

## Negotiating the Transnationality of Social Control: Stories of Immigrant Women in South Florida

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**Key words:** social control; transnational; dominating discourse; controlling processes; women immigrants; honor and shame

**Abstract:** Historically, young women have been the object of social control, often in the name of filial honor. This article addresses a particular phenomenon of such social control as it is experienced by first- and second-generation female immigrants from Cuba and Haiti who are living in South Florida in the United States. This theme is explored by analyzing the life stories of six immigrants from these countries. The biographical stories of immigrant women reveal how social control operates in the context of transnationalism through controlling processes, internalization of gender expectations, and dominating discourse. It is also argued how social control manipulates and restricts female spaces and operates across spaces in a transnational manner from homelands to host nations. The main conclusion of the study is that a family's relocation to the United States for the purpose of political, social, or economic freedom does not necessarily result in liberation from restrictive social control for young women from such immigrant families. The "transnationality of social control" is therefore understood as the hegemonic domination of female bodies and behaviors through the mimesis of reified and remembered spaces of homelands in host societies.

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## 1. Introduction

A society's knowledge and norms are passed from one generation to the next through verbal and nonverbal forms of communication. As a result of such learning, social conditioning occurs, which is also called "cultural transmission" (see BLOCH, 2005). Historically, young women have been the particular object of an aspect of social conditioning that may be characterized as social control. In many societies, young women experience unique and substantial social pressures to conform to particular behavioral guidelines. These family and social expectations focus on girls and women prior to marriage, as these females are frequently imagined as the keepers of a family's or society's future and its honor (PITT-RIVERS, 1966; PERISITIANY, 1966). Women immigrants may receive varying messages regarding social expectations due to the differing societal values and historical contexts they find themselves exposed to before and after emigration, which leads to several questions: What forms of social control do immigrant young women experience? How do such women maneuver in their post-immigration locations without becoming alienated from their parents or from relatives and community members who remain in their homeland? These are the questions explored below. [1]

In the study of social phenomena, it is vital not to lose sight of the individuals touched by a particular phenomenon but to rather build theories grounded in the lived experience of real people. In order to understand women's experience of social control in the context of transnationalism, it is important to hear the stories of immigrant women. Such life stories describe both how social control has been expressed in their lives and how they have responded to it. KLEINMAN (2000) highlights the fact that "the violent consequences of social power" result in everyday suffering for individuals not likely to be identified as victims of social conflict (p.228). Likewise, feminist scholarship illustrates ways in which symbolic violence contributes to cultural practices that are experienced as domination and subordination by women (e.g., MADRIZ, 1997; JENKINS, 1998; ROTHENBERG, 2003). Other authors such as ARDENER (1993) and contributors have studied how spatial issues are also part of dominating and separating gendered ideals and norms. This article contributes to this body of scholarship by exploring the experience of a particular social phenomenon that can be described as the "transnationality of social control." [2]

When we speak of transnationalism in this article, we are referring to the social phenomenon whereby immigrants maintain contacts and connections with their homelands following migration (VERTOVEC, 2002). This persisting attachment and association results in a form of dual existence, in the sense that immigrants experience "multi-locational identities [that] bridge geographical space" (BRYCESON & VUORELA, 2002, p.6). In thinking about the notion of transnationalism in relation to social control, we mean the domination and restriction of female spaces and the transmission of hegemonic processes from homelands to host societies. It appears important to realize how cultural transmission is relegated to gendered ideals about honor and shame specifically in regard to female bodies and behaviors through the transportation of cultural

norms along with families and individual lives as a result of the emigration process. Mechanisms of controlling women are part of remembered actions, discourses, habits, and practices from homelands, which are reified and relived in host nations. [3]

This article draws on information gathered and analyzed in a qualitative study that explores the construction of ethnic identity and sense of belonging among immigrants in the United States (see the overview article by CHAITIN, LINSTROTH & HILLER, this issue). The primary methodology we utilized for data collection was that of biographical narrative research, in which participants told the stories of their lives without interruption. After giving their initial narratives, participants responded to questions eliciting information about their identity formation and emigration experiences. The biographers are comprised of first and second generation immigrants from Cuba and Haiti living in South Florida. Among these participants were a number of women who were in their twenties or thirties at the time of the interviews. [4]

Although social control was not a topic originally addressed in the research questions, it was a theme that emerged repeatedly, in the life stories of the women in this age range. Thus, it became evident to us that this was a research topic meriting attention and analysis. A second reason for exploring this theme is while Cuba and Haiti are distinctive island-nations in the Caribbean, European forms of social control and ideas of honor and shame pervade these societies due to their respective colonial histories. Even more interesting for the purposes of this article is how such views then are transported along with Cuban and Haitian immigrants to the United States and what such concepts provide for a more meaningful understanding of gendered immigrant-lives. [5]

In this article, we explore the experience of social control among six of the female biographers—three Cuban-Americans and three Haitian-Americans. These women were born between 1968 and 1984. Three of them were born in Cuba or Haiti and arrived in the United States as children or young adults. The other three were born in the U.S. to parents who immigrated from Cuba or Haiti. The table below details this information about the informants.

Name	Ethnicity	Year of birth	1 <sup>st</sup> or 2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	Year of immigration
Yolanda	Cuban	1982	2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	n/a <sup>1</sup>
Lisa	Cuban	1977	2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	n/a
Nina	Cuban	1968	1 <sup>st</sup> generation	1989
Patricia	Haitian	1970	2 <sup>nd</sup> generation	n/a
Theresa	Haitian	1984	1 <sup>st</sup> generation	1989
Catrina	Haitian	1976	1 <sup>st</sup> generation	1991

Table 1: Immigration information of Cuban and Haitian biographers [6]

In all cases, the names used in this article are pseudonyms. An analysis of the women's experience of social control follows a brief discussion of the socio-historical context of their stories. These historical sketches highlight the experience of women in Cuba and Haiti. [7]

## 2. Socio-historical Context

### 2.1 The Cuban experience

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Havana, Cuba, was an important port for the Spanish fleet and a center of trade in the Caribbean. Gambling, prostitution, and crime were rampant (THOMAS, 1998). As the Spanish colony became more established and developed, the city and island as a whole became more orderly. Although Cuba retained the cultural mix that has always been a part of its character, the influence of the Catholic Church and the social mores of Spain came to prevail. [8]

The experiences of women of Spanish heritage clearly differed significantly from the daily lives of female African slaves brought by force to Cuba and their descendants. In this paper, our sample includes Cuban women of Spanish heritage. As a result, we are focusing on the socio-historical context of Cuban women of Spanish descent. In Havana in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such women did not go out in public unaccompanied. Shopping assistants brought goods from the stores out to the women in carriages for their consideration, as they could not be seen on the street (THOMAS, 1998). By the late 1800s, Cuban women began to travel to the United States. They noted the ability of the North American women to travel and shop with personal freedoms that were unknown in Cuba (PEREZ, 1999). [9]

During the United States occupation of Cuba, following the war of independence in 1898, women began entering the workforce in Cuba as clerks, stenographers, and telephone operators. These women often worked out of necessity as a result

1 "Not Applicable" because she is a second generation immigrant.

of economic devastation caused by the war, or because they were now widows responsible for feeding their families (PEREZ, 1999). For the first time, "respectable" women went out shopping or traveled in cars unaccompanied. Some women were beaten severely or divorced, however, for cutting their hair. The display of a woman's hair had always been reserved for the private realm (PEREZ, 1999). [10]

During the first half of the twentieth century, North Americans came to Cuba in large numbers both as residents and tourists. There was a huge increase in American tourism after World War II, when Havana became known as a destination for gambling, prostitution, and drugs (PEREZ, 1990). The American presence in Cuba and American material goods influenced the lives of Cuban women (BENJAMIN, 1990). Castro's rise to power brought about not only political revolution but also social revolution. His goal to destroy the lingering influences of colonization led to efforts to overturn the social dynamics among classes and genders. Such efforts only deepened the desire for many in the upper and middle classes to hold to traditional roles for women. The cultural and moral tensions between traditional Spanish customs, the more liberal behavior of North Americans, and the radical change sought by Castro are reflected in the stories of immigrant Cuban women. Such cultural tension is also evident in the experience of the Haitian immigrant women included in this study. To better understand their experience of social control, it is important to know something of the socio-historical context of women in Haiti. [11]

## **2.2 The Haitian experience**

Haitian history and culture reflect European colonial influence in ways both similar and different from the colonial impact on Cuba. When Columbus landed on the Caribbean island in 1492, he gave it the name Hispaniola in honor of his Spanish patrons. The Spanish retained control of the eastern portion of the island, while the western region came under the control of the French. French pirates began to use the island as a base of operation, and they were followed by French planters who established a slave-based society. In 1791, a slave rebellion commenced, leading to several years of brutal fighting that ultimately resulted in the establishment of the free nation of Haiti in 1804 (GIRARD, 2005). Although officially liberated from France, the new society that emerged continued to be significantly influenced by French culture, racial prejudices, and stark class divisions. Most upper class members were characterized by their lighter skin and their loyalty to French heritage in spite of the expulsion of their former French colonial masters from the Haitian isle. What is more, even with the end of slavery, the poor of Haiti continued to experience exploitation and severe hardship (BELL, 2001; GIRARD, 2005). [12]

The stark class divisions in Haitian society led to very different experiences for women from the upper and lower classes. The elite often studied in France, refused to speak Kreyol, and kept numerous domestic servants. Lower class women labored under the multiple responsibilities of household chores, raising their children, and trying to support their families as agricultural or domestic

workers. These women often worked in environments that condoned both domestic violence and violence against workers (PAMPHILE, 2001; GIRARD, 2005). As BELL (2001) notes, "While women assert that they are the *poto mitan*, central pillar, of society, they are also quick to point out that they are the most *defavorize*, marginalized, within the *klas defavorize*, marginalized class" (p.18). This was true also for young girls of the lower classes, who were often sold into a form of modern-day slavery as "restaveks." These children were taken in as domestic servants in exchange for a space to sleep and a bit of food to eat. They were often subjected to physical and sexual abuse. Although the "restavek" custom of exchanging a child's labor for room and board is now illegal, it continues to be practiced on the island (BELL, 2001). [13]

Married women were legally considered minors in Haiti until 1979. In addition, although women were given the right to vote in 1950, "only upper-class women were allowed to exercise this right, and then only when it could enhance the dictators' power—until 1990" (BELL, 2001, p.21). Under the government of Francois Duvalier, known as Papa Doc, women were given some leadership roles, but they were also viciously tortured and murdered as political opponents or as relatives of political opponents (GIRARD, 2005). During the rule of both Francois Duvalier and his son Jean-Claude Duvalier, the use of rape as a weapon of political terror became rampant (BELL, 2001; GIRARD, 2005). The violence directed toward the educated during these years caused many of the nation's elite to flee Haiti. Political instability, corruption, and graft contributed to economic devastation for the country and periods of extreme poverty. This led many of the desperate poor to try to make their way to Florida on small vessels. These migrants became known as "boat people." Those caught at sea were turned back; others made their way to South Florida. Some Haitian immigrants settled in Miami's "Little Haiti" and other Florida neighborhoods; others migrated to other parts of the United States (BELL, 2001). [14]

These brief historical summaries are intended to provide some context for the life stories of the Cuban and Haitian immigrant women discussed below. Both Cuba and Haiti were strongly impacted by colonialism. Spanish mores and French culture influenced the social expectations governing Cuban and Haitian women. These expectations were evident in the social control experienced by our biographers. This was true for those who immigrated to the United States and those born in the U.S. It is also important to note that Florida residents received and perceived Cuban and Haitian immigrants in very different ways. North Americans tended to see Cuban immigrants as political refugees seeking freedom from communism, while they viewed Haitian immigrants primarily as economic refugees who brought little in terms of skills and capital to contribute to society. Such perceptions may have contributed to Cubans reinforcing cultural traditions that preceded Castro, including traditional roles for Cuban women. Likewise, middle and upper class Haitians may have felt motivated to counter negative stereotypes about poor Haitians; in order to do so, they may have sought to demonstrate their social status in part through maintaining social norms regarding women's behavior. [15]

While our brief historical overview of gender relations in Cuba and Haiti provides a summation of hegemonic forms of dominating women on these island-nations, the life stories of Cuban and Haitian immigrant-women below are evidence for understanding the "transnationality of social control." What is significant about these women's remembered experiences is how mimesis of homeland of Cuba and Haiti become part of everyday custom and discourse through specific forms of cultural transmission as gendered expectations and restrictions in the host country of the United States. [16]

### **3. Results and Analysis**

The six life stories analyzed for this article reflect the influence of the socio-historical context described above. Both Cuban and Haitian women immigrants experience patriarchal social control. In spite of this similarity, there were differences in the forms of social control the women experienced. We will analyze excerpts from our biographers' stories below, highlighting those findings that relate to the topic of social control. Following the presentation of results and analysis, we will consider several common themes that emerged in our analysis. [17]

#### **3.1 Cuban women immigrants**

Our Cuban biographers describe experiences in which their fathers and grandfathers attempted to restrict their behaviors for the purpose of protecting them from physical harm or social dishonor. The women responded in somewhat different ways, however, to this shared experience. [18]

##### *3.1.1 Yolanda's experience*

Yolanda, a second-generation Cuban-American in her mid-twenties, talks at some length about the gender expectations she faced. In fact, she begins her life story with this very issue:

"You know, the Cuban tradition is that parents are strict with girls and permissive with boys. They can do whatever they want! It was very difficult for me to be able to grow, to choose a career and be able to finish school. I could not be independent because my father never wanted that I become independent. He wanted for me to find a man, get married, and then everything will be fine." [19]

Yolanda describes her lifelong desire to have a career in the arts—either as a singer or an artist—a desire that was frustrated by the controlling messages of her father:

"I had a dream to become a singer. Then my father never, never supported me and never wanted singing for me, because he did not want people to take advantage of me. Like the stars, you know, they have to dress in a way that my father did not want me to, and that sadly is something that up to this day I think about. If I could have pursued my dream I would be in a different place. Also, when I was thirteen years old I was accepted to the New World School of Arts because of my art; I draw very well.

My father did not want me to go to that school either because I had to take the train, and he said no. So my father did not allow me to move forward. If I had done all those things I would be in a different place right now. But all that disappointment built my character ... So basically it has been difficult coming from the Cuban tradition, because parents are severe with daughters. My father has been strict with me." [20]

Yolanda goes on to say why she has "excellent" parents and how her father's strictness has helped her to be a responsible person. Nevertheless, she concludes, "He is still a Cuban dad and to him singing is not a career for a decent woman like me. It will be a shame for the family if I turn into a singer." Yolanda associates the social control she experiences with the nation of her father's birth, Cuba, and with his concern for family honor. She speaks of Cuban tradition and of the fact that her father is a "Cuban dad" when trying to explain the restrictions that kept her from pursuing her dream. She notes several times that "it has been difficult growing up with Cuban parents in North America. My father has been severe with me." [21]

From her words, we see that Yolanda feels she was prevented from "moving forward" in order to satisfy her father's sense of family honor. Having described the control of her Cuban father, Yolanda comments that she preferred being born in the United States.

"Oh yes, Hispanic men are *machistas*; they want to have control and they think they can do whatever they want. North American men are not like that. ... I am glad my parents came to this country and I was born here." [22]

Yolanda believes she has more freedom in North America than she would if she were living in Cuba. Yet in spite of living in the United States, Yolanda experiences the restrictions of her "Cuban dad." This exemplifies the transnationality of social control, whereby Cuban-male norms of hegemonic domination are reified for restricting Cuban-female behaviors in everyday life in the United States (see CORNWALL & LINDISFARNE, 1994). Therefore, living in the United States, and being born in the U.S., does not preclude the influence of social mores and expectations transferred from the family homeland. This can result in a conflict for second generation immigrant women concerning their love and respect for their Cuban heritage versus their desire to lead an independent life more reflective of Western liberal culture. [23]

### 3.1.2 Lisa's experience

Lisa, like Yolanda, is a second-generation Cuban-American. She is married and in her thirties, but she is still experiencing pressure from her family to conform to certain cultural traditions and the social expectations related to those traditions. For example, she is being pressured to live close to her parents, even though she wants to move to Denver.

"I live with my husband, but my parents still—you know, even when they moved to a different house, my parents still live next door to my grandparents. My aunt still lives



there; and my cousin's twenty-two, and he still lives there. I feel like the black sheep 'cause I want to leave. ... I want to move; I want to move up north. I want to move to Denver; that's where me and my husband want to go. And to them it's like I'm destroying the family. Then I try to tell them, well, wait a minute; you immigrated here. But then it's like oh, we were under persecution and da da da, and all this. And it's like, ... I want to take the chance to better myself. I don't see it happening here. I'm sorry, I love you guys. ... But to them it's like a slap in the face because they have been so close all their lives, basically they haven't seen anything else." [24]

In Lisa's life, her grandfather is an agent of social control. She describes the restrictions he placed on her when she was growing up:

"My grandfather [is] very headstrong and stubborn and very, very old school, very old school even with me. I remember, oh no, I couldn't talk to any boys; I couldn't wear certain things. I mean he was even worse than my own dad, you know. [My dad] wouldn't let me go out with some, but my grandfather was even ten times worse." [25]

Lisa recounts a story that illustrates the way social control operated in her life as a teenager. When Lisa was in high school, her grandfather often picked her up after school to drive her home. She describes one memorable day:

"He came to pick me up, and I'm chasing this boy 'cause he stole a letter. You know, the boy was gay anyway, but my grandfather doesn't see that; he just sees me running after this boy down the sidewalk. And I knew it, as I'm running after the boy and I hear the horn honking, and I—his name was Bobby, and I'm like, Bobby, give me that letter now. I'm going to be in trouble. He's like, Why? Just for chasing me? I'm like, please, I already can hear it. Just give me the letter. And I got it from him, then I got in the car, and my grandfather started yelling. Why are you yelling? And it pissed me off that he called me this, and later on I called him and I [said] you shouldn't have called me that. He goes, well, that's how you were acting. He called me a *puta*. I'm like, do you know why are you saying this to your granddaughter? He goes, that was what you were acting like. I told him the situation; I was just getting a letter. But he's like, that's not how you should act. You should la la la. I'm like, okay, whatever. I'll sit on the side with my legs crossed; that's what I'll do. But he's very, very old school, my grandfather." [26]

These stories point to the role of discourse in reinforcing the transnationality of social control: that is, transferring and transmitting cultural behaviors from the homeland in the host nation. Fathers and grandfathers informed the young women in the family what they could not do. In some cases, the young women who resist this form of social control present the controlling message as senseless sounds, such as *da da da* and *la la la*. This may indicate that they heard these same messages repeated so often that the words lost their meaning and impact. The replacement of the words with "noise" also may indicate that these women are unwilling to listen to these messages; it may be a verbal defense mechanism. [27]

### 3.1.3 *Nina's experience*

Nina's childhood differed in significant ways from the childhood experiences of Yolanda and Lisa. She emigrated from Cuba at age twenty, nearly ten years after her father left the island for the United States during the Mariel boat lift. In her life story, Nina speaks of the example of strong, independent women in her family. Her grandmother was one of the first women to attend the University of Havana, and Nina admires her independent spirit and freedom from traditional gender roles. Two of Nina's great aunts were actively involved with the counterrevolution and were imprisoned. One of them escaped from the prison; the other was released after a few years. Nina speaks of how much she was influenced by this latter great aunt:

"In the beginning of the revolution, she started with something what is called the counterrevolution. Politically she never liked the revolution, she had no interest in that. She was a very peculiar woman; she influenced me a lot because she like me a lot. I always remember her. She was a very liberal woman in her own way, because she was also a very Catholic woman, very religious. That was something extremely contradictive. She was a lesbian; well, she had a partner for all her life. This person lived with her. ... Well, she never left Cuba. She remained prisoner during these years; I think she did two or three years. Later when she went out of jail, my aunt never again worked for the government." [28]

Nina was just eleven years old when her father emigrated to the United States in the Mariel boatlift, and it was ten years before they saw each other again. In addition, Nina grew up in Castro's Cuba, a communist society that rejected the social mores of former colonial powers Spain and the United States. As a result of these factors, Nina experienced considerable freedom in terms of social behavior. During her later teen years, she was living on her own in Havana in the family home. She describes her life as a college student during that time:

"It was a bohemian season. We spent life in the streets; we drank a lot. I mean we consumed a lot of alcohol ... the normal life of a student, you know, always arguing. We spent hours talking during the night; you awake talking in the day, eh, changing the world." [29]

At this point, Nina's father had gained United States citizenship, and he began taking steps to bring her to the U.S. as his minor daughter. Just before turning twenty-one, Nina made the decision to emigrate. Living with her father and step-mother, Nina encountered her father's efforts to control her behavior. In spite of the examples of her courageous great aunts and the independence she had experienced in Cuba, it was difficult for Nina to break free of her father's expectations of her.

"My father wanted to prohibit things that you cannot prohibit a twenty-one year old, because he had jumped ten years of a girl and he lost my adolescence. ... I loved him, but still there is all that resentment." [30]

Nina observes that the Cuban-American community in South Florida seemed to be living in a time warp. They emphasized Cuban culture and traditions of the pre-Castro era. Nina describes this difference:

"I start going out with my cousins, typical Cuban-American girls. They went to schools like Nuestra Senora de Lourdes that are typical schools of Cuban-American girls that teach you the traditions of their mother. I mean, you are Cuban-American but in the sense of not what I am, that I was born in 68, but the country that their parents left. Do you understand, that was another Cuba. ... Calculate that my cousin is the same age like me and never in her life had relations with another man. If my cousin gets married and she is a Mrs., I mean, she gets married as if she were from another world of another epoch." [31]

The stories of our Cuban biographers reflect different life experiences. A common thread among the stories, however, is the experience of the transnationality of social control. The fathers of all three women, and the grandfather of one, attempted to restrict their behavior in keeping with traditional values of the pre-Castro Cuban culture. Cuban society has changed significantly over the past few decades. The immigrants who came to the United States from Cuba in the aftermath of the Cuban revolution brought their social expectations of girls and women to the U.S. Their daughters were subjected to a form of social control that did not reflect modern-day American or modern-day Cuban cultural values. Our Haitian biographers also experienced social control, though it took different forms in their lives. We will highlight a few examples of this below. [32]

### **3.2 Haitian women immigrants**

The stories of our Haitian-American biographers reveal how forms of social control were enforced in their lives primarily, though not exclusively, by their mothers and grandmothers. This is in contrast to the Cuban immigrants, who experienced social control primarily from their male relatives. In addition, the Haitian immigrants identify class and race as prominent motivating factors behind the social control directed toward them, as well as the family honor that was the key justification for social control in the Cuban sample. [33]

#### **3.2.1 Patricia's experience**

Patricia was born in the United States but raised in Haiti until her teen years. She experienced similar social control in both countries. For example, Patricia explains that both her grandmother in Haiti and her parents in the United States controlled whom she could socialize with and how she could speak. She was not permitted to be friends with anyone they thought might "corrupt" her. She was not allowed to speak Kreyol, which was seen as the language of the lower class, and was spanked if caught using Kreyol. Patricia also told us that she was not allowed to play outside during her childhood in Haiti:

"Every day, for example, where we lived I could only stay inside the house. I wasn't allowed to be out, I guess to play outside. I wasn't allowed to play outside because

young ladies had to always be inside the house and not outside. My brother was allowed to go play outside with his friends and everything like that, but I wasn't allowed to talk to his friends because they were boys, and I wasn't allowed to talk to boys, not even just as friends. Yeah so basically when my brother's friends would come over, he would have to be in one side and I would have to be in another side. Definitely a double standard with guys, definitely a double standard." [34]

Patricia's comments reflect the differing social standards expected of girls and boys; such gender differences were also noted by Yolanda. Patricia referred to the fact that discourse including words such as "proper" and "respectable" and "ladies" was used as a tool to control her behavior, as we saw with the Cuban biographers. Patricia wanted to take a taxi or bus "but of course I was never allowed to do that because proper young ladies don't do things like that." The word "proper" came up in another of Patricia's stories.

"My father did not want to raise me [in the United States] because he felt that he lived in a neighborhood that wasn't safe ... that a proper young lady should not live in that neighborhood. ... What made him decide finally to let me stay is because there was a boy that wrote to me from Haiti and of course he took the letter, he read the letter. I never saw the letter to this day because my father took the letter, he read it, and then he says that my grandmother wasn't doing a proper job raising me because here I have boys writing to me. So he had to keep me here so he could keep an eye on me." [35]

Patricia speaks of experiencing the conflicting social expectations of the United States and of Haiti, and how she worked through those contrasting influences:

"It was hard ... going to high school and seeing the ways the Americans were living and everything like that, and then going home and I couldn't do most of the things they were doing. I wasn't even allowed to join any sports groups or anything like that. I just came back home, start studying; that's all they cared about really. So of course I did a little sneaking around so I could actually have some fun. You know, stay the night at somebody's house, and go someplace else and everything like that. Because you had to get around it. And then when I would say to them but so-and-so is dating or something like that, they would say well so-and-so, they're Americans, you're not. You know, something like that. And then I would say back to them, well I'm being raised in America you know. I would try to be Americanized, but they would never go for it." [36]

Living in the United States did not preclude Patricia from being governed by Haitian social expectations. This is an example of the transnationality of social control; Patricia's parents brought their values and traditions with them to the United States and reinforced them there. A comment by Patricia regarding dating captures her experience of the interplay of social control, conflicting cultural forces, and the struggle for agency:

"Dating was out of the question. Until I turned eighteen or something like that, it was definitely out of the question, even when I came here. That was what was very

difficult too because of course I wanted to date. Because every other person in America was dating, because it was a normal thing. But my father was totally against it. I wasn't allowed to date in high school; I wasn't even allowed to date in college. But of course I did, but according to him no. And then when I moved down to Florida for law school even my father would tell me, you know, your boyfriends basically are your books. Basically you are only allowed to date your books, nothing else. And that's when I put my foot down and said ok, Papi, I'm gonna start dating here in law school. Although I was dating really before, but you know even in law school he was so strict saying I can I could not even date so that was that." [37]

Although as a teenager Patricia negotiated the conflicting social standards she was exposed to through the use of secrecy and deception ("sneaking around," pretending that she had not started dating when she in fact had), she found it difficult to break away from the expectations of her parents and grandmother. Patricia speaks more than once of feeling "programmed" into certain "choices" and behaviors.

"I was raised with the different classes and how I couldn't associate with a different class and everything like that. I don't necessarily believe in it, but it was so programmed in me that automatically I didn't associate with so much of the Haitians in Florida because they were different than the Haitians in up north. The Haitian up north were educated; they were everything the Haitians down in Florida were really not. ... Now it seems like I'm becoming more me. ... Because growing up I had so much of my family, and I'm telling you, they program you. And until you get deprogrammed and you become you, even if you know it's wrong, for some reason you end up doing it anyway because that's what I learned since I was little." [38]

We see issues raised by Patricia such as class, Kreyol, dating, and feeling programmed in the life story of another Haitian immigrant, Theresa, whose story is discussed below. [39]

### *3.2.2 Theresa's experience*

Theresa was born in Haiti but moved to the United States at age five. Thus, she was exposed to North American cultural influences as well as her family's expectations, which reflected Haitian culture.

"I'll never forget this, maybe I was eight years old. My mom asked me, if you couldn't become a violinist, what would you be? And I said, I wanna be an actress. And she said, oh that's not a professional job. Oh my goodness, don't bring shame onto the family; pick something else. And I'm like, okay, a detective because I used to read a lot, and I loved Nancy Drew. I read all her books. So I said I want to be a detective. And she's like, okay, no girl in my family is going to walk around toting a gun, so no. Pick something else. And I was like, attorney, and she said good, good. I'd prefer doctor, but I think we can work with attorney. Yeah, if you're successful then that won't be shameful on the family. You see it's always about the family; it's all about that." [40]

As we saw in the Cuban stories, family honor plays a pivotal role in the social control experienced by girls and young women. Unlike the Cuban biographers, however, who spoke of pressure to focus on home and family, the Haitian biographers did not feel a restriction against working outside the home. Rather, it was important that their line of work not shame the family. Theresa describes how the use of language also was related to family status:

"In the upper class, French is considered the language, the proper way to speak and then Haitian Kreyol is considered slang, so you know ah that's where the funny story comes in with my grandmother with the nanny she got for my mom. I mean she made it clear from day one she said okay you are never to speak Haitian Kreyol with [Theresa] because I'm not raising a commoner you know. I'm raising somebody to live with me here in my social status and continue that social status." [41]

When the nanny was heard speaking Kreyol to Theresa, she was fired. [42]

These comments reflect how social control within families of young immigrant women is often tied to the perception of family honor. In general, these women associate North America with greater freedom than the country of their birth or their parents' birth. At the same time, Theresa refers to a mental tug-of-war and speaks of conflicted feelings related to some of her choices. When she participated in Community Theater, she kept it a secret from her parents because she was sure they would be mad at her. Even though Theresa feels there is nothing wrong with acting, she feels intense pressure to "just be a good girl, the respectful daughter. And so they never knew; I did it all behind their back." [43]

Theresa shares a similar conflict in terms of her choices in regards to romantic relationships. She comments on how her parents told her "you have to marry someone as affluent and socially acceptable as we are." She describes how her parents forbade her from dating or marrying an African-American.

"They've made it clear to me: pick whatever race you want, except black American. Pick any nationality you want, except black American. My mom even told me, if you feel the need to marry a black man, just make it a European black man. Don't bring home a black American. And that is how I was raised. ... My mom, every time I talked to a guy it was, like, don't talk to him, don't talk to him, don't talk to him. And I met a bunch of really, truly nice guys, but my mom was like, no, he's not good enough for you, he's not good enough for you, he's not good enough for you." [44]

Theresa explained how her mother disapproved of her last boyfriend because although he was Haitian he was not upper class. Then Theresa notes,

"And I'M NO LONGER WITH THAT GUY. I don't know what to say about that. I will say it has rubbed off on me, although I fought it. I fought it hard. ... When it comes to guys, I guess I can still see where my parents are coming from." [45]

In spite of her recognition of the racism and classism in her parents' efforts to control her dating partners, Theresa believed their views "rubbed off" on her. As a

result, she ended the relationship with her boyfriend. Both Patricia and Theresa indicate in their stories how internalization of social control influences their behavior. They refer to feeling "programmed" and to social expectations rubbing off on them. They also find a certain degree of secrecy and deception useful in maneuvering between conflicting cultural influences. [46]

### 3.2.3 *Catrina's experience*

Catrina, who came to the United States at age fifteen, is a Haitian woman who did not come from the upper class. Her family speaks Kreyol, unlike the Haitian biographers from the upper class. Her father died when she was nine, and her mother came to the United States to work, leaving Katrina with her grandparents.

"My mom came here in 1989, and she worked so hard to bring me here. And when she brought me here I was fifteen years old. And it was different from home, and when I first got here, I followed in my mom's footsteps. Just like she come to work to make a living, and I come here to do the same thing." [47]

In her story, Katrina focuses on her efforts as a young female-immigrant to avoid the destructive social influences she encountered in the United States. For Katrina, the key to success and safety is relying not so much on the social standards of her family but upon the divine control of God. She speaks of this earnestly.

"God been in control since then, since I came here, because if it was not for God I would not be here still, and I could be outside in the street doing drugs, doing a lot of things. But I didn't choose those things. I chose the right way to control my life, and that's why I don't let anything control my life. I control my life, [Katrina] controls her life because you know when you have control, when you have that control in your life, nobody can take it away." [48]

In addition to seeking spiritual strength and self-will to avoid destructive influences, Katrina also indicates that she feels the pressure of maintaining a good reputation among those who know her back in Haiti.

"You leave from your house, from home, and you wanna be somebody. And people will talk about you even if you're not here anymore. You know, people will still say this person used to do good things." [49]

The imagined conversation of community members back in Haiti acts as a controlling influence upon Katrina's behavior. She seeks to avoid negative gossip and disapproval. Similarly, Katrina imagines Americans talking about Haitians and wants approval from them, as well. She comments,

"We all could do different good things, especially when they are talking about the Haitians. We are Haitians, we have good things in our heart in our way. We could do good things; we could do better things than other people. ... When you have your paper, your immigration paper, when you have everything legal, you have your green

card, you have everything, you will make it. You will have a good life, just like everybody else. Except, don't do drugs, don't do anything violence, don't do any criminal stuff. Cause if you drugs, any criminal stuff, anything they don't like, they don't appreciate you to do in their country. You just have to follow the rules." [50]

While Catrina seeks to "follow the rules" of the United States, at the same time, she says she doesn't really adapt to American culture. She negotiates living in a new culture by obeying the laws and avoiding trouble, but at the same time holding on to the behavioral norms learned in her native country. [51]

We see in the stories of the Haitian women significantly different immigration experiences due to differences in socioeconomic status. The two biographers from the upper class feel special pressure not to speak Kreyol and to follow their parents' restrictions regarding dating. These issues were not prominent in the story of Catrina, who was of a lower social class. Yet the three women all experienced forms of social control designed to prevent them from bringing dishonor on themselves and their families. This topic of shame and honor was highlighted in the stories of the Cuban biographers as well. [52]

### **3.3 Summary of results and analysis**

The life stories analyzed for this article indicate that young women-immigrants frequently experience particular forms of social control, which also transcend transnational boundaries through the emigration process. An emergent theme repeated in the stories of our female biographers was equating social control with protection. Our biographers described parents and other relatives as attempting to restrict their behaviors for the purpose of protecting them from physical harm or social dishonor. These women immigrants also indicated to us how words as "proper," "respectable," and "ladies" were used as tools to control their behavior. [53]

The Cuban women immigrants received controlling messages primarily from male family-members. Haitian women immigrants, on the other hand, tended to receive such messages more frequently from female family-members. The objective of these social control-mechanisms for Cuban women was directed toward female decorum in the name of family honor. In addition to family honor, the Cuban women felt pressure to remain physically close to family members. The emphasis of social control in the case of Haitian women encompassed issues of race and class in addition to family honor, at least for the women with higher socioeconomic status. There was less emphasis on proximity to family members in the case of the Haitian women. [54]

Immigration may have represented a form of freedom from political or social oppression for these women's families. Living in the United States did not, however, equal liberation from gender expectations that were expressed in restrictions on the behavior of these young women. We found these patterns of controlling women as continuing from homelands and as being reinstated in the adoptive host lands of the immigrant women and by these women's families. Such behavioral patterns suggest how transnational processes do not impede



cultural forces and cultural transmission in regard to gendered expressions, even ontological forms of oppression in relation to gendered ideals. [55]

In our study, female immigrants addressed how they experienced the conflicting forces of American and ancestral social expectations, and how they worked through such contrasting influences. One difference we noted in our biographers' stories was that the Haitian women sometimes used secrecy or deception as a coping mechanism, an approach that was not indicated in the stories of the Cuban women. It may be that the physical proximity of the Cuban women limited their ability to act in ways that their family members would not be aware of. Three common themes that emerged in their stories were: experiencing social control in the name of protection, maneuvering between cultures, and responding to dominating discourse. We will discuss these themes below. [56]

## **4. Discussion**

### **4.1 Controlling for protection**

As discussed above, the justification for the social control among Cuban and Haitian women in our sample was for their own protection; that it, to defend them from dishonor and harm. The desire to protect a young woman may be very well-intentioned. However, it was often more a concern for the family's reputation than for the young woman in question. Such views in general enforced the women's "protective" restrictions and limitations imposed on the women. [57]

Laura NADER (1997) uses the term "controlling processes" to describe "the mechanisms by which ideas take hold and become institutional in relation to power" (p.711). Controlling processes function in ways both visible and invisible. When Theresa's grandmother prohibited her from playing outside, although her brother was allowed to do so, this was a visible demonstration of how gender impacted the behavioral restrictions of girls in comparison to boys. On the other hand, Patricia decided to break up with a boy she really liked because he was not upper class. This was evidence of an invisible influence, the message she had received from her mother that boys from lower classes were "not good enough" for her. Whether the control manifested in the lives of these women was overt or subtle, it operated as a form of power over these women's actions. [58]

While social control is exerted in name of protecting women, its outcome is restriction and limitation. Ethnographic studies have shown how such social conditioning regarding what is proper can lead women to stay away from what are considered "male" public spaces (COWAN, 1991, p.188). MADRIZ (1997) has noted that a "code of behavior" imposed on women in the name of safety serves to reinforce "the private=women / public=men dichotomy" (p.354). When considered in the context of immigration, we see how moving from one society to another does not necessarily alleviate the phenomenon of women's behavior being restricted in the name of protection. Cuban culture and Haitian culture differ in many respects from American culture. Both our Cuban and Haitian biographers speak of feeling prevented from engaging in the activities in which they saw their American

schoolmates participating. This indicates the social expectations of the homeland were transported to the United States and continued to operate in the lives of these women. This is an indication of the transnationality of social control. [59]

#### 4.2 Maneuvering between cultures

As mentioned above, our female biographers spoke of the difficulty of living in American society while being governed by Cuban or Haitian social norms regarding girls and young women. These women had to find ways to maneuver between the cultures of their homes versus the culture of their family homeland. In the classic work *Honour and Shame* (1966), PERISTIANY refers to honor as being "at the apex of the pyramid of temporal social values" (p.10). Similarly, PITT-RIVERS (1966) explains how the purity of a daughter reflects upon the honor of her parents, especially her father and other male kin. Safeguarding this purity is a young woman's foremost filial-obligation. Evidently, immigration does not significantly affect the conceptualization of women as fulfilling certain social roles, even if the culture of the sending country is quite different from the culture of the receiving county. As a result, young women—who either come as immigrants or are born to immigrant parents—often live in a new environment that is characterized by one set of social expectations while also being forced to negotiate the social expectations deriving from the socio-cultural context of the family's homeland. [60]

It can be difficult to resist conforming to the gender expectations of social control for various reasons. Research findings indicate that "to the extent that women internalize the social imperative, they feel they are making the decision on their own" (NADER, 1997, p.716). They may think they are making a decision to behave in a certain way, but this decision is actually constructed out of social and cultural forces of dominance. On the other hand, they may recognize their choices as reflective of parental social control and yet at the same time feel unable to deviate from these restrictions because they have been "programmed," as two of our biographers explained to us. One approach these two women employed to negotiate differing social norms was to use secrecy and deception. They engaged in "American" activities but misrepresented their actions to their parents. [61]

While many women are well aware of more liberating feminist-views, they still suffer oppression as a result of patriarchal traditions and perspectives (OPREA, 2005). Aside from the internalization of social norms, this difficulty arises out of concern regarding damaging family relationships. To make a break from the gender expectations of the homeland in order to embrace the social norms of the land of immigration has resulted in tension and conflict. This is especially difficult for young women still living with their parents or grandparents, as our biographers expressed in their stories. The notion of "the uncanny in social violence" (GAMPEL, 2000, p.49) sheds new light on interpersonal dynamics and social forces. This concept points to the suffering of women who feel they must isolate the everyday patriarchal oppression they experience into an "unknowable mental

space" (GAMPEL, 2000, p.59). This concept may also help us understand why there is not more resistance to social control on the part of such women. [62]

Our biographers' choices also illustrate the notion of "class habitus," which BOURDIEU (1984) has described as "the internalized form of class condition and of the conditionings it entails" (p.101). Such internalized perceptions influence choices and practices that are undertaken in order to indicate one is cultivated, rather than vulgar (BOURDIEU, 1984). These efforts to maintain one's status as part of a distinguished class may contribute to the transnationality of social control. Female first-generation immigrants may move from one socio-cultural context to another, and female second-generation immigrants may not have been personally exposed to the socio-cultural context of their parents' native land. Nevertheless, to the degree they abide by the patriarchal social pressures of their ancestral homeland, they are perpetuating a form of social control as remembered experiences from the homeland. Such cultural transmission in the form of memories, and directly through the restrictions and domination of immigrant women, represent aspects of gender ideals both for the young women who adhere to such norms and those who reinforce them. Transnationalism in this interpretation is not simply about physical movement from one place to another but also represents the mimesis of cultural norms taken from the homeland and transmogrified in the host country. As such we argue for a consideration of mental transnationalities, wherein the mimicry of a cultural homeland is maintained in the social spaces of a host nation through immigrant lives and behaviors. [63]

#### **4.3 Dominating discourse**

It is also useful to explore discourse when considering how social control functions in individuals' lives. As FOUCAULT (1980) has demonstrated, truth and knowledge are contested notions socially constructed through discourse for the purpose of domination. When one considers the social control of young women, "the rhetoric of hegemonic masculinity" relies upon a discourse of honor and shame in order to preserve social inequalities (LINDISFARNE, 1994, p.85). It has been stated that women are not "controllers of their own discourse" (HERZFELD, 1991, p.79). Moreover, discursive practices, such as verbal forms of admonishing, disapproving, and threatening, reinforce "the disciplining and policing of girls' behaviors" (MADRIZ, 1997, p.343). [64]

These notions of dominating discourse were evident in the stories of our biographers. One way in which social control was implemented in their lives was through a certain discourse of honor and shame. The words "proper" and "respectable" were repeatedly used. Also negative words such as "puta" were used in an effort to keep these young women in line with gender expectations. Parents' verbalization of what friends or boyfriends were or were not acceptable in turn directly affected how immigrant-women behaved in everyday life. At the same time, we noted a counter-discourse emerge in the use of nonsensical sounds such as "la la la" and "da da da." These noises reflect a discourse of

resistance against verbal forms of domination used to control these women's lives and activities. [65]

Thus, relocation from one country to another does not necessarily alter the patterns and contents of discourse which are used in controlling girls and young women. It may be that, in succeeding generations, such dominating discourse would be modified or altered due to the cultural influences of the new homeland. For first- and second-generation immigrants, however, gender expectations of the ancestral homeland are carried across sea or land in the minds and mouths of their own relatives. [66]

#### **4.4 Concluding thoughts**

The women whose stories were analyzed for this article experienced numerous restrictions. Their families came to the United States seeking asylum and greater freedom—whether from communism in Cuba or from political or criminal violence in Haiti. For these young women, however, there were limits on this freedom. They continued to be subject to the controlling processes of social conditioning directed towards girls and young unmarried women. They had to negotiate differing social influences. They had to find a way to have agency while maintaining family ties. While they had internal conflicts concerning the restrictions on their freedom, in most cases the young women outwardly decided to abide by their families' social guidelines. If they did dare to break the "rules," they did so secretly. In some cases, these women believed they had been "programmed" by their respective cultural regulations. Even so, there was little deviation among them for rebelling against the hegemonic restrictions so dominant in their lives. This is reflective of the effect of the controlling processes they were exposed to, as well as their class habitus (BOURDIEU, 1984). [67]

These stories of social control and maneuvering through gendered expectations emerged as these women simply responded to the request to tell their life stories. They had not been asked specifically about gender-related issues; they were not asked about social control. This highlights all the more the impact of this aspect of their lives. In the process of simply telling their life stories, these elements emerged again and again. Clearly, social control plays a significant role in the lives of these women, further underlining why the emergent notion of the "transnationality of social control" merits more research. [68]

By examining the lived experiences of women from Cuban and Haitian descent, our findings also demonstrate how forms of cultural behavior are transmitted and reified by immigrant groups from homelands to host countries. To this end, Cuban female-émigrés and Haitian female-émigrés are subject to similar forms of restrictions as their kinsfolk from their homelands through the hegemonic models of cultural norms which are reinforced by immigrant experiences. The transfer of cultural transmissions of immigrant Cubans and Haitians from their homelands such as the use of discursive practices for distinguishing between acceptable and unacceptable behaviors in regard to female actions are also fragments of historical remembrances stemming from European colonialism and the

maintenance of concepts such as honor and shame for controlling women. As we have argued throughout this article, the significance of discussing the "transnationality of social control" is not simply to point out the complexities of spatial relations in regard to gender and across international boundaries but also toward understanding how cultural mentalities continue as remembered and relived forms of identity awareness through time and space as layered forms of communal cohesion from homelands to host nations. [69]

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