation with traditional norms and values they also hope to realise a change in behaviour.

While the criminalisation of immigrants and refugees has been an important trend in the last several decades, research has shown that the 9/11 attacks and their aftermath have resulted in a considerable increase in reliance on deportation by many western states; anti-terror-measures resulted in a more restrictive reformulation of laws as well as the extension of laws for national security (Mitchell 2004, Pratt 2005). The consequences of these policy changes, which western governments expected to function as a deterrent, are dramatic for the young people themselves and their families, as well as for the home countries, which have to accommodate the deported delinquents.

Recent research on the phenomenon of deportation has dealt with the reasons for expulsion, the mode of transfer as well as

the possibilities of an eventual reintegration into the former home community. While the legal basis for the deportation, the legal status of the youth, and the form of transportation may vary, the deportees nevertheless experience similar problems when they finally arrive at "home." Integration into society in the home country can be particularly conflict laden. The youth, already traumatised by the transit, are confronted with what is for them a foreign culture. Ignorant of its rules and codes, they have to deal with village or town communities that frequently react with suspicion towards them. In most of the cases these youth wish to return to their families and desire the legal recognition of their status as citizens (see DeGenova 2002; Peutz 2006; Walters 2002; Zilberg 2004). These cases of "forced transnationality" (Zilberg 2004) pinpoint the blurred boundaries between local and global as well as the other, involuntary and painful side of the coin of delocalisation and mobility. As anthropologists working on migration, transnationalism, diaspora and cosmopolitanism, we need to consider the imaginary geographies that are called upon by those who are "backed by papers" (Yngvesson and Coutin 2006) and who would wish to stay, but are not allowed to do so. Furthermore, we need to reflect upon the ways in which these recent phenomena are perceived by the diaspora communities.

To date, few research on deportations has been carried out, and the main focus has been on the interplay between legal provisions, transit-routes and the frequently problematic reintegration into former home communities (Peutz 2006; Zilberg 2004). This article will contribute another perspective to this approach in discussing the perception of these deportations within the diaspora and their impact on life within the migrant community. In considering the inside perspective of the Haitian migrant community in the Canadian city of Montreal, where deportations

of Haitian youth back to Haiti regularly causes much agitation, I will exemplify how the discussions interrelate with the self-perception of the migrant community. The different and apparently contradictory reactions that may be discerned among Haitian migrants will be analysed against the social and cultural context so as to elaborate on the different levels of meaning involved. With this examination of these 'deportation narratives' I intend to illustrate mutual constructions of Otherness within this migrant group and how inner borders are constructed and maintained—borders that do not only divide social class, but the generations as well.

This paper is a side product of anthropological fieldwork carried out in Haiti as well as in Canada in 2002 and 2003. While my original research interest focussed on the changes and transformations of religious practices in the diasporic context, the issue of forced return migration could not be ignored. The following interpretation is based on informal encounters within the Haitian migrant community, as well as on semi-structured interviews carried out with adults and young Haitians, who discussed the threat of deportation in different ways. I will order the reactions of adults and youths according to different patterns of reactions and link these observations to structural differences between the first and the second generation of Haitian migrants in Montreal.

After a short introduction into Haitian migration to Canada and some thoughts on the issue of class-specific ethnic identity as well as the relation to the home country, I will present the issue of Haitian youth delinquency in Montreal in order to illuminate the frame of reference for the discourses to be presented here. In a next step I will use the public reactions to the announcement of the Canadian state regarding deportations of more Haitian delinquents back to Haiti, for identifying different types of reactions. I will differenti-

ate between parents' and children's perspectives in order to elaborate on generational differences and conclude with some general thoughts on possible interpretations of forced transnationality in different social contexts.

## HAITIANS ON THE MOVE

Of the 1 to 1.5 million people of Haitian background, who today live outside of Haiti itself (Glick Schiller/Fouron 2001: 12), between 40,000 and 70,000 stay in the Franco-Canadian city of Montreal (Davenport 2003; Dejean 1990).<sup>4</sup> Haitian migration in the Caribbean and the North American context is not a new phenomenon (see Boswell 1982), but it emerged as a mass movement in the course of the 1950s. Simplifying considerably, one can subdivide the Haitian movement to Canada into two larger migration waves.

The first wave began in 1957 with the rise of François Duvalier to power and the subsequent dictatorial regime. Given the hopeless political situation in the country, primarily members of the Haitian upper classes, such as intellectuals, artists, medical professionals, lawyers and also the whole political left fled the country until the end of the 1960s. The francophone Canadian province of Quebec continued to be a favourite destination, when with the second wave of Haitian migration in the 1970s and 1980s more and more members of the working-class migrated, since they, as franco-creolophone, enjoyed considerable privileges regarding employability and

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<sup>4</sup> These numbers vary due to the fact that many Haitian migrants are not officially registered. Other important centres of the Haitian diaspora are New York City and Miami (each with around 150 000 migrants), Boston (around 30 000) and Paris (around 15 000) (Stepick 1998, Delachet-Guillon 1996). Other target countries are the Dominican Republic, Cuba, other francophone islands of the Caribbean Antilles and to a small extent the countries of francophone Africa (Boswell 1982).

communication with the Canadian administration (Labelle et al. 1983). At the same time they maintained good contacts to other centres of Haitian migration, such as Boston, New York City, Miami, or Paris. This living as commuters between different places of residency in constant reference to the cultural traits of one's own cultural group has not only been examined in the context of diaspora studies (Cohen 1997), but particularly in relation to the notion of transnationalism, i.e., life in or between more than one nation-state (Glick Schiller et al. 1992, Basch et al. 1994).

New theoretical approaches underline the multiple links running within and between diaspora communities and demand that the geographical scope of research is expanded in order not only to work in the home and host-countries but also to integrate other places relevant for diasporas (Fog Olwig and Sorensen 2002; Trotz 2006). Without wanting to deny these claims, I would like to underline the particular importance of the home country—be it a real or imaginary reference. Research on notions of the diaspora have shown that the fate of the home country as well as the image that evolves around the home country are particularly significant for the construction of diasporic identities and has consequences for the ways in which migrants position themselves vis-à-vis members of their own group, vis-à-vis other minorities and vis-à-vis the host society (Cohen 1997: 26, 144 -153; Safran 1991).

Currently, the relationship of the Haitian diaspora towards their home country is considerably affected by the fact that Haiti, as the poorest country of the western hemisphere, has undergone a continuous decline in the last century and is at present completely devastated in political, ecological and economical terms. In the course of the last three decades, many Haitians have taken leave of any illusion eventually returning, realising that corruption, nepotism and the unadulterated exploitation of re-

sources continued unabated with each new government. Particularly the euphoria accompanying the inauguration of Jean-Bertrand Aristide was frustrated and an ambivalence between affection and bitterness towards the home country emerged in the diaspora—with considerable consequences. From this moment on, the transnational lifestyle with reference both to the Haitian and the Canadian nation began to emerge and many Haitians started to explicitly plan their future in Canada, or elsewhere in the Haitian diaspora.<sup>5</sup>

Furthermore, the self-perception of Haitian migrants is much affected by how their community is perceived by others. They see themselves as being confronted more with racism and stigmatisation than other ethnic minorities, for instance in disputes with institutions and administration (LeGall/Meintel 1997; Potvin 2000). Particularly in the 1980s, when Haitian immigration into the United States and Canada was increasing, it was sometimes perceived as particularly massive, not only by the Québécois, but also by other minority groups. Hence, throughout North America several negative stereotypes associated with Haitians emerged. Comparable to the perception of Haiti by the surrounding Caribbean and North American countries, the Haitian minority in Canada and the United States was classified as a hotbed of criminality and violence and was associated with the trafficking in drugs and weapons and the spread of the HIV/Aids-pandemic (Richman 1992: 192; Stepick 1998: 35).

Due to this entanglement of inner and outer perspectives, the cultural identity of the Haitian community in Montreal is not homogenous. Those belonging to the elite

<sup>5</sup> Nina Glick Schiller elaborates in detail the influence of the Haitian diaspora on the internal politics of the country and the evolution of transnational social spaces (z.B. Fouron & Glick Schiller 1997, Basch et al. 1994: 157-177). The coup against Aristide and the success of René Préval in February 2006 has not changed this standpoint in the diaspora.

of the community rather perceive themselves as being closer to the French bourgeoisie and feel themselves to be better off in relation other ethnic minorities in Quebec. Thus, some of them distance themselves from those Haitians who can be ascribed to be working class. Among the latter the mentioned negative stereotypes can result in a strong distrust towards members of other ethnic minorities, but also towards the elite of their own group, a reaction that is expressed either in very conservative and conformist behaviour with regard to the norms and values of Canadian society or in social distance with regard to other ethnic minorities (Drotbohm 2005a; Potvin 1999, 2000). While these characteristics were particularly prevalent in the 1990s, more and more examples for successful integration into the Canadian society can be cited, and Haitians today are represented in all professional groups and contribute actively to the shaping of politics in Quebec.

In sum, it should be kept in mind that the self-perception of the first generation of Haitian migrants characterised by an inner antagonism is nourished from different directions. While the image of the home country has shifted from mystification to frustrated ambivalence, the negative reputation of the Haitian community has led to an internal division and to class-specific discourses of difference. Therefore, even today, more than fifty years after the arrival of the pioneer migrants, the laying of a foundation for a unified Haitian community still proves to be difficult.

## **STREET GANGS IN MONTREAL AND FORCED TRANSNATIONALISM**

Given this dynamic between self-perception and the public reputation of the Haitian community in Montreal, the issues of youth delinquency and deportation have acquired a particular meaning. Generally,

from the perspective of migrants, the integration and social mobility of the following generation is of particular importance. Arjun Appadurai identified this relationship between the generations as a key issue for understanding deterritorialised communities and interprets them in terms of a diasporic ideology in which this relationship is elaborated as a part of identity and localisation processes vis-à-vis inner and outer references (Appadurai 1996: 44).

This tendency was also observable during my research in Montreal. Be it in a private dialogue, informal meetings or official events—the public perception of Haitian children and youth is a particular concern for Haitian migrants of the first generation. In the majority of cases, Haitian parents described their own fears vis-à-vis the loss of culture among their offspring, their consuming of North American mainstream mass culture and their abandoning of Haitian norms and values, taken together results of an immoral western capitalism and individualism. Everyday questions of style—dress codes and hairstyles, music, and their leisure time behaviour—prompt Haitian parents to regularly describe their own distance from and failure to comprehend the life-worlds of their children. A particularly hot issue in this context is the problem of Haitian street gangs in Montreal. This issue, regularly discussed not only among Haitian parents but also in the Montreal press, focuses the dynamic between individual, family, migrant community and host country in a particular way.

Although the threat to the city of Montreal by criminal street gangs can hardly be compared to that of other cities<sup>6</sup>, it is by all means real and associated with violent theft and drug dealing (Chalom/Kousik 1993). The over-representation of Haitian youth in these gangs has also been documented (Douyon 1996).<sup>7</sup> A series of events during 1992, when a Haitian street gang in one neighbourhood of Montreal broke into and robbed several shops, constitute until

today a particularly significant coordinate in the production of stereotypes about the Haitian community in Montreal (Perreault / Bibeau 2003: 69).<sup>8</sup>

But let us go back, after this brief contextualisation, to the summer of 2002. A small number of Haitian youth were arrested by the Montreal police on charges of gang-related activities and drug dealing, and were in custody waiting for their court case. This situation was nothing new and similar cases had received only little attention before. However, in the past the Canadian government apparently had only rarely made use of its option to deport Haitians, who had simply failed to apply for Canadian citizenship and therefore were either illegal immigrants or Haitian citizens with a permanent residency status.<sup>9</sup> I will describe below the impact of this legal practice on the Haitian diaspora in Montreal by means of the local Haitian reactions to a series of announced deportations in 2002. As described above, we are dealing with a group that on the one hand is characterised by a class-specific discourse of

<sup>6</sup> In US cities such as Chicago, Los Angeles or New York, youth gangs emerged as ethnically homogeneous groups at the beginning of the 1920s, particularly in immigrant neighbourhoods (Duffy 2004: 1; Klein 1995; Trasher 1968 [1927]). Today, gangs constitute trans-family, informally structured social units, mostly organised on the level of neighbourhoods, which do not necessarily need to be homogenous in terms of ethnicity or gender. Their activities include organised crime, with appropriate division of territory and spheres of influence (McCorkle / Miethe 2002, Thiele/Taylor 1998: 91-100).

<sup>7</sup> A study carried out by Gladys Symons (1999), which includes the perspective of the police as well as the young gang members, came to the conclusion that the coherence between gang membership and belonging to a certain group is partly constructed by the local police (Symons 1999).

<sup>8</sup> A detailed description of different types of youth gangs in Montreal can be found in Perreault and Bibeau 2003: 44-51 as well as in Symons 1999: 126-128.

<sup>9</sup> The report of the National Coalition for Haitian Rights (NCHR) summarises the development of the phenomenon and the legal situation in Montreal (Adams 2003, online-source).

difference and for who the relationship to the home country has a significant meaning. These two features—constructions of internal difference and the relation to the home country—will appear frequently in the following interpretation.

### **THE PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE: NEGOTIATING TRANSNATIONAL IDENTITIES**

For several weeks in the summer of 2002 the deportation of a number of Haitian youth back to Haiti stood in the centre of every-day gossip on the street, as well as in local television, print and audio media and the online-forum of the Haitian diaspora. Here, I will try to recapture some of these reactions, beginning with those of the elder Haitians, who belong to the first generation immigrants. Their reactions to the announcement of the deportations include outrage, aggression, confusion or compassion. Apart from the intensity of these emotions, the reactions were in no way homogeneous, but expressed different, in parts contradicting appraisals of the events. They can be summarised in four types of reactions, which will be illustrated by means of exemplary statements.<sup>10</sup>

First, there was the reaction of a loudly audible minority, which greeted the deportation of the delinquent youth. In this way, the "scum" of the community would finally

get what it deserved, as would the parents who had failed to teach their children Haitian values, adequate modes of behaviour and respect. When I talked to Josèphe, owner of a chain of supermarkets, 49 years old, it became clear that he perceived criminal acts of Haitians as an attack on his own professional prospects.

For years we have fought our bad reputation. Can it be, that a couple of brats mess up the reputation of the whole black community in Montreal and destroy our lives? These gangs are a shame for the Haitian community. I am glad to see that the Canadian government is finally taking rigorous steps.

Josèphe is among those who already came to Canada twenty years ago and who has invested a lot of money and sweat in order to extend their financial basis.

Reactions like his are prominent among those primarily concerned with the reputation of their group vis-à-vis the multicultural environment and who perceive themselves as representing the upper classes of the Haitian community. The actions of the Canadian government are appreciated because they hope that their group will be freed of these 'blemishes' for the benefit of a peaceful coexistence in a multicultural society. Particularly those who worked hard for their upward mobility and finally 'made it' are worrying about keeping their vested rights. In this case the deportations are perceived as a purification that may free the community of a negative stereotype. Comparable to the scapegoat-principle, the respondents expect the processual liberation from the stigma of criminality.

The study carried out by Marc Perreault and Gilles Bibeau about youth gangs in Montreal confirms this trend. They describe how the delinquent behaviour of the youth of an ethnic group can be perceived

<sup>10</sup> The following description is based in part on spontaneous informal discussions about a radio broadcast titled „Il neige pas à Port-au-Prince“, first broadcast on 6.6.2002, for downloading, see <http://www.souverains.qc.ca/neigepas.html>. This broadcast collected several reactions from the public to the deportations of Haitian youth. I used this broadcast as a hook and asked people about their attitude to the issue. Furthermore, I carried out semi-structured interviews with members of different social segments within the Haitian community. All names mentioned in the text are synonyms. All interviews are translated from French or Haitian Creole into English by the author.

as an attack on the group's reputation and therefore as a threat:

One of the common reflexes is to blame the splinter groups of these young 'boors' who lack social values and of which these delinquents have to be isolated. Commonly, the fact that these events harm the reputation of the entire black community is deplored. (Perreault and Bibeau 2003: 71, translation by the author).

The reactions of the second group did not centre not on the consequences for the reputation of the Haitian community, but on those for the home country. With the deportations they saw a wave of criminality and violence arriving in Haiti, with which the country would not be able to cope. I talked to Myrielle, who worked as a bank employee, was 53 years old, and came to Canada in the 1990s:

But Haiti already has so many criminals! Today they are small-time thieves, but tomorrow the whole country will be in big business. The island will degenerate into a territory for drug trade, since these guys bring with them the tricks, perfidies and sophistication of organised crime in North America. They know very well the needs here, the kinds of drugs and the strategies of the Canadian police. But this form of criminality was produced in Canada! These little criminals are Canadian products, not Haitian. Canada's decision to export this criminality to Haiti will end in the complete ruin of Haiti."

Here, Myrielle connects Canadian criminality with the disastrous situation in Haiti and uses the announcements of the deportations for an evaluation of the home-

land's destiny.

In the interviews I often felt the uneasiness of migrants as they reflected on the perspectives and promises the deported youth would face back in Haiti. Often they speculated that the *deporté* would be forced to continue their criminal careers and that this would imply considerable consequences for the security of their own family members living in Haiti. Although the coherence between the criminality developed in western states and the degradation of many developing countries definitely does not apply in general as is assumed by the informant above, these fears are nevertheless real. The examples of youth gangs in Guatemala, El Salvador und Honduras, whose members were deported from North America, demonstrate the difficult conditions under which re-migrated youth live and the dangers of eventually returning to criminal gang activities (see Zeller 2006).

However, I would also like to raise the idea that the prospects Myrielle fears also can be seen in connection to subjective feelings of powerlessness, as they are typical for diasporas. Many migrants would like to contribute to the economical and political development of their home country, but are not able to do so. Particularly those who came during the last couple of years and still have plans and hopes for an eventual return, feel responsibilities and duties for a future life in the home country. They worry about their own eventual interest, but also about family members and friends still living in the home country.

In the third category the preoccupation with personal failings in contributing to the re-construction of Haiti plays a significant role. This group contributed to the public debate particularly heatedly and the visions associated with the deportation resembled scenarios of loss and ruin. Marie-Rose, 47 years old, housewife and mother of two teenagers, commented:



These children are no real Haitians, they have never been there, they do not know anything there and do not know how to get along in such a country. They have no family there or friends, they are *djaspo*, they will slam the door in their faces, or maybe stone them to death. They do not even know how to find something to eat! And the climate! There is no snow in Port-au-Prince! The heat will kill them. All this is completely irresponsible. The Canadian government should assume the responsibility for these kids, whom they have offered no other perspective than crime; they have to offer alternative solutions. If not, they will be back faster than they think anyway. All this will all end badly...

Marie-Rose already came to Montreal more than thirty years ago. After she separated from her husband, she had always worked as a cleaner and since a couple of years again stopped working in order to care more for her two sons. She told me that she was sometimes much scarred by the stories she heard about her home country, about the level of crime and atrocities. She decided that she would never go back to Haiti and she also would forbid her two sons, both of whom are born in Canada, to go there.

In the course of my fieldwork, I often heard generalised and extremely negative descriptions of living conditions in Haiti. Particularly those migrants, who fled as political refugees and have never been back after the dictatorship collapsed, propagate an image of their home country that hardly agrees with contemporary reality. While these kinds of descriptions may be seen in relationship to the abandoned ideal of returning some day, the problematic issue of the exclusion of young deportees by the local communities is all too often true. While

the *djaspo*, as members of the Haitian diaspora sometimes are called pejoratively in Haiti, ensure economical survival in the home country by means of remittances (Basch et al. 1994: 161), they are regularly accused of neglecting their duties of solidarity vis-à-vis their nation and their family members in Haiti, and that they are cowardly for having fled the country (Stepick 1998: 30). Clearly, such animosities are even stronger towards the *deporté*, as illustrated in my introductory remarks.

Marie-Rose, who interprets the issue of deportations on the level of individual life prospects, tries to bring together the negative image of her home country with the perspectives of young Haitians living in the diaspora. Keeping in mind her own experience as a refugee, who had to flee out of the country many years ago, her attitude becomes understandable.

The fourth and last type of reaction that I would like to discuss in this context is entirely on the side of the deported youth. The comments expressed a strong empathy towards the youth, who, it is argued, had no future in Canada and no longer the right to freedom of travel. The Haitian community is accused in the local Haitian media of having failed in supporting the youth threatened with deportation. Youth delinquency was associated with weakened family ties, forsaken adolescence and increasing generational conflicts. Furthermore they presumed that the elite of the community was interested solely in the smooth integration or assimilation of the youth into mainstream society and in the maintenance of their own bourgeois existence. Vis-à-vis members of their own community they argued that they did not appear as a unified group to condemn the actions of the Canadian state. I talked to Jean-Claude, who was 56 years old, already living in Canada for 38 years and working as a taxi-driver. He commented on the issue in the following way:

Our own children do not mean anything to us, we cast pearls before swine. It serves us right that our children turn away and have lost any connection to Haiti. We ourselves have nothing that ties us to Haiti anymore and have turned away long ago!

At this point I would like to refer to the extreme emotionality of the reactions, as they become obvious particularly in the comments by Marie-Rose and Jean-Claude. The interaction of parents with their children should also be interpreted in relation to their own biographies and how they feel about these. If we consider the lives of those migrants, who arrived in Canada as members of the first migrant generation, it becomes clear that the events of 1986 and the turn away from Haiti emotional shift break of the year 1986 and herewith the inner turning away implied also a closer attachment to an eventual future in Canada. However, most of these migrants were relegated to the margins of Quebec society, against their own expectations and visions, due to their lack of education, lack of language skills<sup>11</sup> and the negative reputation of their ethnic group, as described above. From this moment on their view concentrated more on their children, who now not only represented the motivation, but also content and aim of their parents' migration project. These became the carriers of hopes of social and economic upward mobility and the return of the positive reputation and the prestige, which they had enjoyed before leaving their country. Against this background it becomes obvious that the eventual expulsion of members of the second migrant generation back to Haiti, be it their own children or the children of other families, implied the shattering of their life

<sup>11</sup> Particularly those Haitians, who came to Montreal since the middle of the 1970s tended to speak Haitian Creole. Some did not speak French at all when they arrived in Quebec.

plan and the failure of their migration project. The prospect of the eventual deportation of their own children forced Haitian parents to face their deep-rooted fear that their migration could have been for naught and that at the same time the way back home was closed.

### **THE CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVE: FRAGMENTED CULTURAL BELONGINGS**

Several North American sociologists and anthropologists have explored the life worlds of Haitian children who live in the USA or in Canada. To date three issues have been the subject of focus: first, the position of the second generation of migrants<sup>12</sup> between Haitian and western cultures (Laguerre 1984; Potvin 1999, 2000); second, the lives of Haitian children and youth in transnational spaces and in relation to other centres of the Haitian diaspora (Glick Schiller/Fouron 2001); and third, studies (such as those carried out by Perreault/Bibeau 2003; Stepick 1998; Stepick et al. 2001 or Zéphir 2001) which focussed on the issue of youth delinquency and who asked why Haitian children and youth more than any other migrant group are confronted with socio-economic discrimination, as identified by their lack of educational success.

The delinquent behaviour of Haitian children and youth are not obvious at first. Rather, they seem to undergo a usual Haitian socialisation and are fully integrated into their families. However, a glance behind the veil of family life in Montreal reveals that a deep-rooted generational conflict divides the domestic sphere into two.<sup>13</sup> The parents' perspective, as described above, persists in their children's

<sup>12</sup> This contradiction has also been described by Stepick et al. (2001) when discussing Haitian families in Miami (2001: 233ff).

<sup>13</sup> Interview, carried out on 5/15/2002.

ambivalence towards where they come from. A male youth, perhaps 16 years old, told me:

I speak French, English and Creole fluently and I can also speak Spanish. But here I am always Haitian. And they are somehow always the bottom of the barrel.<sup>14</sup>

Against the background of structural violence, historically rooted racism, the fight against economic marginalisation and diffuse life perspectives, Haitian youth contend with their cultural heritage. Particularly those, who have lived the greatest part of their lives in Quebec must, due to their skin colour, contend with an ascribed Haitian identity and the negative reputation of the migrant community. Despite (or because of) this negative stigma, many Haitian youth develop the need in the course of their biography to identify profoundly with the country of their parents, as it is ascribed onto their bodies. Jennifer, also 16 years old, of Haitian origin and born in Montreal, puts it to a point:

I was born here. Here I go to school. Here, I have my family and my friends and I never asked myself this question, because it is here, where I am. But one day someone asked the question: 'Where are you from?' and I answered, 'From

here'. The person laughed. 'No: Where are you from? Where are you born?' I said, 'In Montreal.' They thought I was kidding and did not accept my answer. Since this day this question is always repeated. And this made me think: Where am I from?'

As a result of this form of exclusion, among these children Haiti emerges as a significant coordinate in the creation of their identity. While they develop a strong interest in the history of their parents' country and its political and economical development, they are also confronted with their parents' ambivalence towards the same home country.

The perspective of Haitian parents, as described above, commuting between an ambiguous homeland and the Haitian diaspora, becomes reflected in their descriptions of Haiti, that shift between horrifying portrayals and mystification. On the one hand the parents describe Haiti in an exaggerated way as a place of poverty, misery and natural catastrophes and as a place where theft and murder render a normal life impossible. On the other hand, they speak in dazzling colours of the 'pearl of the Antilles', its heroic history as the first free nation of former slaves, who already in 1804 successfully broke the chains of repression in a famous rebellion. This ambivalence leads on the side of their children to an uncertainty with regard to their cultural heritage, since they, as a result of their skin colour, feel classified, as described above, as being different, as 'visible minorities' while at the same time Haiti, as central element of their identity, remains intangible and diffuse. This is particularly true for those, who only spent a few years in Haiti, if at all, and whose image of the island country is a product of their parents' narratives. At the same time they perceive the Haitian community in Montreal as a kind of space constructed by the first generation

<sup>14</sup> I have elaborated in another context on the perspectives of Haitian children and youth by means of an analysis of the lyrics of rap-songs referring to different cultures of reference (Drotbohm 2005b). Mary C. Waters also describes differing identities within the group of Haitian youth (in the city of New York) and divides them into the following groups: 1. hyphenated black Americans, 2. ethnic Americans and 3. immigrants, who do not identify with America (Waters 2001: 195/196). However, according to my own observations these identities are not lived in parallel, but are lived all at the same time, partially and situationally by each individual.

only for them, a space that offers them neither refuge nor support. Maryse Potvin has explored this phenomenon and formulates her results in the following manner:

They also don't find any kind of refuge in the Haitian community in Montreal, perceived like a space created for the 'first generation'—which offers services for new arrivals and a political springboard for an established elite, but only small means of integration to young Québécois. (Potvin 2000: 186)

Thus these Haitian youth travel between several community-based identifications: first, between the multicultural society of Quebec; second, the Haitian community that surrounds them, including their parents and other family members but also the rest of the first generation of Haitian migrants in Montreal; and third, the community of black youth in Canada, which connects them to a trans-ethnic global youth culture.<sup>15</sup>

In the context the uproar that followed the announced deportations, the reservation and silence among the youth themselves who hardly contributed to the public debate, was surprising. A reaction to the governments' announcement comparable to those of their parents could not be identified—neither in the media, nor in the context of informal meetings with individual youth, nor in the context of organised youth meetings. It almost seemed as if this affair did not concern them at all. Only when I actively introduced the issue into my dialogues with the young people and asked them their opinion did they react, and some controversial discussions did

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<sup>15</sup> The young man, who talked in a mixture of French, Haitian Creole and English, used the English term 'nigger' in this context. He used it as a pejorative term. The accordant term 'nèg' in Haitian Creole has a neutral connotation and means 'person'.

take place. There were two types of reactions, which are again best illustrated by the following examples.

One regular reaction was the justification of the criminal actions or a critique of the media's representation:

Jimmy, 16 years old:

It is nonsense to deport them. What have they done? There are many kids who are in gangs, so what? This doesn't mean that they are criminals. They should talk to them. They could tell them a bit about what it means to be black in Montreal. We are the niggers<sup>16</sup> here. They want us to be good kids, go to school and marry a white girl. But that's not what we want. And we are fed up with this capitalistic shit. We are rebels, yes. We live differently, alright, but this does not necessarily mean that we are criminals. And if yes—so what?"

The boy explained that the Montreal public pay special attention to gang activities and muggings when Haitians were involved. Another young man blamed the media for reproducing the stereotype that all black criminals were Haitians and that nobody paid attention to crimes when the perpetrators were not black. Another one told me, as others around him applauded, that these kinds of crimes were exaggerated in order to find a reason to get rid of Haitians. Another, also typical, reaction was the condemnation of their parents' attitudes towards the governments' announcement. The kids agreed that their parents put more faith in the government than in their own children and had thus lost touch

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<sup>16</sup> The historical division of Caribbean societies along race and class lines is still predominant in many Caribbean societies and is evident in the better position light-skinned children have vis-à-vis dark-skinned siblings.

with them.

Jennifer, 17 years old:

My god, why all this excitement? Because we are not the way they want us to be. They dis' us only because we are not managers and lawyers. And their children, they leave them alone: they have nobody, no government, no community, no parents, no god, who cares about them. At the same time they [the parents] also come out of the shit. Only because they have left their country, they think they are something better. It's awful, to see them chum up to the Quebecois: 'give us work, give us houses, give us cars. Let us be like you.' I hate that. They are house negroes, nothing more. We do not want to be like them.

The young people accused their parents of not speaking up for them because it would be more convenient to keep a low profile. When they call their parents "blancophil," as one of them did, they devalue their efforts at integration as some sort of deference to the host society and criticise them, that they put their material needs before their sympathy for their own children.

So what? Then they are there. Haiti is not hell. It's the country of our ancestors, who liberated us of the white oppressor. Maybe they'll have a better life over there than they did here. In both types of reactions, two entangled themes are in the foreground: first, the affinity of the youth to trans-Caribbean ideologies of rebellion and resistance; and second, the distance between them and their parents and the migrant community. In both cases they are working with images of

themselves, constructed by Canadian society or the Haitian community which they apply in expressing their disappointment in their parents' indifferent attitude towards the subtle racism of the host society. To my question, what problems they thought the youths being deported might have to deal with, one young man said:

These selected quotes illustrate the identity construction of the youths, who have to negotiate their position between the cultures of reference mentioned above (multicultural society, migrant community and family and trans-ethnic black youth culture). The experience of rejection and of racism is the guiding theme in their opinion on the issue of deportation. Against the background of their bleak future and career expectations, racism appears to be the most significant criterion of difference and emerges as the sole explanation for their social situation. The prevailing African American reaction to racism in a host society, a phenomenon that remains a central coordinate in the identity constructions of African Canadians, has for several decades oscillated between the so-called 'democratic logic', which concentrates on the expansion of rights and options among black segments of the population in the USA and Canada, and an 'essentialising logic', which is based on a self-referring identity and is followed by a radical avoidance of white universalisms (Potvin 1999: 59-65). Both reaction types can be allocated to the second logic, since both reactions underline the critique of North American lifestyles and the stereotyping of coloured youth. In these ideologies of resistance typical for youth cultures anywhere in the world, the discussion of the gang activities shifts to a symbolical level, in order to express solidarity and to construct the youth as rebels, who speak up against their own marginalisation (see also Brown 2002).

However, the young peoples' accusations are not only directed towards the racism of the host society but also towards their parents', who are perceived as submissive and indifferent. In this context the term "house negro" is employed as a trans-Caribbean symbol referring to the historically founded antagonism between field slave and house slave. This dichotomy, developed in the context of Caribbean plantation economies, puts the field slave, who had to perform heavy work on his owner's fields and whose life-world was oriented towards trans-ethnic African traditions, in opposition to the house slave, who lived in spatial proximity to his white master, was partly integrated into their master's everyday lives and enjoyed privileges such as education and health care. Against this background of trans-Caribbean ideologies the term "house negro" needs to be understood as a culture-specific term for a traitor and informer.

In the comments quoted above, other levels of communication between the youth and their parents are also revealed. Besides having to deal with the negative reputation of their community and their preoccupation with their parents' efforts of integration, Haitian youth are under pressure to fulfil their parents' expectations and migration dreams. While they themselves have to deal directly with the limits put on their professional and social integration, they must at the same time deal with their fear of being used by their parents as some kind of material resource or as a means for realising their upward social mobility. Marrying a 'white girl' in a 'white environment' for example, would ensure them the desired social step up.<sup>17</sup> Finally, the youth feel rejected by both these reference cultures, by the multicultural host society as well as their own ethnic group, and turn to the ideologies of a trans-ethnic black youth culture, which is able to offer them familiar identity images.

This becomes particularly obvious when they are asked to assess the criminal activities of Haitian youth gangs. Analo-

gous to the dichotomy between the traitorous house slave and the field slave as prototype of the African American liberator, the members of the street gangs are celebrated as post-modern heroes, who lend themselves well for identification. The youth honour the gang members and stylise themselves as urban rebels caught up in the fight for the rights of the marginalised. Finally I would like to come back to the Haitian youth's (restrained) reaction to the announced deportations. While their reactions are coloured by their conflict with both the host society as well as with their own community, the young people remained indifferent towards their contemporaries' perspective of having to spend the rest of their lives in Haiti and nowhere else. This must be interpreted in relation to the imaginative elevation of the home country and its heroic history. In the youth's descriptions, Haiti becomes a mystic, distant place detached from local realities. The youth are not able to perceive deportation as a threat to their generation, since they do not or hardly know the real Haiti and use the country as a foil against the wishes and desires of their parents.

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<sup>17</sup> The second generation of immigrants is defined as people, whose parents (one parent or both) came to Canada directly or via third countries, and who therefore belong to the first generation of immigrants. People, who came to Canada at a young age (under 10), who were socialised primarily in the country of destination, are also called second generation (some scholars call them the 1.5 generation, for example Stepick/Stepick 2003: 129, see also Zéphir 2001: 6). Citizenship or the lack thereof, the most important legal factor in deportation cases, can vary within this group. Due to the long history of Haitian migration to Canada, which lasts already more than fifty years, people belonging to the second or even to the third generation do not necessarily need to be young at age; for instance, a 'son' can be older than 35 years. However, as explained in the introductory remarks, the issue of deportation affects many young people and becomes identified by the migrant community with youth and its symbolic meaning. Therefore, I chose primarily young people as representatives of the 'children's perspectives'.

## CONCLUSION

The decision by the Canadian state to expel delinquent Haitian migrants back to Haiti—irrespective of how long they have lived in Canada—resulted in different and partly contradicting reactions among the Haitian migrant community in Montreal that I have classified on the basis of generation.

While the earlier immigrant generation perceives deportation as a threat to Haiti or as an assault upon their personal family migration project, the younger generation remained indifferent on the issue. Instead, they used the issue in dealing with their own conflict with the migrant community and with their parents' attitude towards their own generation.

Furthermore, it became apparent that the parents' generation change its perspective between here and there, between Canada, the Haitian diaspora and Haiti, an attitude rather typical for transmigrants who construct their identities in relation to and between different places of cultural and national belonging. At the same time, their children are primarily concerned with their own situation in Canada and deal only to a limited extent with the impact the deportation might have in Haiti. For them, Haiti, their parents' home country, tends to have a symbolic meaning and the deportations are perceived as coercion on the part of the Canadian state. In their struggle with these diasporic realities, the younger generation reject the constraints of transnational modes of existence expected of those that are to be deported, since they, as members of the younger immigrant generation, would, in fact prefer their seamless integration into the Canadian nation-state.

In my analysis, deportation has emerged as a significant key site for mediating national and cultural identities and for understanding contradicting perspectives among the first and the following mi-

grant generations. New constraints, as they emerge in the context of globalisation, are interpreted differently and shed new light on generational differences within migrant families, whose members express their belonging in and towards different social fields.

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