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Landscapes of Development: The Haitian Peasantry and the Historical Evolution of Haiti's Landscape

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The Haitian Peasantry and the Historical Evolution of Haiti's Landscape

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Introduction: 100 Years of Independence

In January of 1904, Haiti celebrated its one hundredth year of independence. This was truly a remarkable occasion – land that was once prized by European powers as the pinnacle of plantation slave colonies had been made into a sovereign state by a slave army, just a few years after America won independence from Britain. Haiti was the result of a unique slave revolution and it was the world's first black republic. Haitian President Nord Alexis marked the anniversary by commissioning a new national anthem; *La Dessalinienne*, named after ex-slave General Jean-Jacques Dessalines, reminds Haitians to always remember their history and, above all, to remain united as a people.

Not all Haitians held such positive views of their country's fledgling century. Among those who had been disillusioned by one hundred years of independent Haiti was Dr. Rosalvo Bobo, who would go on to lead the Caco rebellion a decade later that prompted American military intervention. In a centennial address given in late 1903, Bobo pushed existential questions about centennial celebrations: "Centennial of our freedom? No. Centennial of blacks enslaving blacks." ¹ Among other things, Bobo declared that 1904 marked the centennial of "our systematic retrogression...our fraternal hatreds...humiliation and, perhaps, the definitive degradation of the black race, by its Haitian representatives." ² What was it about Haitian history that prompted Dr. Bobo, a prominent politician at the time, to make such dramatically negative assessments of his country? This question will not necessarily be answered here, but it does reveal a great deal about the contested nature of Haitian history.

The sentiments in this speech reflect a serious gap between Haitian state and populace. Nine decades after Bobo gave his address, Haitian historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot would argue that the true Haitian nation was made up by the rural peasantry, and that the state has

¹ Rosalvo Bobo, "Dr. Rosalvo Bobo's centennial address," (1903), translated by P.K. Volkov (2004).

² Ibid.

maintained itself through a parasitic relationship with peasants. This relationship has its origins in the labor and social structures of colonial Haiti (Saint-Domingue).

At the apex of the French empire, Haiti was its crown jewel because of its enormous capacity for sugar production. Sugarcane production dominated Haiti's colonial landscape. Unlike most other European slave colonies Haiti became independent early in the nineteenth century and has 200 years of postcolonial history. While the French flag is gone from Haiti, it is not entirely fair to term the 200 years since independence 'postcolonial'. In many ways, the same political and ideological structures continue to colonize Haitians. International aid policy is particularly significant in Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. Regionally, it is one of the United States' top recipients of aid funds at about \$300 million annually.

In former colonies like Haiti, studying landscape shift can provide unique insight into the impact of public policies and social institutions. Geographers have focused on human culture as the agent in alterations of the physical landscape since the 1920s.³ In Haiti, studying landscape shift provides a particularly important perspective on Haitian history because of the central role that shifts in human-environmental relationships have played in some of the country's most important transitions. Plantation agriculture completely changed the ecological and the racial landscapes of the island, transforming a forest sparsely inhabited by Amerindians into a black sugar production hub. Black slaves fought for their independence in the 1790s because of their desire to own land and be beholden to no master. The US spends \$38 million annually on agricultural development in Haiti via USAID, and this work has a significant impact on Haiti's ecology.

Beyond these impacts, however, is a more drastic reconfiguration of the labor and social structures of Haiti. Trends towards urbanization over the past few decades have made it necessary to reconsider our understanding of what it means to be a peasant in Haiti. By focusing

³ Carl O. Sauer, *The Morphology of Landscape*. (Berkeley, CA: U of California, 1925).

on the evolving relationship between the peasantry and the Haitian landscape, we can come to a more nuanced understanding of why economic development has left the Haitian nation behind. Understanding these unintended consequences of external interventions in Haiti is essential to effective economic development in the 21st century.

Chapter 1: Patterns of Extraction in the Haitian Landscape

Why Haiti?

In many ways, Haiti's history with colonialism runs counter to typical narratives of colonial legacy. The Haitian Revolution was a violent and definitive rejection of the prevailing beliefs about race and political freedom of the early 19th century. A few decades before Haitian independence, the United States declared independence on the principle that all men are created equal; yet the enslavement of blacks loomed as a notable asterisk to this principle. For the United States, France, and all other colonial powers in the Atlantic, Haiti's independence represented a threat to their worldview. If blacks could govern themselves in a republic modeled on Western enlightenment philosophy, then the slave economies and racial hierarchies that built the colonial power of the West would be drawn into serious doubt.

For this reason, the West was intent on isolating an independent Haiti from the rest of the world. France forced Haiti to put itself into extreme debt by collected 'reparations' for the capital lost with Haitian independence, i.e. slaves who belonged to French planters. These reparations were largely extracted in the form of expensive mahogany trees, beginning a cycle of environmental degradation that would leave Haiti almost entirely deforested. As Sidney Mintz observed, Haiti was largely relegated to economic irrelevance in the 19th century. Haiti became relevant to the West again in the early 20th century as Wilsonian ideology drove the United States to involve itself in Haiti's internal affairs. America's involvement in the First World War prompted questions about self-determination in the context of colonialism. The US entry into the war was justified by the claim that it was defending the rights of European countries to self-determine their governments. Wilson's self-proclaimed role was "primarily as the defender of the 'weaker nations' of Europe."⁴ If Europe had the right to choose its forms of government,

⁴ Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism*. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 24.

then why did the same principle not apply to the colonies in the Americas, Africa, Asia and the Pacific? Wilson had to revise his colonial policy - he maintained the validity of his claims about human rights and the equality of nations, but also argued that it is the role of powerful societies to instruct weak societies on their values through the violent mechanisms of colonialisms. This position is perfectly consistent with the logic of white supremacy; nonwhites are less civilized than whites.

Today, Haiti is a symbol of poverty and failed foreign assistance. By nearly every metric, it is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, and it is the only country in the Western Hemisphere with U.N. Peacekeeping military forces present. Not only does Haiti receive \$300 million in foreign assistance from the United States annually, but in 2010, in the wake of an earthquake that killed hundreds of thousands and leveled much of the Haitian capital, the United States spent over \$1.5 billion in recovery efforts. What do these efforts mean in the context of Haiti's unique colonial history? This question has been part of the reason for this focus on Haiti.

Social hierarchies constructed on the basis of skin color in colonial Saint-Domingue did not vanish after independence. A light-skinned elite has controlled economic and political resources in Haiti since white colonial administrators were expelled. Skin and social status in Haiti have a complex and powerful relationship, defined by many factors other than skin color; distinctions between French speakers and Creole speakers, urban and rural, cosmopolitan and uneducated all define an individual's social standing. Tensions between these categories of people and the influence of foreign actors have entirely redefined the landscape of Haiti. The goal of this research is to take a closer look at this shift and assess contemporary trends in landscape shift in Haiti.

Landscape as an analytical tool

The experience of place is determined by a wide array of subjective interpretations, drawn from the landscape around us and our experiences. By historically situating the material and nonphysical elements of landscape, it becomes possible to see the effects that histories have had on a place. In this way, landscape analysis can inform decisions and policies that shape the landscapes of the future. The forces of social and economic history have made their mark around the world, an impact that can be interpreted with landscape as a tool of cultural, historical, and policy analysis.

Sharon Zukin proposes a definition of landscape as not only one's environment, but also "an ensemble of material and social practices and their symbolic representations."⁵ Haiti's landscape can be analyzed as both a material and symbolic product of power struggles. Borrowing from Zukin's definition, we can see that Haiti's landscape "represents the architecture of social class, gender, and race relations imposed by powerful institutions."⁶ A glance at Haitian environmental history reveals that the interactions between powerful institutions and their physical surroundings involve the same processes identified by Zukin. The most significant environmental shifts in Haiti's history have involved external systems of power. With this understanding, we can contextualize events and conditions that are otherwise problematic. Like Zukin, I argue that landscape can "make us more aware of the asymmetry of economic power."⁷ I go beyond her focus on economic inequity, however, and consider how landscape can be used as an analytical tool for deepening knowledge of the complex ways in which people construct livelihoods. With landscape as an analytical tool, we can better understand how Haitian peasants make a life for themselves while negotiating and struggling with a disastrous government, foreign military occupations, environmental catastrophes, and

⁵ Sharon Zukin, *Landscapes of Power: From Detroit to Disney World*. (Berkeley: University of California, 1991), 16.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

one of the densest networks of international aid in the world. This analysis reveals competing ontologies of land use and ownership, as well as value judgments based in ideologies about class and race.

With Zukin's definition in mind, landscape can be a particularly relevant tool for the analysis of the catastrophic trend of poverty-driven environmental degradation in the tropics. This phenomenon has completely changed, for better or worse, the lives of many millions and perhaps billions of people. Deforestation in Latin America, desertification in West Africa, erosion and flooding in South Asia – all are permanent, and all are fates shaped by poverty. I propose landscape as a tool of great value for getting at both the core pressures and the broader forces that have irreversibly changed our planet.

A number of inquiries ultimately point to deforestation as one of the most significant causes of endemic poverty in Haiti.⁸ Ecologically, deforestation involves a wide range of issues including soil health, air quality, and wildlife management. This phenomenon is widespread – tropical forests in Africa, Asia, and Latin America are disappearing at alarming rates, and those rates are accelerating.⁹ This threatens 1) the economic benefits forests provide, especially in rural markets, 2) the water-shed and climate control functions played by forests, and 3) the people who rely on forests for food and shelter. Malcolm Gillis argues that because deforestation is a permanent process ecologically, it also causes permanent poverty. These processes are clearly symmetric in their causal relationship – as Gillis puts it, “poverty is killing the forest. Poor landless Ghanaians and Ivoirians and Indonesians and Burmese have practiced destructive slash-and-burn agriculture, not because they are ignorant, but because they have no other options.”¹⁰ Gillis, however, misses a key point here. He is right that poverty and deforestation cause each other, but he is wrong to point to farmers as the only agent involved. The deforestation that he laments is not the result of a causal chain– poverty causes bad agricultural

⁸ E.g. Freeman 2014, Smucker 2000, Murray 1977.

⁹ Malcolm Gillis, "Tropical Deforestation." *Vital Speeches of the Day*. 62.12 (1996), 373.

¹⁰ Ibid.

practices causes deforestation – but rather of a more complex network of relationships between peasants, governments, and international institutions that are engaged in intense struggles for power.

Several key aspects of Haiti’s geographical landscape stand out at. The name ‘Haiti’ supposedly comes from the word for mountain in Taíno , the language of the island’s original inhabitants. The name is appropriate, as the country’s terrain is almost entirely steep slopes. The mountainous landscape has been crucial in the history of agriculture, resistance, and rural life in Haiti. An aerial view of the border between Hispaniola’s two countries shows a jagged line, forested on the Dominican side and bare on the Haitian side. Once a rainforest, Haiti is now nearly 100% deforested. This fact has redefined lives both urban and rural, dictating the flows of commodities and labor in markets. Haiti’s urban landscape came under closer focus after the 2010 earthquake levelled much of its capital city, killed hundreds of thousands, and affected the lives of all Haitians. Much of the loss of life during the earthquake can be ascribed to the architecture of Port-au-Prince, whose steep hillsides are occupied by dangerously constructed homes stacked on top of one another. A closer look at these features of Haiti’s landscape can guide us to a stronger grasp of just how Haiti came to become what it is today and where it, as a place and as a people, is going. More specifically, I interpret Haiti’s landscape as both a material and symbolic product of power struggles.

My approach draws on the tradition of political ecology in that I am interested in the political dimensions of ecological processes. At its basic level, political ecology is a theoretical framework for examining the interactions between people and the physical environment as part of world systems. This kind of approach allows us to view ecological processes like deforestation and soil degradation as part of a broader “movement of resources from the countryside into urban and European/American markets.”¹¹ I step away from an approach grounded in political

¹¹ Scott Freeman. “ ‘Cutting Earth’: Haiti, Soil Conservation, and the Tyranny of Projects.” *Columbia University* (2014), 9.

ecology, however, by focusing on conflicting perceptions of landscape as a driving force throughout Haitian history. This approach can also inform our understanding of the relationship between foreign NGOs and peasants. In Papua New Guinea, for example, an analysis of divergent conceptions of development between NGOs and residents of conservation areas showed that these conflicting ontologies resulted in strained relationships and ultimately the failure of conservation efforts. Foreign conservationists wanted to prevent changes in the local ecology, while the people with whom they worked sought change in the form of economic development.¹² I argue that a similar divergence in ontologies of land use is central to understanding the evolving Haitian landscape and the failure of economic development in Haiti.

Sugar and Landscape

Part of my approach to an analysis of Haiti as state and nation is to focus on the forces that underlie major shifts in the material and symbolic landscape of Haiti. Focusing on commodities should be an essential element of this kind of analysis, particularly in a former colony like Haiti that was structured around intensive agricultural production. Sugar undoubtedly stands out as a powerful force in Haitian history that has been at the center of the evolution of the Haitian landscape.

In his study of the history of sugar as a commodity, Sidney Mintz presents a thorough analysis of the growth of sugar as a dietary staple in the West and its relationship with the emergence of free market capitalism.¹³ Colonial Saint-Domingue was completely structured around sugar production on plantations. Known as the “Pearl of the Antilles,” it was the most profitable colony in the French Empire. Mintz describes a rapid expansion of sugar cultivation without significant agro-technological development to accompany it in 18th century Saint-Domingue. For sugar planters in Saint-Domingue, innovation was simply an unnecessary facet of production with a predictable and exploitable source of slave labor. Since no one 'owned' or

¹² Paige West, *Conservation Is Our Government Now: The Politics of Ecology in Papua New Guinea*. (Durham: Duke UP, 2006).

¹³ Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. (New York, NY: Viking, 1985).

occupied the vast expanses of seemingly fertile land that was being colonized, there was no need to be efficient in production; they could simply cultivate more land. This phenomenon fits into a broader narrative that permeates colonial discourse about the Caribbean and the New World as a whole, one that characterizes land and resources in the Americas as infinite. Because this narrative relies on the assumption that most of the New World was essentially up for grabs among European powers, it can be understood as an application of a terra nullius policy. Not only did colonizers view land as endless, but they also saw labor the same way, as we will observe in the development of the French slave economy. The immense scale of sugar production in colonial Saint-Domingue represents an ideology of land use – land is a medium for the extraction of resources (i.e. wealth) and nothing more. The immense scale of sugar cultivation in Saint-Domingue resulted in arguably “the most altered ecosystem on earth.”¹⁴

Industrial scale sugar production in colonial Saint-Domingue imposed extreme demands on the land itself. Sugar is an easy crop to grow in the tropics, but the impacts of vast monocultures of cane are severe on soil. If other crops, specifically legumes, are not planted among the cane, the soil becomes extremely and irreversibly degraded through erosion, water loss, nutrient loss, acidification, and a loss of organic matter.¹⁵ Deforestation of the low to mid mountain forests became widespread as French plantation owners cleared way for sugar plantations. The deforestation actually intensified after Haitian independence in 1804 because of France’s demand for ‘reparations’ in 1825. France organized an embargo that economically isolated Haiti and took reparations in wood. This is about the same time that mahogany became popular in French homes and churches.¹⁶ It is easy to see, then, the devastating combination of soil erosion and deforestation in an extremely mountainous tropical country: each rainy season, the soil is simply washed away.

¹⁴ Legrace Benson, “Haiti’s Elusive Paradise” in *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment*. Ed. Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey and George B. Handley, (New York: Oxford UP, 2011), 68.

¹⁵ Oliver Cheesman, *The Environmental Impacts of Sugar Production: The Cultivation and Processing of Sugarcane and Sugar Beet* (Wallington, UK: CABI International, 2004), 119-120.

¹⁶ Larry Luxner, “Former Envoy’s New Mission: Make Haiti Green Again.” *Washington Diplomat* 4 Feb. 2013

Colonial sugar production in Saint-Domingue is connected to poverty in contemporary Haiti by more than deforestation. Plantation sugar production systems, according to Mintz, were essential to the development of modern industrial capitalism. Part of this has to do with labor patterns. Sugar must be harvested and processed very quickly to avoid rotting; this results in a highly staggered, irregular schedule for workers (i.e. slaves). These scheduling demands necessitate what Mintz describes as “iron discipline at the base.”¹⁷ In Mintz’ analysis, sugar production and consumption cannot be viewed as distinct processes. Rather, both were essential elements of an emerging globalized economy:

“Slave and proletarian together powered the imperial economic system that kept the one supplied with manacles and the other with sugar and rum; but neither had more than minimal influence over it.”¹⁸

In colonies like Saint Domingue, sugar producing plantations created immense wealth for metropolises in France and England. This capital was essential to the development of industrial economies in the West. Furthermore, the consumption of sugar was integrated into the labor patterns of the working poor of Western countries. Sugar became a low cost source of calories and energy for the working poor and their families. The tea/coffee break became crucial to establishing longer work days. Mintz focuses on how agents both public and private facilitated the integration of sugar into the everyday routines of the British working poor. As the result of very deliberate policies, “the biggest sugar consumers, especially after 1850, came to be the poor.”¹⁹ Mintz illuminates a dynamic relationship between the production and consumption of sugar, ultimately arguing that sugar fulfills “the capitalistic view of the relation between labor productivity and consumption.”²⁰

Mintz’s analysis of the economic benefits garnered by colonial states via sugar plantations evokes a set of contemporary parallels. The economies of colonial states benefitted from the opening of “markets for such metropolitan products as machinery, cloth, instruments

¹⁷ Mintz (1985), 50.

¹⁸ Ibid, 184.

¹⁹ Ibid, 148.

²⁰ Ibid.

of torture, and other industrial commodities,”²¹ while contemporary Haiti represents a market for the aid industry in a number of ways. One of these markets is for agricultural products and foodstuffs. In sending large quantities of US produced food products, such as rice, to countries like Haiti as aid. US aid agencies undercut the domestic market for such products and make it impossible for Haitian peasants to compete.

An analysis of dietary trends among rural to urban migrant youths found that the growing population of young Haitians moving to cities is more likely to consume a diversity of high-sugar beverages and fried snacks.²² The widespread consumption of processed foods heavy in sugar and salt, as well as the emphasis by international aid agencies on the production of generally non-nutritious ‘cash crops’ and ‘staples’, in Haiti could result in the “Maldistribution of food within poor families [which] may constitute a kinds of culturally legitimized population control, since it systematically deprives children of protein,”²³ that Mintz noted in his analysis of industrial England. The context in Haiti, however, is clearly quite different from industrial England. In Haiti, the goal of weakening or decreasing a population contrasts with the goal in England of disciplining a labor force.

The probable nutritional consequences of processed foods high in sugar for postcolonial Haitians brings us to consider the broader meaning of sugar both grown and consumed in Haiti today. Generally speaking, the consumption of sugarcane in its raw form is common as a treat for children. One can purchase sticks of cane from a vendor who will strip the tough purple skin with a knife or machete, exposing the sweet white fibers. Children chew this like gum, and it is notorious for causing dental problems. Sugar is still grown in Haiti, but likely only sparsely in fertile lowlands. Processing and marketing would likely be a major impediment to most Haitian farmers. Still, as a product that is generally sold raw and processed elsewhere, sugar falls

²¹ Ibid.

²² Jessica Heckert, Sandra Boatemaa, and Claire E. Altman, "Migrant Youth's Emerging Dietary Patterns in Haiti: The Role of Peer Social Engagement." *Public Health Nutrition* 18:07 (2014), 1262-271.

²³ Mintz (1985), 149.

primarily in the category of a 'cash crop.' This designation is often used by development agencies for such a crop, and it is generally viewed as useful tool for economic growth/income generation.

Other than sugary sodas, fried foods, and raw cane, the most common form of sugar consumption in Haiti is rum drinking. The Haitian brand Barbancourt is popular among better-off Haitian men. For the less well-off majority, varieties of homemade liquor known as *clairin* is the drink of choice. The more expensive Barbancourt rum also carries significant symbolic meaning in vodou ceremonies. Rum is passed around at certain vodou celebrations, and is also offered as tribute to deities and ancestors.

Considerations of the place of sugar in contemporary Haiti posits an anthropological question about the meanings given to foods, and the customs attached to preparation and consumption of meals. For example, what kind of value is assigned to processed imported food as opposed to locally produced food? A study of obesity and nutrition in Guyana found that “a status symbol attaches to unhealthy eating habits, which becomes self-perpetuating through sheer copycat behavior.”²⁴ A similar association between processed foods from the West and higher social class may also exist in Haiti. The few Western grocery stores in cities are guarded by armed security personnel, and western food like pizza or French cuisine are common in expensive hotels or the wealthiest neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince.

In rural Haiti, perhaps more striking than what people eat is how they eat. Of particular note is the tradition of communal labor known as *konbit*. Typically in the context of farm work or construction, an individual provides a meal for friends and neighbors willing to work. This meal is almost always a large pot of rice and beans (likely American grown rice as it is the cheapest available). Many development projects adapt a food-for-work model comparable to a *konbit*. In fact, according to development analyst Glenn Smucker, food-for-work is perceived as

²⁴ Ramesh Gampat. *Guyana: From Slavery to Present*. (Bloomington, Indiana: Xilbris, 2015).

just as valuable as cash-for-work among Haitian farmers.²⁵ This observation indicates the severity of food shortages for Haitian farmers, and the direct provision of foreign produced food might actually undermine the broader economic objectives of development agencies. The food shortages that dictate consumption patterns among rural Haitians are significant as constraints, as Mintz argues “the choice itself is far less important than the constraints under which the choice is being made.”²⁶ The way in which development agencies distribute food through work programs also directly contradict Haitian conceptions of the meaning of food. In Haiti, “feeding others is the principal means for reproducing moral relations between individuals, ancestors, and spirits; that is, one is claimed as a member of the social unit through the serving of food.”²⁷ Development projects that offer meals in exchange for work deny the Haitian recipients a seat at the planning table (covered in more detail in Chapter 4), excluding them from the ‘social unit’ of development in Haiti.

Mintz traces the lingering effects of colonial policies in the supposedly post-colonial period. For example, ex-British colonies after the end of British slavery were characterized by the “Importation of contracted laborers from India, China, and elsewhere, and special legislation to keep freedmen from voting and acquiring land.”²⁸ And on the status of ex-colonies in the twentieth century, he writes that

“...they remain ‘sugar islands, their people doomed to straddle two economic adaptations – as reconstituted peasants and as rural proletarians – neither of which could have been economically secure...Now free but almost entirely ignored by the metropolis, the West Indian people became invisible, until their migration to the center of the empire brought them back into uneasy view more than a century later.”²⁹

²⁵ Smucker, White, and Bannister, “Land Tenure and the Adoption of Agricultural Technology in Haiti” *9th Biennial Conference of the International Association for the Study of Common Property* (Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe, June 2002).

²⁶ *Ibid*, 182.

²⁷ Chelsea Kivland “To Defend or Develop? On the Politics of Engagement among Local Organizations in Bel Air, Haiti, Before and After the Quake.” *Journal of Haitian Studies* 18:01 (2012), 80.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 176.

²⁹ Mintz 1985, 176.

Here Mintz gets at the essential conflict that illuminates the evolution of perceptions of landscape in Haiti: the disconnect between state and nation that emerges from the demands of the state that the peasantry reconstitute itself as proletariats, and the resistance of the peasantry to these demands based on their understandings of freedom.

One of the most important takeaways from Mintz is that there was nothing natural about the evolution of sugar from a luxury commodity into a common household good. Governments facilitated the growth of sugar with direct subsidies for sugar products like rum and through regulatory subsidies.³⁰ These policy actions were directly related to the establishment of Western power in the Caribbean. Mintz makes a strong case for the centrality of the accumulation of power to the history of the spread of sugar, arguing that “to omit the concept of power is to treat as indifferent the social, economic, and political forces that benefited from the steady spread of the demand for sugar.”³¹ This relationship which places the colony as provider, supporter, and booster for the metropolis persists in the postcolonial setting. The cultivation of sugar in French Saint-Domingue is part of larger historical patterns of extraction that characterize the Haitian landscape. By considering these patterns of extraction in a contemporary context, we begin to understand that “the movement of resources from the countryside into urban and European/American markets is part and parcel of the deforestation and degradation that occurs.”³² By focusing on the Haitian landscape over time, we can understand that the extraction of labor and resources from the peasantry creates the endemic poverty that plagues them. Peasants are not inherently poor – a peasant who can feed her family and participate unhindered in small markets with the produce of her own land might very well consider herself rich. Poverty among peasants in Haiti is the result of a complex set of factors that a closer look at Haitian history in the next chapter may help to clarify.

³⁰ Ibid, 170-71.

³¹ Ibid, 166.

³² Freeman, 9.

Chapter 2: Haiti Over Time

Early Amerindians

Haiti stands out as unique in many ways, yet a narrative of the nation's history involves many familiar trends – the struggle for ex-colonies to establish themselves in the international order, the emergence of unique creole cultures in the New World, the inequalities of contemporary globalization – all are stories that we can get a better sense of by taking a closer look at Haitian history. The land now known as Haiti was originally occupied by Taíno Arawak Amerindians who are thought to have migrated by sea from South America about seven thousand years ago. By 1492, the Taíno were primarily an agricultural society, and numbered about 1 million. In many ways the Taíno fit our understanding of Amerindians as living off the land, supplementing agriculture with hunting and fishing. Archeological evidence also suggests that they inflicted significant environmental shifts on the landscape. Western Hispaniola's fragile ecosystem was not particularly resistant to Taíno agricultural practices, as they clear cut areas of forest for crops and timber. They also introduced nonnative species like dogs which preyed on native birds and lizards. This, combined with overhunting, led to a serious decline in the island's avian population. In a natural history of the Caribbean islands published by the Spaniard Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo in 1526, he commented that "Nowhere have I seen fewer birds than on that island," in reference to Hispaniola.³³

On December 6th, 1492, Christopher Columbus dropped anchor in northern Haiti in what is now Môle Saint-Nicolas. After establishing a military presence on the island, Columbus returned to Spain leaving his men to search for gold and valuable resources. Forests were clear cut for mines, and tropical agricultural crops were imported to the island. The most significant of these products was certainly sugarcane, which was in the 16th century being grown primarily

³³ Lisabeth A. Carlson and William F. Keegan, *Talking Taino: Caribbean Natural History from a Native Perspective* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2008), 42.

in the Canary Islands off Portugal's coast. Columbus brought sugarcane to Haiti on his second voyage in 1520. Though sugarcane would not become a major export for the island until the next century, the arrival of sugarcane on the island marked the beginning of an industry that would become one of the most significant of its time. One of the major turning points in Haitian environmental history was the discovery that Hispaniola was suitable for sugar production. As the first crop scaled to plantation production in American colonies for European consumption, sugarcane linked Haitian ecology and labor to the global economic network of mercantilist imperialism

The Shift to Plantation Agriculture

The Spanish colonial occupation of the western side of Hispaniola had more drastic impacts on Haiti demographically than it did ecologically. The value of the island's natural resources was clear to the Spanish as they tapped its abundant supply of gold. Within a few decades, the Taíno population was exterminated by a combination of backbreaking slave labor in gold mines and Eurasian diseases. As the indigenous Taíno population was rapidly murdered by forced labor, disease and violence, the Spanish colonial rulers began to import West African slaves to Hispaniola to work sugar plantations. The Spanish slave trade, however, was not as massive in scale as some of its colonial competitors. For this reason, Spain shifted its focus to colonial holdings with larger indigenous populations in Mexico, Peru, and Bolivia. As Spanish power in Hispaniola declined, French pirates and traders and settlers began to occupy the western part of the island, i.e. modern day Haiti. As a much wealthier and powerful empire at the time, especially with regard to the significant role in the transatlantic slave trade, France invested heavily in the importation of West African slaves for sugar production. France eventually replaced Spain as the power on the western part of the island, which they named Saint-Domingue. Sugar became the central product of the French colonial economy, and Saint-

Domingue became known as 'The Pearl of the Antilles,' because of the enormous riches reaped from sugar production.

Race and Revolution

France maintained colonial domination of Haiti through a rigid class structure. Based on race and slavery, this system placed French and other whites at the top, followed by a mixed race class known as the gens de couleur. This class actually possessed a degree of economic power that was rare for a population with African heritage in the colonial Caribbean. The lowest rung of Saint-Domingue's social ladder was its enormous slave population, which by 1789 outnumbered the white population 500,000 to approximately 32,000. The slave population represented a diverse set of languages and cultures from West Africa, and the mixing of these groups in the depopulated Haitian landscape was at the root of processes of creolization, as social and cultural institutions were reconfigured in the context of the slave society.

The social tensions that fed into the Haitian Revolution have their origins in this kind racial class structure. While the gens de couleur class was generally better off than their counterparts in other Caribbean colonies, they lacked any political power. They came into conflict with the whites of Saint-Domingue ultimately because they "saw themselves as French,"³⁴ and were "zealous in defending their rights as Frenchmen,"³⁵ as whites passed legislation to limit their social and political freedoms. Despite the immense wealth of the gens de couleur, "in Saint-Domingue, anyone with a black ancestor, no matter how remote, was subject to humiliating legal discrimination typical of all slave colonies in the eighteenth century."³⁶ Their conflict with white residents of Saint-Domingue was intensified by the contradictions of the French Revolution. While a revolutionary government fueled by an egalitarian ideal took

³⁴ Sidney Mintz, "Haiti." In *Three Ancient Colonies: Caribbean Themes and Variations*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2010), 100.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 103.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 100.

control of France, racial hierarchies still ruled French colonies. The gens de couleur in Saint-Domingue pointed to the ideals of the French Revolution as justification for their claims to political rights.

The political disenfranchisement of the gens de couleur ultimately culminated in a violent uprising in 1791. As the French Revolution threw Paris into chaos, the colonial administrators of Saint-Domingue had nowhere to turn. President Adams in America considered intervening, fearing the spread of slave revolts into the American south, but tensions with France were too high to take military action. Under the leadership of ex-slave Toussaint L'Ouverture, the slave army took control of significant territory in the northern part of the island.

By 1801, Toussaint had issued a Haitian Constitution. He had consolidated power as commander-in-chief and governor of Saint-Domingue beginning in 1794, and although he never severed ties with France, his policies and broader vision for Saint-Domingue created the conditions that necessitated the severing of ties and the establishment of an independent Haitian state. Toussaint's government was focused on military power in order to defend the level of sovereignty that had been achieved since 1791 as well as to enforce productive plantations that brought in foreign revenue. Under Toussaint's regime, plantation laborers were under direct military supervision. Toussaint issued a constitution in 1801 that essentially left no room for French power in Saint-Domingue, and his army of ex-slaves successfully rebelled against Napoleon's attempts to reclaim the ex-colony. Toussaint's *Réglement de Culture* describes the relationship between the Haitian state and nation. This set of work codes represented his belief that agriculture was the basis of government in Haiti, providing the revenue necessary to build the nation that Toussaint envisioned. Haiti was independent, yet what had emerged under

Toussaint's rule was an "unbridgeable gap between the state structure, which was a military one, and the rural agrarian base of the nation."³⁷

After a 13 year struggle for independence, a new generation of black Haitians came of age without ever really knowing or experiencing plantation slavery at its pinnacle. Peasant cultivation of small-held plots continued to expand, as did the development of an internal market system disconnected from the larger Atlantic economy that Toussaint aimed to integrate with. In order to prevent the expansion of the peasantry, Toussaint prohibited all land transactions not approved by the state - under the *Réglement de Culture*, ex-slaves were subject to the same lack of freedom of choice that had defined their servitude. Relative to the enormous drop off in exports during the chaos of the 1790s, the Haitian economy at the peak of Toussaint's power in 1801 had undergone a degree of recovery. By reviving the plantation system, at least in Toussaint's view, he had defended emancipation and redefined the colony's relationship with France. The cost of this total reconfiguration of Haiti's political and economic position, however, was the deepening of the divide between state and nation. For the hundreds of thousands of black farmers who were the lifeblood of the new Haiti, the new order did not satisfy their vision of what emancipation and independence should be: "State and nation were tied by the ideal of liberty, but the nation measured its liberty in Sunday markets and the right to work on garden plots. The Louverture party, on the other hand, embryo of the state-to-come and defender of the same liberty, was firmly attached to the plantation regime."³⁸

The Napoleonic government in Paris sent a large force to recapture the island, and was to some degree successful in achieving this end. French forces captured L'Ouverture and promised the end of slavery. Brute force, however, was not able to quell the underlying tensions that had created chaos in Haiti. Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Toussaint's second-in-command, took charge

³⁷ Carolyn Fick. "Emancipation in Haiti: From Plantation Labour to Peasant Proprietorship." In *After Slavery: Emancipation and Its Discontents*. ed. Howard Temperley. (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 23.

³⁸ Trouillot, 44.

of the revolution and successfully expelled Napoleonic forces. Declaring himself president for life, Dessalines proclaimed Haiti a free republic on January 1st, 1804. He created the Haitian flag by tearing out the white center of the French tricolor, symbolically ordering the removal of whites and the creation of the first black republic.

The Early Republic

National defense was the first priority for newly independent Haiti, and its new government was primarily occupied by members of the military. Dessalines and the Haitian government focused on preventing an invasion by Western powers, who were “entirely hostile to the idea of self-governing blacks.”³⁹ Meanwhile, Haiti was internally fractured. Approximately 200,000 black lives had been lost during the war, and the agricultural infrastructure of the island was in ruins. Dessalines in essence continued the exploitation of Haiti’s rural population by attempting to re-establish the plantation system, an effort that ultimately failed as Haitian peasants insisted on working their own small plots of land and selling their crops in marketplaces that had existed before the revolution.

Fears of Western intervention in the newly independent black republic were well founded, as Britain offered Haiti ‘quasi-protectorate’ status in exchange for exclusive commerce rights on the island. The rejection of this offer by Haiti prompted Britain to impose harsh economic sanctions on the republic. Haiti actually had a degree of leverage in this trade war, as the northern ports were important for commerce between British Caribbean colonies and the United States. This, however, was by no means the end of Western aggression against the republic.

Despite his relative success in defending Haiti from Europe and the United States, Dessalines failed in improving Haiti’s economic situation. The plantation system had not

³⁹ Paul Farmer, *The Uses of Haiti*. (Monroe: Common Courage Press, 2005), 64.

recovered, and the population had made little progress and only succeeded in exacerbating the already apparent problem of deforestation. As a result of staggered agricultural development, Dessalines was considered by many to be “an obstacle to international commerce,”⁴⁰ and the levels of poverty in Haiti continued to rise. This, in addition to a growing contempt for the concentrated power of Dessalines, provoked an insurrection, led by Commander-in-Chief of the Army Henri Christophe, and Alexandre Pétion. In 1806, Dessalines was assassinated and Haiti was divided into two nations in 1812. Pétion became president of the republican South and Christophe president of the authoritarian North.⁴¹

Reparations and Rural Land Restructuring

In 1825, France was in the midst of a serious economic downturn. King Charles X called on the former colony for a payment of indemnity as reparations for property (mostly owned persons) lost during the war. Haiti initially refused, but when a French fleet neared the Haitian coast, a 150 million franc payment was negotiated. This crippled the already weak Haitian economy, as the government was forced to take out substantial loans from France. Yet once again, the country was saved from near annihilation. Also as a direct result of this treaty and the completion of its payments, France recognized Haiti as an independent state in 1838.⁴²

Deforestation intensified because of France’s demand for these so-called reparation - a great part of the 150 million franc settlement was taken in the form of expensive woods.⁴³

By this point, Pétion had died of yellow fever and Christophe had killed himself. Pétion’s replacement, Jean-Pierre Boyer, had reunited Haiti in 1820. Over the next decade, violence along the border between Haiti and the eastern Spanish colony Santo Domingo cost the Haitian government a great deal. With much of the government’s focus on national defense, investment

⁴⁰ Farmer, 64.

⁴¹ Jacques Nicolas Léger, *Haiti: Her History and Her Detractors*. (New York: The Neale Publishing Company, 1907), 159.

⁴² *Ibid*, 177.

⁴³ Luxner 2013.

in rural infrastructure was a secondary priority. Boyer in 1826 tried to establish a militarized rural code, the *Code Rural*, to enforce agricultural productivity. The primary goal of this code was to create a legal connection between peasant laborers and plantation land by barring peasants from leaving plantations to work their own land. These efforts were largely rejected by Haitian peasants, who continued the practice of working small plots of their own land and selling their products in rural markets.

The continued lack of investment in rural infrastructure led to a series of peasant uprisings in the 1840s. Regimes became more oppressive, and European sea powers took advantage of Haiti's internal disorder. A series of threats from British, German, and American warships forced payments on Haiti's international debts, some real and some imagined. One German envoy during one of these episodes described Haitians as "a despicable band of negroes, lightly tinted by French civilization."⁴⁴ Between 1849 and 1913, the United States had sent warships into Haitian waters on 24 occasions. The majority of these deployments involved the Marine Corps collecting funds deemed to be owed to the United States from the Banque Nationale d'Haiti. The Haitian government estimated that 200 million francs had been drained in such a manner, 120 million of which was for France. "By the end of the century, 80 percent of national revenue – mostly derived directly from peasant labor, was earmarked to repay debts."⁴⁵ Many of these debts were completely or partially fabricated.

The turn of the century was a chaotic time for Haiti. Political deterioration continued and reached its height between 1910 and 1915. Historian Brenda Plummer notes that "...the expatriation of resources and capital by the foreign and foreign-oriented enclaves intensified this deterioration. Exploitation had been proceeding for some time, but now crises followed one another in ever more rapid succession."⁴⁶ Peasants and farmers had formed different

⁴⁴ Farmer, 76.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 77.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 79.

revolutionary factions and overthrew Haitian leadership. This continued, and between 1910 and 1915, Haiti had six presidents. Immediately following the overthrow of President General Kilburn Guillaume Sam in 1915, Woodrow Wilson ordered the deployment of 330 US Marines to Port-au-Prince.⁴⁷

Wilson's Intervention

The pretext of the American invasion and occupation was the restoration of order, though a closer look at the policies of the Wilson Administration might indicate that they were more motivated by a desire to stifle popular revolt. Rosalvo Bobo seemed positioned to replace Sam, but the Wilson Administration viewed his populism as a direct threat to American business interests in Haiti. This became clear after the American puppet government passed a new constitution in 1918 that allowed foreigners to own land. This represented a drastic shift from the sentiments of the Haitian Revolution and original constitution. American corporations claimed 266,000 acres of smallholder land, and then went on to hire the peasants whom they had displaced as sharecroppers.⁴⁸ The United States did not withdraw from Haiti for twenty years. The message to Haiti, and indeed to the rest of the Caribbean and Latin America, was clear – cooperate with the American system or face the consequences.

Duvalierism and American Cold War Policy

As America entered the Cold War era, Wilsonian style interventionism reemerged as a central tenet of American foreign policy. Once again, Haiti became a pawn of international politicking. The United States backed a series of anti-communist Haitian leaders through the 1950s, culminating in support for the election of Dr. François “Papa Doc” Duvalier in 1957. Duvalier’s personal police force, the Milice de Volontaires de la Sécurité Nationale, were styled after Mussolini’s Blackshirts. They were commonly referred to as *Tontons Macoutes*,

⁴⁷ Ibid, 80.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 82-83.

supernatural bogeymen who take children from their beds at night in vodou stories.⁴⁹ Duvalier's understanding of Haitian politics was strongly influenced by the US occupation of his youth. In struggling to interpret the African heritage of Haitians, Duvalier drew on the literature of scientific racism. He saw the African origins of Haitians as making them incapable of participating in a liberal democracy. Instead, in his view, they had to be micromanaged through an 'African-style' despotic state.⁵⁰

In the context of Wilsonian ideology, it is clear why this kind of leader might be an appealing ally for the US. It makes the American occupation seem like a logical response to the failure of Haitians to govern themselves. A 1967 State Department study of the Haitian political climate reflects this idea; it concluded that while the Haitian President for Life "approached psychotic proportions at times," he was well suited to lead Haitians, whom the study characterized as "paranoid" and "animists."⁵¹ It seems, then, that the Duvaliers used State Department propaganda about Haiti's African heritage to exert political power and to gain legitimacy with the US. The Tonton Macoutes secret police force is a prime example of this. A symbol of state omnipotence, the violent paramilitary force drew on vodou imagery and narratives to scare the population into submission.

The Duvalierist practice of consolidating institutional infrastructure helps to explain why problems like deforestation and communicable disease in rural Haiti have devolved into humanitarian crises. It also helps to explain the influx of international aid agencies in Haiti today. American aid dollars started flowing into Haiti as a bulwark against communist influence, and the Duvaliers paid lip service to the American cause. Other objectives for American influence in Haiti via the Duvalier regime were "to assure Haiti's support of the US on matters of importance in the OAS, UN, and other international organizations" and to protect "private

⁴⁹ Ibid, 92.

⁵⁰ Laurent Dubois, "How Will Haiti Reckon with the Duvalier Years?" *The New Yorker* (October 6, 2014).

⁵¹ Ibid.

American citizens and property interests in Haiti.”⁵² Haiti’s poverty became valuable for the regime, as it was able to “showcase” poverty to attract aid. Papa Doc’s son, Jean-Claude (“Baby Doc”), took over power in 1971. He also focused on attracting foreign investment that he could profit from. Foreign investment in low wage factory jobs failed to advance Haitians economically, but investors did provide the Duvalier regime with an opportunity to profit from the corruption that they had enshrined in the Haitian political system. Efforts to develop an industrial economy also resulted in mass urbanization. The Duvalierist attempts to modernize Haiti’s economy failed miserably. In 1976, 75% of Haitian met the World Bank’s threshold of absolute poverty, which was an astonishingly low \$140 in income per year. ⁵³

Endemic poverty bred discontent, and by the mid-1980s strikes and violent demonstrations were widespread across the country. Baby Doc responded with a heavy hand, ordering Tontons Macoutes to gun down demonstrators. The Duvalier reign, however, was clearly at an end. At Jean-Claude’s request, the Duvaliers were flown out to France by the US in February of 1986.

Elections and the Bridge to the 21st Century

A series of repressive military dictators made a tenuous bridge to Haiti’s first democratic elections in 1990. Catholic priest and activist Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a leading voice of dissent during the anti-Duvalier movement, won the election with a 67% majority. ⁵⁴ Despite his overwhelming popular support, Aristide faced opposition from three key sources: the army, the wealthy, and the United States. Shortly after his election, Aristide was deposed by a force constituted by former head of the Tontons Macoutes, Roger Lafontant. The new government strove to restore the status quo from the Duvalier period. The only problem was that at this point, complete support from the United States was absent. In fact, the Clinton Administration

⁵² Farmer, 93.

⁵³ Ibid, 100.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 133.

pushed for Aristide's return.⁵⁵ Three years of sanctions were resisted by the military government in Haiti, and so in 1994 the UN Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 940, giving approval to a US plan "to raise a multinational force to use all necessary means to facilitate the departure of the military dictatorship."⁵⁶ US Marines returned to Haiti after a 60 year absence, this time to reinstate a democratically elected leader. In September of 1994, Aristide returned to the presidency.

The efforts to restore the results of the 1990-91 elections were not without reciprocal agreements by the Aristide government:

"The US occupation of Haiti and return of Aristide provided a unique opportunity for the United States, World Bank, and International Monetary Fund (IMF). In exchange for his return to the presidency by force of arms, Aristide was forced to accept structural adjustment measures and the implementation of neoliberal reform in Haiti.⁵⁷

President Aristide's term expired in 1996, and Aristide advisor René Préval was elected with 88% of the vote. A split arose between Préval and Aristide in 1997, and in the 2000 election, Aristide retook the presidency. However, Préval and other anti-Aristide factions cried foul, and the United States (now under George W. Bush) froze all aid to Haiti and called in debts from the Duvalier period. The State Department funded opposition groups who, in February 2004, violently seized several police stations and government buildings. On February 29th, President Aristide awoke to a group of American soldiers and diplomats outside of his home. He was escorted to a US plane that flew him to Bangui, Central African Republic. Préval returned to the presidency, which he held until 2010.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 171.

⁵⁶ Roland Perusse, *Haitian Democracy Restored*. (Landham, MD: University Press of America, 1995).

⁵⁷ Christian Vannier. "Audit Culture and Grassroots Participation in Rural Haitian Development." *Political and Legal Anthropology Review*. 33:2 (November 2010), 290.

The Earthquake, Sweet Micky, and Electoral Turmoil

On January 12, 2010, a 7.0 magnitude earthquake occurred 16 miles west of Port-au-Prince. The poorly constructed hillside neighborhoods of the Haitian capital collapsed on themselves, killing hundreds of thousands. In the wake of the quake, \$10 billion in relief was pledged by the international community. Much of these funds have yet to reach Haiti, and millions of Haitians remain homeless as a result. Later that year, a cholera outbreak swept the Haitian countryside. Over the next few years, several hundred thousand cases of cholera would kill nearly 10,000 Haitians. Cholera had never been in Haiti before, and the strain present in the country has been traced to a U.N. base that improperly disposed of human waste.

President Préval was voted out of office later that year due to the failure of post-earthquake relief, and in a runoff election the US sided against their former ally's party to support third place candidate and pop music star Michel 'Sweet Micky' Martelly. In addition to his music career, Martelly had been an active supporter of the Duvalier regime and opposed the Aristide presidency. Martelly has followed in the Duvalierist tradition, failing to hold elections which have resulted in an empty legislative branch and leaving him to rule by decree. Martelly stepped down from office in early 2016, leaving a weak provisional government and collapsed electoral system behind him.

Chapters 3: Peasants into Proletariats

The Haitian Peasantry

About 10 million people live in Haiti. A majority of these people live in rural mountain communities and primarily rely on agriculture for their livelihoods.⁵⁸ Both English and Creole speakers use the term ‘peasant’ (or *payizan* in Creole) to describe this group.⁵⁹ The connotations of peasantry are similar in Creole to those in English – people who are rural, poor, isolated, and above all defined by a strong connection to land. Peasants are dependent on land for survival, and land also takes on powerful symbolic meaning for them. Peasants understand their surroundings by more than physical features – for those who live close to the land, places are embedded with histories both personal and political, with stories about conflict and struggles to make a life.⁶⁰ Peasants in Haiti are also referred to as ‘*moun andeyo*’ (outside people or people ‘out there’) a term that evokes some characteristics of peasantry that are specific to Haiti. Haiti’s peasantry emerged from a unique set of historical circumstances that can reveal a great deal about not only Haiti, but more broadly about the legacy of colonialism in the Atlantic world.

One of the most important legacies of the Haitian Revolution has been the transformation of a wealthy plantation economy into a peasant economy. After the Haitian Revolution, the leaders of the newly independent black republic made efforts to continue the system of sugar production that had thrived under the French colonial system. The failure of this enterprise in a Haiti free of slavery, however, revealed a fundamental characteristic of the new nation; because of a land distribution system that favored smallholding, Haiti was now a nation of peasants. The Haitian

⁵⁸ *Rural Poverty in the Dominican Republic & Haiti*. Rep. International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), n.d.

⁵⁹ Jennie Smith, *When the Hands Are Many: Community Organization and Social Change in Rural Haiti*. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2001).

⁶⁰ Keith Basso. *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache*. (Albuquerque: U of New Mexico, 1996).

Revolution made a statement “about the nature of property.”⁶¹ For the slave economies of the Atlantic world, this statement was that private property could violently self-liberate. For freed Haitians, it meant that they could now be land owners. Mintz traces a strong push on the part of freed Haitian slaves towards peasant livelihoods to the specific conditions for slaves on the plantations of Saint-Domingue.⁶² In order to cut the cost of feeding slaves, plantation owners allowed slaves to keep small vegetable gardens. As observed in a number of slave colonies, slaves in Saint-Domingue developed a complex market system that continues to define the Haitian rural economy, a phenomenon that Mintz describes in great detail. The market system that emerged during slavery fed into the development of the Haitian peasantry. This is a system characterized by smallholder farming and the sale of rural products to support anything that cannot be produced on the land. It should be noted that the fact that rural Haitians need to produce their own cooking fuel, a route to self-sustainability, contributes to the extreme levels of deforestation in the country. The key intermediaries of the Haitian market system are women, who maintain a budget separately from the man’s farm work. These distinctions in gender roles are essential to understanding “how Haitian peasants deal with the economics of the everyday.”⁶³

Another key characteristic of this population and the market system in which they participated is that they were beholden to no one. Even before emancipation, the ability of slaves to grow their own food meant that they were not dependent on their masters for subsistence. In independent Haiti, where the new government’s reach did not extend to rural mountain communities in any meaningful way, peasants continued to focus on developing livelihoods independent of outside assistance. For moun andeyo, the former gens de couleur who now held positions of power in Port-au-Prince were just as much outsiders as were their French masters.

⁶¹ Mintz 2010, 92.

⁶² Ibid, 111.

⁶³ Ibid, 122.

A more general view of what it means for a person to be a ‘peasant’ or for a group of people to be a ‘peasantry’ can help us to better understand Haiti’s peasantry. To be a peasant generally means that one is a smallholder who may supplement resource generated on his own land with income from sharecropping and part-time labor. Participation in small markets and the generation of income through markets played a particularly important role in Haitian history. The rural market system was established by slaves who were thereby able to generate wealth despite their bondage, and was crucial to the evolution of the Haitian peasantry throughout the 19th century. It developed as a way to cope with a series of stresses – geographic isolation, political exclusion, regressive taxes, and a lack of investment in rural infrastructure. ⁶⁴ A complex system of land tenure developed, based on communal use of land on family managed plots. The set of households that worked land in common, known as a *lakou*, became the central unit of Haiti’s rural land structure. As a result of this informal, communal land structure, most Haitian peasants claim ownership of the land they work, either through purchase or inheritance. Most holdings, however, tend to be small and on degraded land. ⁶⁵

Plantations had been dismantled during the decade long war for independence, but land was redistributed after Haiti’s victory in 1804. Most rich, arable land went to the gens de couleur and military who held political power, and as a result for former slaves rental and sharecropping became common. Another consequence of this scheme of land redistribution was that most rural peasants lived on small plots of land. In the new “rural land structure of nineteenth century Haiti,” the small *lakou* became the typical rural family unit. ⁶⁶ As this peasant economy was developing, a series of self-serving regimes largely composed of the descendants of the gens de couleur burdened Haitian peasants with taxes and a total lack of social services. While these

⁶⁴ Smucker, White, and Bannister, 2002.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 113.

regimes “aimed at siphoning off their [the Haitian peasantry’s] productivity and routinizing the exaction of their effort,” the government did little to nothing to sustain the lives of its people.⁶⁷

State and Peasant Nation

Mintz’s observations about the nature of the Haitian state predicted one of the most significant works in Haitian intellectual discourse – Trouillot’s *Haiti: State Against Nation* (1991).⁶⁸ In the text, Trouillot identifies the state as a parasitic entity that exists on the labor of the true nation – the Haitian peasantry. He argues that the peasantry constitutes the nation in Haiti because it represents the only truly productive class. Without the labor of Haitian peasants, the elite and small middle class of Haiti would have nothing. The relationship between elite, peasant, and land in Haiti represents a particular ethic of land use. The Haitian peasantry described by Mintz that emerged after the Revolution strove for the type of self-sustaining, market-based, smallholder farming that they had practiced as slaves. The colonial ethic that prioritizes productivity above all else, however, prevailed among those with real decision making power. Efforts to revitalize the plantation system directly clashed with the agricultural practices and goals of the peasantry.

The relationship between the Haitian state and nation has been defined by contested identities and geographies since the emergence of black governance in the 1790s. In order to understand the identities and power disparities that underlie the formation of a Haitian state, it is essential to reconsider the significance of Haiti’s revolutionary history. The Haitian Revolution truly began across the Atlantic Ocean in France, where the French Revolution established a government in the name of liberty and equality. The administrative details of the new French government were not important to the residents of Saint-Domingue; what was important was that people took a stand against tyranny, and for every group on the island it

⁶⁷ Ibid, 117.

⁶⁸ Michel-Rolph Trouillot. *Haiti: State Against Nation*. New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, (1991).

meant that they too could air their grievances against tyranny, perceived or actual. Here we see part of the division between state and nation. While the idea of state power put forward by white France was rejected by Haitians, they did retain an understanding of nation that came directly from France. The sense of what constitutes a nation has two key elements – a shared memory of common experience and mutual consent.⁶⁹ The revolutionary drive in Haiti was fueled by the shared experience of discrimination based on skin color and the desire to participate in the political system.

White colonists wanted an ease to restrictive mercantilist trade policies, while the gens de couleur aspired for political and social status as French citizens that was denied to them because of their African heritage. By 1790 these groups had violently clashed in efforts to assert their rights. The most important question for this research, however, pertains to the meaning of liberty and equality for the hundreds of thousands of African-born slaves.

As part of a series of reforms to the century old *Code Noir* governing master-slave relations, in 1785 the royal French government mandated that plantation owners allocate small plots of land to their slaves for the production of crops for their own sustenance and profit. These kitchen gardens were absolutely central to the identity and livelihoods of slaves. In effect, they owned these plots, making their gardens the only piece of property and source of income that a slave on a Saint-Domingue plantation could claim. Furthermore, despite requirements that plantation owners feed their slaves, it was often the case that slaves had to depend entirely on what they could produce on these plots. These facts of slave livelihoods on Saint-Domingue plantations defined the conceptions of freedom for slaves during the Haitian Revolution, and it is clear that their understandings of liberty and equality were “fundamentally intertwined with

⁶⁹ William Saffran. "Citizenship and Nationality in Democratic Systems: Approaches to Defining and Acquiring Membership in the Political Community." *International Political Science Review* 18.3 (1997): 313-35.

an independent claim to land.”⁷⁰ The fundamental role that these understandings have played in Haiti is the basis for Trouillot’s argument that peasant livelihood is more than an economic system; the economic system lays the foundation for national identity premised on perceptions of the land, of sustenance, and of freedom.

The problem for the political leadership of Haiti, even prior to independence, was the reality that Haiti’s national economy was completely dependent on the mass production of export crops on plantations. The Republican Government in Paris declared general emancipation in 1793, but stipulated and prescribed a strict labor regime to maintain plantation production of crops like sugar and coffee. The French economy was a war economy at the time, and robust revenue for military spending necessitated the maintenance of the plantation system. And so a system of free labor on the same style of plantations emerged. The whip was banned, ex-slaves were paid wages, but were not free to leave their plantations. This system was resisted en masse, and ex-slaves made every effort to transform themselves into smallholding peasants by focusing their labor on their own garden plots and expanding these plots. For the masses of ex-slaves, “the one thing that would give their freedom significance [was] the break-up of the estates and the distribution of land to individual workers and their families.”⁷¹ Étienne Polverel, French Civil Commissioner of Saint-Domingue, responded to claims to land by ex-slaves directly – “This land does not belong to you. It belongs to those who purchased it [or] inherited it from its original owners,” (Fick 21). Fick argues that it is this period in between emancipation and independence during which the conception of freedom embedded in smallholding peasant lifestyles emerged as a clear unifying feature of ex-slaves. Indeed this conception of freedom became the clear unifying feature of the Haitian nation.

⁷⁰ Fick, 15.

⁷¹ Ibid, 18.

Race and Peasantry

While recent trends in urban migration complicate our definition of the Haitian peasantry, it is clear that it constitutes a distinct class in Haiti's social structure. More specifically, the peasantry is embedded in a set of neocolonial hierarchies based on race, labor dynamics, and geography. Each of these characteristics that define class in Haiti can be situated historically. Paul Kramer's framework for understanding the colonial construction of race is useful for understanding the evolution of racial class in Haiti.⁷² Kramer understands race as a system of power, which is reconstituted for specific projects. In the project of empire-building, imperial powers use racial hierarchies to exert power over certain groups. By assigning legitimacy to groups deemed to possess certain qualities, imperial powers blur the line between colonizer and colonized. Kramer argues that the struggle to define this line is the central force in the colonial construction of race. In the Philippines, Spanish colonial administrators identified a certain class of Spanish-speaking Catholics as *ilustrados*, or the enlightened ones. While on one hand this elite class helped Spain to exert power by filling bureaucratic roles in the colonial administration, their promotion in the colonial racial hierarchy to a position of power resulted in the blurring of the colonizer/colonized distinction that Kramer highlights. In the Philippines, the *ilustrado* class felt entitled to Spanish political rights because of their newly constructed racial identity. Their demand for political rights was based on sociocultural features such as their occupations, language, and religion. This basis for political rights continued to exclude many peoples of the Philippines.

Analytically there is a great deal of similarity between the role of the gens de couleur in the Haitian Revolution and the role of the ilustrado class in the Philippine Revolution as described by Paul Kramer. Recall how the gens de couleur in Haiti ultimately revolted because of their lack of political power. This conflict was rooted in racial ideology; this class saw themselves

⁷² Paul Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, & the Philippines*. (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina, 2006).

as French, but white supremacist ideology did not provide space for the descendants of Africans as Frenchmen. At the same time, the creole gens de couleur did not identify with the class of mostly African-born slaves.

The power of racial politics in the face of the colonial state manifested itself in revolutionary Haiti in ways that match Kramer's framework. The class structure that emerged during French rule in colonial Saint Domingue was characterized by relatively fluid racial classes. Sid Mintz highlights the *gens de couleur* class, which in Saint-Domingue represented a broad section of society whose shared status as free nonwhites legally and culturally distinguished them from enslaved Haitians and their white French captors. They represent the descendants of the children of African slaves and French colonists, and in the eighteenth century they amassed a great deal of wealth. Perhaps the most significant difference between this group and the hundreds of thousands of enslaved Haitians was that "more than half of the Haitian people at the time had been born in Africa."⁷³ Because of this, there are still immense social and cultural differences between the descendants of the gens de couleur and the descendants of those who were enslaved at the time of the Haitian Revolution.

Labor Patterns of the Haitian Peasantry

As mentioned above, traditional definitions of peasantry typically define it in terms of economic arrangements. More specifically, 'peasant' implies a particular type of labor. Other studies detail the evolution of the labor practices of the Haitian peasantry, but I am specifically interested in the way that international development institutions shape labor patterns today. The focus here is on how development institutions intrude on peasant understandings of their relationships with land. The influx of NGOs into Haiti took on a new significance in the 1990s as the post-Cold War neoliberal foreign policy objectives of the United States came to define its relationship with Haiti.

⁷³ Mintz 2010, 97.

Haiti's dependence on foreign loans to balance its national budget allowed foreign governments and financial institutions to set its budgetary priorities – much in the way that New York-based banks took control of the Haitian economy during the American occupation of the early twentieth century. Through structural adjustment programs, foreign institutions have mandated the retraction of state-sponsored social services and the privatization of traditionally public sectors. This privatization process has generally entailed the contracting of government duties by large foreign development firms to foreign based NGOs. The Haitian peasantry is object of the network of development institutions, and these institutions generally interact with the peasantry through a bureaucratic process known as legalization, whereby social organizations have to register with the Haitian government. The question of who truly represents the peasantry is important, but in considering the interaction between foreign NGOs and peasant organizations, Vannier argues that the legalization process in the Haitian development sector has created an audit culture that alienates the Haitian peasantry and blurs the true priorities and objectives of development. “The audit process,” Vannier argues, “is a bureaucratic attempt to manage complex local realities by reducing and simplifying them to binary measurable categories.”⁷⁴ By basing the legitimacy of community organizations essentially on their adherence to Western business culture and disallowing political expression, the development marketplace has not allowed room for free organization or expression among the Haitian peasantry.

The value judgements that inform development priorities are ultimately based in the economic system that has created the conditions that necessitate the use of terms like ‘developing’ or ‘third world.’ On one level, a particular ethic of land use is represented in the actions of development institutions that work in the agricultural and environmental conservation sectors. The landscape of Haiti, which is ultimately culturally constructed, also encompasses value judgments based in the class ideologies detailed above.

⁷⁴ Vannier, 299.

Chapter 4: Development in Haiti Today: The Parallel State

Journalists have deemed Haiti ‘the NGO Republic,’ because of the huge influx of foreign-based organizations that provide basic public services throughout the country. Well before the 2010 earthquake that brought the likes of Sean Penn to Port-au-Prince, foreign organizations had flooded the Haitian countryside to engage in a vast array of social development initiatives. The roads are scattered with the ubiquitous white Toyota Land Cruisers with acronyms printed on the sides. These NGOs represent the most powerful force in the Haitian economy – foreign aid to Haiti is larger than the Haitian government’s annual budget. While Haiti has seen certain metrics that measure economic development improve slightly, widespread poverty and inequality continue to define Haiti’s economy.

Foreign Aid in the Age of Globalization

When we consider the powerful role that foreign aid plays in the contemporary Haitian economy, it is helpful to consider this phenomenon in the context of broader economic globalization. Alex Dupuy, a scholar of Haiti, defines globalization as:

“a process of integration of the economies of the world in the international division of labor of the capitalist world system and a concomitant shift of power from nation-states to multinational corporations and other organizations controlled by the core capitalist countries,”⁷⁵

Dupuy would lump aid organizations based in the US and Europe that control the vast majority of funds flowing into Haiti into the category of “other organizations controlled by the core capitalist countries.”

Dupuy points to this system of global economic integration as the key cause of the politicization of aid to Haiti. The World Bank has in the past decade made the point that ‘bad governance’ is the cause of stagnant development in Haiti. This view, which emerged during the

⁷⁵ Dupuy, 46.

administrations of democratically elected Haitian presidents during the late 1990s, contrasts sharply with the views of the Bank towards the Duvalier government of 1971-1986. “The bank,” Dupuy argues, “looked for reasons to continue to support them.”⁷⁶ It is not necessarily the case that these organizations are more comfortable with autocratic regimes. Rather, the type of government is essentially irrelevant. What matters for this kind of conditional aid is the state’s willingness to open their country to foreign investment.

The importance of the connection between internal economic reforms and the flow of foreign aid to poor countries like Haiti became clear in the late 1980s, as the ‘Washington Consensus’ came to govern relationships between the West and the recipients of foreign aid dollars. The shift to democratic governments in Haiti during the 1990s also changed the political climate for foreign aid significantly. In contrast to the Duvalier dictatorships, democratic regimes are vulnerable during elections to external pressures in their efforts to maintain power, as we saw with Aristide’s 2004 ousting. Dupuy suggests that longstanding debts held by Haiti and by poor countries more generally were exploited “to demand that they restructure their economies, open them more to the operation of the market, and facilitate the takeover of their assets by foreign capital.”⁷⁷ During the post-Cold War period, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) shifted to an insistence that loans are to be made conditional on the acceptance of structural reform. These reforms include “above all the privatization of public enterprises and the provision of social services.”⁷⁸ In Haiti, this privatization occurs through NGOs, and has “led to a steady deterioration of the Haitian economy since the 1970s and its transformation into an essentially labor-exporting economy increasingly dependent on remittances from Haitian migrants, foreign aid, and drug trafficking.”⁷⁹ Because of the vast disparities in economic and political power between these

⁷⁶ Dupuy, 44.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 48.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 46.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Western institutions and the Haitian state, this kind of conditional loan policy constitutes a form of coercion.

Globalizing Haiti

There is a clear relationship between the development of products and industry for external markets and the prevalence of economic and political instability in Haiti. Analyses by Mintz and Freeman have also shown the ways in which the flows of these commodities are not independent phenomena, but rather part of a larger pattern of extraction of resources, the geographical shifting of those resources, and the development of a global economy to direct resources. In particular, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have taken significant steps to integrate Haiti into the globalized economy. Cycles of economic, political, and environmental instability created conditions for these international organizations to play a role in Haiti, repeating a familiar theme in Haitian history. After suspending foreign aid under President Aristide in 2000, these institutions agreed to reopen the flow of aid into Haiti in exchange for the government's compliance with structural adjustment programs (SAPs). These measures are generally focused on the privatization of public institutions and services, as well as establishing measures to prioritize transparency and accountability in government spending.⁸⁰ Dupuy argues that the flow of aid to Haiti has become a tool for exerting political control primarily on the part of the United States. While critics who focus on the predatory and "antidevelopmental" policies of the Haitian state are not wrong, SAPs and austerity measures designed by international financial institutions have resulted in Haiti's descent into economic catastrophe.

The politicization of aid and debt is certainly connected to environmental degradation. There are convincing models that show a relationship between foreign debt, the expansion of

⁸⁰ Alex Dupuy, "Globalization, the World Bank, and the Haitian Economy," in *Contemporary Caribbean Cultures and Societies in a Global Context* ed. Franklin W. Knight and Teresita Martinez-Vergne, (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2005).

industrial agriculture, and deforestation.⁸¹ While these kinds of analyses detail the relationship between international financial institutions and ecological damage to landscape, Dupuy gets at the shifting labor patterns that result. Western aid organizations focus on making Haiti an attractive destination for foreign investors by creating the circumstances for “an abundant supply of cheap but ‘dexterous, and relatively non-militant’ labor.”⁸² A free flow of foreign capital in Haiti has made it more profitable to live in cities than to work on smallholder farms, and this represents yet another clash between the objectives of economic development and those of smallholder peasants.

The Parallel State and The Politicization of Aid

In many ways, foreign NGOs in Haiti represent a parallel state – they provide services and functions that are usually performed by the government.⁸³ In her study of urban organizations in Port-au-Prince, Kivland finds that community leaders “could not count on the state to realize their vision and that they longed for foreign support, which was where they believed the real power resided.”⁸⁴ Because of the perception of Haiti as a failed, corrupt state, aid is distributed to NGOs according to foreign interests rather than investment in the government. Stagnant development might have something to do with how aid is distributed. In large part, American aid money to Haiti is distributed among fragmented, unsupervised, and uncoordinated NGOs that generally aim at presenting easily measurable success metrics to donors.⁸⁵

There is a significant history of politicization of aid to Haiti – the West has historically made assistance to Haiti dependent on internal political and economic policies. For example,

⁸¹ Richard J. Culas, “Debt and Deforestation: A Review of Causes and Empirical Evidence” *Journal of Developing Societies*, 22 (2006), 347-58.

⁸² Dupuy, 51.

⁸³ Peter Hallward. *Damning the Flood: Haiti and the Politics of Containment*. (New York, NY: Verso, 2010), 177-78.

⁸⁴ Kivland, 82.

⁸⁵ Hallward, 178.

Jean-Bertrand Aristide was re-elected in 2000 promising to raise the minimum wage. The US responded by implementing an aid embargo, claiming that raising the minimum wage would disrupt the manufacturing sector. Aid to Haiti was not reinstated until Aristide was violently removed from office, with US support, in 2004.⁸⁶ Indeed, Hallward postulates that the bulk of the projects that money is funneled to are

“explicitly designed to pursue US interests – the promotion of a secure investment climate, the nurturing of links with local business elites, the preservation of a docile and low-wage labor force, and so on.”⁸⁷

There would be no need for the aid sector if poverty alleviation projects were working. The preservation of the situation, however, serves US interests. In fact, 84 cents of every dollar of USAID funding in Haiti comes home to the US as “salaries, supplies, consultant fees, and services.”⁸⁸

NGOs provide a means of maintaining a situation beneficial to the United States, particularly by upholding the strict Haitian social structure. The US promotes an image of Haiti as a failed state by emphasizing the crucial necessity of the “provision of white enlightened charity.”⁸⁹ Through this narrative and the resulting ideological impact, the US is able to pressure Haiti into adopting policies conducive to foreign investment without direct military occupation. It is, rather, an occupation of aid agencies that allows for Haiti’s inclusion in the United States’ sphere of influence.

Accountability & the Depoliticization of Grassroots Organizations

While it is true that foreign-based NGOs make up the bulk of investment in Haiti, there is a robust tradition of grassroots peasant organizing that constitutes the Haitian civil society.

Kivland highlights how

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 180.

“ ‘organized people’ (moun òganize) often distinguish their work from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) with a shift of vocabulary...whereas these foreign organizations aim to ‘develop’ (develope) Bel Air by bringing aid to strangers, they are engaged in “defending” the zone and the interests of their neighbors by pooling their own resources as well as securing outside support.”⁹⁰

The culture of collective advocacy that “valorizes local leadership”⁹¹ is strong in Haiti. As mentioned in Chapter 1, konbits are an important tradition in which an individual provides a meal for family, friends, and neighbors willing to participate in communal labor, usually of an agricultural variety. Vannier also highlights the centrality of this kind of organization to the social order of Haiti – “the peasantry of Haiti has a long history of indigenous organization,” which has been directed towards both “accomplishing agricultural production,” (as with konbits), and “informal law enforcing and judiciary bodies.”⁹² Like the konbit, this kind of rural organization is focused towards the community level self-sufficiency that defines peasant livelihood.

If we focus on the role of ‘peasant groups’ (gwoupman peyizan) in broader social and political change in Haiti, we come to see that they have been the central vehicle for competing for power with the Haitian elite and foreign entities. Aristide tapped into these organizations to propel himself to the first democratic electoral victory in Haitian history, and they were key to the political change that made his election possible; “the explosion of political agitation and resistance organized by gwoupman and ti kominite legliz [little church communities] played a significant role leading up to this collapse [of the Duvalier regime].”⁹³

Much of Kivland’s research is with an urban organization in Port-au-Prince that runs a community restaurant and a school. She focuses on how the imbalance of power between foreign and local organizations affects the ways in which local groups make sense of the aid

⁹⁰ Kivland, 76.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Vannier, 287.

⁹³ Ibid, 289.

sector. The result of this power gap, she finds, is a “profound ambivalence and discouragement...about navigating political inclusion and social engagement at the nexus of a robust foreign aid apparatus, a weak government, and concerned outsiders” (Kivland 77). In the urban context, community organizations are resisting the same pressures that peasant groups resist in the countryside. There is a conflict between the intrusion of institutions on their lives and fundamental valuations of sustenance, survival, and solidarity.

The competition for power and resources between peasant groups and foreign NGOs, however, is not held on a level playing field. Local organizations in Haiti are “defined by an ongoing effort to gain the support of more powerful actors while still maintaining a seat at the decision-making table and control over resources.”⁹⁴ There is even a formal process for excluding grassroots organizations from the development process. Any group in Haiti that hopes to access foreign aid money has to register with the Haitian Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, a continuation of the process referred to as ‘legalization.’ Kivland argues that “this process of legalization is one of the biggest hurdles to starting an organization.”⁹⁵ In addition to the fees associated with legalization, local organizations are stifled from participating by a preference for organizations that are integrated into the accountability structures of foreign NGOs. Vannier highlights the consequences of this dynamic:

“In many instances...a NGO will bypass participation by ‘traditional’ organizations (e.g. sosyete) in favor of assisting community members to form a new organization specifically for the purpose of managing or participating in the particular project or program.”⁹⁶

In other words, locally embedded peasant organizations are denied access to resources in favor of outside groups that understand the politics of the foreign aid sector.

⁹⁴ Kivland, 77.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 79.

⁹⁶ Vannier, 290.

At one level, foreign aid to Haiti has been politicized; recall how in 2000 the US used an aid embargo to weaken the Aristide administration. At the level of local organizations, however, we see a distressing depoliticization of group activities. That is, they are unable to actively participate in national politics. The ‘audit culture’ that Vannier identifies as the ethos of the push for accountability has come to define the acceptability of local organizations for inclusion in the broader project of developing Haiti. When they do not “mesh with the accountability structures of international aid,” (Kivland 88), they are consistently denied funding. We have already seen to whom these organizations are expected to be accountable. They are certainly not held accountable to the recipients of their aid – otherwise it is doubtful that the UN would still be operating in Haiti after they accidentally imported a cholera epidemic that killed 10,000.⁹⁷

As Dupuy convincingly shows, development projects are primarily held accountable by Western institutions with a political agenda. This is why Vannier argues that

“efforts by NGOs and the Haitian state to minimize perceived corruption and political opportunism that pervade and jeopardize development activities in the Haitian countryside have resulted in the implementation of an ‘audit culture.’”⁹⁸

Vannier goes on to argue that this ‘audit culture’ propagated by NGOs is at the heart of the withdrawal of the Haitian peasantry from national politics. For one, grassroots organizations might shy away from registering with the Haitian government given their memories of the tontons macoute and the harsh repression of social organizations during the Duvalier regime. This is particularly true for groups that are in any way engaged in political advocacy, labor unions, electoral work, etc. Foreign donors are concerned by organizations that show political leanings, fearing involvement in the corrupt Haitian political system. Vannier observes that “the risk-aversity of NGO personnel to these concerns generates a situation in which local-level

⁹⁷ Frerichs, R.R., P.S. Keim, R. Barrais, and R. Piarroux. “Nepalese origin of cholera epidemic in Haiti.” *Clinical Microbiology and Infection* (18:6, 2012).

⁹⁸ Vannier, 282.

economic development is severed from local-level political action.”⁹⁹ Today in Haiti, we see a lack of involvement in the political process by the bulk of the nation. While we on the outside might point to the blatant corruption that dominates Haitian politics, this corruption has been allowed to fester as a result of the depoliticization of local organizations on the part of NGOs focused on accountability. Haitian urban organizations and peasant groups actually constitute a vibrant civil society, one that could be the foundation of a strong participatory democratic system. This resource has remained untapped by foreign development projects.

It is also important for us to clarify what we mean by corruption. Rather than a set of behaviors or practices, we could consider ‘corruption’ as a “discursive field that enables the phenomenon to be labeled, discussed, practiced, decried, and denounced.”¹⁰⁰ As has been observed in Haiti, “impoverished local populations view and utilize resources brought from outside the community in ways neither imagined nor predicted by those bringing the resources. If authorities view local practices as threatening a project’s institution or sustainability, they often describe these practices as ‘corruption’ on the part of ‘opportunists.’”¹⁰¹ The patron-client structure of political relationships in Haiti, which is a symptom of the retracted state apparatus, fits this description. Kivland finds that government support for local organizations is generally defined by “the long-standing policy that residents call *politik ti moso*, ‘little morsel politics,’ by providing minimal handouts or temporary incomes to local leaders and associations (including gangs).”¹⁰² It true that bribery is rampant in Haiti, but rather than defaulting to the position that the government is incompetent, projects tasked with ‘democratization’ and ‘good governance’ could dig a little deeper. Bribery keeps the state apparatus alive in the face of a miniscule and

⁹⁹ Ibid, 296.

¹⁰⁰ Akhil Gupta. “Blurred Boundaries: The Discourse of Corruption, the Culture of Politics, and the Imagined State,” *Journal of the American Ethnological Society* (22:2, May 1995), 385.

¹⁰¹ Vannier, 294.

¹⁰² Kivland, 82.

shrinking tax base. The state's power has been diminished by the development system, and officials grasp for support wherever they can find it.

The Logic of Development in Haiti

The system of parallel state powers in Haiti depends on a particular ideology. As we have seen, part of this ideology is an ontology of land use rooted in Haiti's history as a slave colony turned republic. The introduction of 'development' as the objective of Western power in Haiti, however, invokes a new set of claims. Since they have "replaced the state," Kivland's research partner Ronald argues, "...NGOs walk by their own logic. When you take a good look, you see that you can't make a demonstration against them. What are you going to demand (*revandike*)?...Who's going to refuse a gift?...The social contract...is with the state and the people."¹⁰³ Embedded in Western development initiatives is a flawed understanding of the moral imperative to give charity. Development critic Peter Singer argues for a redrawing of the "traditional distinction between duty and charity."¹⁰⁴ He argues that if we are capable of alleviating suffering, then doing so cannot be considered charity. Distance does not make a difference in our duties to one another. Charity does not allow for the kind of demands that Ronald argues are only possible in a social contract between state and nation.

Participatory development has long been the stated goal of projects as the needs of the population in question become more of a priority in project planning. The frustration that Ronald expresses at the structure of the development sector in Haiti, however, points to the inherent contradiction in economic development efforts. The goal is to create lasting, self-sustaining economic growth, but funding is only possible if the project fits into a broader liberalization agenda that may contribute to endemic poverty. Participation by the state and by the nation are allowed, "*as long as* [their] participation does not involve consequential

¹⁰³ Kivland, 90.

¹⁰⁴ Peter Singer. "Famine, Affluence, and Morality." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (1:1, Spring 1972, pp. 229-243).

decisions, shifts in power, control over resources, or the organization of projects,” (Kivland 91). Kivland suggests racist ideology underlies the development logic. I think such a strong claim, while well grounded, might blur racial class divisions within Haiti. The distinctions between peasants and elites are perhaps stronger currents in the true impact of development work in Haiti.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

State and Nation through Landscape

Focusing on landscape tells us a great deal about the rapid social, political, and environmental changes in former colonies. In particular, this focus can reveal how foreign interventions that might be intended to promote development can fail by clashing with the fundamental valuations of land use and landscape. This focus has necessitated a close look at how Haitian peasants construct livelihoods in the face of political and environmental instability. By tracing the historical origins of the peasant class in Haiti, we come to see that smallholder farming is more than a means to sustenance for this group. It is fundamental to a construction of identities and historical consciousness. The agricultural practices of Haitian peasants evolved as resistance to the extraction of resources by outside forces.

Competing ontologies of land and liberty are central to how this resistance has played out over Haitian history. These understandings of land ownership, land use, and landscape have their origins in the plantation practices of the Saint-Domingue colony. The gens de couleur class of free people of African descent understood freedom to be their elevation to the status of French citizen, and they were active participants in the plantation agricultural project. This class owned a third of all plantations in Saint-Domingue and a fourth of all slaves. Their goals and values have historically clashed with those of Haiti's peasantry, which has its origins in the hundreds of thousands of ex-slaves who populated independent Haiti. For these people, liberty and equality meant the ability to sustain oneself on small plots of land and participate in local markets.

A gulf between the Haitian state and nation emerged and remains constant since independence in 1804. In order to maintain the productivity and wealth of colonial Saint-Domingue, the state demanded the nation of peasants to reconstitute itself as a nation of proletariats, wage laborers on industrial sugar plantations. The peasantry has maintained a

resilient and robust resistance to these demands. Today, the state remains absent from the lives of Haitian peasants, who now have to negotiate a parallel state of foreign projects and NGOs.

The Place of Aid in Haiti Today

It is important to keep in mind the broader role of foreign development assistance in Haiti today. It is part of a particular economic project being drawn up by the United States and international financial institutions. There are not necessarily sinister intentions behind the investments that these actors make in Haiti. It is just as essential to keep foreign assistance in the context of economic statecraft on the part of the United States. The crux of the international project in Haiti is the liberalization of the economy. This means the privatization of public sectors and services, primarily through NGOs in Haiti. These organizations undoubtedly provide services to Haitians that they would otherwise suffer without. At the same time, the system of foreign assistance weakens the development of a robust civil society. The audit culture that permeates every aspect of development projects in Haiti has caused the withdrawal of the Haitian peasantry from national politics. We see the evidence of this relationship in political chaos that plagues Haiti today. If foreign development assistance supported the Haitian state instead of replacing it, then it might be possible for the Haitian nation to make demands of its government.

Policy Implications

It is hard to tease out the practical outcomes of detailed historical analyses. I think that Haiti's unique yet informative history has some important implications for how we make foreign development and conservation policy. For one, foreign development organizations should tap into the vast network of peasant groups in the Haitian countryside. If these groups had their organizational capacities expanded through sustained investment, then there would be no need for a patchwork of foreign NGOs. These organizations could function as unions, increasing employment through shared labor programs similar to the *konbit* system.

The second key takeaway for policymakers is that they should make every effort to work within existing structures of land tenure and use. Because of the historically embedded relationship between peasants and land in Haiti, a formal land tenure system is not necessarily desirable. Land insecurity is not the main source of insecurity for Haitian peasants, poverty is. In order to facilitate a robust agricultural sector, which makes up the bulk of the Haitian economy, foreign development and the Haitian state alike should focus on ensuring the personal security of peasants.

Solutions to economic and environmental deterioration in Haiti are far and few between. Some of the most often repeated solutions among Kivland's partners are that either "the United States exposes its behind-the-scenes governance and claims Haiti as a commonwealth," or the "banishing everyone except the very poor and letting the people rebuild the country."¹⁰⁵ Neither option is meant to be realistic; they are both provocations. Haiti needs more than provocations – it needs heavy and sustained investment in public infrastructure, education, healthcare, and democratic institutions. This much is clear, and a continued reflection on Haiti's history and landscape can help to overcome roadblocks to Haiti's true independence.

¹⁰⁵ Kivland, 95.

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