

Imagining Brazil: Reasons to migrate, destination choice, and life in a new country in the accounts of Haitian migrants

WORKING PAPER



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ABSTRACT

In 2021, Haitians constituted one of the three most represented foreign nationalities in Brazil alongside Venezuelans and Colombians. Yet Brazil became a major destination for Haitians only after the 2010 earthquake, mostly in response to welcoming declarations by Brazilian politicians and to the relative ease in both travelling and residing in Brazil regularly. In this paper, we explore the relevance of the imaginative components of this migration, sitting alongside the tangible ones mentioned above. Our research reveals that, already in the years prior to the 2010 earthquake, Brazil has started establishing itself more and more in the Haitian imaginary as a possible destination country. Brazil's leadership of the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) since 2004, together with the coverage of world-relevant sport events in Brazil between 2007 and 2019, and the 2011 release of the 20th Century Fox animation's film 'Rio', all contributed to centring the image of Brazil as a stable country. This research is located within the growing literature of subjective factors in migration decision-making, aiming to uncover the relevance of these factors alongside that of tangible ones. The paper draws on qualitative and quantitative data (interviews and a survey) collected within the framework of the MIDEQ project by researchers from the UNIperiferias Institute of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and jointly analysed by researchers from UNIperiferias and ODI in London, UK.

1. INTRODUCTION

As of 2021, around 1.3 million migrants resided in Brazil. Haitians constitute one of the three largest nationalities, alongside Venezuelans and Colombians (Agencia Brasil, 2021). However, although Haitians have been migrating to Brazil for decades, they only became a sizeable flow after 2010. That year marks not only the start of a new migratory wave for Haiti, but also the birth of a large new migration corridor that – in comparison to Haitian’s prior migration to the US and Canada – begins and ends in the Global South.

Since 1913, the beginning of the first sizeable Haitian migration¹, Haitians have used migration as a strategy to search for better and more secure livelihoods (Joseph, 2015, 2017). According to Joseph (2015), “it would be almost impossible to find a household in Haiti in which there is not a member abroad, as households and family networks usually have at least someone in the *peyi etranje* (foreign country)” (p. 67). Yet Brazil was not usually part of this strategy. Understanding why and how Brazil has become so popular as a destination requires multi-layered analysis.

Research on migration decision-making considers individual and collective and mental, emotional, and physical decisional processes related to the different phases of the migration journey, from before its inception to after the arrival at destination. Crucially, scholars now agree that migration decision-making requires much more than answering the question of whether to stay or to go, as was long assumed (Triulzi and McKenzie, 2013; BenEzer and Zetter, 2015). Considerations, and consequently decisions, on where to go (Crawley and Hagen-Zanker, 2019) and how (Crawley and Jones, 2020; Hagen-Zanker and Mallett, 2016) have in recent years been explored further by migration researchers. Attention is increasingly focused on the subjective components of migration decision-making, such as imagination, personality traits, emotions and feelings, and beliefs and values (Hagen-Zanker, Hennessey, and Mazzilli, 2023).

In this working paper, we explore migration decision-making related to the choice of destination, focusing on Haitian migration to Brazil. The research questions guiding our work are, 1) *Which actors shape Haitian migrants’ expectations of Brazil and migration decision-making?* 2) *Around which factors do Haitians construct their imagery of Brazil?* 3) *How do their expectations compare to reality?*

Grounded in Crawley and Hagen-Zanker’s work (2019), amongst other studies, we show that, for Haitians, cultural, social, and political factors ‘came together’ to generate a specific, and attractive, imagery of Brazil – which would lead to many choosing it as their preferred destination.

¹ Joseph (2017) explains that the first major flow of Haitian mobility occurred during the occupation of Haiti (1915-1943) and the Dominican Republic (1912-1924) by the US armed forces. This migration was motivated by the growing sugar cane industry in the Caribbean, generating a shortage of labour on plantations, especially in Cuba and the Dominican Republic, which Haitian workers filled.

This topic is relevant to the field of migration studies beyond this particular migration corridor. The breadth of countries included in MIDEQ's research allows us to explore the theme of imagined destinations in migration decision-making across other corridors too, for example, in relation to the Ethiopians' imagery of South Africa (Mazzilli et al., 2023a). Working across corridors and geographical areas can shed light on what factors concur to shaping prospective migrants' imagination in relation to a certain place but also on what factors are corridor-specific. Echoing Durkheim's argument (1895) that "comparative sociology is not a particular branch of sociology; it is sociology itself, in so far as it ceases to be purely descriptive and aspires to account for facts", we highlight the relevance of the research that has been conducted within the framework of MIDEQ, as comparisons can show how unique or recurring (and all the degrees in between) certain social phenomena are. Yet, with this work we do not aim at identifying or establishing strict regularities, as each migration and its decision-making is as unique as the person who experiences it.

The working paper proceeds as follows: the next section gives a concise overview of Haitian international mobility over time, with a specific focus on the events that marked the presence of Brazil in Haiti and/or on the interaction between the two countries. In Section 3, we delve into the literature on decision-making, particularly referring to imagined destinations, and establish connections between the factors highlighted in the literature and those emerging from our study. Section 4 analyses the study results more in depth, honing into the elements that have 'come together' (Crawley and Hagen-Zanker, 2019) for Haitians to shape their idea of Brazil as a destination, to decide to migrate, but also to evaluate their life at destination in comparison to what they imagined before migrating. Finally, in Section 5 we draw the most relevant points together, explaining how this specific case informs wider knowledge of migration decision-making.

2. RESEARCH METHODS AND SAMPLE

This analysis is based on data collected in 2021 drawing on in-depth interviews with 65 Haitians living in Brazil, alongside two focus groups discussions (FDGs). One FGD held in São Paulo included seven Haitians, three women and four men, and the other held in Porto Velho included seven Haitians, six men and one woman. In this paper, we draw on 20 interviews on the topic of decision-making, but also include insights from others where decision-making often came up organically within a conversation². The in-depth interviews took place in five Brazilian states - Rondônia, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Paraná, and Santa Catarina, and took place during the months of September and October 2021. Both the in-depth interviews and the focus groups

² In this specific study, we selected 20 of the 101 total interviews conducted for the Haiti-Brazil migration corridor, whose questions focused on decision-making. We also added considerations stemming from other interviews that in some way touched on this subject too.

followed semi-structured scripts touching upon decision-making, gender, race, and migration intermediaries.

All in-depth interviews and focus groups were recorded. To this end, written authorization was requested to the participants to confirm that they were aware that the interview would be recorded and that their identity would be preserved. Reflecting this, all names used in the paper are pseudonyms and the ages mentioned refer to 2021, the year which the interviews were conducted. The age range of the Haitians interviewed was between 16 and 65 years old, and the period in which they arrived in Brazil was from 2018 to 2020, divided as follows: 2008 and 2012: 20% (13); 2013 and 2016: 52% (34); 2017 and 2020: 28% (18). Almost half of those interviewed are from the Western Department (where the country's capital is located). 50.7% of the total said they had between one to five children. 85.3% of them said they had children living in Brazil.

During the period in which the interviews were carried out, 68% (44) had formal employment, with the main activities declared: self-employed/entrepreneurs, industry/factories, app driver, nursing, supermarket, travel agency, restaurants. Among the 65 Haitians interviewed, 32% (21) said they were not working. Of these, the vast majority 81% (17) were studying. Among those who were neither studying nor employed, 19% (4) were men. 80% (52) of those interviewed stated that they had professional training. Among the 21 Haitian women interviewed, 62% (13) were working, with five 5 of them also studying. 38% (8) were not working but were studying. Ten of the 21 women had completed their higher education or were in the process of completing it.

17% (11) chose not to report their monthly income. 4.5% (3) claimed to have no personal income, 21.5% (14) received up to one minimum wage (R\$ 1,212/ U\$ 238.77) (7 of them are students and receive a scholarship, between R\$ 400.00 and R\$ 600.00). 49.2% (32) declared having a personal monthly income between R\$1,300 and R\$3,500 – U\$197.06 and U\$689.71; 12.3% (5) had a personal monthly income between R\$5,000 and R\$7,000 (all arrived in BR before 2015) – U\$985.26 and U\$1379.42. The average salary of the 65 Haitians interviewed was R\$1,870.00 (U\$368.39) (1.7 times the minimum wage).

We also present some of the results of the survey conducted at the same time as the interviews in the cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, which included 868 Haitians living in Brazil, 440 women and 428 men. The module on decision-making includes around 24 survey items, although they do not offer a great of detail on the reasons for migrating, why Brazil was chosen and what they would do differently, or the difficulties they encountered in Brazil i.e. racism, challenging job opportunities. The majority of survey questions instead focus on migration preparations, from whom did the migrant get information or advice to migrate, help with documentation to migrate, money, finding a job or place to live in the destination. There are some questions around experiencing problems while travelling to destination.

To facilitate the project's entry into the Haitian community in each city, all the interviews and focus groups were organised and carried out by Haitian interviewers supervised by senior Haitian researchers from the UN/Periferias/MIDEQ team. The in-depth interviews were conducted in Portuguese and the survey in Creole. All the Haitians who took part in the data collection were fluent in Portuguese and had a wide network of contacts with the Haitian community in each city, where the interviews took place. All participants had migrated to Brazil between 2008 and 2020, prior to the pandemic.

The choice to conduct individual interviews and FDGs in Portuguese depended on time constraints for carrying out the fieldwork within the context of the MIDEQ project. Therefore, it is important to note that this choice implies being able to talk to a specific group of participants, that is, those who were independent users of or fluent in Portuguese. It is important to note that the perceptions of those Haitians who had less education or those who did not speak Portuguese – which could be considered as a proxy for other obstacles they experience in their daily life, such as in their job and/or interaction with the state – were not included in our sample. On this point, we also observed that one of the main challenges in collecting qualitative data was identifying Haitian women who were comfortable in participating. Among the main reasons were insecurity and shyness due to not being able to speak Portuguese but also the need to receive the husband's approval to participate in the interview.

We acknowledge that studying imaginary retrospectively, as done in this paper, can overshadow the shifts taking place during and after the migration journey. While this decision was motivated by the role played by UN/Periferias in the data collection, we also point to the important work carried out by the Interuniversity Institute for Research and Development (INURED) researchers, also part of the MIDEQ project³, that can shed more light on other aspect of Haitian migrations to Haiti not explored here.

3. HAITIAN INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY AND RELATIONS WITH BRAZIL

Joseph (2015) highlights how mobility has been embedded in Haiti since its very establishment as a colony, first as part of the enslaved people trade, then with the practice of *marronnage* (the act of fleeing from the brutal conditions of slavery), and finally in terms of migration after the abolition of slavery. Migration to France and other islands of the Caribbean have remained a constant throughout its history.

Joseph (2017) divides more recent Haitian migration into four phases: the first phase (ca. 1913-1943) consisted of temporary labour migration directed towards Cuba and the Dominican Republic and the second one (ca. 1950-1980) was made up of professionals and intellectuals migrating to the US, Canada (particularly Montreal and Quebec), but also Francophone African countries such as Senegal, Benin, and the

³ See, for instance, [this](#) article on 'Migration, memory, and longing in Haitian songs', published by INURED researchers within the framework of MIDEQ.

Democratic Republic of Congo. Meanwhile, in the third phase (ca. mid-1990s to mid-2000s) Haitians chiefly migrated to the US in search of political asylum, seeking refuge from the tense political situation that followed the coup d'état and deportation of the democratically elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 1991. Towards the end of this period, in 2004, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who had been reinstated, was ousted again by another military coup.

The fourth and current phase started in 2010. Haiti's residents had already been facing increasingly harder living conditions such as food shortage and the 2008-2010 cholera epidemic, when Haiti was hit by a severe earthquake in 2010, causing around 220,000 deaths, 300,000 injured and 1.5 million homeless (Aljazeera, 2021; UN, 2022). Since that time, Haitian emigration has grown in significance, diversity, and volume, while Brazil became more popular as a destination.

During the six years that had preceded the earthquake, Brazil, as country and potential destination, had become first present and then increasingly relevant in the Haitian imagery (de Carvalho and de Melho, 2011). In 2004, following the military coup, UN Resolution n.1542 established the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) consisting of a civilian and a military component to cooperate with the Organization of American States (OAS), the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and other organisations. MINUSTAH was led by the Brazilian army, which not only made Brazilians, and consequently the Brazilian culture, visible to ordinary Haitians, but was also part of the broader political will of Brazil to be recognized as an international power.

One action that was particularly symbolic and representative of the dialogue between both countries was the Peace Game held in Port-au-Prince in 2004, while the Brazilian army was present in Haiti. The Brazilian football team, famous for having won the World Cup title two years earlier, was celebrated by the Haitian population in the match against the Haitian national team. The 6-0 score for Brazil did not reduce Haitian support for Brazil, but rather reinforced a popular saying that articulated "Haitians are more Brazilian than Brazilians themselves"⁴.

In addition to these actions, one emblematic phrase stated by the then-president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva explains what self-image the Brazilian government aimed to construct in the international sphere. Referring to the 2008 economic crisis in the US, Lula stated that "[o]ver there, it [the economic crisis] is a tsunami; here, if it arrives, it will arrive as a little wave." Although it is debatable whether or not Brazil experienced economic growth during that period, it did according to political narratives, and the image they portrayed. In 2007, Brazil hosted the Pan American Games, and over the next decade, from 2010 to 2020, the country hosted the 2013 World Youth Day, the 2014 FIFA World Cup, the 2016 Olympic Games, and the 2019 Copa America. These events of international scale brought both attention and resources to the country.

⁴ This saying was reported by a Haitian researcher during the data collection.

In 2011, Brazil expressed its interest in having a permanent seat on the UN Security Council through the participation and proposal of the G4 - a group formed in 2004 by Brazil, Germany, India and Japan - in which they declared themselves "aspiring new permanent members of the UN Security Council", and "stated that the international system would benefit from the expansion of the UN Security Council, which would ensure that the Council is truly reflective of current geopolitical realities and make it stronger, more representative, legitimate, effective and efficient." The same year also marked the worldwide release of the film 'Rio', an animation produced by 20th Century Fox Animation, set in the city of Rio de Janeiro. The vibrant colours and lush nature portrayed in the animation contributed to form the image of Rio de Janeiro, and by extension Brazil, as a joyous place to live. These very different actions and events demonstrate not only Brazil's political ambitions to position itself in the world as a new power, but also its reach and relevance in the world's imagination.

It was in this broad and fast-changing context that migration towards Brazil became more common amongst Haitians. A symbolic event was the 2012 speech by the then-president Dilma Rousseff on an official visit to Haiti. She declared, "As is the nature of Brazilians, we are open to receive Haitian citizens who choose to seek opportunities in Brazil" (Mundo, 2012). This declaration was in harmony with the set of policies developed at the time to support Haitian legal migration to Brazil. For instance, between 2011 and 2016, a number of Brazilian public universities implemented the Pró-Haiti program, offering scholarships to allow Haitian youth to continue their studies abroad (see Alphonse and Macedo, 2017). These declarations and actions reflect the position of Brazil at the time, when facing the devastating consequences of the 2010 earthquake for Haiti.

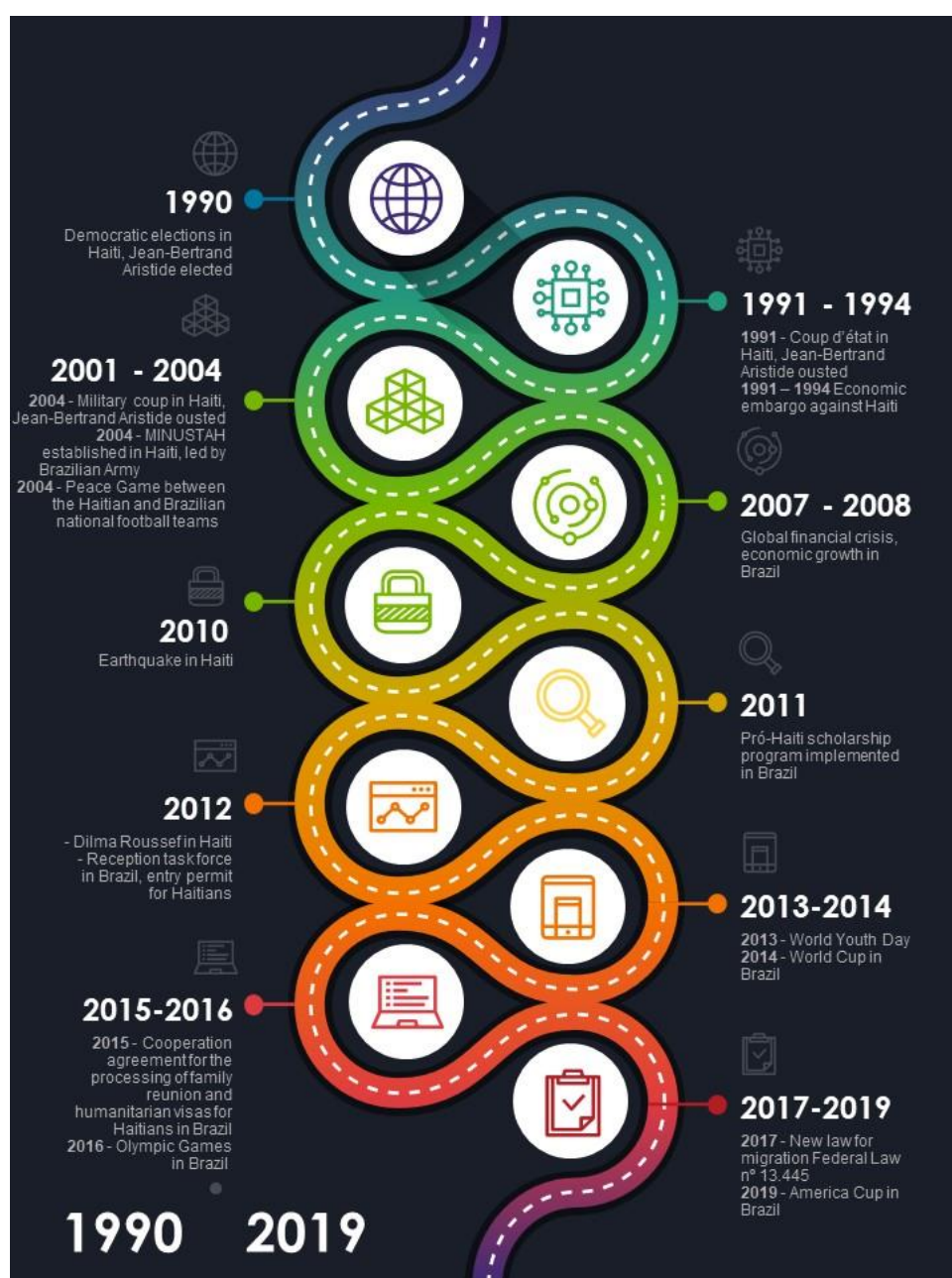
However, this process was not without tensions amongst Brazilian government, Haitians, civil society organisation and other stakeholders. Following the 2010 earthquake, a large number of Haitians began to arrive at the northern border of Brazil. Over time, this flow expanded, demanding institutional responses regarding the granting of refuge to arriving Haitians. In 2012, an inter-ministerial reception task force to welcome Haitians was established and, within this framework, the National Refugee Council (CONARE) got the Brazilian government to establish the Humanitarian Visa to be granted for Haitians. However, there was a quota of 1,200 annual permanent visas for humanitarian reasons. The waiting list was huge, as many Haitians asked for visas, and/or were staying undocumented in the country.

Trying to reduce the waiting list at the consulate in Port-au-Prince, the Conselho Nacional de Imigração (CNIg), in April 2013, through RN n.102, eliminated the previous quota of 1,200 annual permanent visas for humanitarian reasons. In 2015, with the assistance of IOM, Brazil and Haiti signed a cooperation agreement regarding family reunion and humanitarian visas for Haitians. With no maximum quota, this initiative enabled the creation of a visa processing centre that allowed the Consulate in Haiti to issue up to 500 visas per week, including permanent and family reunion visas. In partnership with Brazil's Ministério do Trabalho (Ministry of Labour) and the

Conselho Nacional de Migração (National Migration Council), CONARE has also been granting work and residence visas for Haitians.

In 2017, the new Migration Law, Law no. 13,445/2017 was sanctioned. In it, humanitarian reception became a principle for granting a visa and residence permit in Brazil. The right to family reunion is provided for in Arts. III, IV, and VIII. Although the challenges faced by the Haitian community in Brazil in family reunification are immense, (Mantovani 2022; Demétrio et al. 2023) even if provided for by law. In April 2023, Interministerial Ordinance MJSP/MRE No. 38 was published, which aims to facilitate the granting of a temporary visa for family reunion purposes for Haitian nationals and stateless people, with family ties in Brazil, as provided for in the 2017 Migration Law (Fernandes e Faria, 2017).

Figure 1: Timeline of recent salient events



Infographic designed by the authors

4. IMAGINED DESTINATIONS AND LIFESTYLE IN THE LITERATURE

Every human being imagines. As such, imagination is a psychological process, consisting of visualising someone's self and/or others in certain places or situations at different moments in time. Imagination is obviously not necessarily connected to migration, but it always includes an element of mental movement. In fact, several scholars have used definitions that pinpoint this possibility for someone, when imagining, to travel in their own mind while physically staying put. Interesting examples of this are the definition of imagination as “mental journey” (Cangià and Zittoun, 2020) or “mental time-travel” (Kyle and Koikkalainen, 2011) - which these scholars applied to migration.

Hagen-Zanker et al. (2023) identify imagination as one of the four categories of subjective factors⁵ that contribute to migration decision-making, overlapping with tangible factors such as employment opportunities, livelihood options, or access to rights (Lee, 1966; Harris and Todaro, 1970; see also de Haas, 2021). The literature on the linkages between imagination and migration decision-making analyses can be classified into two broad themes: i) imagined destinations (i.e., how the place will look like and/or what experiences someone will be able to have there) and ii) imagined lifestyle/identity. There are several points of contact between the two, as it is common for prospective migrants to imagine their future self and life, in a future destination (see, for instance, Raitapuro and Bal, 2016). In the context of our migration corridor, Haitians' imagery of Brazil involved both ideas on the more tangible aspects of the destination (e.g., how Brazil would look like) and the lifestyle they would be able to have once there (e.g., being able to study or have the job they aspired to, including that of being a football player, or living in the nice cities and big houses they had seen on *telenovelas*⁶).

The literature on imagined destinations engages with people's preferences on where to go and why, often in comparison to staying where they are or going back to their place of origin. Several studies have demonstrated that the imagery and expectations around a certain destination depend on the place's reputation (Campelo et al. 2014; Mazzilli, 2019, 2021). Places achieve a distinct reputation over time (Tuan, 1977), after narratives about them have been produced and reproduced long enough to become established – usually by individuals in positions of power or cultural significance (Johnstone, 1990). Ryden (1993) argues that this moment is when places start existing for real, explaining that “places do not exist until they are verbalised” (p. 242). However, the fact that these narratives are taken for granted does not mean that they correspond to reality - as we will expand in the next section. Crucially, the reputation of a place can last even much longer after things have changed and changes in places'

⁵ The remaining three categories are personality traits, emotions and feelings, and beliefs and values.
⁶ Soap operas.

reputation require time and efforts to challenge an established 'truth' (Mazzilli, 2019). Moreover, this reputation is mediated by an array of different factors that determine how people evaluate destinations (Belloni, 2022; Dannecker, 2013; Schewel, 2015; Mata-Codesal, 2015), such as cultural proximity, adherence to a personal or community value scale, or the possibility to fulfil a certain goal.

With places' reputation consolidated and becoming part of narratives, individuals then evaluate how that destination would be a suitable for themselves and their own goals. In her work on Eritrean migrants in Italy, Belloni (2022) refers to this evaluation as 'cosmologies of destination', a hierarchical understanding of places based on how much their image corresponds to subjective social and moral criteria considered important by migrants and their social circle of reference. Belloni's research (2022) shows how the Eritreans participants in her study had mapped their destinations along an "implicit but widely shared normative and moral scale" (p. 557), according to perceived safety, individual freedom, social recognition, and economic achievements. Other research (see, for example, Crawley and Hagen-Zanker, 2019; Mallett et al., 2017) has shown that considering certain countries' policies as more open than others also plays an important part in shaping migration trajectories, as was the case for Syrian migrants preferring to migrate to Germany (Mallett et al., 2017; see also Koikkalainen et al., 2020; McAuliffe and Jayasuriya, 2016; Sjöberg and D'Onofrio, 2020). Echoing these studies, our results show that both the broader reputation and its culture and policy considerations feed into Haitians' decision to move to Brazil.

Studies on imagined lifestyle note that these 'mental journeys' (Cangià and Zittoun, 2020) precede and influence migration-decision-making, although this topic has not been explored as much as imagined destinations. As identified in the literature, the appeal of a modern lifestyle is a strong incentive to migrate, especially to individuals who feel they and their community have been bypassed by globalisation (Brown et al., 2017; Raitapuro and Bal, 2016). A case in point is Brown et al.'s research (2017) with young Indians of Darjeeling, which argues that youth's aspiration in India's regional towns are influenced by their geographic marginalisation - precisely, by the tension between their exposition to globalisation through education and media and their inability to seize the benefits of it (see also Massey, 1991). Behind their desire to migrate to the more 'global' cities of India lies then a desire to enjoy the 'promises' of a lifestyle they have been exposed to.

Finally, as much as imagination and evaluations on the destination's suitability are individual processes, they are also heavily mediated by social and cultural values and expectations connected to socio-economic factors such as gender (Leon-Himmelstine et al., *forthcoming*) or class. For instance, Salazar (2020) defines imaginaries as "culturally shared and socially transmitted representational assemblages that interact with the personal imagination" (p. 2).

The sources on which imaginaries ground are many. First and foremost, interactions with others constitute primary sources for imagination: conversations, stories, but also rumours can transmit a specific image (Belloni, 2020; Koikkalainen et al., 2020;

Mazzilli, 2019). Secondly, the literature has widely documented the strong influence of media - particularly TV (Conrad Suso, 2020; Dannecker, 2013; Mai, 2004; Hagen-Zanker and Mallett, 2016; Piotrowski, 2010; Salazar, 2011, Willems, 2014) and, more recently, of social media (Koikkalainen et al., 2019; Kölbel, 2018, Mazzilli et al., 2023a) in shaping imaginaries of destinations for people all around the world.

5. HOW IMAGINATION FEATURES IN HAITIAN MIGRATION TO BRAZIL

This section draws on the data collected by the UN/Periferias/MIDEQ team and explores the key points that emerged as relevant for Haitians' migration decision-making. Our analysis here has a broader focus than imagination, since not all participants shared specific views on Brazil. In fact, some of them did not think much of the destination at all and focused on just leaving Haiti. This point cannot be understated, as, besides our focus on imagination as a pivotal subjective element of migration decision-making, we remain very much aware of the relevance of objective factors too (see also Mazzilli et al., 2023b). For Haitians, tangible factors influencing their decision to leave mainly relates to the economic, political, and environmental challenges of life in Haiti⁷.

This lack of a specific image of the destination country for some participants should not undermine the relevance of imagination for decision-making, as it simply reflects the complexity of the human mind and the economic and other challenges that many migrants face. A breadth of elements concurs to shape individuals' migration decision-making, which is as diverse as the range of people's lives and personalities (see Hagen-Zanker, et al, 2023), and as such it is not surprising that some people held very clear images of Brazil in their mind while some did not.

In the following paragraphs, we consider the key aspects of decision-making that emerged from our data collection.

1. BRAZIL AS FIRST DESTINATION CHOICE

The qualitative interviews highlighted that for the majority of participants Brazil was indeed the first destination choice. For many, and especially women, this was due to the influence of other family members who were either already in Brazil or because they had heard of it from their network (Leon-Himmelstine et al., forthcoming). Family and community networks appear as key reasons for selecting Brazil, both in the qualitative interviews and in the survey. Of the 21 Haitian women interviewed in the qualitative data collection, seven said they had come because of their husbands who had come before and settled here. Of these women who came here under the influence of their husbands, all work in industry, commerce or as freelancers.

⁷ For more detailed information, please check [Migration and Inequality in the Global South: Evidence from the MIDEQ Hub \(unrisd.org\)](https://unrisd.org).

“It was in 2010, after the earthquake in Haiti, [that] we started talking about coming to Brazil, my husband came and then asked me to come too. I came after him. My husband came in 2014. (I came) a year later because we couldn't stay apart, him working here and me there. And I decided to come too.” (RJ⁸. Malie, female, 52, in Brazil since 2015)

“The influences for me... I have my family who came to Brazil. First, they came, then we talked, then they influenced me to come to Brazil too. (...) The first reason [why I migrated], I'll say it was because of the politics in Haiti; the second reason, because of my family, my cousin; I have a brother who travelled before me, I talked to him. He told me: ‘Come and migrate to Brazil.’” (SC. Cheder, male, 33, in Brazil since 2013)

The influence of family in Haitians' decision-making comes up in several interviews, although it is crucial to acknowledge that it operates in a variety of ways (see also Leon-Himmelstine et al., *forthcoming*). In some instances, married women follow their husbands. In some cases it was more of a joint decision, as in Malie's quote above, while other times felt like they had little or no choice in the matter. In these instances, female respondents explained that they came to Brazil to join their husband who was already here, emphasising the importance of being close to their family as a priority.

In other cases, parents decide in agreement with their child that the son or daughter will migrate to pursue their higher education. In fact, university education in Haiti is described as difficult and hard to access, in particular because most universities in Haiti are private and therefore very expensive, while the few public ones do not offer a sufficient number of scholarships. When this type of migration takes place, some members of the extended family living in higher-income countries (such as the US or Canada) usually send money to the migrant for the first few months of their life abroad, as we also observed in our study.

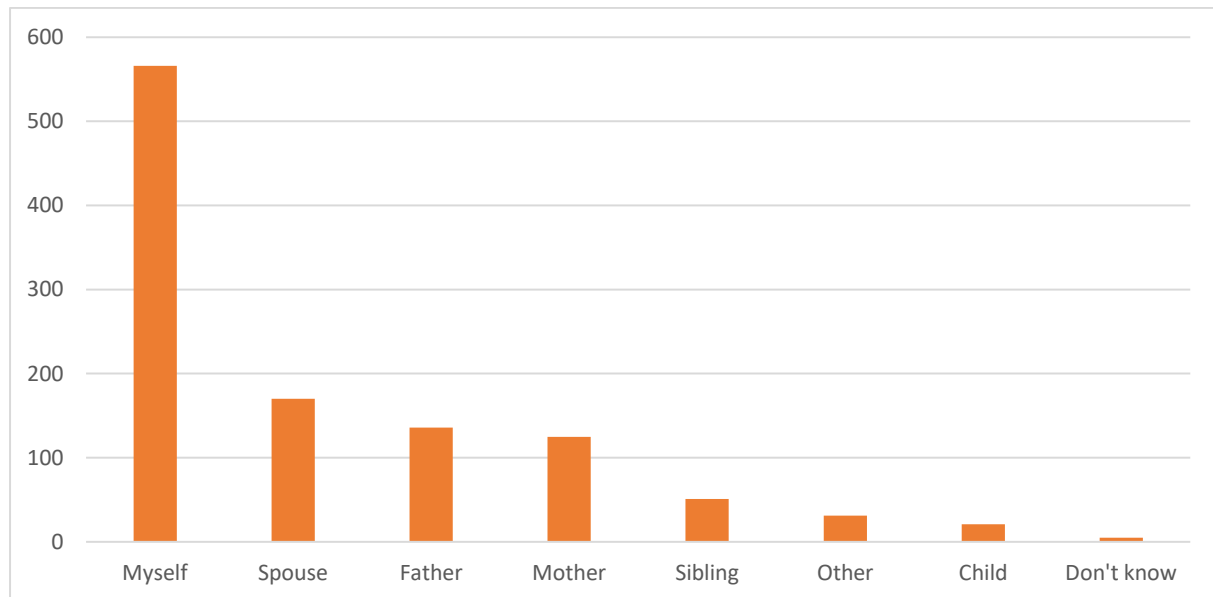
“In my case, it was my mum's decision. For a better life. Like it or not, life here in Brazil, for some, is better than life in Haiti.” (RO. Viviane, female, 25, in Brazil since 2014)

“It was my mum. She came to Brazil first in search of a better life. And as teenagers, we don't have much to say. So she came first, and we didn't see each other for four years. So she wanted me to come here, and I did (...) She chose it because access was easier, and she had a job. At the time, the borders were open to Haitians because of the earthquake in 2010. So they opened and my mum took the opportunity to look for work here. So that's why I came... I can't say why she chose this city, but I think it's because of the job opportunities.” (RO, Naty, female, 21, in Brazil since 2016)

⁸ These initials correspond to the Brazilian state where the interview was conducted: RO stands for Rondônia, RJ for Rio de Janeiro, SP for São Paulo, PR for Paraná, and SC for Santa Catarina.

The survey also explored who takes the decision to migrate (Figure 2). Migration is indeed both a collective and an individual decision, where in many cases the potential migrant as well as the family and community influence the decision. Figure 2 shows that for 566 out of 868 responses it was the migrants themselves who decided that they wanted to migrate. The second most frequent response is the spouse, the father and the mother deciding for the migrant to move. This survey item allows the selection of more than one response, so it is possible for multiple family members to influence the decision⁹. However, it is clear that in this case, the migrants themselves had the most important say in the migration decision, in addition to close family members.

Figure 2: Whose decision was it for you to migrate? (N)

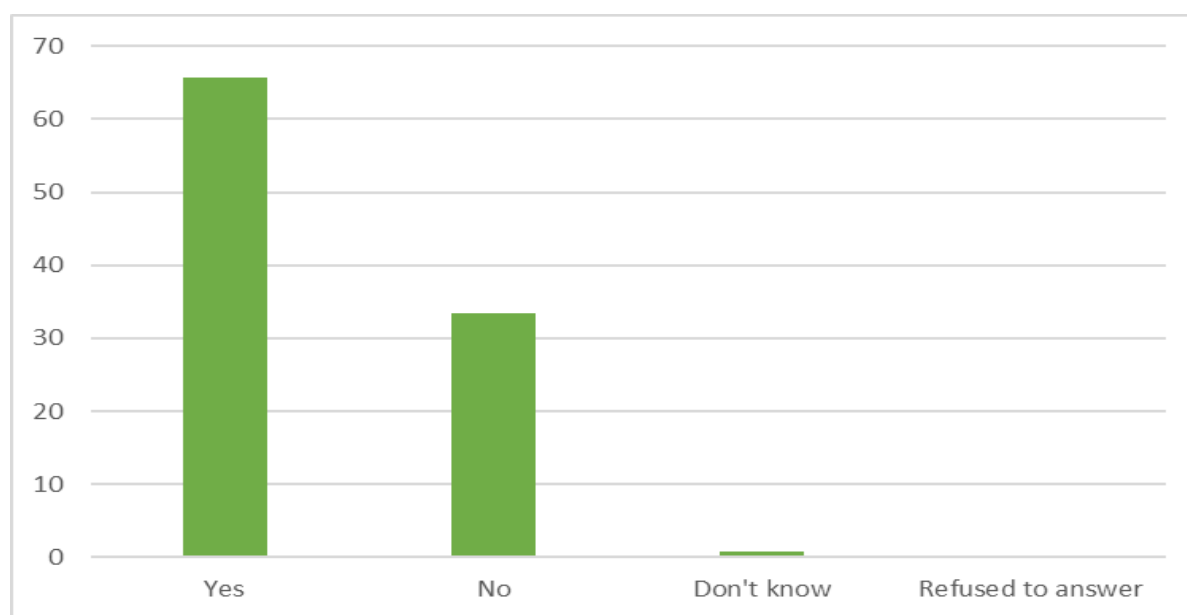


Note: Multiple response possible, N=868.

The survey data also reflected the relevance of Brazil as a country of destination particularly in comparison to other South American countries. Figure 3 shows that for around two thirds of Haitians interviewed in Brazil; (66%), Brazil was indeed their first destination choice, while the other third of respondents indicated that other countries were their first choice, including the Dominican Republic (23%), the U.S. (22%), Canada (11.4%), and Chile (11.4%).

⁹ Most survey items used in this analysis allow the selection of more than one response, in turn, we report the frequency of responses rather than overall response proportions out of the total sample. In the few cases where percentages are reported, the survey item allows for mutually exclusive responses.

Figure 3: Was Brazil your first choice of destination? (%)



However, it is important to emphasise that we are drawing on data that was collected in Brazil, with Haitians who had opted for Brazil in the end for one reason or another. Moreover, some interviewees discussed having different destination preferences initially, such as for instance higher-income countries as France, Canada, or the United States. They remarked that migrating to Brazil was much more feasible than migrating to many other countries for tangible and practical reasons, such as travel cost¹⁰ and visa requirements, and because many already had family members and/or acquaintances settled in Brazil who could facilitate the transition. This was, for instance, the case for Thays, who frames her migration to Brazil more as a convenient calculation rather than her preferred option.

“I didn’t choose to migrate to Brazil. My brother chose to migrate to Brazil two years before me because it was easier to get documents in Brazil than in any other country. So, as he was already here, it was easier for me to decide to migrate [here too].” (PR. Thays, female, 29 years old. In Brazil since 2014)

In their study on adolescent girl migrants in Ethiopia, de Regt and Mihret (2020) discuss “agency in constrained circumstances” to explain how girls maximise their options awareness and agency in a context that leaves them a restricted pool of choices. Haitian migrants to Brazil operate in a similar context, as they are aware of a variety of destination options and express preferences about them, and yet are constrained by material barriers (financial or migration policies). Thus, while for the majority of the participants in the study Brazil was the *preferred* destination, for others it was not, but became *the best possible* choice.

¹⁰ Although travelling to Brazil remains quite expensive, many Haitians manage to cover its cost by getting indebted.

2. THE INFLUENCE OF DIASPORA IN HAITIAN MOBILITY

The role of family and friends and wider migration networks for migration decision-making is well documented in the literature (Feyissa, Zeleke and Gebresenbet, 2023) and our study also uncovered the remarkable influence of the Haitian diaspora for this specific migration corridor.

Not every national community outside their country of origin constitutes a diaspora. Kenny (2013) points out that the term ‘diaspora’ is often very widely – and inappropriately – used. In fact, ‘diaspora’ comes from the ancient Greek ‘*diaspeirein*’ (to disperse), and as such conveys the meaning of a group of people who has been forcibly dispersed but retains an interest in the country of origin and the project to go back to its ancestral land. This is why the diaspora has traditionally been connected to the Jewish or Armenian people, and more recently to the Palestinian people, but should not be associated to every national community abroad.

Diaspora fits the Haitian context well and captures Haitians’ tormented relationship with a country of origin that they ‘have to’ leave in order to escape the deep structures (re)producing poverty and inequality. Such conditions emerge from songs and popular culture, as it is well documented by Cella et al. (2022). Further, the diaspora occupies a central place in the transnational mobility of the Haitian universe, playing a fundamental role in the country's social and economic life (Bersani and Joseph, 2017). Joseph (2015) emphasises the family dimension that the idea of diaspora adds to migration, as “family structures [...] play an important role in shaping the social morphology of [the Haitian] diaspora” (Joseph, 2015, p.61). Being able to send for a sibling or family member in Haiti to join a migrant family member abroad has both the moral and financial value of the diaspora, a way of honouring the family in the eyes of neighbours and relatives.

During the in-depth interviews we conducted we were able to gauge the status attributed to the Haitian diaspora and how that influences the mobility of Haitians.

“People who have travelled, who have lived abroad, from my childhood to my adulthood, always say good things. They have said that living in foreign countries is always good, [that] you get work, you get a good opportunity, an opportunity that we often don’t have in our country, which is Haiti. So the people who travelled always said, ‘Ahh, if you travel, if you live abroad, you’ll get whatever you want, you’ll get a job, you’ll get work, school and everything else.’ So we believe that [migrating] is always better for us and our family.” (RJ. Cenel, male, 37, in Brazil since 2008)

As such, the expectations of positive change through migration are strongly influenced by what the diaspora shares, through conversations, social media, and remittances alike. Often these images, words or bank notes transmit a similar message, that of success. Social networks have played a fundamental role in Haitian mobility, both to

keep in touch with family members and to find out about the possibilities of migrating. The extent to which the diaspora serves as a mobilizing factor for Haitians, generating mental pictures about the opportunities that migration offers (see Hagen-Zanker, Hennessey, and Mazzilli, 2023), can be seen in some participants' accounts.

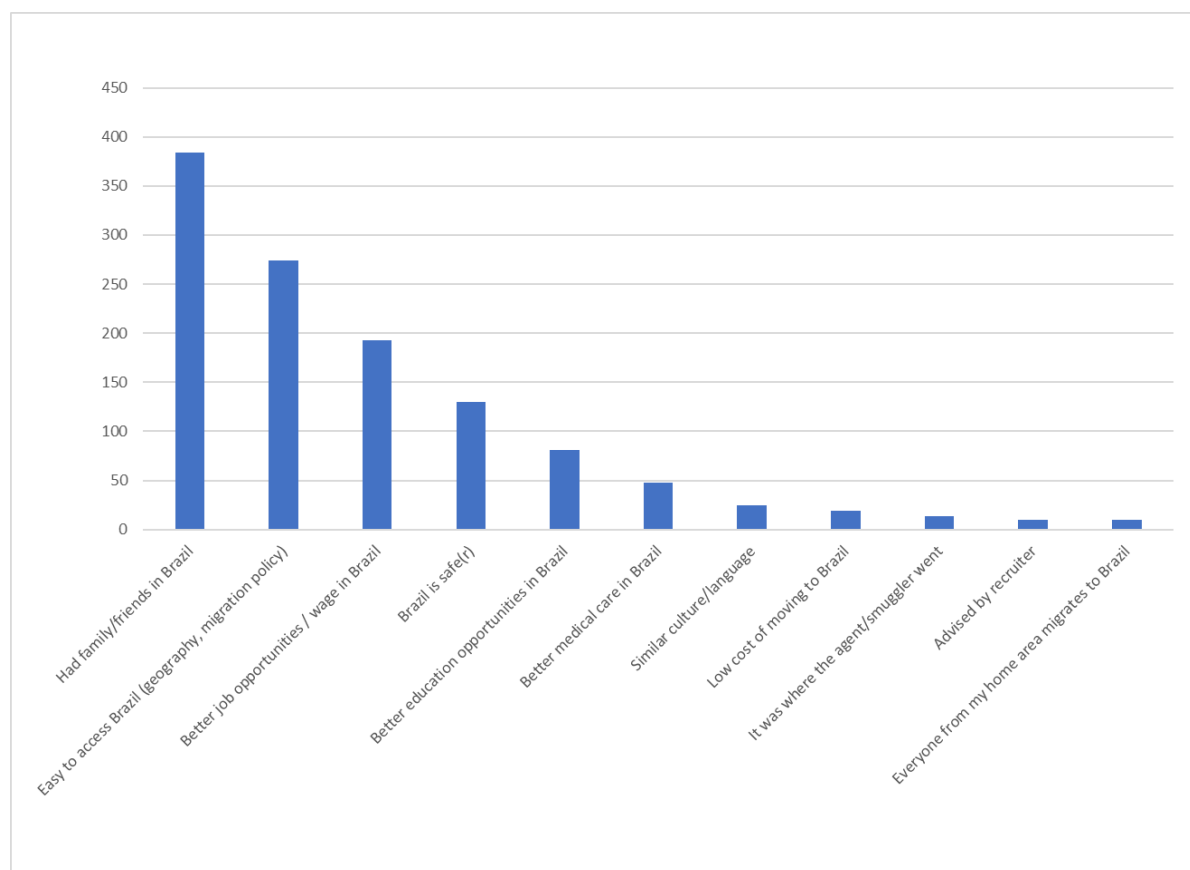
“When I lived there [in Haiti], and I think it's still the same today, people who migrated out of the country were considered people with money, people who had a better life. From my point of view, that was how we perceived people who lived abroad.” (RO. Viviane, female, 25, in Brazil since 2014)

It is not just direct family or friends who shape migration decisions. In certain situations, information on the migration process comes from a friend or more distant contact who has already migrated. Even in the in-depth interviews with those who said they had come alone, we heard in their accounts that they had often relied on, contact with an acquaintance already in Brazil in one way or another. This was the case with Ti Joel, who says migrating was his idea, based on the story of a friend of a friend who was already studying in Brazil.

“It was totally my idea because I was aware of what I wanted, even before I didn't want to come to Brazil, but after I spoke to this same friend, who I always went to his house, and he was studying economics, so he commented that there was a possibility that I could study a course at university level, then I chose to come to Brazil, it was my option, it was my choice (...) Because I wanted to study and I was finding it difficult in the other countries I was in, so he said it, he commented and I took advantage of it and here I am studying.” (PR. Ti Joel, male, 31, in Brazil since 2015)

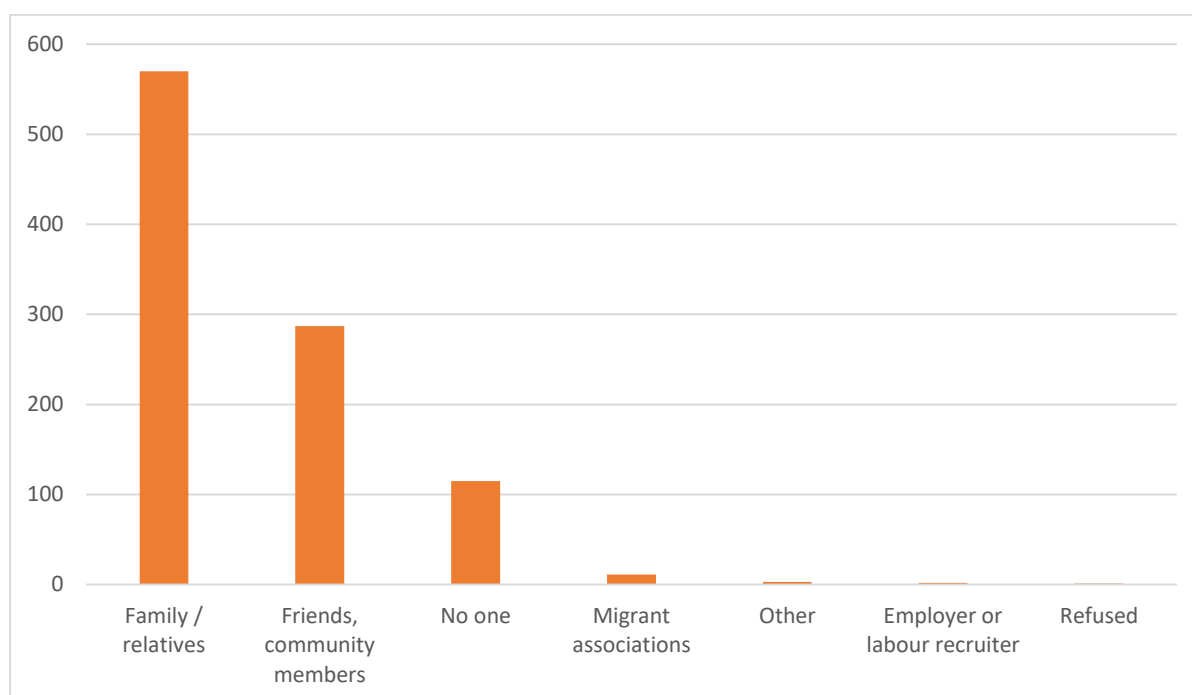
Sometimes, the information transmitted by those in the diaspora ends up influencing the choice of a particular destination, as we can see the survey data as well. In fact, as shown in Figure 4, the most common response to the survey question ‘Why did you migrate to Brazil versus any other country?’ is ‘Had family/friends in Brazil’. As such, it is evident that the Haitian diaspora in the form of both strong and weak ties largely influences the migration process.

Figure 4: Why did you migrate to Brazil versus any other country? (N)



Note: Multiple response possible, N=868.

In the survey, we further explored Haitians migrants' connections in Brazil before migrating. As Figure 5 shows, nearly two thirds (570) of the total number of respondents (868) indicate that they had family or relatives in Brazil, followed by one third of respondents (287) who indicate to have had friends or community members (who might have offered them information and assistance). These response categories are not mutually exclusive, so it is possible that respondents have both family/relatives and friends in Brazil. Interestingly, a non-negligible 11% of respondents (115) indicate they knew no one in Brazil before leaving Haiti. However, from the survey we can infer that a large proportion of the sample had ties in the destination country. We know from the broader literature that such ties contribute to the reduction of costs by sharing information related to the migration journey, opportunities in the country of destination as well as helping with the process of integration into a new country (Haug, 2008; Manchin and Orazbayev, 2018; Massey, 1993), as well as shape the imaginary as discussed above.

Figure 5: Before you left Haiti, who did you know in Brazil? (N)

Note: Multiple response possible, N=868.

In summary, the Haitian diaspora has both a material and subjective effect on migration decision-making. On the one hand, migrant networks contribute in the practical ways we know well from the migration literature, through information and practical and financial support. On the other hand, we also see that the ideas, stories, and lives lived differently touch Haitians back home and start becoming part of their imaginary. By allowing people to take mental journeys to Brazil before migration even happens, the possibility becomes more concrete. We now discuss how this possibility might turn into action.

3. HOW THE IMAGES OF BRAZIL FEATURE IN THE REASONS FOR LEAVING HAITI

Our analysis shows how strong the image of Brazil is for Haitians, regardless of whether it is their first destination choice or not. Amongst our respondents, migration is mainly motivated by the search for better living conditions both for the migrant in Brazil and for the family that stays back in Haiti, as well as the possibility of achieving qualifications pursuing either higher education or professional training. As such, the specific choice of Brazil appears motivated in equal measure by economic opportunities and policy-related reasons, which Haitians seem to know well and see as enabling them to fulfil their goals. For instance, some interviewees mentioned the "good Brazilian reception", which referred to the Brazilian legislation on humanitarian and student visas. For most Haitian migrants interviewed it had been possible to regularise their migration status relatively easily, and to gain access to the labour market. Haitians account for these factors as necessary conditions to feel more stable and financially secure. This Brazilian "good reception", closely associated with the

ease of entry and regular stay in the country, as one of the main factors that made Brazil a popular destination for Haitians, is described in Thays' comment, when she tells how Haitians began to find out about the possibility of migrating to the country.

“A group of Haitians managed to cross the border. They managed to get to Brazil and months later they had a document. I think the news got around here, from town to town, from person to person, telling us that people had migrated with visas, and it worked, so a few months later everyone was following the same path, trying to cross the borders.” (PR. Thays, female, 29, in Brazil since 2014)

The survey data also reflects the importance of tangible factors behind the choice of Brazil. As shown in Figure 4 above, factors such as migration policy, work opportunities and safety are also key motivations. More specifically, respondents indicated that “Easy to access Brazil (geography, migration policy¹¹)”, “Better job opportunities/wages in Brazil”, “Brazil is safe(r)”, “Better education opportunities” as key reasons for selecting Brazil, after the presence of family and relatives. It is evident from both the qualitative interviews and survey data that the possibility to achieve qualifications and jobs in Brazil, the perceived safety there, coupled with the relatively easy access to Brazil both in terms of migration route and policies, motivated Haitian migrants to select it as their destination.

“For me, Brazil is the country that offers the most possibilities to work and study, and definitely [offers the most possibilities] in terms of documents as well.” (SP. Jean, male, 27, in Brazil since 2018)

“I wanted peace and quiet, [and] this is a very big and good country. Peace, I like that; [I like to] to be working, you have an income, you can have a family, you can have a peaceful life, that's it... I think all Haitians want to grow up a bit, leave where they were born to go somewhere else and see what else they can achieve.” (SC. Lele, male, 29, in Brazil since 2015)

In the focus group held in the city of São Paulo, one of the participants, Stanley, said that Brazil is a place “where people live in peace” because there is no risk of deportation, which was key for his destination choice:

“People are free to walk around without the police to send them back home, as they do in the United States and Caribbean countries like the Dominican Republic. Everyone is pursuing their work, their dreams.” (SP. Stanley, male, focus group)

Finally, as explored in the previous section, family reunion is also a recurring desire among Haitians living in Brazil.

More generally, our analysis shows that sometimes the reasons to migrate and the imaginary of the destination are often intertwined. It is in fact hard to untangle the

¹¹ Geography is not necessarily an easy factor in Haitian migration to Brazil, as the journey is long and crosses several countries' borders. It is more likely that this answer refers to the relatively open migration policies encountered in Brazil, which make it possible for many Haitians to reside in Brazil under a humanitarian visa. However, we report the specific wording used in the survey.

image of Brazil as, for instance, a safe country, from the feeling of insecurity that some migrants experienced in Haiti, and the actual dangers they had incurred there. Yet imagination goes beyond picturing a desirable alternative to what is missing in the country of origin. Mila, a young woman who had moved to the Dominican Republic with her family before migrating to Brazil, shared that her image of Brazil was that of a wealthy and diverse country full of opportunities, where black people would not experience racism. In her account, she attributed a central role in the creation of this image to TV programmes and football matches¹².

“In football we saw lots of people of all colours. In soap operas, not so much, but we saw them. And in soap operas we saw the big cities. We didn't see poor Brazil, so in our minds Brazil would be a paradise for us, with all the opportunities. So we thought that we wouldn't suffer racism, that we would arrive and quickly get things, live in those big cities that we saw in the soap operas, in those huge houses that we saw in the soap operas.” (Mila, female, 20, in Brazil since 2012)

Mila also reflected on the disillusionment that she felt once settled in Brazil, as her mental image of the destination did not correspond to reality. This contrast emerged clearly in several interviews, as we explore in the next section. Other participants also mentioned football as one of the main references they had about the country, associating the emotional connection with sport, especially the Brazilian national team, which they also knew from the 2004 Peace Game described in Section 2 above, with the idea of cultural richness and plenty of opportunities.

“Before I came here, I thought Brazil was the country of football, it was a very cool country, very big, but I didn't have a lot of awareness about it.” (Marie, 23, in Brazil since 2020)

“The idea of migrating came into my head before I understood what it was like to migrate before I understood what the change would be like. It came about in a rather silly way, but when I was a child, I saw Brazil lose to France in the World Cup. At the time, I played and was passionate about football and my idea was that since I was a child and I'd been introduced to the Brazilian and Argentinian teams as football options. As I've always been passionate and followed the Brazilian team, my idea was to play for Brazil. Ever since I was a child. In '94 I was four years old, I saw Brazil win the World Cup and I celebrated. In '98 I was upset by the defeat and my idea was to come and play for Brazil to get revenge on France.” (Charles, male, 32, in Brazil since 2014)

One of the participants from our focus group in São Paulo also referred to the imagery constructed about Brazil through the Peace Mission (MINUSTAH). For him, this brought Haitians closer to the Brazilian people and this generated an illusion that Brazilians would be more receptive. For him, the idea of migration is an investment in

¹² The data collection did not pick up on any reference to the reasons for choosing Brazil as a destination being related to football, while some participants mentioned that the Brazilian national team had helped to create an image of what Brazil would be like, alongside other factors – as reported in the quote by Mia.

the future and that the choice to migrate to Brazil comes from information acquired on the internet and from friends who say that in Brazil there would be the possibility of building dreams, studying, working, and doing everything that could do in Haiti. However, he states that being in Brazil, Haitians have no chance of succeeding:

“Even more so as blacks, because Brazilian blacks are treated even worse than Haitians, because those who live in favelas, even if they speak Portuguese, unlike us, which we did not mention, (they, the Brazilians) do not have completed high school.”

Summing up, we can see that the imagination of Brazil and feelings of excitement about a new life and new opportunities feature alongside more practical and tangible reasons to leave and to go to Brazil in particular. This means that Haitians often left for Brazil with high expectations. We now consider how they fared once they arrived in Brazil, in particular whether their image of Brazil changed.

4. THE CLASH BETWEEN EXPECTATIONS AND REALITY

Comparisons between expectations and reality in relation to migration have long been a topic of interest for scholars. Already in the 1970s, Cerase (1974) explored how expectations and reality played out for return migrants from the United States to Southern Italy. Similarly, in 1980, Thomas-Hope argued that “the expectation of most West Indian migrants of their future overseas are shaped by what their home society expects of them through their emigration” (p. 35) - which resonates with the most recent literature. Research on expectations and reality in migration has recently both intensified and broadened, including different areas and categories of migrants such as work/living conditions (Howenstine, 1996), skilled labour migration (Lu and Samaratunge, 2015), and, linked to our research, professional football players (Poli, 2010).

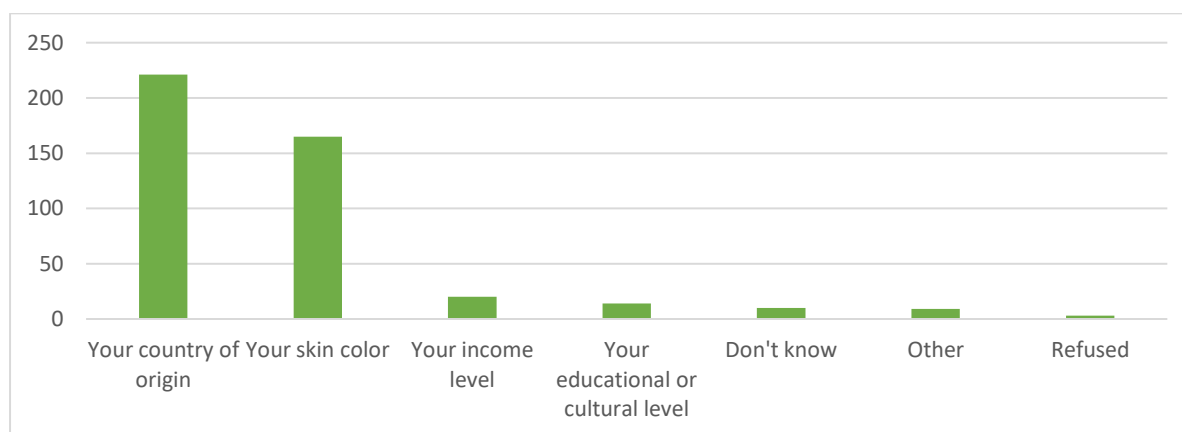
Mila’s quotes in the previous section hinted at the contrast between expectations and reality and to the disappointment felt when migrants face such contrast. The most common reasons for disappointment are connected to lack of professional opportunities, the cost of living, and racism. When asked if life in Brazil matched up with the expectations she and her family had when they migrated to the country, Mila replied:

“Definitely not. Because when it comes to the question of racism, we’ve really deluded ourselves on this point. In fact, perhaps making a comparison with the Dominican Republic, it’s a little less blatant. In the Dominican Republic, if you’re black, you’re automatically not Dominican. So you have to be Haitian, even though there are black Dominicans. So you’re always targeted in the street. Here in Brazil, because we have a large black population, this is somewhat mitigated - just a little. Because we also see all the violence against black people. In short, the chances of work, employment, success, you name it, that black people have compared to white people are much lower. So, this issue of racism that we thought it would

stop, that we would stop suffering, but no. It continued, only in different ways. It continued, just in different ways. It was also an illusion to think that life would improve as soon as we arrived.” (Mila, female, 20, in Brazil since 2012)

The survey also included a set of questions on racial discrimination. The survey data shows that, indeed, many Haitian migrants have been victims of racism. Around 36% of respondents (316 out of 868) reported that they had experienced some form of discrimination in Brazil. When asked about what they attributed this discriminatory behaviour to, the majority of respondents who experienced discrimination (221) expressed that this was because of their country of origin while the next largest group (165) attribute it to their skin colour (shown in Figure 6). It is evident that xenophobia and racism are some of the many challenges Haitians have experienced in Brazil, as already documented in the literature (de Souza and Pádua 2022; Gil and Pizzinato 2023) and as the qualitative accounts showed, these experiences have led to disappointment when expectations did not match reality.

Figure 6: To what do you attribute this discrimination?



Note: multiple response possible (n. of responses=86)

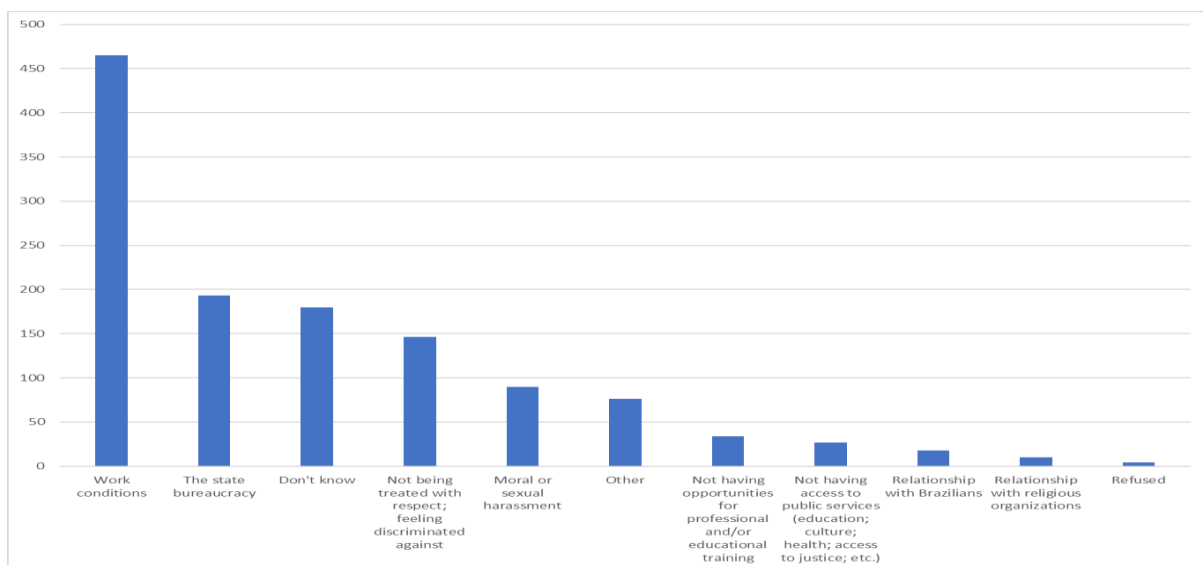
Other respondents also expressed similar feelings of sadness and disappointment, sometimes mixed with frustration, on the difference between how they thought Brazil would be and the reality they experienced.

“Unfortunately not, I'm not going to lie. Brazil is a beautiful country, that's for sure, but from my point of view, the opportunities I thought I was going to have haven't even half materialised. I had to make a lot of sacrifices to get to where I am now.” (RO. Viviane, female, 25, in Brazil since 2014)

“Before I came here, I did some research into Brazilian salaries. I thought I'd earn a salary of around 3,000 [reais]. I put it in my head that I'd get a job for 1,500 and another job for 1,500, two jobs that would make about 3,000. At the time I did my research, the dollar was just under two reais. After my calculation, there would be a thousand and a few reais left over. In reality, it's quite different. I did the research in 2014, and I left Haiti in January. [I left Haiti] at the end of January 2015, I arrived here in February.” (SC, Toto, male, 41, in Brazil since 2015)

The survey data also highlights the participants' negative experiences with employment conditions and discrimination. Survey respondents were asked to share the two worst things about their experience in Brazil. As shown in Figure 7, the most frequently reported worst experience was working conditions, while not being treated with respect or being discriminated against was amongst the top four reported worst experiences. In short, the labour market conditions including work opportunities, salaries and working conditions as well as discrimination are amongst the worst experiences Haitians have experienced in Brazil. As such, these factors may have contributed to the mismatch between expectation and reality for Haitian migrants, as the qualitative data suggests.

Figure 7: Indicate, among the options, the two worst things about your experience as a migrant in Brazil (N)



Note: Multiple response possible, N=868.

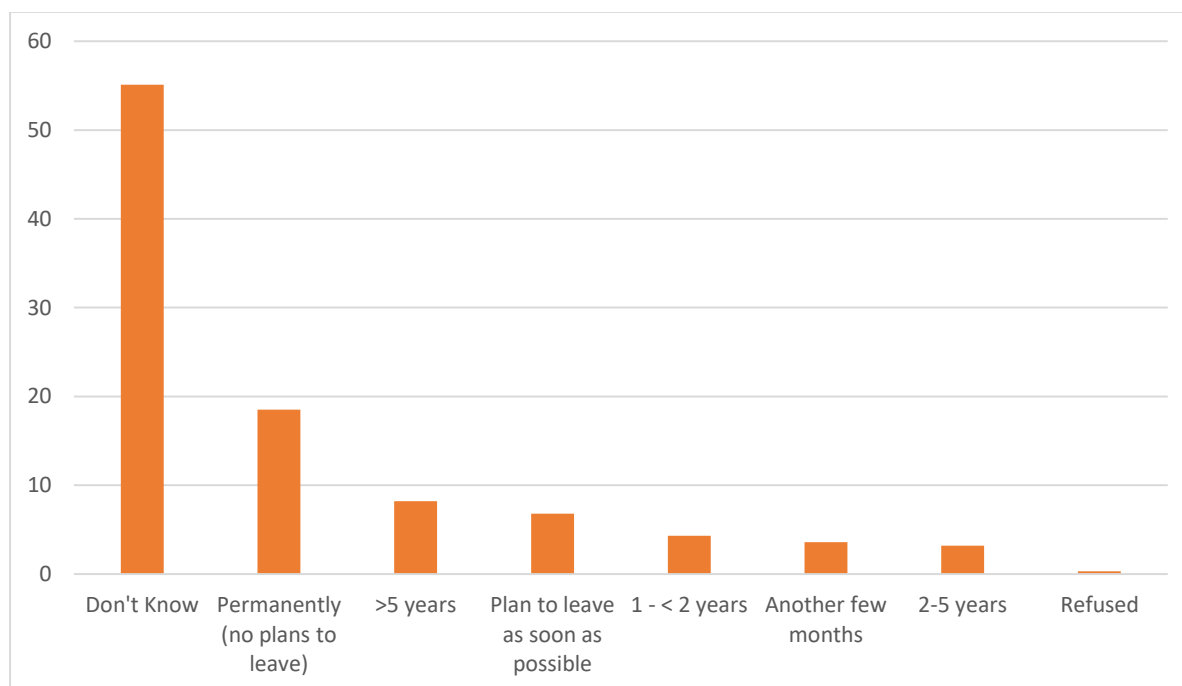
Overall, a significant proportion of participants reported experiences of discrimination in Brazil (over one third of survey respondents, plus several participants in the qualitative interviews), which is compounded by the difficult living conditions many Haitians reported in relation to salaries and quality of life (Risson and Dal Magro, 2017). These setbacks are not just tangible but are crucially also a disappointment as they do not confirm the image of Brazil and the strong expectations connected to it.

6. FACING THE CONTRAST BETWEEN EXPECTATIONS AND REALITY – CONSIDERATIONS TO MOVE ON

Finally, how does disappointment between expectations and reality affect Haitian migrants' plans for the future? With regard to remaining in Brazil or moving elsewhere, the data from the survey and in-depth interviews converge. Figure 8 shows that over half of respondents to the survey, (55%) do not know for how long they would like to stay in Brazil, while 7% plan to leave as soon as possible. These findings could potentially signal that most Haitians are either not completely satisfied with life in

Brazil, have plans for onwards migration, or are uncertain about their desires and aspirations. Conversely, around one fifth of respondents (19%) indicate that they intend to stay permanently or do not have plans to leave.

Figure 8: How long do you intend to stay in Brazil? (%)



Among those in the qualitative interviews who stated they do not know whether they will stay, doubts seem to be mainly fuelled the uncertainty of economic stability and growth opportunities. Marcos is a 45-year-old Haitian who has lived in Porto Velho, Rondônia since 2014. He told us that he wants to stay but the difficulties of maintaining a stable financial situation and still helping his family are ever present in his daily life, despite having a degree in mechanical engineering. This makes him think about leaving Brazil in search of better opportunities.

“I want (to stay), but I think at some point I’m going to make the decision to leave the country to emigrate to another country that has better benefits. (...) Since we’re earning very little, [and] it’s not solving the problem, we have the idea of moving to another country so we can get money. (...) I will leave Brazil because we get two thousand reais a month, or 2,500 a month, but we have to pay expenses and send money to our family. You can’t send 200 dollars, 250 dollars, because the dollar is too expensive. We need to go to another country that has dollars, because it will make it easier for us.” (RO. Marcos, male, 45, in Brazil since 2014)

It is not only the economic situation that motivates considerations of leaving Brazil. Younger participants indicate their desire to continue their academic training in other countries if it is not possible to do so in Brazil. Often this is again related to economic conditions, the cost of living and need to earn an income.

“My dream has always been to study, study, study, but I’ve realised that it’s been very difficult for me, because in Brazil, and I think in any other country too, in order to study, you have to work to support yourself. The course I would like to study

would be difficult for me; [it would be difficult] to study, work and support myself, because it's either one or the other: study or work. The way Brazil is at the moment, I think it's getting a bit difficult for all of us. I think going to another country would be better, or not.” (RO. Viviane, 25, in Brazil since 2014)

Others who are less sure about what they would like for the future explain that if they had the means to try life in a country with more opportunities, they would do so, but that at the moment it is difficult to follow these plans due to the cost of migrating again - which is why they remain in Brazil. Fewer people expressed a desire to return to Haiti, mainly due to the context of insecurity and economic and political instability in their country of origin.

Some of those who stated they want to stay in Brazil, argued that they already have family in Brazil, suggesting that the effort and high investment in mobility of family members is an important factor for future decision-making.

“It's going to be very difficult to leave Brazil, because of my children, and because I already have a career, which I didn't even tell you about, in the meatpacking industry; they're valuing me a lot. I used to be a production assistant, now I'm in charge, in a little while... I receive the greatest respect, because I can say: "hire so-and-so for me" and they'll do anything on the spot. There are things you won't get twice, there are things you can't just leave, and I don't like leaving this place either... I like stability, I'm here, I'm here and that's it. If I have to leave here, I'll go home and live with my family.” (SC, Jack, 39, in Brazil since 2011)

In summary, while there is a small but considerable group of Haitians who wants to remain in Brazil, thus signalling their satisfaction with their life in the host country, and a smaller group of Haitians who wish to move somewhere else, the majority of the participants in this study are ambivalent about moving on. Multiple factors, both tangible and subjective, come together to shape this ambivalence: while many Haitians are not completely satisfied with their life in Brazil either because of material reasons (i.e., their low income) or because of racism and discrimination, they are also aware of the difficulties of migrating again. Some participants noted they are open to the possibility of migrating again if an opportunity arises, although from the interviews it is not clear whether they are currently actively looking for such opportunities. What is clear however is that virtually none of the participants considers returning to Haiti, even though this decision carries considerable emotional weight.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper sheds light on the migration decision-making process of Haitians who moved to Brazil, drawing on qualitative in-depth interviews and survey data. We have centred our analysis on the imaginative components of migration decision-making, thus contributing to the literature on the subjective factors informing migration decision-making (Hagen-Zanker, Hennessey, and Mazzilli 2023) and that on destination preferences (Crawley and Hagen-Zanker, 2019). Decision-making is not only layered and complex, but also highly individual, presenting a ‘coming together’ of

a diverse set of tangible and intangible factors that shape the decision to leave in the first place and decide on where to go. Factors specifically include aspirations for life, migration policies, and economic opportunities. However, despite the personal nature of decision-making, there are some common elements that cut across the sample, which we have emphasised.

The data reveals that imagery played a key role in influencing Haitian migrants' decision to migrate to Brazil through a set of diverse elements, in particular a) a series of salient events that put Brazil 'on the map' for many people; b) the critical influence of the diaspora in Haitian mobility; and c) a series of tangible socio-economic and policy-related factors that made Brazil an attractive destination.

a) First, several salient events in the six years that preceded the 2010 earthquake contributed to craft an image of Brazil as a strong, dynamic, and prosperous country. These included the Brazilian army leading the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti in 2004 (even though it is recognized that the mission also caused damages to Haiti), Brazil hosting various top-level global sporting events between 2007 and 2019, and the role of media, such as the worldwide release of the film 'Rio' in 2011.

b) Second, the Haitian diaspora further fueled imaginaries of Brazil. Through conversations, stories, and rumors, the diaspora – whose role is particularly strong for the Haitian people, as the majority of them feel 'constrained to leave' by structural circumstances – has shaped expectations around job opportunities, wellbeing, social inclusion, and the idea of living a peaceful and fulfilled life. In many cases, ideas, expectations, and images of Brazil also came from what broadcasted on TV, mainly Brazilian *telenovelas* and football.

c) Finally, the specific choice of Brazil appears equally motivated by socio-economic and policy-related reasons, which make Brazil an attractive destination alongside these intangible imaginaries. More specifically, economic opportunities, access to education, relative ease of accessing legal migration pathways and greater safety all contributed to Brazil becoming a real alternative compared to traditional destination countries for Haitians, like the U.S. and Canada.

In our analysis, we drew out four key takeaways on how imagination features in Haitian migration to Brazil.

1. Haitians are generally well aware of the economic and legal context of different destinations, and while for the majority of the participants in the study Brazil was the *preferred* destination, for others it was not, but it had become *the best possible* choice given the tangible possibilities they had access to. The specific choice of Brazil is often motivated by economic opportunities, favourable migration, and social policies, alongside the more intangible expectation of getting a 'good Brazilian reception'. This feeling of being welcome and accessing opportunities has been noted as contributing to destination preferences in other studies (Crawley and Hagen-Zanker, 2019). Moreover, we can see that the mental image

of Brazil and feelings of excitement about a new life and new opportunities feature alongside more practical and tangible reasons to leave and to move to Brazil in particular. This means that Haitians often moved to Brazil with high expectations regarding both practical and subjective aspects of life, but also that tangible factors are just as important in shaping decision-making as subjective ones. In fact, both concur to take a decision.

2. Likewise, the Haitian diaspora has both a material and subjective effect on migration decision-making. Migrant networks provide support in the practical ways we know well from the migration literature, but we also see that the stories about life in the destination country shared by members of the diaspora touch Haitians back home and start becoming part of their imaginary.
3. Imagined destinations and lifestyle can be confirmed by the reality encountered at destination, but they can equally often clash. Many of our respondents expressed disappointment about the reality of life in Brazil and shared an expectations-reality mismatch. The most common reasons for disappointment are connected to tangible reasons, such as limited job opportunities, low salaries, the high cost of living, and experiences of racism and discrimination. It is also important to highlight that, despite the expectations-reality clashes, the data shows that migration to Brazil overall improves Haitians' life, since they leave a highly insecure and dangerous context. We posit this is the main reason why, despite potential disappointments, the Haitian diaspora still encourages migration to Brazil.
4. While some Haitians we interviewed were adamant that they wanted to stay in Brazil – especially those who had managed to reunite with their family members who were already in Brazil, and others said they wanted to move on, the majority of the participants in this study are ambivalent about leaving Brazil. Multiple factors, both tangible and subjective, come together to shape this ambivalence: while many Haitians are not completely satisfied with their life in Brazil either because of material reasons or the discrimination, they are also aware of the difficulties of onward migration. Once again, we also see that any decision to stay or leave carries a lot of emotional weight. Operating within what has been defined as a 're-location of aspirations'¹³, those Haitians who were considering moving on shifted their expectations and imaginary of a more fulfilling life onto the next destination.

We hope that future studies focus on a diverse set of geographies when exploring subjective factors in migration decision-making, particularly South-South migration, as much of the literature is still focused on donor interests such as Africa- Europe migration. We also encourage other researchers to look into this matter from a gender perspective, emphasising differences in aspirations and imaginary in relation to the

¹³ This definition comes from the ongoing work of Berlin Institute for Empirical Integration and Migration Research (BIM)'s researchers Julia Stier and Nader Talebi and was discussed in person with one of the authors.

participants' gender. An excellent starting point is Leon-Himmelstine et al.'s (forthcoming) article, exploring the role of gender norms in shaping the decision to migrate amongst Haitian migrants in Brazil.

Shifting the focus onto South-South migration can help researchers in identifying what subjective elements, and specifically what components of imagination, influence decision-making beyond geographical specificities. In addition, this shift can help decoupling migration decision-making from the misplaced assumption that 'every (African) migrant wants to go to Europe' (Mazzilli, 2022), which has been fuelling hostile narratives on international migration all over the world. Finally, understanding these dynamics can inform better migration policies and programs to reduce the inequalities that lie behind much migration.

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