



Fear and Loathing in Haiti: Race and Politics of Humanitarian Dispossession

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Abstract

The response by Western governments to the earthquake that devastated Haiti on January 12, 2010 throws into sharp relief the connections between racism and dispossession in times of humanitarian crisis. In this article, we take the 2010 earthquake as a point of departure in order to examine the purpose that circulating discourses of black criminality serve in narratives of humanitarianism and development in Haiti. Through an examination of debt, financial colonialism and neoliberal adjustment we explore the deep associations between racism, humanitarianism and ongoing capitalist processes. We conclude by outlining what it would take to dismantle the dispossessions that racialized discourses of blackness, criminality and failed development facilitate in Haiti.



Introduction

The catastrophic earthquake that occurred in Haiti on January 12, 2010 revealed the important role that race and racism play in contemporary forms of capitalist accumulation. While ordinary citizens around the world were quickly galvanized into action, organizing within their communities supplies of food, clothing and money donations, some of their governments adopted a more cautious and later, increasingly calculated stance that reflected a greater urge to contain and control the Haitian population than to honour and prioritize their right to life with dignity and self-determination. That the dispossession of the right of Haitians to be treated as people has been conducted in the name of humanitarian assistance raises important questions about the deep associations between racism, humanitarianism and ongoing capitalist processes. Many radical scholars and journalists have observed that the militarized response to Haiti and the growing competition among certain states and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for political and economic control of the reconstruction process are part of a form of capitalist expansion that relies upon the disorientations caused by disastrous events to effect the removal of assets and rights to resources once held. But fewer scholars have examined the role played by a prior dispossession: the dispossession of the Haitian people's common humanity and the racisms that lie at the heart of the process of capitalist accumulation itself. We argue that it is important to understand the securitized responses of countries like the United States, Canada and France to the earthquake in Haiti as animated not only by the benefits to be derived from future surpluses and debts generated by Haiti, but also by the political and economic control made possible when poor black Haitians are dispossessed of their right to be considered as humans at all. This racialized dispossession is evident in the discourses of black criminality that continue to circulate in humanitarian and development narratives. These discourses generate racialized forms of fear that not only construct poor black bodies as a threat to Eurocentric notions of civilization and progress, but also to the social, economic and political order of global neoliberalism.

What purpose do these circulating discourses of black criminality serve in narratives of humanitarianism and development? Popular media accounts, and the actions of the government of the United States in the early days after the earthquake constructed Haitians as dangerous and violent, a people so pre-disposed to criminality that it was necessary to 'secure' the island before desperately needed medical supplies, food and water could be distributed to the injured and displaced. The military actions undertaken in order to render humanitarian assistance during the early days could not be easily distinguished from those taken during war. We will never know how many lives might have been saved if assistance could have been provided more quickly, but what is clear was the way in which media images labeling desperate Haitians as looters served to create a climate of fear that supported the position taken by U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates to prioritize

security over urgent care. For as he stated: “It seems to me that without having any structure on the ground, in terms of distribution, that an airdrop is simply going to lead to riots as people try and go after that stuff. So without any structure for distribution or to provide security when things become available, then it seems to me that's a formula for contributing to chaos rather than — rather than preventing it” (Shaughnessy 2010: online). The delay in assistance no doubt cost lives: Partners in Health, an international aid agency, estimated as many as 20,000 people may have been dying every day, who otherwise could have been saved if assistance had been the top priority (Dugan and Dade 2010). Eighteen days after the earthquake jolted Haiti, killing approximately 222,500 (of a population of 9 million), injuring an additional 300,000, and displacing over 500,000, as many as 600,000 people had still not received any international food assistance (Ministry of the Interior, 2010). One month after the earthquake, 75 percent of a target population of 1.1 million affected persons still required shelter and hygiene kits in order to dispose of generated waste (OCHA 2010). Organizations like the UN Food Program attribute the slow pace of its response to the scale of the devastation and the destruction of the infrastructure and supply chain that would ordinarily distribute goods across the country, but as a number of commentators have noted, the delays were also hampered by the climate of fear that made some donors reluctant to distribute aid without security forces present, in communities designated by the U.S. State Department to be high security red zones. Ultimately it will never be known if the number of people rescued from the rubble might have been higher than the officially declared 211 (Ministry of the Interior 2010) had securitization been less of a priority, but it is clear that by losing precious time in the delivery of emergency assistance, the government of the United States with the assistance of others, including the Canadian state, dispossessed the Haitian people of the worth and value of their lives. In fact, as the United States assumed sovereign control, Haiti became, what Agamben (1998) describes as a state of exception, where the immediate humanitarian rights of the poor and displaced were suspended, giving the United States military power over life and death in Haiti. By reducing the Haitian people to ‘bare life’ — outside the protection of law and thus able to be killed with impunity — any rights that Haitians may have had were rendered invalid, and their lives disposable. Once reduced to ‘bare life’, the United States and other ‘assisting’ governments, aided by media houses, made it possible for Haiti to be constructed as prone to violence and irrationality, and in need of military intervention and containment.

Circulating discourses of Haitian poverty, violence and criminality therefore serve an important purpose: they naturalize the relationship between blackness and poverty, and in so doing, disassociate the majority of Haitians from civilization (defined in Eurocentric terms). By constructing Haiti as a nation that lies outside of modernity and progress, these discourses have not only served to devalue Haitian lives, but they also have been instrumental to efforts to render Haiti governable in

ways that are amenable to the interests of more powerful actors, both locally and internationally.

Criminalization as the first response to social problems facing black communities is not something new. As scholars such as Julia Sudbury (2002) and Ruth Gilmore (2007) have documented, the disproportionate number of black men and women who have been incarcerated within the rapidly expanding prison-industrial complexes of North America and Europe speaks to the ways that the causal mechanisms driving the participation of individuals in extra-legal activities are ignored or made secondary to the material benefits to be derived from what Julia Sudbury describes as 'the ceiling of black bodies'. But what is a disturbing trend in the ways in which powerful states have responded to the dislocations created by natural disasters is that criminalization, discipline and punishment have become a predictable part of the humanitarian response to black communities in crisis. The parallels between the responses to the survivors of the aftermath of hurricane Katrina in New Orleans and the survivors of the earthquake in Haiti are uncannily similar. Similar to Katrina, a discourse of criminality pervaded reports in the weeks that followed the earthquake as media reporters scrambled to find scenes of the proverbial looting and rioting that black people appear to be predisposed to. Repeated references to escaped prisoners from the national penitentiary destroyed by the earthquake underscored the notion of an uncontrolled black male threat associated (as with Katrina) with reports of gang rape.² And even as it became clear that precious time was being lost in the rescue process because the U.S. air force in charge of L'Ouverture airport had not allowed planes with much needed medical supplies to land in Haiti, the media continued to fixate on a narrative of chaos and violence that constructed a picture of a hopeless Haiti that had to be contained.

Popular discourses of black violence should be understood as historically rooted in expressions of fear, racialized fear of the threat that autonomous communities of poor black people potentially pose to contemporary notions of progress, civilization and the economic and social institutions at the heart of capitalist liberal democracy. This is a fear that has existed throughout Haitian history, from the early beginnings of the revolution, and that continues to exist today. For as Napoleon Bonaparte declared during the Haitian revolution in 1804: "The freedom of the negroes, if recognized in St. Domingue [colonial Haiti] and legalized by France, would at all times be a rallying point for freedom-seekers of the New World" (Alexis 1949: 174). In what follows, we briefly trace this history in order to expose the roots of racialized discourses surrounding humanitarian

² Prior to the quake, the penitentiary was a site of human rights campaigning. According to human rights lawyer Mario Joseph, 80 percent of the prisoners were being held without charge (Interview with Amy Goodman, Democracy Now, January 21, 2010).

responses to the recent earthquake, and argue for alternative approaches for reconstruction that break with market-led, non-distributive and anti-democratic mechanisms of power exercised in Haiti.

Sovereignty denied: Debt, Financial Colonialism, and Neoliberal Adjustment

As CLR James (1989) documented, from its inception as an independent and sovereign state in 1804, Haiti was seen as a threat to the economic system of plantation slavery, that had facilitated economic expansion in both Europe and North America for over two hundred years. Particularly for the United States, Haitian independence was a direct threat to American slavery and this generated a level of fear that resulted in processes of exclusion and sanction that significantly weakened all of the social, economic and political institutions that emerged in the post-revolutionary period in Haiti. For decades following Haitian independence, colonial powers (Britain, France and Spain) and neocolonial powers (especially the United States) greeted the Haitian government's efforts to be included in foreign trade and capital flows with protracted trade embargoes, attempts at invasion and resubmission to slavery, refusal of political recognition, and sustained efforts to contain and control news from Haiti and Haitians themselves from circulating in the greater Caribbean, including the slave-holding U.S. South. The 58-year economic embargo placed on Haiti by the United States in the early years of its existence was designed to weaken and destabilize the country in ways that are reminiscent of the economic embargo taken up against Cuba in the twentieth century (from 1960) that continues even today. But unlike in nearby Cuba, the Haitian economic blockade occurred at a time when Europe and America were united in their dependence on racialized imperial control to expand their systems of production and exchange.

Weakened by the economic blockade, Haiti was further devastated by the mechanism of debt. In 1825, in exchange for official recognition of their freedom, the Haitian people were required to pay France a total of 150 million francs in gold. The stranglehold the debt to France had on Haiti's economic and social development continued well into the next century, when it was finally paid off (Hallward 2008). Calculated in 2003 by former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide to be equivalent to US\$21bn including interest, Haiti's debt bondage introduced a new form of colonial control³. Haiti was one of the first postcolonial countries subjected to the debt model, or "financial colonialism" as coined by Naomi Klein (2007), that emerged as an effective mechanism of control because indebted countries were forced to comply with the governing strategies of creditor nations even as they were forced to repay, with interest, the original debt.

³ There have been calls by various Caribbean based groups, including by Aristide, to the French government for this debt to be repaid to Haiti (see Singh 2010).

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, the specter of Haitian freedom and the economic threat posed by the possibility of black liberation, continued to haunt wealthy states in the Americas whose economies were also dependent on the labour of racialized working-class populations. Equally powerful throughout the 20th century was a set of racialized discourses that served to construct Haiti and the majority of the Haitian population as everything that the modern world hoped not to be. Whether through enduring misconceptions of religious practices like voodoo, or the grinding poverty of infamous slums like Cité Soleil, Haiti became the proverbial ‘Other’ of what development and progress was imagined to be. Yet, the social, political and economic situation that the majority of Haitians face was never solely of their own making; the notorious dictatorship of the Duvaliers (1957-1986) was supported by the US as an anti-Communist counterbalance to Cuba during the Cold War (Smith 2010). The international community as a whole, the United States, France and more recently Canada, have all played important roles.

Throughout this period, debt and aid remained powerful tools that Western governments and the international financial institutions used in order to bend Haiti to their interests. As in many countries of the circum-Caribbean, including the neighbouring Dominican Republic, financial colonialism led to direct U.S. occupation of Haiti from 1915-1934. Whether as a military occupying force, supporters of the brutal Duvalier dictatorships, or as instigators of the 2004 exile of Haiti’s democratically elected leader, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, powerful Western governments have played a significant role in dispossessing the majority of Haitians of their right to determine their own way of organizing their economy and society. Aid and the conditional lending policies of the IMF and World Bank proved by the late 1980s to be equally effective mechanisms of control. Despite the fact that approximately half of Haiti’s \$1.3 billion debt was estimated to belong to the Duvaliers, whose family fortune in 1986, was calculated at \$900 million, the Haitian people were forced to repay it. The structural adjustment policies that Haiti was obliged to implement following the end of the Duvaliers’ era not only further impoverished Haiti, but also eroded the social, economic and political institutional infrastructure required for Haiti to be able to govern itself. For example, thirty years ago Haitians produced most of the rice they consumed, but this ability disappeared in the mid 1980s as cheap imported rice from the United States, subsidized by the U.S. government, flooded Haitian markets and displaced local farmers. Haiti is now heavily dependent on imported food, above all U.S.-grown rice (of which Haiti is now the fourth-largest importer). The consequences of this dependence came to a head in April 2008, when hundreds of thousands of Haitians protested rising prices of imported food, forcing the prime minister, Jacques Edouard Alexis, out of office. President René Préval subsequently lowered the price of imported rice but the earthquake has only exacerbated Haiti’s dependence on U.S. imports and foreign aid: indeed, rice from the United States has been the keystone of the humanitarian aid response (Lindsay 2010). The adoption of the neoliberal export-oriented model, with its preference for trade liberalization, niche

markets and assembly production not only dispossessed Haiti of its ability to feed itself, but created the context for the mass rural-urban migration that resulted in so many people being concentrated in the capital of Port-au-Prince on the day of the earthquake.

Jean-Bertrand Aristide's reluctance to implement the neoliberal reforms requested of him by the International Financial Institutions after his reinstatement to power in 1994, paved the way for further punitive monetary sanctions. When, for example, Haiti fined U.S. rice merchants \$1.4m for allegedly evading customs duties in the liberalized rice industry, the United States responded by withholding \$1.4 million in aid (Younge 2004). In 1998, foreign aid to Haiti was blocked by the United States, followed by a more extensive set of economic sanctions in 2002, in response to allegations that the results of parliamentary elections in favour of Aristide's Lavalas party were tainted. Thus in the same year that George W. Bush assumed the presidency of the United States, \$512 million in emergency humanitarian aid from the U.S., the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and the International Monetary Fund was frozen, propelling the Haitian economy into a destabilizing tailspin. Despite its high level of poverty, Haiti was not eligible for debt relief under the IMF and World Bank's [Heavily Indebted Poor Countries](#) initiative (HIPC) launched in 1996. Hence, while the U.S.-led aid embargo was in effect from 2001-2004, Haiti was obliged to pay interest on its debt, amounting to 90 percent of its foreign exchange earnings in July 2003 (Farmer 2004). It was only in June 2006, two years after Aristide's ouster, and the demonstrated compliance of the Préval government with the policies of these institutions, that Haiti was allowed to enter the HIPC programme.

The NGOization of Haiti

Even as the international financial agencies continued to wield their weapons of debt and aid, circulating public discourses continued to locate the source of Haiti's crisis in its people, their inability to embrace modern liberal democratic ideals, and their propensity towards criminality and violence. These racist ideologies have been instrumental to the process of humanitarian dispossession because they have provided the rationale for a new set of external actors — the Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) — to take increasing responsibility for the governance of the country. The expansion of the NGO sector in Haiti throughout the 1990s represented a further step towards the dispossession of the Haitian people's right to govern themselves. For as INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (2007) argue, the rise of the Non-Profit Industrial Complex has been an important component of the expansion of neoliberal market principles across the global South. As Harvey (2005) has argued, many NGOs function as the 'Trojan horses for neoliberal globalization' stepping into the gap created by states when they withdraw from welfare provision, and appropriating these functions with the assistance of large U.S. government agencies such as the U.S. Agency for

International Development (USAID) or corporate-backed International Non-governmental Organizations (INGOs) such as CARE. For instance in Haiti, USAID provides 70 percent of the funding for NGOs, and other corporate and individual institutions, the other 30 percent (Hallward 2008).

Reliant on funding from large overseas donors, NGOs have increasingly become advocates and supporters of the political philosophies that govern these large and powerful funding institutions. The Non-Profit Industrial Complex has dispossessed the Haitian people's right to constitute the principles upon which to govern themselves. As Timothy Schwartz (2008) has documented, for example, CARE International's USAID-funded project to provide food aid to Haiti helped to distribute U.S. food crops, thereby exacerbating the food insecurity caused by trade liberalization in Haiti and flooding Haitian markets with products from the U.S. The displacement of the Haitian government by the Non-Profit Industrial Complex is evidenced by the extraordinary number of NGOs, over 10,000, working in Haiti (Morton 2006) when the earthquake struck, with responsibilities that were once the purview of the state. It is perhaps not surprising then that less than one penny of U.S.-government aid dollars following the earthquake went to the Haitian government, while 42 cents went to USAID disaster assistance, much to be channeled through NGOs, and 33 cents to the U.S. military (Mendoza and Fisch 2010). The role that NGOs have played in humanitarian dispossession is also captured in a recent editorial that appeared in *The Lancet* (2010) that criticized the way that large aid agencies and humanitarian organizations obsessed with raising money through their own appeal efforts competed with each other in ways that furthered their own interests rather than those of the individuals whom they claim to help⁴. As stated in the editorial, "[a]lthough many aid agencies do important work, humanitarianism is no longer the ethos for many organisations within the aid industry. For the people of Haiti and those living in parallel situations of destruction, humanitarianism remains the most crucial motivation and means for intervention" (Lancet 2010: online).

The importance of NGOs to humanitarian dispossession is perhaps most clearly demonstrated in the actions of ten members of the New Life Children's Refuge group, a U.S. religious charity, who were detained whilst attempting to cross into neighbouring Dominican Republic with thirty-three undocumented children aged between two months and fourteen years. Without regard for Haitian laws, adoption or emigration procedures, the members of this missionary group sought to remove the children from Haiti, arguing that their actions were designed to help the children. That members of the charity assumed they could take decisions regarding the adoption, care and emigration of Haitian children, matters that ordinarily would have been determined by Haitian state agencies, demonstrates the power of circulating narratives of an incapable and ungovernable Haiti in need

⁴ This observation is also made by Fluri (2009) in relation to Afghanistan .

of external control⁵, and corollary discourses of the Haitian threat to modernity. For as aboriginal experiences in Canada and Australia demonstrate, the removal of children from their communities has been a powerful strategy for integrating recalcitrant nations into a dominant social order. It is therefore not simply coincidental that the narratives of rescue that prompted members of the New Life Children's Refuge group to remove Haitian children from Haiti should simultaneously co-exist with powerful discourses of securitization and containment, because both represent a response to the fear and the threat that Haiti and Haitians pose to the dominant global economic and social order.

Securitization and Containment

Echoed in the current humanitarian efforts spearheaded by Western governments is the on-going construction of a black nation as a threat to the racial order of colonial and neocolonial capitalism, one requiring, above all, management and containment. Indeed, there were already nearly 9,000 United Nations troops in the country when the earthquake occurred. The aim of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), operating since 2004, was to increase security and protection, and to assist with the restoration and maintenance of the rule of law, public safety and public order. Critics of MINUSTAH's activities during the 2004 elections, however, argue that the UN Mission was in fact central to the efforts of the United States, Canada and France to oust Aristide. In 2005, for example, a report undertaken by Harvard Law Student Advocates for Human Rights claimed that the UN stabilization force "effectively provided cover for the police to wage a campaign of terror in Port-au-Prince's slums" (2005: online) where Aristide had his political base.

In the days and weeks following the earthquake, containment as a familiar strategy of rule became the primary concern of powerful states like the United States. The MINUSTAH forces were joined by the U.S. military. One of the early functions of the U.S. military was to ensure that Haitian citizens remained on the island, minimizing the possibility of the displaced reaching the shores of the United States. Within 72 hours of the earthquake, a large U.S. aircraft carrier arrived off the coast of Port-au-Prince without the much needed supply of food and water that could fill its helicopters and be ferried ashore (Padgett 2010). Instead, while supplies were trickling in from elsewhere, the aircraft carrier served as the base for the U.S. military's campaign of refugee deterrence. Rather than provide aid, a cargo plane made daily five-hour long sorties transmitting Creole audio messages and distributing leaflets up and down the coastline warning Haitians not to seek refuge via the sea. The message, reinforced by five U.S. coast guard boats

⁵ This argument was influenced by the work of Karen Dubinsky (2010) who is critical of the rescue tropes that pervade much international adoption.

patrolling Haitian waters was: "...If you think you will reach the U.S. and all the doors will be wide open to you, that's not at all the case. And they will intercept you right on the water and send you back home where you came from" (McKinley Jr. 2010: A11).

Efforts to contain refugees in Haiti are underscored by the most modest of immigration policy reforms in the United States and Canada. Immigration systems in both countries increasingly criminalize migrants, especially those of colour. Undocumented migrants in the post-9/11 context are a new fix for the prison-industrial complex. While the earthquake's refugees are threatened with becoming 'celled' and deportable bodies should they seek their survival in the U.S., the estimated 100,000 undocumented Haitians in the U.S. prior to the earthquake are now eligible for 'temporary protective status' (TPS), but only if they can pay the \$500 fee, and deportation orders for 30,000 Haitians have been suspended (Preston 2010). January 12th now marks not only the great tragedy of the earthquake but also the creation of new categories of Haitian migrants: those who will provisionally seek livelihoods for themselves and for the country's reconstruction as conditionally legalized subjects, and those who cannot access TPS because of its high fee and administrative barriers or who arrive (despite the U.S. deterrence campaign) from Haiti after the earthquake. This latter group, far greater in number, will face the full force of the migrant prison industrial complex. In Canada, only those with family ties (a definition slightly expanded in Québec) and a small number of orphans will qualify for entry.

Narratives of progress, humanitarianism and development and the construction of Haiti as a country in need of management and security are also produced by conditionally valorizing the Dominican Republic in relation to Haiti. The Dominican Republic's success in achieving high rates of growth and investment in tourist development and other industries, and in obtaining comparably superior indicators of human development (birth rates, death rates, literacy, etc.) is often highlighted in comparisons of the two countries (e.g., Agrell 2010). In doing so the flows between these two states and their distinct incorporation into colonial capitalism – as a slave plantation society (in Haiti) and as a mixed-race impoverished frontier society (in the Dominican Republic) – are erased. Instead, the Dominican Republic is constructed as living proof of the triumphs of capitalist development promoted by a "more reasonable" elite.⁶ Dominican leaders and their foreign backers have depended upon an ideology of negrophobia and anti-Haitianism to extract surplus value from Haitian migrant workers and to suppress the Dominican working class, both central to processes of extremely unequal accumulation in the Dominican Republic. While "hispanidad" generally functions as the debased cultural "other" of anglo/protestant capitalism,

⁶ This erroneous reading is circulated widely by Jared Diamond in his book *Collapse* (2005). Versions of the narrative resurfaced in reporting in the weeks following the earthquake.

in the relational logics of race and accumulation that function on the island of Hispaniola, the Dominican Republic serves as the example of capitalist success and as evidence of the failure of the “black” nation of Haiti.

Rethinking Reconstruction and Development in the Aftermath of the Devastation

The magnitude of the destruction caused by the earthquake in Haiti is mind boggling in terms of the challenge that it has posed to short-term emergency assistance and long-term reconstruction and development. Yet, it is important to critically examine how the discourses of blackness, poverty and criminality that shaped the emergency humanitarian assistance in the first few weeks after the devastation have continued to shape the formulation of long-term reconstruction and development policies.

As early as the day after the earthquake, neoconservative think-tanks like the Heritage Foundation advised the United States government to view the catastrophe in Haiti as an opportunity to raise its profile and influence in the region. Calling for an immediate expansion of U.S. trade preferences for Haiti, the foundation argued that both Haitian (read creole elites) and U.S. exporters and importers in the garment assembly sector would benefit significantly if investment opportunities already available under the Haitian Hemispheric Opportunity through Partnership Encouragement⁷ (HOPE) Act were expanded. But as scholars have argued since the mid-1980s (Pantojas-Garcia 1985, McAfee 1991), trade initiatives tied to the apparel sector, like HOPE and HOPE II (enacted in 2008), rarely create opportunities for sustained development because most rely upon the hyper-exploitability of labour, and women workers in particular, in order to be successful. For rather than providing sustainable livelihoods, the low wages⁸ and exploitative working conditions serve to deepen rather than alleviate the economic insecurity of low income Haitians. While advocates for the expansion of garment assembly operations (including President Clinton, the United Nations Special Envoy to Haiti since 2009) focus on the short-term employment opportunities that these operations offer, few examine their long-term contributions to the creation of sustainable livelihoods and importantly, to the diversification of the Haitian economy. The continued reliance on what Brian Concannon of the Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti has described as “the same old ‘free trade’ model of development”, reflects the extent to which dominant market-led development

⁷ The 2006 HOPE Act and 2008 HOPE II Act offer expanded market access opportunities to firms with garment assembly operations in Haiti that go beyond those under the Caribbean Basin Initiative, in so far as they permit Haitian assembled apparel where at least 50 percent of the components or processing costs come from the USA or any of its FTA or regional trade preference partners to enter the USA duty-free.

⁸ While some garment industry workers earn as much as US\$4 per day in the apparel sector, Concannon argues that most workers earn the minimum wage of US\$2, a sum that is not sufficient to support two people living at subsistence levels in Haiti (Concannon in Terrall 2007).

approaches continue to be guided by the interests of those in a position to take advantage of market-based opportunities rather than the need to protect Haitians from the instabilities that many of these footloose industries generate (see Terrall 2007). While many highlight the importance of these industries to employment creation, others question the continued wisdom of promoting these incentive-driven programmes when the evidence across the region demonstrates the limited contribution that they offer to the creation of stable, “value added,” multiplier-producing forms of industry, and their poor record with regard to labour rights.

As major donor agencies and countries begin to outline their views of the most important steps needed for the reconstruction of Haiti, racialized discourses of poverty and criminality have begun to emerge in the form of an almost pathological obsession with the issue of corruption. Like the narratives of looting and raping criminals in the early days that followed the earthquake, the almost exclusive focus on corruption in conversations about Haitian reconstruction serves to justify the need for external control of the process. Yet, as Naomi Klein (2005) astutely observed with respect to Iraq, the type of jostling currently taking place among donor countries and agencies to take charge of the reconstruction effort speaks to the real economic benefits that countries like the United States, Canada and France stand to gain when their consulting firms and engineering companies spearhead reconstruction efforts. As Klein notes, “[f]oreign consultants live high on cost-plus expense accounts and thousand dollar-a-day salaries, while locals are shut out of much-needed jobs, training and decision-making” (2005: online). Expert ‘democracy builders’ lecture governments on the importance of transparency and ‘good governance,’ yet most contractors and NGOs refuse to open their books to those same governments, let alone give them control over how their aid money is spent. In the context of the current efforts by grassroots organizations to build transparent, regulated and democratic institutions in Haiti, it is ironic that the discourses of criminality that pervade development policy circles have only been directed at the Haitian population. For, as Brian Concannon (2010) notes, people in Haiti joke that when a Government Minister skims ten percent from a foreign aid project this is considered as corruption, but when a Washington consulting firm skims forty percent, this is considered as overhead.

What would it take to dismantle the dispossessions that racialized discourses of blackness, criminality and failed development facilitate in Haiti? Perhaps the most important opportunity to change the racialized capitalist script that has informed international approaches to Haiti throughout its history lies in the current moment as Haitians and the international community contemplate the criteria upon which future long-term reconstruction and development will be based. Changing the script can only occur, however, if there is a concerted effort to acknowledge the causal mechanisms that have languished at the heart of Haitian instability and poverty throughout history, and a commitment to a vision of development where

‘the fundamentals’ are oriented towards maximising quality of life rather than market efficiency.

We identify four pre-requisite changes that must first be undertaken if a people-centered reconstruction approach to Haitian development is to be successful. First, there must be a commitment to breaking the bonds of the structural violence of financial colonialism that continue to exist in the form of debt. In June 2009 when it was determined that Haiti had met the conditions set by the IMF for debt relief, a decision was made to cancel the US\$1.2 billion dollars in multilateral debt incurred before 2004 that Haiti owed. This decision, however, only removed a proportion of Haiti’s debt. An additional US\$709 million in debt to multilateral financial institutions remained – of which US\$447 million was owed to the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), US\$165 million to the IMF, US\$39 million to the World Bank, and US\$58 million to the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) (see [H.R.4573](#)).

In the aftermath of the earthquake, Venezuela, to whom US\$295 million was owed, moved to cancel its bilateral debt with Haiti, as did the G7 countries later on. So while much of Haiti’s bilateral debt was quickly canceled, much of the multilateral debt owed to institutions like the IDB, the World Bank and the IMF remained. Amidst mounting international pressure, including a bill put forward by Representatives Maxine Waters and Stephen Bachus instructing the U.S. Treasury to ensure that the international financial institutions completely cancel Haiti’s remaining multilateral debt, the IDB and World Bank agreed in March, 2010 to cancel Haiti’s debt, followed much later on in July 2010, by the IMF. The reluctance of the international lending institutions to quickly cancel the outstanding debt was interpreted by some as evidence of their desire to maintain this effective tool of external control, despite the institutions’ arguments to the contrary. Yet, the decision taken at the March 31, 2010 donor conference to designate the World Bank as the administrator of the US\$9.9 billion pledged for reconstruction over the next three years, rather than the Haitian state, and the IMF’s decision in July 2010 to provide Haiti with \$60 million in new loans, suggests that this form of financial colonialism has yet to be finally put to rest.

Second, a people-centered reconstruction approach to Haitian development can only be successful if there is a rejection of the hegemony that neoliberal solutions have exerted over Haitian development possibilities over the last four decades since Baby Doc Duvalier opened the Haitian economy up to U.S. capital in the 1970s and 1980s. Indeed, as the recent campaign for a five year moratorium on all trade agreements signed by Haiti, launched by a grouping of social movements and civil society organizations - Plateforme Haïtienne de Plaidoyer pour un Développement Alternatif (PAPDA) - indicates, it is crucial that Haiti be given time to redefine its national policies and decide what its position should be at the international level. If securing and improving the quality of life enjoyed by

Haitians became a fundamental requirement for all reconstruction and development strategies, then food security, income security and gender, class, racial and spatial equality⁹ would take precedence over strategies geared towards securing private property rights, attracting foreign direct investment and leveraging the private sector. In order to achieve food security, greater attention will need to be given to agriculture, and the livelihood opportunities that can emerge when agricultural markets are protected from cheap subsidized foreign imports. Income security will only be possible if there is a commitment to providing local livelihood opportunities at living wage levels. In the current reconstruction effort, the UN and a number of NGOs have begun cash-for-work programmes. These programmes are currently oriented towards providing short-term jobs such as rubble clearance and electrical and street repairs but they could feasibly form the basis of a strategy aimed at linking aid geared to reconstruction to income generating employment at living wage levels. Rather than expanding the (cruise ship-based) tourist and export apparel industries, a people-centered strategy would focus future state resources on industrial activities that demonstrated a clear commitment to creating backward linkages with the local economy. A commitment to gender, racial, class and spatial equality would similarly channel aid resources into sectors like education, health and housing, and would aim to reduce the concentration of economic activities and opportunities in the capital city Port-au-Prince, by locating possible growth generating sectors outside the city.

Third, a people-centered approach goes hand-in-hand with the need to address the environmental degradation and vulnerability that three centuries of capitalist development have wreaked on the land. Arguably, Haiti has a degree of environmental degradation almost without equal in the rest of the world; aerial photographs clearly demonstrate the virtual elimination of forest cover over the last century (from 60% coverage to less than 4%)¹⁰. Deforestation, largely as a result of demand for charcoal and land for farming, has resulted in severe soil erosion on the intensively farmed land which has contributed to lower agricultural yields and landslides, exacerbating the effects of natural disasters such as the 2004 and 2008 hurricanes and floods. Urban areas are also extremely vulnerable with Port-au-Prince, built on a coastal plain, being recognized by USAID (2007) as the most environmentally vulnerable area of the country. Not only does Haiti's growing population stress the environment, environmental degradation negatively impacts upon human health. Lack of clean water and poor food security contribute to Haiti's unacceptably low life expectancy and high child and maternal mortality rates, implying that any environmental interventions should also include improving access to health and family planning.

⁹ Jadotte (2006) estimates that in 2006 Haiti had the second highest income gap between the richest and poorest in the world - 68 percent of total income went to the wealthiest 20 percent of the population.

¹⁰ Library of Congress [Federal Research Division](#) (May 2006). [Country Profile: Haiti](#).

Fourth, a people-centered reconstruction approach to Haitian development can only be successful if there is a genuine commitment to enabling and supporting the formation of a democratic and sovereign Haitian state. To achieve such an outcome will require a dismantling of the Non-Profit Industrial Complex in Haiti, that has over the years contributed to the weakening of the Haitian state and played a significant role in the ousting of Aristide from power (Engler and Fenton 2005). The dismantling of residual structures of state terror will also be necessary if new governance institutions are to emerge.

The United States under the current Obama administration appears unlikely to consider development in Haiti differently. It continues to aid Haiti's elite; to sponsor international capital to take advantage of cheap labour; to weaken the ability of the Haitian state to govern; and to repress any political resistance to that agenda by the MINUSTAH. The disbanding of MINUSTAH, that, almost since it began in 2004, has been marred by scandals of extra-judicial killings and sexual violence by its troops, is essential. For the past twenty years, the tendency of Western power to bypass and undermine the Haitian state has significantly weakened it and helped to give rise to the Non-Profit Industrial Complex. Three groups that may prove instrumental in strengthening state capacity and assuming a greater role in the governance of the country are the Haitian diaspora, the CARICOM regional community and not least, the democratically elected and illegally ousted Aristide, for whom there have been grassroots calls for his return and reinstatement, as well as for lifting the political ban on his party, Fanmi Lavalas, from participation in the electoral process. While there are no guarantees that any of these groups will be immune to the hegemony that neoliberal solutions have held over development possibilities, their widely different interests and relationships to Haiti offer much hope that another Haiti might be possible.

Conclusion

Narratives of black criminality and recidivism and the need for containment are fundamental to the production of regimes of control that emerge in order to combat racialized forms of fear. In Haiti, these narratives represent black bodies generally, but especially poor, young, male black bodies, as the greatest threat to the order of things because they are viewed as angry, angry at their exclusion from masculine leadership and authority that has privileged Haitian elites and foreign powers – from the rise of mulatto elites in the early years following the revolution, to the United States military occupation in the early 20th century, to the Duvalier dictatorships (father and son), and more recently in the post-Aristide years, to Haiti's creole elite. The suspension of crucial assistance in the early moments following the earthquake until Haiti could be secured by the U.S. military, speaks to the productive effect of this fear. In the months and years of reconstruction ahead, contesting the material historical geographies that feed this fear offers poor Haitians their greatest weapons of self determination. While racialized discourses

do their damage by providing the justification for a range of material practices that have dispossessed Haitians of many of their rights throughout history, challenging these discourses cannot be left to the production of counter-discourses alone. Rather, the challenge rests in revealing the vulnerabilities that powerful interest groups face when they are no longer able to control or appropriate the value produced not only by poor Haitians, but all other dominated groups. As Haitians begin to rebuild, such an effort means demanding the non-intervention of foreign powers in the democratic processes of the Haitian people, and supporting reconstruction efforts and interests guided by an ethos of historical restitution, wealth distribution, and regional cooperation, rather than financial colonialism and market-based development.

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