

**Samuel Martinez.** *Peripheral Migrants: Haitians and Dominican Republic Sugar Plantations.* Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995. xix + 228 pp. \$35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-87049-901-2.



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Why do some of the world's most peripheral laborers risk their lives by migrating not to cities or the industrialized world, but to other poor peripheral economies where they suffer low wages and inhumane treatment? Do they do it because they are so desperately poor and hungry in their home countries? Do they stay, planning never to return, or are there other factors pulling them back home? Finally, how does such migration affect the home areas left behind?

These are but a few of the important questions raised by Samuel Martinez in his study of the motivations and effects of rural Haitian workers who risk their lives for uncertain results in the harsh sugar estates of the Dominican Republic. In this fascinating book, Martinez takes the reader into the lives of the migrants and their decision-making processes. Through binational, community-based field work in two Haitian communities and one Dominican sugar estate, Martinez helps us better understand the motivations, actions, constraints, and multitude of risks of Haitian migrants as they travel to another country in the world economic periphery. Seemingly each page

uncovers subtle complexities that highlight a form of labor migration that has been understudied: rural-to-rural, peripheral economy-to-peripheral economy migration that is circular in nature. That is, Martinez illustrates how and why certain Haitian men and women willingly choose to temporarily work for wages in the Dominican Republic and then return with their meager savings. Ultimately, these migrants hope to use their earnings for multiple trips in order to better their peasant livelihoods back in Haiti.

Martinez roots his study in a firm historical setting. He first examines the late development of the Dominican sugar economy in comparison with the rest of the Caribbean. Then he analyzes how Haitian laborers came to be incorporated into the Dominican system beginning around 1915 and 1916 as the United States occupied both halves of Hispaniola. However, Martinez refuses to blame the U.S. occupation solely for the rise of Haitian migrant labor pouring into the Dominican Republic. Rather, a host of external factors propelled Haitians across the border: demand in the Dominican Republic as new technology allowed

for more cane to be processed; Dominicans' general refusal to work in their own fields, necessitating a demand for immigrant labor; the displacement of some Haitian small landholders as foreign investment acquired large tracts of land; and, increased pressures on Haitian land due to a growing Haitian population.

While such external factors partially motivated some Haitians to emigrate to the Dominican Republic (and Cuba, too, it should be noted), they do not explain why Haitian migration was "circular," that is, why Haitians generally planned to return to Haiti. Martinez finds another more important internal and personal factor to explain the rise of emigration to the Dominican Republic and the subsequent return to Haiti of most migrants: migration began as a means for young men to earn money so that upon return to Haiti, they could enter conjugal unions with money and, perhaps, some family land. Later circulatory migrations would hopefully enable men and sometimes women to earn cash in which they could if not better, then at least maintain, their traditional peasant lifestyles in Haiti. As Martinez explains, "When people cling to this way of life as tenaciously as rural Haitians have, it is not just conservatism or a lack of viable alternatives that impels them to do so. Rather, within the terrible constraints under which they live, rural Haitians consider their modes of livelihood to have retained some advantages relative to other possible lifestyles" (pp. 64-65).

This view of migration highlights Martinez's own interpretation and application of the "articulationist mode of production" approach to migration. Martinez rejects neoclassical equilibrium theories of migration which argue that migrants make rational choices to move someplace where their standard of living will be better. The Haitian example of repeated migration and return to Haiti "confounds any simple interpretation of voluntary mobility as the outcome of invidious comparisons between home and host areas" (p. 18).

Neither do the theories on circulation beginning in the 1930s adequately explain the Haitian case. Such theories held that circulatory migration was a rational response to poverty designed to get enough cash for certain purchase goals in order to return to a subsistence life, or that circulatory migration was a way to mitigate risk. But, Martinez writes, "Where a functioning subsistence economy survives in the migrants' home area, as is still the case for much of rural Haiti, it may not be easy to say for sure whether the pull of people and property at home or the push of obstacles to settlement in the host area is the stronger incentive to return" (p. 22).

Instead, Martinez sees a modified version of the articulationist mode of production as best explaining what happens in Haiti. The articulationist explanation argues that the international and national capitalist systems may benefit from the retention of peasant societies. Such retention may mean that workers' families will be able to feed themselves through reciprocity networks while the migrant is away and at the same time the employer benefits because he need not provide amenities or benefits to ensure a steady supply of labor. Ultimately, Martinez sees "migrant behavior to be determined largely by structural imperatives of the societies of origin and of destination" (p. 24):

In short, if rural Haiti may be said to possess a distinctive peasant mode of production, it is one that has long existed in intimate association with global capitalism. Surely, rural Haitians would ideally prefer that decisions about local production and consumption be kept as much as possible in local hands. Yet my firsthand observations and those of other Haitianist ethnographers suggest that Haitian peasants generally do not wish to escape the market economy and might even find that prospect difficult to imagine (p. 25).

For Martinez, this approach to migration best explains the goals of Haitians who choose to temporarily migrate to the Dominican sugar estates.

In short, migrants are not striving so much for "personal economic autonomy as a personal economic identity" (p. 92). This is of particular relevance for the rural Haitians that Martinez interviewed. Young men go to the Dominican Republic to seek such a personal economic identity because they cannot necessarily rely on parents or guardians to provide for their basic needs. As such, they travel to establish themselves (create their own economic identities), with this, then, serving as a basis for entering their first conjugal union. Subsequent migrations into the Dominican Republic's market-wage economy are undertaken with specific goals: money to build a house, buy land, buy tools, etc., in order to better secure their peasant livelihoods.

Women also have defined personal economic identities in rural Haitian life. Both spouses earn income that becomes household income, but both also retain certain funds for their own uses. Thus, women have certain individual economic identities. When men migrate, women must often double up on chores by working fields that their men would usually work. This threatens to undermine women's individual economic identities because the women spend less time at the market or doing whatever it is that they do to bring their funds into the family and for themselves. Consequently, many women voice outright discontent about migration. Because migration brings uncertain savings (or, in fact, the man may never return!), some wives question the financial risks incurred from migration.

*Peripheral Migrants* is divided into an introduction, eight chapters, and two appendices. The introduction lays forth the different methods (both legal and illegal) that Haitians use to get to the Dominican Republic and then outlines several theories that have sought to explain Third World migration. The first two chapters place Haitian circulatory migration into historical context. Chapter One traces the historical roots of the demand for Haitian laborers in the Dominican Re-

public. This chapter then illustrates how important political events (the Trujillo dictatorship, the 1966 U.S. intervention in the Dominican Republic, and the end of official Haitian government organization of labor to the Dominican Republic in 1986) affected migration. Chapter Two explores why workers first began to migrate to the Dominican Republic in the 1910s and then have continued to do so throughout this century.

Chapter Three first describes the two communities in southeastern Haiti and the sugar estate in the Dominican Republic that serve as the case studies in this book. Martinez then explores how rural Haitians have experienced change and continuity in the migration system over the decades. Of particular interest is this chapter's discussion of (1) who goes to the Dominican Republic, and (2) the important economic and cultural motivations for seeking employment across the border. While the mean age of a migrant is twenty-three years old, the majority of men make more than one trip over their lifetimes. Sixty-six percent of men over thirty-five had made at least one trip while the median number of trips to the Dominican Republic for men thirty-five or older was four throughout one's lifetime. Economically, it often took several trips for a migrant to earn enough money to meet his goals. To save enough money to build a house required many temporary stints in the Dominican Republic. Most men stopped migrating after they had calculated that enough money had been earned to secure their means of making a living in Haiti.

Perhaps one of the greatest benefits of Martinez's study is his incorporation of Haitian peasant culture to understand the migration. In both Chapters Three and Four (the latter on why Haitians return to their homes after working in the Dominican Republic), Martinez brings cultural insights into motivations for migrating and returning to Haiti--insights that an otherwise strictly economic study or a study where the researcher did not know Haitian Creole could not elaborate.

For instance, Martinez stresses the importance of "shame" in people's motivations: "The stigma attached to soliciting work from wealthier neighbors may well motivate some men to go far from home in search of work" (p. 75). Haitian peasants might prefer to work for their neighbors or for an outsider setting up employment in the community. However, they would have to be invited to work for the neighbor rather than approach the neighbor and solicit work. "Most rural Haitians would regard soliciting employment from an outsider who might set up shop locally as something very different—and less shameful—than going hat in hand to ask a neighbor for work," Martinez writes (p. 76). Life in the harsh sugar estates also includes a sense of shame, according to Martinez. Migrants generally "limit their visits with nearby friends and relatives to payday weekends, when they can put a good face on their situation by taking a Sunday afternoon off, donning their good clothes, and perhaps sharing out salty, fried snacks and a small bottle of rum" (p. 145). Any other time, these migrants suffer from material deprivation, which Martinez sees as a source of shame.

Cultural issues, as opposed to just economic concerns, also motivate migrants to return home. Rural Haitians, notes Martinez, worry about the fate of their souls after death. Extensive mortuary preparations need to be made, including building a tomb, readying a coffin, and purchasing livestock and land to be sold in order to pay for the funeral. "For many," the author observes, "the fear that their souls may suffer torment after death, if they have no family members to carry out the proper mortuary ceremonials for them, may give added urgency to the longing to return to Haiti voiced by nearly all non-returning migrants" (p. 89).

Besides cultural and economic concerns, very practical concerns require migrants to physically return to their communities. Living standards in the Dominican estates are dismal, workers suffer

repression, and there is no secure means to remit earnings to one's family. This latter concern is extremely important. Mail delivery is unreliable if existent. Also, people cannot necessarily trust that money sent with a fellow migrant on his return to Haiti would actually end up in the hands of the family of the remaining migrant. Another practical concern for returning includes the rural Haitian notion that land should not sit idle merely because its owner is away. If a migrant spends years in the Dominican Republic and then returns to Haiti, he may "find that his kinfolk have divided up or sold his property as their own, or that all the relatives he once knew have died or moved away" (p. 90).

Chapters Five and Six round out Martinez's approach of examining migration's effects on migrants and kin by focusing on the impact of migration—in the home areas and especially on women. While Dominican Republic earnings may be parlayed into future economic security for a migrant and his family, this is a very risky gambit. Besides low wages and the necessity to return to the Dominican Republic several times over one's lifetime, the home areas run the risk of decline in the migrant's absence. Migrants usually leave for the Dominican Republic before their own fields are prepared, requiring remaining family members and especially the women to prepare the fields in addition to their own individual tasks. Women at home have their own economic assets, usually from petty market activities. When a migrant husband leaves for the Dominican Republic, the woman must not only continue her own activities for her own economic health and identity, but also fill in for her absent husband by working his fields.

As discussed above, this is an important point in Martinez's argument: money comes in from migration, but because the female spouse has to take over the absent husband's activities, there develops "greater economic interdependence between spouses. This increased economic dependence

may be one reason why many women come to oppose emigration openly" (p. 132). Women's own personal economic identity is jeopardized by the risk involved in her spouse's migration. He may not return or, if he does, there is no guarantee that the money he brings back will be significant. At the same time, the wife finds herself doing double duty with her own and her husband's activities. Ultimately, her own independent economic activity may suffer. In addition, "Women may also perceive that the high risk of failure in migration suits neither their households' income security nor their own economic autonomy, and they may question the value of their husbands' migrations accordingly" (p. 137).

Chapter Seven examines the reasons why some Haitians remain in the Dominican Republic indefinitely and how they cope. Chapter Eight is more of a political statement and afterthought than a conclusion. In this chapter, Martinez notes with concern how "rural circuits of petty accumulation, which make possible the conversion of migrant money to subsistence resources, have seriously degraded since the 1970s" (p. 161). Martinez then examines the context of migration to the Dominican Republic in light of human rights concerns. While acknowledging the abuse and repression on the Dominican sugar estates, he rejects the notion that trade sanctions against the Dominican Republic would be appropriate. Sanctions would mostly hurt Haitians who have come to rely on wages in the Dominican Republic for their livelihoods in Haiti. To punish the Dominican Republic for its practices would have the most negative effects on the people that sanctions would be trying to protect.

In all, *Peripheral Migrants* is an exceptionally insightful work. The success of the book lies partly in its conceptualization and partly in its methodology. Conceptually, Martinez takes the reader through the myriad of stages and nuances that go into a migrant's decision to go to the Dominican Republic, return or not return, and the

effects on the lives of those who stay and go. This approach that combines personal, cultural, and economic insights--while not a labor history in the traditional sense--goes far in helping scholars better understand the plight of people who are sometimes peasants, sometimes workers, and their kind. These people in particular live in a complex world where the intricacies of global and personal economics, culture, and daily risks merge. The poor, then, see their best option for survival in the world that they know as going to another poor peripheral country to earn a small amount of cash. Martinez effectively teases out these intricacies from his data and explains their significance with a knowing compassion derived from a year's field work and several other short trips to Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Martinez's methodology is crucial for this success. Martinez roots the book in a strong historical basis, previous studies of Haitian migration, and case studies of migration from around the globe. His knowledge of Haitian Creole and Spanish allows him, as he himself notes in a postscript on his methodology, to gain insight into the lives of Haitian migrants that other scholars who had to depend on Spanish-speaking Haitians would have missed. Building on his historical and global basis and his language skills, Martinez then lived among Haitians in the Dominican company town of Yerba Buena and the southeastern Haitian villages of Rochteau and Cabrouette, conducting on-site, community-based research through a series of interviews. Interviews consisted of "life history" questions as opposed to "synchronic, standardized" questions. According to Martinez, life history questions provided different responses than synchronic questions. In particular, if one asked why someone traveled to the Dominican Republic (a synchronic question), respondents showed "no sign of the commitment to home" in their answers. However, when asked to recount their personal histories of why they migrated, respondents told Martinez that the reasons usually had to do with the need for specific monetary con-

cerns at home (p. 172). Ultimately, this line of questioning sought peoples' personal outcomes as well as motivations. In this way, Martinez was able to illustrate the multiple dimensions of migrants and those who stayed at home.

Anyone concerned with immigration issues, Caribbean history, or labor history will come away from this book with a much greater understanding of the dynamics of Caribbean immigrant labor history. *Peripheral Migrants* will likely become a major source for future examinations of Caribbean migration patterns and effects on the home left behind. In particular, studies on the impact of periphery-to-periphery migration in this Caribbean and elsewhere in the world will drawn on Martinez's book on this important, yet understudied, topic.

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