

(Dis)connections: migration, transnationalism, and global capitalism between Haiti and the United States

KAREN E. RICHMAN, 2018 (2nd edition), *Migration and Vodou*, University Press of Florida, pp. 384, ISBN: 9780813064864

In *Migration and Vodou*, Karen Richman presents a fascinatingly rich ethnography that draws on over two decades of multi-sited research across Haiti and the United States, embedded within an extended transnational family of migrant workers and remittance recipients. Through the lens of this one family, Richman draws us into a dynamic world of transnational interconnection that will be familiar to scholars of various parts of the Caribbean region.

Richman's ethnography details a community from Ti Rivyè, a coastal fishing village in the Léogane Plain in the south of Haiti. In recent decades, the region has seen many of its inhabitants migrate to the United States, in order to provide economic support for those left back at home. Most find work as agricultural workers in South Florida, although in the first instance Richman met her main interlocutor of the book whilst at a state-licensed labor camp in Virginia.

The book opens with a detailed presentation of an exchange of 'letters' between these separated family members through the exchange of audio-cassettes. Richman details how these 'letters' mix spoken word and ritual song, creating a transnational performative space of rhetorical and ritual exchange. For communities stretched between rural Haiti and South Florida, creative uses of these audio technologies result in a reconfiguration of the boundaries of ritual performance space, allowing migrants to continue to serve their spirits (*lwa*) and participate in rituals even from a distance.

Richman further argues that this genre (which was subsequently supplanted by the introduction of cell phones in the 2000s) was far more congenial for extending an emphatically oral creole

aesthetic that prizes proverbs, figurative language, indirection, antiphony, and shifting between speech and song. An accompanying audio CD to the book also allows readers to hear these performances alongside the detailed textual analysis Richman provides, whilst situating these exchanges within a larger African diasporic genre of verbal exchange, analogous to African-American 'signifying,' Jamaican 'throwing' or Barbadian 'dropping' of remarks.

The migrants that Richman portrays within a Haitian diaspora occupy a difficult position: on the one hand they are essential to their communities' survival back home (due to their economic remittances), yet they are at the same time subject to stigma and disdain for their decision to leave. As Richman points out, these individuals 'slave away in hostile, foreign countries for the sake of people who resent them for ever having left' (p. 26). Richman's decision to focus her book around these audio exchanges thus serves as a particularly evocative lens not only onto the economic power relations developing in this increasingly transnational context, but also upon the microtensions that develop within families and communities as these power dynamics are navigated and communicated.

Migration and Vodou makes several important contributions to anthropological debates. Firstly, Richman provides a detailed analysis of the development of a labor export economy within a region that has continued to become increasingly transnational in the decades since this ethnographic research was undertaken. Richman's work reveals how members of a rural, peasant class in neo-colonial Haiti adapt to increasingly transnational and capitalizing models of production and globalization.

For anthropologists of Haiti and the Caribbean more broadly, Richman provides a rich history of the region, considering how colonial practices alongside agricultural production of sugar and coffee have created the socioeconomic context demanding labor migration within a global system of capital reproduction. Throughout Chapters 2-4, Richman does an excellent job of combining such economic theories with local Haitian theories of production, in which feeding is a dominant metaphor, and traces this through various other syncretic African diasporic practices elsewhere in the region. In so doing, the author grounds her account within a discussion of the transformation of land and labor relations among the Haitian peasantry, and situates her later theoretical arguments within a context of Haiti as a producer and exporter of migrant labor, which in turn has created a structural dependence upon imports and remittances from migrant labor abroad.

The author then moves to consider processes of ritual and kinship change in Ti Rivyè's response to broader demographic and socioeconomic transformations during the early 20th century. Throughout Chapters 5-8, Richman explores the structures of Vodou religious cosmology and Haitian understandings of migration within this framework, and presents a central dialectic between "Guinea" (Africa), which represents the long-term orientation of peasant communities, hierarchies, and the importance of family and land, and "Magic," representing shorter-term and more individualistic behaviours. Richman then proceeds to explore this dialectic of Guinea/Magic as a crucial backdrop against which to interpret relationships between those who remain on the island, and those who leave to seek a livelihood elsewhere, arguing that the watershed of ritual change in turn introduced new professional ritual leadership, and that discourses of "Guinean authenticity" served to legitimize these changes. Ritual songs (also presented on the accompanying CD) capture this tension, and Richman uses textual analysis of these verbal contests to document these changing relations of ritual and kinship in the light of increased migration.

In Chapters 8 and 9, by way of conclusion, Richman returns to the relationships between those who have left and those who have stayed, arguing that ritual songs and the moral discourses that are so central to them are used to cast migrants as morally inferior, albeit economically necessary. In response, some migrants rebel against their home-kin and convert to Protestantism, which Richman sees as a strategy employed to contest criticisms made by home communities, whilst still positioning one's actions within the wider moral discourses of Vodou, or what Richman calls the dialectic of Guinea and Magic. As Richman explains, the evil enemy is "not a discrete person but rather a vast, sorcerous system that turns poor Haitians neighbors against one another" (p. 266).

The book could have made a more comprehensive effort to contextualise this central dialectic — Guinea and Magic — within other syncretic African diasporic practices and cosmological frameworks elsewhere in the region, and readers who are not familiar with the specifically Haitian context may find this dualism more frustrating than enlightening in places. One must applaud the author's dedication to relaying rich ethnography within the terms of its own interlocutors, however, and in this regard the book offers one of the richest ethnographic accounts of transnational kinship networks in the region.

The book also benefits from great scholarship in drawing together literatures on migration, transnationalism, and global capitalism, as well as from anthropological perspectives on religion and cosmology, and ethnomusicology. All of this is also situated within one of the richest and most concise discussions of agricapitalist and (neo)colonial history within Haiti that can be found. Some might critique the book for its narrow focus upon one single, rural community, yet Richman documents sociocultural processes so pervasive throughout Haiti and the Caribbean at large, that the book arguably benefits from this most specific lens upon one particular community, and the ethnographic rigour it then supplies to Richman's wider theoretical analysis. Scholars of political economies in formation, transnational kinship structures, and the creation and performance of cosmologies and ritual spaces in emerging globalized contexts, will find rich ethnographic material and analysis to emulate *Migration and Vodou*.

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