

THE UNWANTED GIFT: HAITIANS AND THE LEGACY OF THE BLOOD SCANDAL

Nathalie Tran and Johanne Charbonneau, Chaire de recherche sur les aspects sociaux du don de sang
 Université INRS, Centre – Urbanisation Culture Société, Montréal, Canada
www.uqs.inrs.ca/chaire-don-sang

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

→ A steady supply of blood is crucial to a nation's health. But today's challenges are somewhat different than yesterdays: both technological advances and an increasing number of medical interventions combined with an intensification of migration have resulted in a greater demand for specific phenotypic blood.

→ In March 1983, in the face of an unknown virus later known to be HIV-AIDS, the Canadian Red Cross asked that "homosexuals, hemophiliacs, heroin users and recently emigrated Haitians" (4H Club) voluntarily abstain from donating blood. The impact of this auto-exclusion still reverberates through the Haitian community today and hinders blood donation from a community in need of phenotypic blood to treat sickle cell anemia. Accounting for 52.5% of Blacks in the province of Québec (91,435 in 2006), the Haitian community is the focal point of this presentation.

→ Using a constructivist approach to ethnicity, which requires an examination of both internal and external borders of the Haitian community in Montreal, this poster explores the various factors that affect how members of the Haitian community view and practice blood donation today in light of this past. This constructivist approach calls for the definition of a community via a double movement: through its identity markers (defined internally by members) and its the external borders (how the community is viewed by institutions/majority + minority groups).

→ Our sources combine first-hand interviews as well as secondary sources such as Krever Commission testimonies, audits, statistical data, and historical reviews.

→ Carried out in 2009-2010, this qualitative study explores how blood donation is perceived among ethnocultural communities in Montreal, Québec, Canada. A total of 83 semi-structured interviews were conducted with blood agency personnel, community leaders and blood donors from an array of ethnic and religious backgrounds, including 7 people of Haitian origin (leaders + donors).

OBJECTIVES

The study's overall aim is to qualitatively examine motivations, practices and cultural beliefs of minority donors and their communities so as to better understand the socio-cultural background of blood donation in order to develop strategies to seek their collaboration in the organization of blood drives and recruit more donors of diverse origins. More specifically, with regards to Haitians, this present poster reinterprets blood donation practices by contextualizing them within the community's historical presence in the province: its unique relationship with Québec society will help shed light on the legacy and scars of the blood scandal.

2. HAITIAN COMMUNITY SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHICS

- Since 1969, Haiti has been in the top 10 countries of immigration in Québec
- 91,435 Haitians in Québec (2006), up from 5,225 (in 1971) / 93.8% reside in the Montreal urban area
- 70.7% of Haitians (aged 15 years-old +) were born abroad (1st generation) / 26.4% were born in Canada (2nd generation)
- Young population structure: those 15 years-old and younger account for 27.4% of the community (vs. 16.8% Québec average)
- Account for 52.5% of the province's 188 100 Black population

Haitian immigration waves to Québec

Pre - 1960: HAITIAN ELITE

- Religious and cultural exchanges prior to 1940: Quebecers and Haitians are Catholic French-speakers
- 1950's university students + intermarriages
- By the 1950's, approx. 20 Haitian families lived in Québec

FIRST WAVE (1960 - 1972): PROFESSIONNALS

- Repression by Papa Doc (Duvalier) against the intellectuals + expansion of the public sector in Québec = Thousands of Haitian professionals (doctors, nurses, teachers, etc.) flee Haiti for Québec
- The Haitian elite is very well integrated into Québec society

SECOND WAVE (1972 - mid 1980's): PEASANTS AND WORKING CLASS

- Repression by Baby Doc affects peasants and working class + Québec in need of non specialized labour force = Thousands (2000/year in 1970's) less fortunate and less educated Haitians flee Haiti for Québec
- Bad working conditions and emergence of discrimination against Haitians
- Change in federal immigration law in 1972: 1500 working class Haitians are faced with expulsion. 55% were able to obtain their visa with support from the majority society.
- Early 1980's: economic crisis = increased discrimination against immigrants, including Haitians
- The class difference between the first and second waves hinder community solidarity

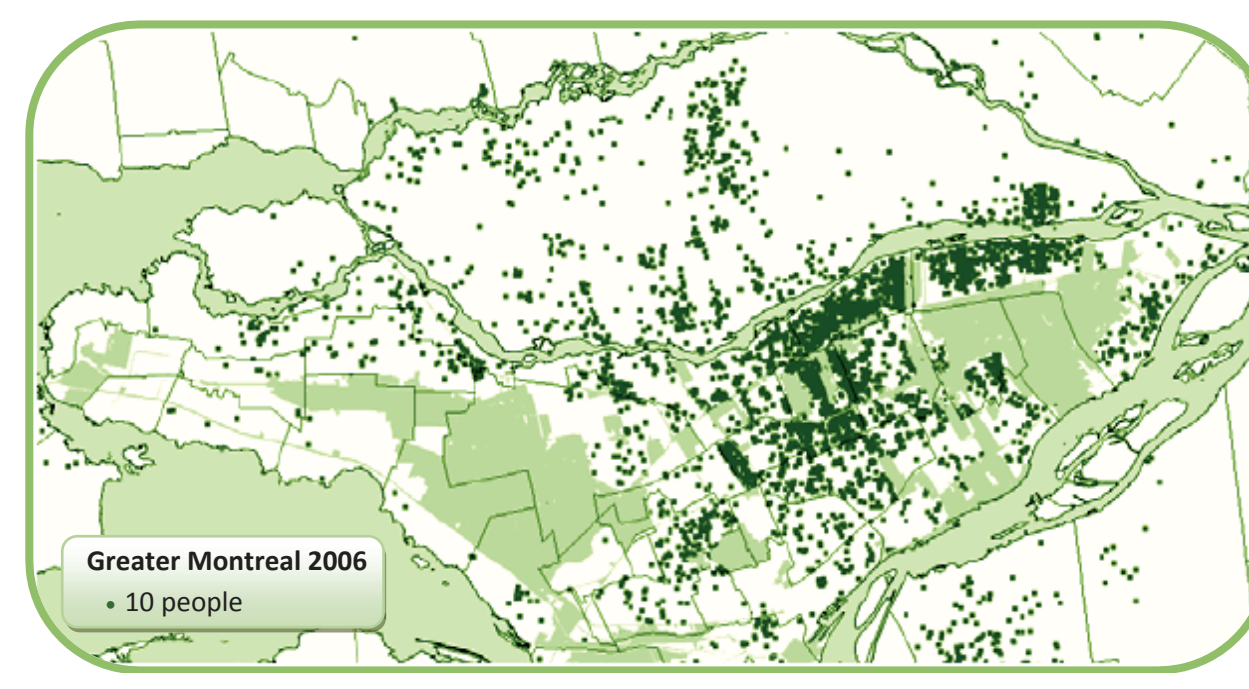
mid 1980's - 2000: PARENTS AND REFUGEES

- Family reunification and refugees
- Bill C-24 : immigrant admission now contingent on labour market needs
- 2010: Haiti is the 4th country of immigration in Québec
- Second generation of Haitians are now adults : faced with social and economic integration problems

Identity markers

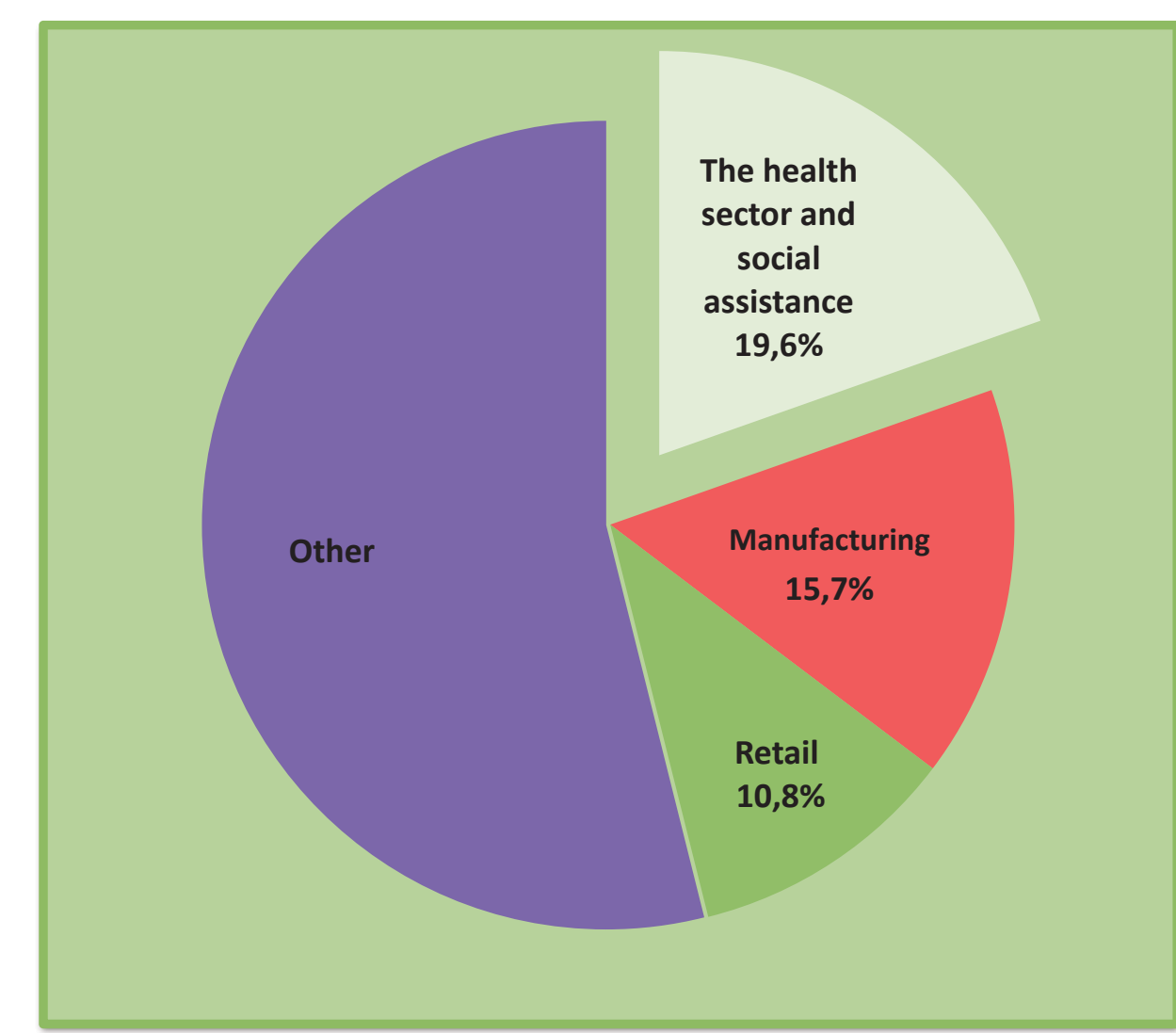
- **Language** 98,1% French / 39,1% Creole as mother tongue / 74% use French at home and 82,4% at work
- **Culture** Haitian writers and poets have had considerable visibility and impact in Québec as well as in the Haitian Diaspora. More recently, Haitians have been invested in the province's star system.
- **Religion** Religious practices and values (Catholic, Protestant, Voodoo)
- **Economic niches** Health sector – professional immigration wave brought trained doctors and nurses (health sector) + scientists / in 1990's Haitian women represented 25% of nursing students in colleges / Since mid 1980's, Haitians are well represented in the taxi industry
- **Visible minority** 95,8% of Québec Haitians consider themselves part of a visible minority group / 42% identify with a hyphen identity (Haitian-Quebecer); 29% with a unique ethnic origin; 17% with a Canadian one and only 8% with a Black identity (Labelle 2001)
 - Haitians are closer to the majority population than other Black communities in Montreal
- **Black communities** Historical, geographical, and cultural divide between French-speaking Haitians (recent immigration), and English-speaking Caribbean (older immigration) in Montreal / The promotion of a "Black" identity is contested within the Haitian community
- **Ties with Haiti** 1st + 2nd generation have symbolic ties to Haiti / Many maintain strong transnational links (sending money, visits, etc.) = reinforced after the 2010 Haitian earthquake
- **Generations** Visibly growing gap between 1st and 2nd generation: 1st generation of professional exiles is successful, socially and economically integrated / 2nd generation (youth) anchor their future in Québec but is faced with 28,2% unemployment rate vs. 13% for the Greater Montreal area = increasing social discrimination, racism and marginalisation which has led to a rise in a more racialized identity
 - Though young Haitians might feel closer to a racialized identity, the idea of belonging to the larger Black community remains disputed

Geographical repartition of Haitian-born immigrants - Montreal area



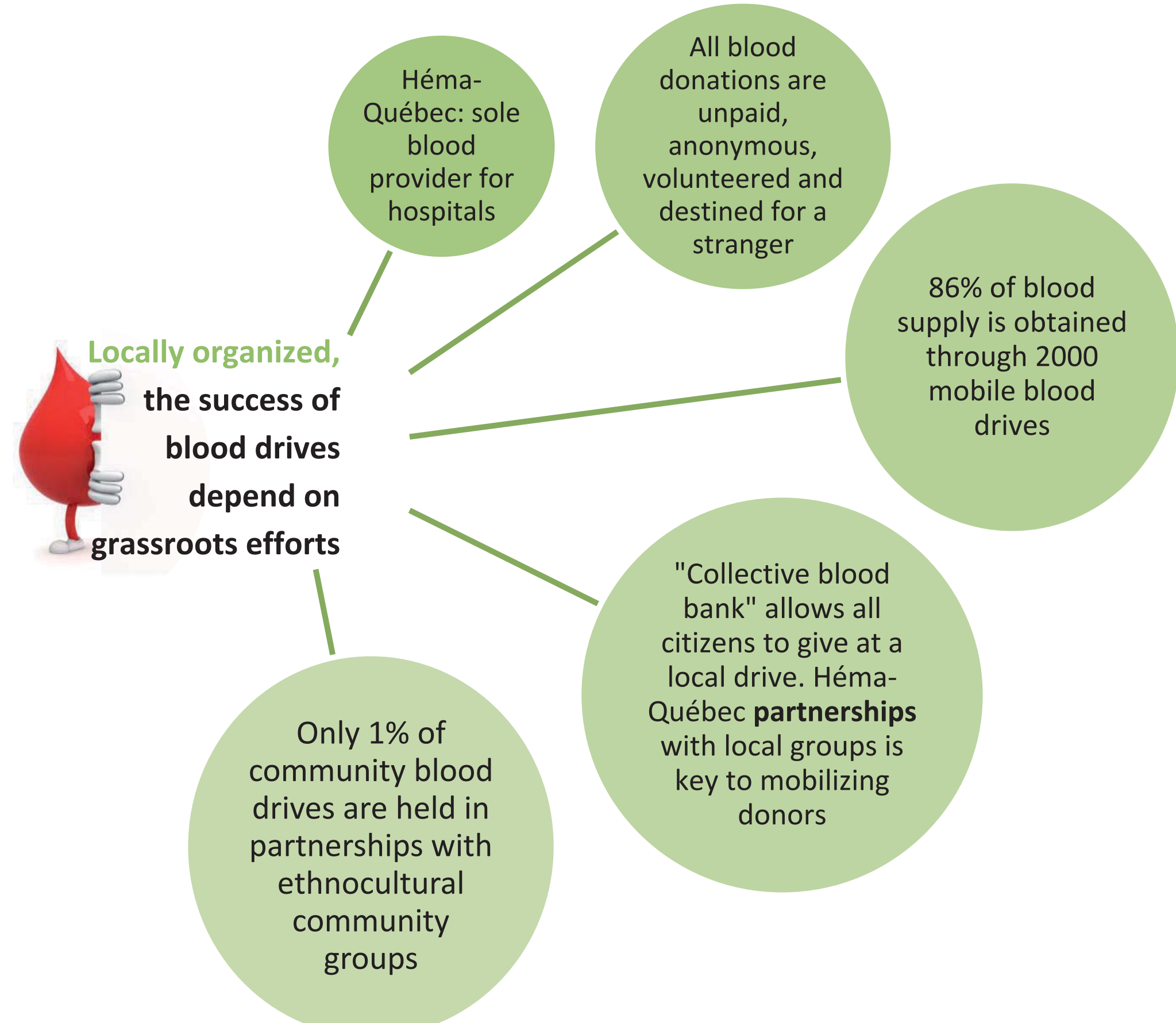
Source: Farah Fouron (2010), Direction du développement économique et urbain, Ville de Montréal

Main employment sectors



Source: Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles (2010)

3. BLOOD DONATION IN QUÉBEC



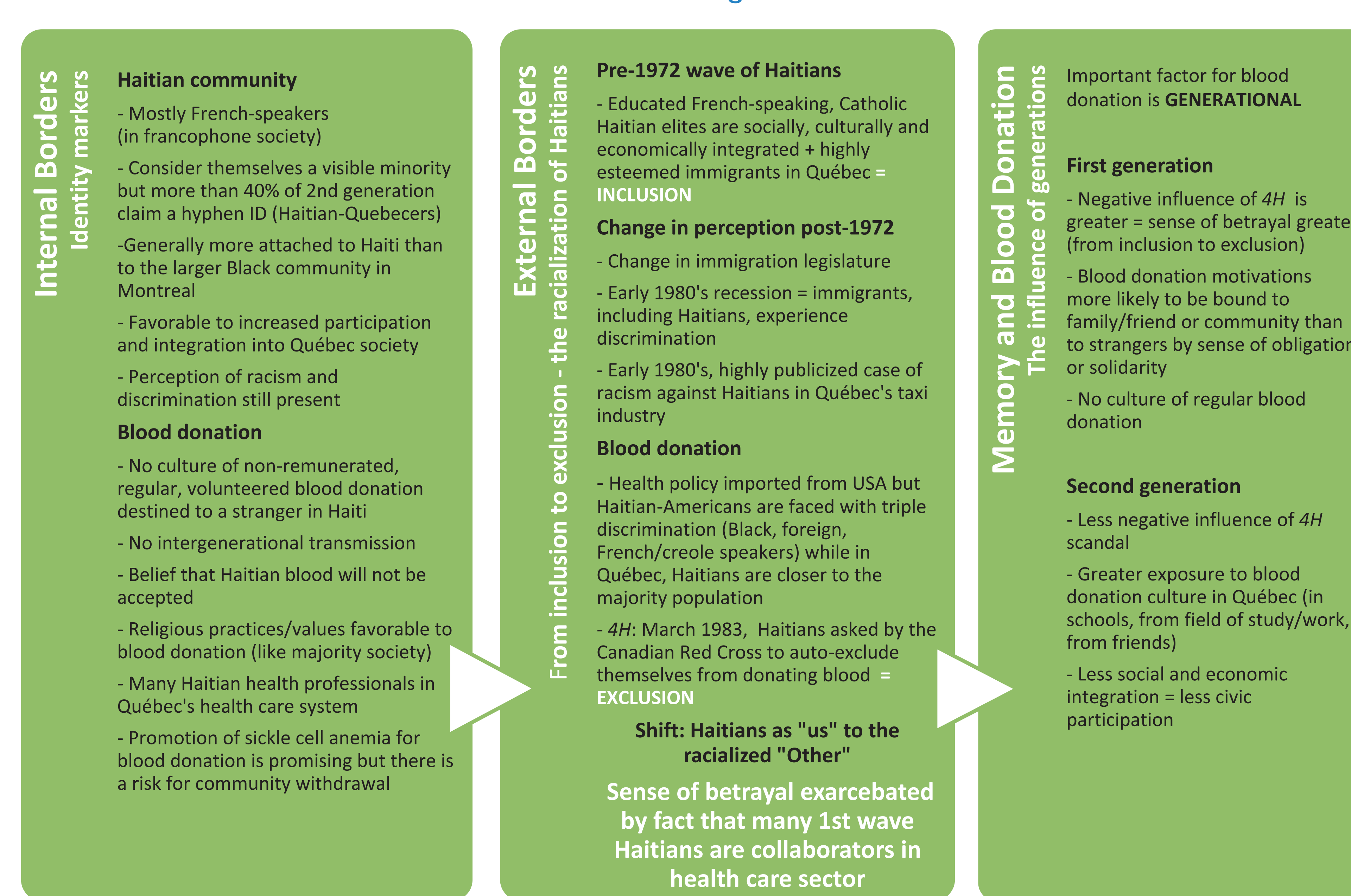
Chronology of events

- 1st Haitian community blood drive held in 1982 (pre-scandal): only one blood donor from outside the health community
- In March 1983, following in the footsteps of the CDC in the United States, the Canadian Red Cross issued a statement asking the 4H to exclude themselves without taking into account the importance + visibility of the Haitian community in Québec which greatly differs from the Haitian-American one.
- Following this first statement in which they were not consulted beforehand, Haitian leaders met with Red Cross representatives to negotiate their withdrawal in the 4H Club but fail to do so = complaints + demonstrations by Haitians
- In protest with 4H, Haitian nurses boycott community blood drive
- In the following years, restrictions towards the exclusion of Haitians simply disappear without any public announcement
- Beginning of public hearings at the Royal Commission of Inquiry on the Blood System in Canada (Krever Commission, final report 1997)
- Today, there is an urgent need for phenotypic blood to treat sickle cell anemia but Héma-Québec, now the province's unique blood supplier, must find ways to recruit Haitian donors

4. RESULTS: Blood donation and Haitians

Blood donation in Haiti	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of voluntary, non-remunerated and regular donation to strangers • Blood donors = negative connotation (seen as being poor)
Motivations for donating blood in Québec	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Haitians don't define themselves as regular donors • Blood is preferably given to a family member or close acquaintance (sense of obligation, personal request to donate) • Blood donors are mostly 1st wave Haitians and from middle and upper social classes • Blood donation is consistent with religious values/practices
Other priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are other priorities within the community such as finding employment and housing for recent immigrants, dealing with youth's social integration and discrimination as well as sending money home.
4H	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Haitians did not give blood before the scandal + recent immigrants rarely give blood = the community feels like it was wrongly targeted by the blood agency • Haitians were the most visible and audible of the 4H Club = easy target for discrimination • No scientific proof of the link between Haitians and being an AIDS carrier • Real consequences for the community = "Haitians are vectors of AIDS in Québec = seen as contaminated = must be avoided" (witness testimony at the Royal Commission) • Sense of betrayal heightened by the fact that many renowned Haitian born professionals worked in the health sector
Memories + Myths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belief that Haitian blood is thrown away or not used (a belief also shared with other Black communities in Montreal) • Sense that Haitian blood is not accepted = do not want to be turned away at blood drive • Informants feel they are not greeted properly by blood drive staff (looked at suspiciously, perception that staff might want to exclude them) = can deter subsequent blood donations • Legacy of 4H : resentment still lingers in the Haitian community = many await public apology
Sickle cell anemia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different levels of knowledge about sickle cell anemia. Few links made with the need for phenotypic blood • Most informants believe that if Haitians were more aware of this medical need, more would give blood
Generational differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blood donation: no intergenerational transmission between the 1st and 2nd generations • Sense in the community that targeting Haitian youth = better recruitment outcome

5. DISCUSSION: FROM "US" TO "THEM" – the influence of generations on blood donation



CONCLUSION

A DESIRE FOR MORE FLUID BORDERS

- Community leaders ask for more porous borders
- Héma-Québec → Haitian community: spokesperson, ethnic media
- Héma-Québec ↔ Haitian community: joint organization of blood drives
- Héma-Québec ← Haitian community: improving reception at blood drives, revision of questionnaire, better management of refusals, employee diversification

Risk of closing borders ← X →

- Sickle cell anemia: a motivation that can also lead to community withdrawal
- Youth: a deficit in economic integration that fuels a more racialized identity



MAIN SOURCES

- Dejean, P. (1978). Les Haïtiens au Québec. Montréal, Presses de l'Université du Québec.
- Farmer, P. (2006). AIDS and accusation: Haiti and the geography of blame. Berkeley, University of California Press.
- Icart, L. (2006). "Haïti-en-Québec: notes pour une histoire". *Ethnologies* 28 (1): 45-79.
- Krever Commission (1997). Final report. *Commission of Inquiry on the Blood System in Canada*.
- Labelle, M., D. Salée, et al. (2011). *Incorporation citoyenne et/ou exclusion? La deuxième génération issue de l'immigration haïtienne et jamaïcaine*. CRIEC, La Fondation canadienne des relations raciales.
- Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles (2010). *Portrait statistique de la population d'origine ethnique haïtienne recensée au Québec en 2006*. Montréal, Government of Québec: 9.
- National, public relations cabinet (2009). *Audit auprès de membres de la communauté haïtienne de Montréal*. Montréal: 81.
- Statistics Canada (2008). *La mosaïque ethnoculturelle du Canada, 2006 census*. No. 97-562. 39 pages.
- Testimonies of Montreal's Haitian community (September 26th 1994). Transcriptions of the Krever Commission, Ottawa.

CHAIRE DE RECHERCHE **Aspects sociaux du don de sang**



Produits sanguins
 Cellules souches
 Tissus humains

FONDATION
 HÉMA-QUÉBEC

INRS
 Université d'avant-garde