She's Not Dominican

Critical Reflections Concerning the Complex Past and Hopeful Future of Hispaniola

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"*She's not Dominican*." Those words were etched upon my mind while living in the Dominican Republic (DR) for six months in 2012 and 2013. My wife and I and our two teenage daughters were living in the DR in order to complete the lengthy adoption process of our third daughter, Emilie.[1] Emilie, only 15 months old when God graced our lives with her, was born a Dominican (outside of Santo Domingo) but she is biologically of Haitian descent. She is a full representative of Hispaniola: Dominican by birth, Haitian by ancestry.

Our time on the island during the adoption process was certainly not our first nor last experience in the Dominican or Haiti – For the 5 years prior, our family made many trips each year to work with a "point of use" water filter manufacturer on the island (this particular non-profit company manufactures and distributes an affordable ceramic water filter that is 99.9% microbiologically effective).[2] Since Emilie's adoption, we have been working on the northern part of the island in Cabarete, a small town outside of Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic, with a foundation that educates (academic support, individual tutoring, literacy programs), trains (vocational, health) and empowers young Dominican and Haitian girls living in extreme poverty.

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[1] Under Dominican law, we were required to live as a family with Emilie under Dominican supervision for several months until the Dominican officials determined that our adoption should proceed. We planned on 2 months; it proved to be 6. Without question, it was the most beautiful and fulfilling chapter to date in my life.

[2] Our family assisted this non-governmental organization (NGO) with funding and support to build a new manufacturing facility in order to greatly increase their output and to provide a facility to train local distributers, as well as charitable groups, who wanted to incorporate a local and sustainable clean water initiative into their service. The strategy is designed to be replicated worldwide.

In essence, through the adoption and the above endeavors, we are committed to the wonderful people, challenges and opportunities upon the island of Hispaniola. It is my objective to speak honestly, respectfully and constructively about the complex history and the path ahead. Should I falter in that objective – which I undoubtedly will – I ask that you understand that I admittedly lack the life experiences of Dominicans and Haitians. I am a 45 -year- old male who has benefited from white American privilege. But please understand this: my heart has been both inspired and broken completely for the Dominicans and Haitians. I am hopeful for their future and I come at this effort with only agape love and a desire for justice for all on the island (as histrionic as I know that sounds). As Emilie's father, I also approach the effort with fierce passion and tremendous responsibility.

So how did these words "*She's not Dominican*" become etched upon my mind? Why did I choose these words as the title of this paper? Living in the Dominican during the adoption process, one thing that resonated with my family and me was the frequency with which Dominicans or Haitians living within the Dominican who encountered us with Emilie would inquire about our story. With genuine curiosity they would ask, in essence, why are you four Americans with this darker skinned child? We would respond that we were living in the Dominican for an unspecified period of time necessary to complete the adoption process. Invariably this response would in turn trigger a bewildered expression and the matter-of-fact statement, "She's not Dominican". This response was never delivered confrontationally; rather, it was almost as if they were pointing something out to us that perhaps we needed to know: this child we were adopting *from* the Dominican was nevertheless (to them) not *actually* Dominican.

I can understand that statement on many levels. Emilie is dark skinned, clearly of African (via Haitian) descent. Dominicans are often lighter skinned and of Spanish descent. But that aside, Emilie was born in the Dominican and was granted a Dominican birth certificate. Hence, on paper, she was a Dominican citizen. Yet we invariably (and I mean almost daily) had this dialogue with those who asked the questions: why were we hanging about as a family in the Dominican? Over time, I came to learn that this interchange was emblematic of an extremely complex issue that encompasses hundreds of years of race and ethnicity issues. I determined that I needed to "unpack" this issue if I were to succeed in my execution of the tremendous responsibility to help Emilie understand this history so she can approach life – the sacred and the worldly - with *her* authentic African/Haitian/Dominican/American heritage. Further, I need to acquire a deep understanding of this issue if I am to succeed in my vocational objective for studying at Chicago Theological Seminary: that is, to further educate and prepare myself to lead a non-governmental organization (NGO) in the Dominican Republic and/or Haiti that is

focused on sustainable social, economic and spiritual development ("whole person" development).[3]

Thus, I approach this paper almost as an armchair or "street educated" anthropologist who seeks to establish a foundation for further theological reflection. I have come to realize that any missiological objectives I may have must first be rooted in a solid cultural understanding. To that end, it is my objective for this present paper to discover whether there may be a "common fund" through which Dominicans and Haitians may draw strength, find commonality, empower self-determination, as well as constructively shape their identity moving forward.[4]

Against this backdrop, within this paper I reflect upon several themes that repeatedly resonate with me during my stays on Hispaniola:

- Skin color, bias and related tension.
- Diaspora (the desire among the island's most valuable resources to leave and, with respect to Haitians migrating to the Dominican, the effort to deport "illegal" Haitians, which continues yet to this day).
- The undeserved mythology – that is, the self-serving, self-created and destructive mythology related to larger-than- life "leaders" throughout history on both sides of the island.
- Mythology that is unfulfilled in certain historic figures yet ripe with constructive power.
- A sense that the United States is somehow complicit in the tragic parts of the island's history (actions taken in the interest of slavery, the Cold War and economics).
- The Haitian religious practice of *Vodou* and a desire to see if it can be redeemed from an image polluted by popularized stereotypes and, commensurate with its unique history in Haiti, be reclaimed in part as life-affirming and community-building.

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[3] I intend to do this upon transitioning - God willing - into a second career in the near future.

[4] Josef Sorett, "Believe Me, This Pimp Game is Very Religious" in *The Hip Hop and Religion Reader*, ed. Monica R. Miller and Anthony B. Pinn (Routledge, 2003), 235. Sorett quotes Paul Gilroy in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (Cambridge: 1993) at page 80 that there is a "*common fund of urban experiences*" and a legacy of Africanisms that influence hip-hop. In this paper, I have appropriated this notion of a "common fund" to help explore and articulate the possible historical sources from which Dominicans and Haitians may draw strength, find commonality, empower determination (on both the *communal* and *self* level), as well as constructively shape their identity moving forward.

- The failure of foreign aid and NGOs (some of which I have been a part of).
- The unrealized potential of liberation theology and a true sense of wondering whether it can be "retooled", escape its Marxist roots, and instead focus on the constructive traditions (discussed herein) upon the island.

These topics no doubt exceed the scope of this paper, but I hope to meaningfully unpack each of them through reflecting upon firsthand field research and experiences as well as the work of accomplished authors/scholars whom I have come to admire and appreciate and who have addressed these topics in the past. Prior to unpacking each of the above referenced topics, I believe it may be helpful to provide a brief historical summary.

As Christopher Columbus was scheming to "discover" (i.e. conquer) the New World from his base in Santo Domingo, the Spanish leaders wrestled with France over control of Hispaniola. The two colonially ambitious nations settled their dispute in 1697 by splitting the island via the Treaty of Ryswick.[5] The treaty that brought truce created two colonies: Spanish Santo Domingo on the eastern side and the considerably smaller French Saint Domingue on the western side.[6] While the "splitting" moment was called a truce, suffice it to say that from that moment on, the "split" factions have fought. Then, in 1804, Haiti was established when the slaves upon the French side of the island successfully revolted against French colonial powers and established the first free black republic in the world (and the second free republic in the Americas).[7] In 1822, Haiti (under the direction of president Jean-Pierre Boyer) invaded the colony of Santo Domingo for the third time with the aim of fusing the island, then occupied the eastern Dominican territory for approximately 22 years. Subsequently, in 1844, Santo Domingo wrestled back its independence from Haiti and became the Dominican Republic. Since that moment in time, the Dominican Republic has occupied nearly two-thirds of the island of Hispaniola.

Indeed turmoil continues between the two nations. The leaders of both nations have a storied and tragic history of plotting against one another. As this paper will explore (below), perhaps the most well known period in this perpetual conflict occurred in 1937 when the Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo ordered the massacre of what is believed to

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[5] Michele Wucker, *Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, and the Struggle for Hispaniola* (MacMillan, Kindle Edition, 2003), 13.

[6] *Ibid*, 32.

[7] *Ibid*, 37.

be more than twenty-five thousand Haitians along the border of the two nations.[8] The victims were by and large Haitians who had immigrated to the Dominican for purposes of working in the sugarcane fields.[9] As one scholar/author states, *"(t)he memory of what happened …in 1937 is still vivid in the minds of the islanders. Even now, it is nearly impossible for Dominicans and Haitians to think of each other without some trace of the tragedy of their mutual history that took place that year*".[10]

To say that the tension and turmoil is deep-seated and continual would be an understatement. By way of example, other countries of Latin America celebrate their "Independence Day" as the day they won independence from a European colonial power; while every February 27, the DR celebrates the day in 1844 when it fought off its neighbor, Haiti, to become an independent nation after a near 20-year occupation by Haiti.[11] Indeed the conflict is hardwired and perpetual. As I wrote this paper, thousands of Haitian immigrants in the Dominican Republic were either deported or are facing the risk of deportation to Haiti. June 18, 2015, was the deadline under a new law for tens of thousands of Haitians throughout the Dominican Republic to register under a new immigration law or face potential deportation.[12]

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[8] *Ibid*, 14. *See also* 44 wherein Wucker states, "*Prompted by the United States, the Dominican Republic and Haiti on January 1, 1929, drew a new line, the one that still stands. Under the accord, negotiated under watchful American eyes, Haiti ceded land, allowing Dominicans to build the International Highway, while the Dominican Republic gave up a two-hundred-meter-wide swath for another highway to be built by Haiti in the south.*"

[9] *Ibid,* 44. Wucker states, *"(t)he Massacre earned its macabre name a second time in 1937, when Rafael Trujillo ordered the slaughter of Haitians who had crossed over to the Dominican side or who had always lived there. The death toll reached into the tens of thousands as the blood of innocent Haitians flowed freely into the water and transformed the border from a place that had once been a refuge from persecution and slavery...*" *See also* Laurent Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History (*Metropolitan, Kindle Edition, 2012), 305. Laurent states, "*Though the massacre was one of the largest genocides to take place in the Americas during the twentieth century, there has never been any official trial or investigation of what happened. To this day, it remains a disturbing specter in both countries, largely unacknowledged and unmemorialized*."

[10] Wucker, *Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, and the Struggle for Hispaniola*, 44.

[11] *Ibid*, 40.

[12] Dudely Althaus, "Despite Dominican Pledges, Haitians Fear Mass Deportations." *The Wall Street Journal* 18 June 2015: A 11.

As I was traveling in the Dominican during May of 2015 to conduct field research related to this paper, I could sense the tension building; many Haitians feel it is only a matter of time before Dominican authorities begin to gather up Haitians. The deadline and registration was part of a 2010 change to the Dominican constitution that terminated the process of granting citizenship automatically to people born in the country (making it a requirement that both parents be either a citizen or permanent resident). To make matters more inflammatory, in 2013 the equivalent of the Supreme Court in the Dominican made the change retroactive such that greater than 200,000 people of Haitian descent would have their citizenship revoked. By the time I conducted my field research in Haiti in November of 2015, many of the Haitian immigrants' worst fears were materializing.

One Haitian lawyer with whom I spoke articulated the change in citizenship law as follows: The Haitians use a law of consanguinity (or *blood* relatedness). If your mom is Haitian, you are Haitian regardless of where you are born. The Dominicans on the other hand use a law of *location* (being born in the country gave you a "birth right" to citizenship). If you were born in the Dominican, even if you had or have Haitian parents, the Dominicans recognized you as a Dominican citizen. This meant that even children of undocumented migrant cane workers were automatically granted citizenship status in the Dominican. After the earthquake, when more Haitians fled to the Dominican in search of a way to make money and survive, the Dominicans changed the law so that any migrant workers who had children were essentially like tourists who had children while vacationing (i.e. they were considered "in transit" and not really "living" in the Dominican when they had their child). As such, the change in the Dominican constitution now takes this citizenship away. Accordingly, hundreds of thousands of children lost not only their citizenship but also their ability to exist in the only country they have ever known. The Dominican government does have a process that purportedly allows the victims to legalize their residency and/or citizenship, but that process is a mess and, to date, very few are able to access it. (cite)

What is the impetus for this new law? Following the horrific earthquake in Haiti in 2010, thousands of Haitians in search of a way to make a living migrated to the Dominican. Dominican lawmakers and supporters of these retroactive measures argue that the intent is to repatriate undocumented immigrants (and not those who were born in the Dominican Republic). However, having lived down there during the process of adopting my youngest daughter and having dealt personally with the morass associated with birth certificates and critical legal documentation, I can attest that there will be (in fact there already is) tragedy in the process: many people will simply not be able to find the paperwork their parents may have been provided upon their birth; and the governmental infrastructure does not appear to be equipped with sufficient resources or systems to make the process of finding or regenerating such documentation possible. Undoubtedly, wives are being separated from husbands and parents from their children. With this expulsion is tremendous pain. Some will resist the process of being separated from loved

ones (not to mention perhaps a source of labor and wage) - to what consequence? More tension and conflict seems to be on the horizon.

This expulsion of Haitians from the Dominican is emblematic to political difficulties that have befallen both sides of the island. Among almost all of the Haitians with whom I met during my field research in Haiti in November of 2015, the deportation issue was very real and personal. Several had friends or family members who had been deported. One shared that his friend was "swept up on the street" and was not even allowed to go home to gather his belongings. Another individual had a sister who was in the late stage of her pregnancy and living in the Dominican. She was sent home. Thankfully, in these instances, the deportee had family or friends to which to return. This is likely not the norm – many of the victims of this new law have absolutely no ties remaining in Haiti and therefore no support system when they arrive in Haiti. As one Haitian educator explained to me, there are many victims who "*are kids of Haitians but they have no Haitian roots any more. They are moving them back with no support and no family to go to. They have no roots to latch on to*." He said his biggest disappointment is that there is absolutely no process and that the cruelty is absolutely compounded by the fact that there is no infrastructure in Haiti right now to help support those people who are returning. He left me with the sense that they feel in the aftermath of the earthquake the Dominicans are kicking them while they are down. In the face of international criticism and condemnation, the Dominican government states that this was not engineered as attack against individuals of Haitian descent but rather an attempt to fix a broken system of immigration laws.

With the foregoing context, the balance of this paper reflects upon the issues outlined above informed by my primary field research as well as the writings of leading authors/ scholars on the Haiti and/or the Dominican Republic. [13]

Section 1: Replacing Destructive Myths With Constructive Traditions.

Despite their problematic history, as the only two countries on the small island of Hispaniola, the Dominican Republic and Haiti are inescapably "*two wings of the same bird*."[14] Michelle Wucker, an esteemed scholar on Haiti/Dominican relations, traveled to

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[13] Field research was specifically conducted for this research paper during the month of May 2015 and November of 2015. In addition, I draw upon my time living on the island as referenced in the introduction to this paper, as well as numerous trips "in country" working with the NGOs referenced within this research paper.

[14] Wucker, *Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, and the Struggle for Hispaniola*, 136.

Hispaniola when she won a grant from Rice University to study the politics of language and culture on the island. She states, "*My questions were these: … Did culture make it impossible to find political solutions to conflict*?"[15]

Wucker situates the American reader to the Dominican and Haitian conflict by drawing comparisons to a similar conflict in the United States. She writes, "*I began to realize that the reactions of Dominicans to Haitians closely resembled the way Texans spoke about Mexicans, in that illegal immigration, jobs, and land were the real issues behind racist slurs. I began to see the Dominican-Haitian conflicts in terms of immigration as well: more and more Haitians were coming to the Dominican Republic, which couldn't support its own people. Because their skin was darker than that of the mostly mulatto Dominicans, and because they spoke Kreyol instead of Spanish, the Haitians stood out. In Santo Domingo, as in Texas, the debate often returned to the theme of jobs, even though the new immigrants were doing work the natives shunned."*[16] In this brief passage, one can see the complex interplay between color, language, competition (for labor) as well as cultural mythology.

The foregoing observations provide critical context to two of the key issues addressed in this section: First, the nature and history of skin color and tension on the island; and second, mythology (on one hand, the self-serving, self-created and destructive mythology related to larger- than -life "leaders" throughout history on both sides of the island; as well as the mythology in certain historical figures that is to this day unfulfilled, yet ripe with constructive power). Each of these themes is examined in more detail below.

The rooster and the cockfight. Prior to diving into these two key themes articulated above, it is helpful to examine a common source of inspiration for both the Dominicans and the Haitians. Ironically, both countries on the island have in essence claimed the rooster as their national symbol. Wucker points to the imagery of the "rooster" in both Dominican and Haitian culture and history as a proxy for the complex interplay between these two nations and cultures. Pointing to the rooster as a "*solitary male symbol, tied to Caribbean machismo and violence*," Wucker asks "*if the symbols that dominate a culture accurately express a nation's character, what kind of a country draws so heavily on images of cockfighting and roosters, birds bred to be aggressive? What does it mean when two countries that are such close neighbors choose those exact same symbols*?"[17] Continuing with this symbolism and analogy, Wucker explains, *"(r)oosters, after all,*

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[15] *Ibid,* Kindle Loc. 36.

[16] *Ibid,* Kindle Loc. 49.

[17] *Ibid,* 12. Wucker further notes, "*The rooster has come to represent all aspects of daily life in Hispaniola: politics, home, territory, courtship, healing, sustenance, the passage of time, and brotherhood*."

fight for territory…it is only when they come into close quarters that fights break out."[18] This tension associated with limited territory aptly symbolizes the astonishing history of Hispaniola.[19]

Skin Color and Tension. Despite being "*two wings of the same bird*", there is palpable discord between the two sides of the island. Calling someone Haitian in the Dominican Republic is by and large a pejorative assertion. Wucker states, "*calling someone Haitian is on the surface synonymous with describing them as negro or molado but with an added psychological weight of fear and hatred*." While my personal experience leads me to believe there are many enlightened Dominicans who see Haitians as their "brothers and sisters" upon the island, her point, I believe, is well established: years and years of fighting and ingrained tension have led to a susceptibility to bigotry from each side toward the other.

Dominicans and Haitians attribute nationality, as a default rule, by color. According to Wucker's research, "*more than two-thirds of Dominicans are mixed race (mostly African and European, but possibly with a tiny portion of Taino blood) in the middle of the color spectrum*." The remaining population is split more or less evenly between the black and white ends".[20] On the other hand, she observes, the vast majority of Haitians occupy the darkest end of the color spectrum.[21]

Despite the vast majority of Dominicans having some African heritage through the mixture of their blood, many observe that Dominicans seem to go to great lengths to deny this tie. Some scholars go so far as to say that in the U.S., most Dominicans would be considered "black".[22] Yet, the Dominicans of mixed heritage and darker skin tone often utilize the term "indio" to describe their complexion (a term unique to the Caribbean), in an attempt to negate their African heritage.[23]

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[18] *Ibid,* 13. Wucker states, *"(l)ike the cockfight, the confrontations between the Dominican Republic and Haiti, trapped and fighting for limited territory, have been dramatic and tragic."*

[19] *Ibid,* 26. Wucker states, *"(t)he cockfight is not about the roosters. It is about the men. That is the essence of the symbol of Hispaniola's two countries, where cockfighting and life imitate each other*."

[20] *Ibid,* 33-34

[21] *Ibid*.

[22] "Haiti and Dominican Republic: An Island Divided." *Black in Latin America*. Writ. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. DVD. PBS, 2011.

[23] *Ibid.*

With respect to color and identity between the two sides of the island, Tzvetan Todorov's well-known social construct of the "Other" is instructive. Todorov describes "otherness" as follows: *"…the other are unknown quantities, outsiders whose language and customs I do not understand, so foreign that in extreme instances I am reluctant to admit they belong to the same species as my own*." Under this construction, identifying the "Other" and asserting one's position relative to it involve three processes: a value judgment, an assessment of distance, and, ultimately, identification or rejection.[24] These three processes create a deep-seated foundational belief and filter system through which one side encounters and engages with the other. Said differently, they create a predisposition (a mixture of attitudes and perspectives) such that one's prejudgment of the other dictates how one will encounter and interpret any set of facts regarding the other. It is the closed mind: good/bad; superior/inferior; dark/light.

Wucker utilizes Todorov's construct of "otherness" to examine why Dominican and Haitian leaders historically have chosen to emphasize the differences between their two countries: "*The things they have in common are the most painful elements of their tragic history: brutal leaders, poverty, rejection by the outside world, and long episodes of violence (directed most often at those who have the least power to defend themselves)*".[25] This is not a phenomena limited to the Dominicans and Haitians. She concludes: "*the next-least-fortunate always find a group worse off than themselves: the Irish against the Germans against the Italians against the Chinese during the Industrial Revolution; the Dominicans against the Haitians on Hispaniola; the Germans against the Turks in Europe; the Serbs and Croats hating each other in Bosnia*".[26] This focus on "otherness" is, it seems, by design of leaders (or those few on the front side of the tragic wealth gap) who desire to deflect the ire of the poor in their own country from the failures of their country's rulers. Junot Diaz, famous Dominican author and outspoken critic of the recent efforts to deport Haitians, summarizes the issue as follows: *There's no question that many Dominican elites have historically deployed a metaphysics of Haiti-hating to curry favor with the colonial powers and also as a way to modulate all manners of internal contradictions within the Dominican state (and as a way of consolidating power through nationalist practices)*.[27]

An obvious question, then, is: *under what set of facts and circumstances are the Haitians and Dominican's interacting*? As referenced in the introduction above, thousands of

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[24] *Ibid,* 242.

[25] *Ibid,* 243.

[26] *Ibid,* 208.

[27] Richard Andre. *The Dominican Republic and Haiti: A Shared View fro the Diaspora* in Americas Quarterly, Summer 2014.

Haitian immigrants in the Dominican Republic are facing (or have already suffered from) the risk of deportation to Haiti. As I spend time on the island, I can attest that this rhetoric echoes what Americans often hear pundits say about Mexicans, illegal immigration and the "taking" of jobs. What is driving this discourse? Each year (for hundreds of years), from October roughly through June, thousands of Haitians cross the boarder to cut sugar cane in the Dominican. Throughout the island's history, this has created a host of issues and opportunities for exploitation, including: leaders of the two countries agreeing on how to exploit the laborer (i.e. Haitian president agreeing to provide labor to Dominican sugar operations in exchange for a fee that lined the pocket of the Haitian president and enabled the exploitation of the Haitian laborer); Haitians arriving at the work camp ("batey") and becoming indentured to the "company store"; Haitians working in a highly dangerous labor environment but receiving little to no healthcare; Haitians taking roots (family) within the Dominican and understandably not wanting to leave upon the conclusion of the season (as often their children born in the Dominican have no formal "paperwork") and a host of other complex issues which exceed the scope of this paper.

When interacting with a handful of Dominicans and Haitians one quickly realizes how the idiom "paperwork" dominates the discussion. During my time in both the Dominican and Haiti, interviewees virtually unanimously proclaimed that there are two classes of Haitians in the Dominican: those who have papers (including passports and visas) and those who do not. The former, many whom are students, tend to elicit more tolerance and communal acceptance. Those in the latter group, mostly considered by Dominicans to be originating from the bateys, are at the nucleus of the conflict and are the true victims of this recently enacted deportation law. Some of the comments from the Haitian as well as Dominican interviewees are emblematic of this dynamic:

- *"Don't dress like a cane worker when you go over there… If you are black, you must dress well to be seen as something other than Haitian or if Haitian be seen as something other than a cane worker."*

- *"I would be scared to go to the Dominican. If things go bad anywhere around a Haitian in the Dominican, the Dominicans will blame it on a Haitian."*

- *"My children are studying in the Dominican. (Because they are Haitian) I tell them they must stay in the city near the school where people know who they are."*

- *"I don't have a problem with Haitians who are over here legally – just the ones without papers"*

- *"Uneducated Dominicans view all Haitians as evil and fear vodou. When something bad happens, like a sick child dying in the countryside, if there is a Haitian living in the area they may blame it on the vodou.."*

- *"Dominicans hate Haitians because they will do any type of work (in the Dominican) for less money than a Dominican, even if it is a job that Dominican's don't want to do."*

- *"Haitian workers originally were only coming to the Dominican seasonally to work the sugar cane and live in the bateys. They began to have babies and to build up their own communities. Their kids go to school in the Dominican and want to leave the batey and take other jobs."*

- *"The Dominicans made a deal in 1929 with the (then) Haitian president to take Haitian people to the Dominican in order to work the sugarcane. This is what the Dominicans wanted. Now they want to reverse what they asked for and force them out."*

- *"Fuera los haitianos!"* (graffiti seen all over the Dominican which translates in English to "Haitians Out!")

This immigrant-labor dynamic has engendered much of the "otherness" described earlier: Dominicans prescribe to the Haitians work that Dominicans would not do, yet nonetheless, blame the Haitians for the Dominicans' poor job/labor market.[28] As such the recent efforts in the Dominican to "deport" Haitians in the Dominican is not a new phenomena -This historic tension has resulted in many past violent efforts within the Dominican to gather up and force out the immigrant Haitians who stray from the prescribed seasonal work and life confined upon the batey.[29] The most notorious of such instances occurred (as referenced in the introduction) in 1937 when Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo ordered the massacre of thousands of such immigrants who for the most part had immigrated to the Dominican for purposes of working in the sugarcane fields. This same "otherness" is fueling the current deportation dynamic.

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[28] Wucker, *Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, and the Struggle for Hispaniola*. 122, 225. Wucker contends, *"(i)n America as in the Dominican Republic, the argument that immigrants take jobs was disingenuous because few citizens would accept the poor working conditions and pay that immigrants would."*

[29] *Ibid,* 122, 134. Wucker contends, "(s)trapped for manpower, the Dominican government had its soldiers patrol the streets looking for Haitians, round them up, and take them to the bateys (work camps). (p. 122). Further, she posits, *"(t)he bracero problem was not the Dominicans' fault, nor was it his. It was the Haitians' fault. On June 14, President Balaguer issued a new decree ordering that all Haitian immigrants over sixty or under sixteen years old be expelled. If the human-rights groups did not like the way Haitians were treated in the Dominican Republic, they could all go home.* (p. 134).

The context of "otherness" and violence upon the island sets up another critical theme - that is, the larger than life "leaders" on both sides of the island (Dominican and Haitians) who worked so hard to create a false, self-serving (undeserved) mythology.

Mythology: The Self-Created, Self-Serving and Destructive vs. the Unfilled and Constructive. As referenced above, a key feature in the playbooks of Dominican and Haitian dictators alike are the schemes to keep those they oppress from rebelling. But these political schemes tend to engender a loop effect: one leader prevents people through fear, eradication or persuasion from expressing frustration and revolting in the face of horrible socio-economic conditions. This dictator stays in power by nurturing myth around his accomplishments or strength. He is also a master of redirection, diverting attention (and tension) outward toward the "Others" by way of a "*nationalistic and racist political agenda so that instead of recognizing his failure to improve his people's lot they blame their neighbors across the island*". [30] Eventually he falters or pushes too far and fighting ensues. As a result, rising populist leaders make promises (should they be placed in charge) to share more of the wealth and power. Thus, the mythological figure-in-waiting wrestles away the helm; the previous leader's promises never materialize and the cycle repeats.[31]

I perceive this "will to power" dynamic as reminiscent of Reinhold Niebuhr's arguments in *Moral Man and Immoral Society.*[32] Dominant groups (elite in leadership) claim a special intellectual or moral superiority to justify their power and indulgences (they "succumb to the self-righteous delusions of innocence and infallibility").[33] In this dynamic, a leader is always working to preserve his own power and wealth and the heir-apparent is right behind, hoping to dislodge the incumbent and, historically, slip into the

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[30] *Ibid,* 234-235.

[31] Laurent, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History*, 168. Laurent states, *"(b)y way of example, between 1843 and 1889, there were twelve presidents and eight constitutions in Haiti. Almost always, the changes in government came as the result of a military campaign in which the president was ousted by a rebel at the head of a regional army. The new constitutions, as historian Claude Moïse points out, were never the 'result of a national consensus,' or even of 'agreement among the ruling classes.' Instead, they were largely tools used to maintain control of the state and to divide up the spoils that came with it. The discussions surrounding each new constitution focused primarily on just one question: how much power the president would have within the system."*

[32] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1932).

[33] Arthur Schlesinger. "Reinhold Neibuhr's Long Shadow," *New York Times*, 22 June 1992.

same pattern. Accordingly, leadership on the island has suffered from the cyclical or "loop" effect of promises, power struggle and regime change. Then the cycle repeats.

Two examples (one from the Dominican and one from Haiti) provide context to this "will to power" or "loop" dynamic: Trujillo in the Dominican Republic and Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier in Haiti. Rafael Trujillo came to power as the U.S. occupation was coming to a close in 1924. Trujillo was head of the Dominican army when in 1930 he forced the ailing President Vasquez to step aside. He was a megalomaniac (naming just about everything – including renaming the capital and the highest mountain peak – after himself).[34] He was a notoriously predatory womanizer. Like all tyrants within the will-to-power cycle described above, he was paranoid and used fear and homicide to eradicate all that he believed threatened his hold on the people and his power. Among the many atrocities he committed within and to Dominicans, he is believed to have massacred tens of thousands of Haitians. Employing his tools of intimidation and manipulation, he was in power for more than 30 years.

On the other side of the island, the legacy of Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier and his father before him grew as he grappled to and maintained power by similar tactics for nearly 30 years. Claude was a son of Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier (who came to power in 1957). Papa Doc ruled "unsparingly, using states of siege and assuming emergency powers to quiet constant unrest".[35] He existed within the loop of power by imprisoning or eradicating those who spoke up against injustice associated with his dictatorship. When Papa Doc died in 1971, Baby Doc, his nineteen-year old, oldest son, was bestowed with the "President for Life" title. With incredible alacrity he siphoned money from the government treasury. When the populous or church spoke up against him, his *tontons macoutes* would intimidate or terrorize with the same unabashed approach as Trujillo had done on the Dominican side of the island.[36] Having robbed the coffers so significantly that he did not leave any of the spoils for the leaders of the armed forces (a tactic of necessity that his father as well as Trujillo had understood), the military facilitated the will-to-power cycle to yet again gain momentum upon the island. In1986 Baby Doc was forced to flee the island.

In contrast to these underserved and self-created leadership myths, when one studies many of the island's more tragic historic episodes, one is left with the hopeful impression

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[34] Wucker, *Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, and the Struggle for Hispaniola*, 45.

[35] Laurent, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History*, 97.

[36] *Ibid,* 117. A "Tonton Macoute" was a special operations unit within the Haitian military created by François 'Papa Doc' Duvalier. The origin of the phrase is a mythological "bogey man" who kidnapped children.

that there is yet an unfulfilled opportunity for constructive traditions through certain historic figures. The Mirabal sisters in the Dominican Republic as well as the slave revolt (and many of its key leaders) in Haiti, for instance, are ripe to be expanded upon in order to create a "common fund" through which Dominicans and Haitians may draw strength, find commonality, empower self-determination and shape their identity moving forward.

In many respects, the legacy of the Mirabal sisters in the Dominican Republic represents the most underutilized heroines in history in terms of their still-relevant, constructive power. The Mirabal sisters were the matchsticks that ignited the populous upsurge that overthrew Trujillo. The three sisters (who are the subject of the next book addressed within this paper) were horrifically murdered by Trujillo because they gave voice to the activists who were working to shed light upon (and topple) Trujillo.

Minerva, Patria, and María Teresa Mirabal were married to men who were also activists. On November 25, 1960, Trujillo's operatives murdered the three women while they were returning from visiting their husbands whom Trujillo had imprisoned. The murder of the Mirabel sisters (code-named "the Butterflies" in the resistance) became the last straw in a building pressure to rise up and overthrow the brutal dictator.[37] To this day, the Mirabal sisters are remembered through symbols of three butterflies that adorn many public spaces throughout the Dominican Republic. Certainly since Trujillo, the Presidents of the Dominican have not been nearly as tyrannical; yet as I witness the current economic imbalance on the island, the known corruption within the government and judiciary, as well as the en masse deportation of Haitians, I cannot help but wonder what voice and agency would the Mirabals apply to the situation?[38]

Similar to the Mirabal sisters in the Dominican Republic, in Haiti the slave revolt and its key actors represent a constructive iconic tradition that has yet to reach its full potential. In August 1791, slaves on the sugar plantations – led by a former slave named Toussaint

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[37] Wucker, *Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, and the Struggle for Hispaniola*, 70.

[38] Heritage Foundation 2015 Index of Economic Freedom. "Dominican Republic" http://www.heritage.org/index/country/dominicanrepublic (accessed on July 9, 2015). The Heritage Foundation ranks the DR as one of the top 30 most corrupt governmental / judiciary countries. *See Also,* U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs, "The 2012 Investment Climate Statement"http://www.state.gov/e/eb/rls/othr/ics/2012/191140.htm (accessed on July 9, 2015). The World Economic Forum's Global Competitive report identified corruption as the most concerning factor for doing business in the DR, ranking it "139 out of 139 in terms of transparency in awarding of public contracts, second-to-last (138 of 139) in wastefulness of government spending, and 134 out or 139 in diversion on public funds."

L'Ouverture - initiated the largest slave revolt in history.[39] As referenced above, in 1804, the triumphant slaves (having overthrown French rule and oppression) established Haiti as the first free black republic in the world.[40] The importance of Haiti's founding revolution cannot be overstated – it is the only successful slave revolt in the history of the world.[41] Yet, nearly two centuries later, as discussed in sections that follow regarding Haiti's history (and the effort of various regimes and countries to undermine the trajectory of Haiti discussed later in this paper), the full promise and potential of that revolution has yet to be fulfilled. As one prominent Haiti author and scholar explains: *"(t)wo hundred years ago, Haiti illuminated the history of humanity and of human rights. Now we must give Haitians the chance to confirm their vision…out of a situation that seemed utterly hopeless, they created a new and better world for themselves. Two hundred years later, that remains a reminder of what is possible: if it happened once, perhaps it can happen again."*[42]
Indeed, the question which faces Dominicans and Haitians and those within the world community who are hopeful for the island of Hispaniola is how will (as Wucker calls them) the destructive myths be replaced with sustaining ones…"[43]

Section 2: The Constructive Power of Butterflies

Having explored the historical discord between the two sides of Hispaniola and laid the foundation to view the Mirabal sisters as underutilized iconic figures, this section

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[39] Laurent, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History*, 19. An official estimate of the colony's population in 1789 reported that Saint-Domingue contained 55,000 free people and 450,000 slaves.

[40] *Ibid*, 5.

[41] *Ibid*, 14.

[42] *Ibid.* 368-370. Just as the revolution is a tradition capable of being reclaimed by Haitians, so might be the tradition and legacy of certain Haitian leaders, such as Toussaint L'Ouverture and Jean Jacques Dessalines.

[43] Wucker, *Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, and the Struggle for Hispaniola*, 245. The author contends, "*(t)he new struggle for Dominicans and Haitians is to replace destructive myths with sustaining ones, in a slow and painful process."*

expands upon how the "the Butterflies" (Patria, Minerva and Maria Theresa[44]) contributed to the Dominican and Haitian "common fund" through which constructive power can be derived.[45] To this end, no one has captured the story and power of the Mirabal sisters more comprehensively and vibrantly than Julia Alvarez in her book, *In the Time of Butterflies*.

By way of background, Julia Alvarez was born in New York but raised in the Dominican Republic. Her parents (Dominican natives) returned to the DR when Julia Alvarez was an infant; her father was involved in the same underground movement as the Mirabal sisters. Alvarez notes that the founders of the underground – called "las Mariposas" (the Butterflies) had inspired throughout the country cells of resistance in which her father participated. Her family fled the Dominican Republic and the specter of the Trujillo dictatorship after Trujillo's secret police had begun to determine the identities of members of the resistance cell to which her father belonged. This occurred just months before the Mirabal sisters were murdered.[46]

Through extraordinary character development (aided by historical accounts provided by relatives of the Mirabal sisters, including their surviving sister Dede), Alvarez brings to life the palpability of Trujillo's intimidation and terrorization of those who sought to expose the injustices within his near 30-year tyrannical regime.[47] Alvarez provides poignant and historically grounded accounts of Trujillo's obsession with the Mirabal sisters, in particular Minerva Mirabal.

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[44] Patria Mercedes Mirabel Reyes – born February 27, 1924 – is known as Patria; Maria Argentina Minerva Mirabal Reyes – born March 12, 1926 – is known as Minerva; Antonia Maria Teresa Mirabal Reyes – born October 15, 1935 – is known as Maria Teresa; Belgica Adela Mirabal Reyes – born February 29, 1925 – is known as Dede (She was not one of the murdered sisters and was not as politically active. Dede died in February 2014. She worked tirelessly to bring to light and preserve the legacy of her martyred sisters.). *See generally* "Mirabal Sisters", Wikipedia, accessed on July 21, 2015, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mirabal_sisters.

[45] Throughout this paper, I refer to the "common fund" as the constructive pool of traditions through which I believe Dominicans and Haitians may find commonality, empower determination (on both the *communal* and *self* level) and shape their identity moving forward.

[46] "About Me", Julia Alvarez website, accessed on June 28, 2015, www.juliaalvarez.com/about/.

[47] The three sisters (Patria, Minerva and Antonia Maria) had a fourth sister Beglica, known as Dede. Dede did not have an active role in the underground.

Trujillo had a brief encounter with Minerva while visiting the catholic girls' boarding school she attended.[48] As Alvarez reveals, Trujillo was fixated by Minerva's moxie, inviting her to several state events and making intimate advances toward her, despite her young age.[49] (Trujillo was widely known to exploit young women, reportedly having his henchmen steal them away to fulfill his pleasures.[50]) At one such event – a party to commemorate Columbus's "discovery" of the Americas – the Mirabal family made a hasty exit (a sign, Trujillo believed, of disrespect).[51] Angered, Trujillo sent his henchmen to the Mirabal household to extract an apology. Even though Minerva's father, Enrique Mirabal Fernandez (known as "Don Enrique"), offered the apology Trujillo sought, he was nonetheless imprisoned. As Trujillo already suspected the strong-willed Minerva to be involved with the underground movement against him, he also had her taken into custody to be interrogated and intimidated.

The Mirabal family's plight began to gain public recognition and, sensing the pressure of public opinion, Trujillo decided to release Don Enrique and Minerva. Already in failing health, Don Enrique died in 1953 and Minerva credited the stress of her father's imprisonment as the cause of his death. These events only served to further bolster Minerva's resolve. She continued to speak out against Trujillo and her two sisters (Maria and Patria) followed her footsteps into increased political activism. Trujillo, ever so embarrassed by his inability to silence Minerva's activism, banned her from the University where she was then studying. From this point forward, Minerva and her sisters never fell far from Trujillo's radar.

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[48] Julia Alvarez, *In the Time of the Butterflies* (Algonquin Books, Kindle Edition, 2012), 22.

[49] This account of Trujillo's attraction to Minerva is fictionalized. By most accounts, Trujillo did indeed meet the sisters and the Mirabal family at a party at his home in 1942. They had been personally invited by the governor of Moca (their home province). The Mirabals left the party early – against a known tradition of not leaving until after Trujillo himself had exited. Trujillo was reportedly angered and later sent his men to the Mirabal household in an attempt to extract an apology. Even though Enrique offered the apology, Trujillo nonetheless imprisoned him. It was then that Minerva – who Trujillo already suspected of political activism – was taken to the Fortress Ozama to be interrogated. (*See Generally,* Wucker, *Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, and the Struggle for Hispaniola*, 70.

[50] Wucker, *Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, and the Struggle for Hispaniola*, 45.

[51] *See generally* Alvarez, *In the Time of the Butterflies*, 91 -101 (the "Discovery Day Dance")

Minerva, Maria and Patria all married anti-Trujillo intellectuals and activists while continuing to pursue further education. Indeed it was Minerva's husband – Manuel (Manolo) Tavarez Justo – who led the growing underground movement, which was intensifying as the young Dominicans were becoming more vocal about their opposition to Trujillo.[52] As active figures in the underground, the three sisters became known as "The Butterflies" ("La Mariposas" in Spanish). In 1960, as intensifying pressure mounted against Trujillo, he imprisoned all known participants in the underground movement. Given the large number of young men and women he had to place in custody to quell the movement; public opinion reached a boiling point. Thus, in an effort to lesson the pressure, he released all female prisoners, including the Mirabal sisters.[53] Yet, as their husbands still languished in jail, the Butterflies would not be silenced and Trujillo was filled with paranoid rage.

On November 25, 1960, as Minerva, Maria and Patria were returning from a trip to visit their husbands in jail, Trujillo's henchmen took final action. The three sisters, along with their driver, were led into a sugar cane grove and beaten and strangled.[54] Patria was 36 years old, Minerva was 34 and Maria was 24 at the time of their murders. While the henchmen tried to cover up the murders by pushing the sisters' car over a roadside cliff with their bodies inside (to make it look like a car accident), the public had no doubt about what had happened. Trujillo's will-to-power "loop" had finally come full circle – The murder of the Butterflies was the final impetus in a building pressure to rise up and overthrow the brutal dictator. The Mirabel sisters' murders ignited the populous upsurge that lead to Trujillo's assassination just six months later (in 1961).

Regretfully, the "will-to-power" cycle continued after Trujillo was assassinated. After Trujillo's death, Joaquin Balaguer – a protégé of Trujillo – continued to rule for 22 years.[55] It was not until the late 90's – after Balaguer's presidency came to a close and

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[52] *Ibid,* 167. The three sisters and their husbands ultimately formed a group called the Movement of the Fourteenth of June. The name is in remembrance of the date that Patria witnessed the brutal murder by Trujillo's henchmen of people on a religious retreat who Trujillo suspected of organizing opposition. *See also,* "Mirabal Sisters", Wikipedia, accessed on July 21, 2015, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mirabal_sisters

[53] *Ibid*, 223, 257.

[54] *Ibid*, 275.

[55] Wucker, *Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, and the Struggle for Hispaniola*, 234.

shortly after *In the Time of the Butterflies* was published – that the Mirabal sisters began to receive the national and international recognition that their heroics deserved.[56]

On her website, Julia Alvarez explains that she believes in the enduring power of the butterflies: "Think about it", she implores, "four young women from a small country mobilized a whole nation to liberate itself from a thirty-one year dictatorship, and their memory now empowers a global movement."[57] Alvarez speaks of the fact that the Mirabals' story inspired the United Nations to establish November 25th (the day the Mirabal sisters were murdered) as the international day to eliminate all violence against women. But, as important as this cause is, I contend their story has additional implications that have yet to be fulfilled. The legacy of the Mirabal sisters is ripe to be expanded upon in order to create a "common fund" through which Dominicans and Haitians may draw strength, find commonality, and empower determination (on both the *communal* and *self* level) as well as shape their identity moving forward.

I reach this "common fund" conclusion based on theological themes I perceive in the legacy of the Mirabal sisters. Specifically, theirs is an enduring story that can be expressed and engaged in over and over again by oppressed people seeking encouragement and empowerment in their different contexts. That theme of encouragement and empowerment reflects the liberation themes of Jesus's ministry on earth. Just as there is nothing historical about Jesus to the extent the word "history" is singularly perceived to be "bygone" or "in the past", the legacy of the Mirabal sisters is an enduring touchstone for love and justice on behalf of the poor and oppressed.

While the Mirabal sisters did not claim Christological commitments as their motivation (and Alvarez's book is indeed a fictionalized account based upon historical people and

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[56] "Mirabal Sisters", Wikipedia, accessed on July 21, 2015, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mirabal_sisters. After the assassinations of her sisters, Dedé devoted her life to the legacy of her sisters. She raised her sisters' six children, including Minou Tavárez Mirabal, Minerva's daughter, who has served as deputy for the National District in the lower House since 2002, and before that as deputy foreign minister (1996–2000). Of her own three children, Jaime David Fernández Mirabal, is the current Minister for Environment and Natural Resources and former vice president of the Dominican Republic. In 1992, Dede founded the Mirabal Sisters Foundation and in 1994 the Mirabal Sisters Museum in her hometown Salcedo. She published a book, *Vivas en su Jardín*, on 25 August 2009. She lived in the house where the sisters were born in Salcedo until her death in 2014, aged 88.

[57] "Butterfly Power", Julia Alvarez website, accessed on June 28, 2015, http://www.juliaalvarez.com/napa/butterfly-power.php.

events), one cannot help but reflect upon themes of liberation theology[58] contained in the lives and very real martyrdom of the Butterflies. The three women were actively and urgently participating in reshaping history on behalf of the oppressed. In drawing this theological comparison, it is perhaps possible to appropriate Cone's description of Black Liberation Theology: "*God not only reveals to the oppressed the divine right to break their chains* ***by any means necessary****, but also assures them that their work in their own liberation is God's own work*…"[59] This indeed describes the dogged perseverance of the Mirabal sisters.

In this respect, the Mirabal sisters' impact has the potential to reach far beyond the context of the Dominican Republic in the 1960's. Their legacy has the potential to be inspirational to all people who are oppressed, be it through race, gender, sexual orientation or economics. The Mirabal sisters' activism for civil rights in the face of known danger is capable of transcending the categorical distinctions of oppression between Dominicans and Haitians and beyond. More particularly, their legacy offers a medium to engage with God to question suffering (and demand change) in a modern and authentic way. By revisiting the Mirabal legacy, the Dominicans and Haitians are able to keep the question of justice poignant and pertinent, visible and reachable. Remarkably, as I will explore in the sections that follow, most Haitians have very little knowledge of the Mirabals. If engaging with the Mirabals in the context of a "common fund" is possible, then ideally, modern-day Dominicans and Haitians are should be able connect to and advance the dialogue and activism that relates to the unfinished work of social and economic justice upon the island of Hispaniola.

Section 3: Distinguishing Haiti's Revolutionary Heroes and Constructive Traditions from a Cloud of Misinformation

Similar to the constructive power of the legacy of the Mirabal sisters, Haiti's heroic conquest of its enslaving colonial oppressors is a rich but underutilized element to the

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[58] Liberation theology began within the Catholic Church in Latin America in the 1950's as a response to the poverty and oppression and social injustice of the area. The father of Liberation Theology is largely thought to be Peruvian priest Gustavo Gutierrez, author of *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1973). It has taken on many forms, such as Black Theology of Liberation, and is today both multi-cultural as well as multi-locational. Critics often associate liberation theology as having Marxist roots. *See Also, See generally* "Liberation Theology", Wikipedia, accessed on July 21, 2015, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberation_theology.

[59] James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1986), 48.

common fund between Haiti and the Dominican. In August of 1791, when Toussaint L'Ouverture initiated the largest slave revolt in history, he sparked a flame that changed the world. More than just leading to Haiti's establishment as the first free black republic, he crippled the confidence of colonial slave traders to a degree from which they would never recover. James Walvin, describes this significance as follows: *If the celebrated Great Discoverer, Christopher Columbus, can be seen as opening the door to slavery in the Americas, an army of Haitian ex-slaves under the leadership of a black military genius named Toussaint L'Ouverture, himself an ex-slave, must be credited with setting in motion the cascading epic events that would slam the door shut across the Americas, once and for all.*[60] The black armies first led by L'Ouverture and later by another ex-slave, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, defeated not only the French, but also other interested colonial forces from Britain and Spain who wished to suppress the revolt in the interest of protecting a burgeoning economy built upon the backs of slaves. Even the founding fathers of the United States of America, such as Thomas Jefferson – a slave owner himself – expressed to the French minister in America his hopes that the French could conquer Toussaint.[61] Similarly, George Washington openly lamented "a spirit of revolution among the blacks" of Saint Dominque.[62] Both Jefferson and Washington feared that this self-determination would be contagious among the slaves of the United States. Indeed, these heroic ex-slaves, and the estimated 150,000 slaves who died over the twelve year revolution, shattered the foundation of the horrible social construct of slavery and changed the trajectory of colonialism for Haitians and Dominicans a like (and else where in the Americas).

Thus, in order to revitalize this constructive power, I believe it is first necessary to explore the Haitian religious practice of *Vodou*, as most Dominicans (and Americans for that matter) view Haiti's past – including its heroic revolutionary leaders - through a shroud of confusion regarding past and current Vodou practice. In fact, if properly understood, elements of Vodou and the revolutionary events in which it played a role, can be viewed as powerfully life-affirming and community-building in Haiti's history. As such, it is an important constituent to the "common fund*"* to which I have been referring.

One of the key reasons why Toussaint and Dessalines were successful in igniting revolutionary self-determination was their ability to tap into the collective African heritage and the strong traditions among the slaves from disparate locations on the African continent. In a sense, they tapped into a similar type of "common fund" that

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[60] Randall Robinson, *An Unbroken Agony: Haiti, from Revolution to the Kidnapping of a President*. (Basic Civitas Books, Kindle Edition, 2007), Kindle LOC 47-49.

[61] Ibid. Kindle LOC 70.

[62] Ibid.

modern-day Dominicans and Haitians should be able to connect to in order to advance the unfinished work of social and economic justice upon the island of Hispaniola. Within this heritage, however, is considerable confusion regarding the nature of Vodou, coupled with simpleminded racism, that has, I believe, unfairly confounded the constructive power of this great Haitian legacy.

A Resource for Survival and Meaning-Making: The island of Hispaniola, which Haiti shares with the Dominican Republic, was the point of departure for the European conquest of the Americas. By the late 17th century, the English and French colonialists in the Americas had discovered that sugar cane could be the world's biggest cash crop; they were intent on establishing and controlling the world market for this crop off the backs of enslaved laborers. As a result, the region that is now Haiti became the most profitable colony in the world by the late 18th century.[63] Scholars and historians estimate that by 1789, the region contained nearly 10 slaves for every 1 free person.[64] Illustrating the speed with which the number of slaves grew to keep up with the world demand for sugar, nearly two-thirds of the approximately half million slaves at the end of the 18th century were born in Africa (as opposed to being born into slavery in Haiti).[65]

As these Africans grieved and suffered together they created their own rituals for healing, mourning and worship.[66] They gathered on the plantations when they could in order to commune and to be, if only for a brief amount of time, outside the control of the tyrannical slave master who viewed them as less-than-human chattel property. In these rituals, the participants fluidly combined practices/rituals from diasporic African traditions (e.g. the worship of the Rada Lwa discussed below), including the Christian influences that already had touched the African religions in varying parts of Africa in the 16th century (i.e. before they were enslaved); some remnants of the indigenous traditions upon the island of Hispaniola (i.e. influences that existed upon the island before the Africans arrived); as well as the messages of the Christian missionary efforts taking place upon the island at that time. Overtime, these amalgamated religious influences became known by the West African name of Vodou.

This emerging religion thus became a mechanism for slaves to hold onto their African religious heritage, to commune with and seek guidance from their ancestors, and perhaps most significantly, to commune and find solidarity with those who shared their current grief and oppression. With regard to this latter point, Vodou provided the ability for

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[63] Laurent Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History* (Metropolitan Books, Kindle Edition, 2012), 18.

[64] *Ibid,* 19.

[65] *Ibid*, 22.

[66] *Ibid*.

those who were enslaved (who lacked the material means of extracting themselves from their physical situation) to temporarily escape the oppression. That is, the Vodou practices offered a mode of meaning-making and a form of retreat from oppression and confinement to a self-determined destination.

Anti-Assimilation and Rebellion: Just as Haitian Vodou provided resources for survival and meaning-making, it also provided an important platform for anti-assimilation and rebellion against culture-crushing oppression and racism (e.g. association with the Petro Lwa discussed below). Vodou provided, among other things, a mechanism for slaves to commune and find solidarity with others who shared their current situation in life. These communal rituals were held by groups of slaves on the disparate plantations in which they were held in captivity. Beyond providing a resource for spiritual fulfillment (an inward quest) and emotional support, Vodou soon began to develop outwardly as a communal infrastructure through which the participants could transmit information to others who were located on different plantations. Connections could be made, and ideas could be shared.

I must disclaim at the outset that I am not attempting here to explain Haitian Vodou in its entirety, as Haitian Vodou is incapable of being encapsulated in a single-story. Unlike other monotheistic religions (Christianity, Islam or Judaism), Vodou is not a set doctrine to which a practitioner commits (there is not a singular, authoritative, sacred text nor is there a centralized governing authority), it is a practice done through various rituals or ceremonies to which each individual brings his or her own motives and objectives. As one Vodou scholar and dedicated Vodou priestess (a/k/a Mombo) states, "Vodou is a practice that you do, not a creed that you believe in."[67]

Haitian Vodou should not be confused with the term *Voodoo* (a/k/a Louisiana Voodoo), which has a considerably different set of rituals. While *Voodoo* and *Haitian Vodou* both share ties to West African diasporic religious traditions (such as emphasis upon ancestors), Voodoo can be distinguished from Haitian Vodou by Voodoo's utilization of gris-gris charms or amulets, Voodoo queens (such as the well-known Marie Laveau) and

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[67] Mambo Chita Tann, *Haitian Vodou: An Introduction to Haiti's Indigenous Spiritual Tradition* (Llewellyn, 2012, Kindle Edition), Kindle LOC 991-992.

its commercialization (especially through New Orleans tourism).[68] Simply put, the notion of *Voodoo* with which most American's have become familiar through stereotypes, New Orleans tourism, and Hollywood popularization is not the same as the very organic and often life guiding Haitian Vodou religious practice.

Vodouists or Vodouisants (practitioners of Haitian Vodou) believe in a Supreme Creator called the Bondye, meaning "good God", as well as a host of spirits or "Lwa" (a/k/a "Loa") that are subservient to Bondye.[69] Vodouisants believe that the ancestors live eternally in the land of *Ginen*, a heaven-like homeland. In some respects, Vodou has monotheistic qualities because Bondye is believed to be the deity that created the universe and governs it still to this day. Bondye, however, is not personal in the sense of interacting with people's daily lives. Such personal connection is a result of the Lwa (lesser gods or spirits) with whom one may interact through the intercession of a *houngan* or *mambo* (i.e. a Vodou priest or priestess).

In 1992, Canadian filmmaker Jacques Holender produced an intriguing "insider's" look at Haitian Vodou practices in his documentary film: *Spirit of Haiti – Voodoo* (although he uses the term *Voodoo,* his film is very specifically about Haitian *Vodou* and not the type of popularized *Voodoo* described above).[70] Summarizing its life-affirming and community-building attributes, Holender stated: "*(Vodou) is the lifeblood of Haiti. It sparked the revolution that gave Haiti its independence in 1804. And, today, it fires the imagination of a proud people beset by poverty, disease and repression. In fact, (Vodou) permeates every facet of Haitian culture… It also plays a political role: (Vodou) is linked to the community movement now fighting for recognition in Haiti*."[71]

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[68] "*Louisiana Voodoo*", Wikipedia, accessed on August 5, 2015, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louisiana_Voodoo. *See Also*, "Voodoo Secrets*"*. The History Channel, 2006. In the History Channel documentary, Voodoo Queen Marie Laveau's ties to the Catholic Church in New Orleans are chronicled. Laveau encouraged people to inculturate their Voodoo practices with Catholicism. In as much as she was known as a powerful Voodoo Queen, it cannot be overlooked that she was also an advocate for the less fortunate in New Orleans. Voodoo queens held considerable influence in the community and lead the rituals / meetings. They also administered the paraphernalia (charms, amulets, healings or curses).

[69] "*Haitian Vodou*", Wikipedia, accessed on August 5, 2015, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haitian_Vodou.

[70] *Spirit of Haiti – Voodoo*. Dir. Jacques Holender. Nemesis, 1992. Film.

[71] "*Voodoo* (1993) – IMDb", The Internet Movie Database (IMDb), Accessed on August 7, 2015. (IMDB.com/title/tt0389515).

In his film, Holender brings his audience inside a Hounfour while Haitian men and women congregate in a circle and dance and sing to the rhythm of drums in an effort to connect to various Lwa. The Vodouists achieve a heightened or altered state physically and mentally through the rhythmic connection. The participants draw upon each other's energy and there is undeniably a sense of religious embodiment. There is something very deep and complex about this religious sensibility, which I contend is due to Vodou's history as a resource for survival and meaning- making and for expressing anti-assimilation and rebellion to culture-crushing oppression and racism.

Vodouist serve personal or family Lwa along with the more widely recognized Lwa of the traditional groupings of Rada (the ancestral African and indigenous spirits), Petro (the spirits of the Haitian Revolution and variations on some of the Rada Lwa), and Gede (the non-ancestral spirits who have been forgotten by their families and have thus become spirits accessible to everyone)".[72] In addition to these Lwa that are capable of categorization, there are other Lwa that are considered more dangerous and perhaps less capable of categorization. One scholar says that there are said to be 401 different Lwa and perhaps thousands of local variations on the major and minor or individual family Lwa.[73] Even historical figures in Haiti, like L'Ouverture, Dessalines and Makandal might be given Lwa status.

The Rada grouping of Lwa have their foundation in Haitian Vodou's African heritage. These Lwa originate from the memories of the African religious and cultural practices. As discussed more fully below, these Lwa provided the key resource for survival and meaning-making among those torn from their motherland. As such, these Lwa are not only older than other Haitian Lwa, but they are also more revered.[74] As Mambo Chita Tann, author of *Haitian Vodou: An Introduction to Haiti's Indigenous Spiritual Tradition*, states *"(a)s befits their nature of association with what is ancestral and untouched by the violence and difficulty of life in slavery, the Rada Lwa are more archetypal in manifestation than other Lwa in many ways. Their service is more stately, their songs more formal, and their dances and drumbeats explicitly preserved from the various tribal and ethnic groups that the Rada division includes*.[75]

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[72] Tann, *Haitian Vodou: An Introduction to Haiti's Indigenous Spiritual Tradition*, Kindle LOC 290-292.

[73] Ibid. Kindle LOC 2143.

[74] Ibid. Kindle LOC 1636. Mambo Chita Tann also states that "those few Lwa who come to Haitian Vodou from the Taino people— the indigenous Lwa— are generally also honored as part of the Rada service, except a few that are considered to be too "hot" and are thus classified as Petro.

[75] Ibid. Kindle LOC 1638-1640.

A sample of the various (major) Rada Lwa, in approximate order in which they may be called upon and served, is a follows:

- Legba (or Papa Legba) – Legba is the first Lwa called (after Bondye) each time a service or any activity with the Lwa is initiated. Legba is the gatekeeper as he controls the crossing over from the natural world to the spirit world. As such, he is one of the most venerated Lwa in Haitian Vodou. He is a guardian of sorts, often prayed to for protection. He is visualized in the Rada service as an old man, hobbling about on a crutch often accompanied by a dog or dogs.

- Marasa (or Marassa Dosou – Dosa) – These are twins (children) who must be kept happy or they will not listen to the wishes of the Vodouisants who call upon them. They must be fed, often sweets, in generous proportions and they must get constant attention lest they begin to fuss and cry. If not kept happy, they have a reputation of fouling the ceremony or even begetting harm to the participants.

- Loko (or Loco or Papa Loko) – Loko is thought to be the spirit of the first houngan and thus highly respected by all houngans and mambos. He is the guardian of the *peristil,* or the space within the Vodou temple where song and dance ceremonies take place (thought perhaps to reside in the central pole in the space). In addition to being a *master of ceremonies* of sorts, he is a herbal doctor and knows all of the attributes for healing and magic (be it for good or bad purposes).

- Ayizan (or Mambo Ayizan) – Ayizan is the wife of Loko and is thought to be the spirit of the first mambo. She is visualized as an old woman, dressed in white. She is thought to be the owner/keeper of the market and related commerce. She is also associated with ceremonial palm fronds. She is usually called upon only during initiation ceremonies during which initiates are empowered within the Haitian Vodou tradition.

- Danbala Wedo – Danbala comes to bring peace and is considered to be kind and loving. He is visualized in the form of a white snake. He is so highly venerated that some know him as the father of all Lwa. He is a very "pure" spirit, with a preference for cleanest white.

- Ayida-Wedo – Ayida is Danbala's wife. As Danbala is the serpent upon the earth, Ayida is visualized as a rainbow or snake in the sky. For this reason, the pair is often symbolized on Vodou materials as entwined snakes. She is called upon to bring rain and associated renewal to the earth.

The above is an abbreviated list. Other key Lwa govern the seas (and its bounty), farming, romance, sexuality, physical stamina as well as the dispensing of advice of all

sorts.

The Petro grouping of Lwa is distinguished by the fact that they are not looked back upon as a connection to the African / ancestral religious and cultural traditions. Instead, these are the Lwa that emerged when the enslaved Africans began their plight on the land that is now Haiti and have lived with Haitians ever since through all the pains of slavery through the cycles of violence and oppression.

Summarizing the distrinction between Rada and Petro Lwa, Mambo Chita Tann states, "*anthropologists and non-Haitians often described the Rada as the "good ancestral Lwa," while the spirits of the Petro nation of Lwa were considered "evil," or invented by slaves in Haiti, though this is extremely oversimplified. While there are Petro spirits indigenous to Haiti (or who started to appear after slaves arrived in the island), most of Vodou's Petro spirits come from the Kongo, Ibo, and Senegal nations of western and central Africa, among others; they are just as "ancestral" as any of the Rada spirits. Additionally, some Petro spirits exist as aspects or forms of the Rada Lwa, and Rada spirits are also capable of being forceful and violent. What the Rada Lwa represent that the Petro Lwa do not is a sense of continuity from Africa, the repository of the ancestors and the African and indigenous roots of the Haitian people. The Rada represent the memory of what the various enslaved peoples were able to keep with them in their new world, while the Petro represent spirits who helped in the struggle for those slaves to adjust in a new homeland and a multicultural society."*[76] She continues, "*The Rada and the Petro divisions represent two parts of the Haitian experience, neither of which are accurately described as "good" or "evil." If the Rada represents that part of Haitian life worth celebrating and preserving, the Petro represents the passion, strength, and sheer guts Haitians have had to use to keep the Rada part of their world intact*.[77]

A sample of the various (major) Petro Lwa, in approximate order in which they may be called upon and served, is a follows:

- Legba Petro – Legba the gatekeeper, albeit in a different form than in Rada, is called upon again to initiate the Petro ceremonies. In Petro, Legba is no longer visualized as an old man but rather as a young man.

- Marassa Petro – In Petro, the twin Marassa from Rada have a third companion. In Petro, the three Marassa are even more petulant, insatiable and fussy.

- Met Kafou – Similar to Legba, Kafou is associated with the crossroads in that he opens the pathway to all Petro forces. Many vodouisants consider Kafou to

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[76] Ibid. Kindle LOC 1649-1657.

[77] Ibid. Kindle LOC 1886-1888.

control the intentionally called upon destruction, harm or misfortune. Some believe he has the ability to transform people into animals as well as to manipulate their minds. While not necessarily revered in the same sense as Rada Lwa, Kafou is highly respected and handled with tremendous caution.

- Ezili Danto – Danto is considered to be one of the most powerful (and therefore honored) Petro Lwa. She is considered to be a protector (or perhaps avenger) of children and orphans. Some visualize her as being rather scrappy (e.g. "a Haitian peasant who has mouths to feed, and is not going to wait for a man to handle things for her…She drinks raw rum, black coffee, smokes a pipe and likes spicy food."[78]). She is mute (some saying she had her tongue cut out as a slave) and is considered to have played a role in the original ceremonies that helped to ignite the slave revolt that lead to Haiti's independence.

Similar to the list of Rada Lwa, the above list of Petro Lwa is an abbreviated list. Other key Petro Lwa govern various aspects or purposes of magic.

The third grouping of Lwa are the Gede, the spirits comprised of the souls of those who died and were not taken up to *Ginen* with their ancestors like most Vodouisants. These otherwise condemned souls are assembled by the heads of the Gede Lwa, *Baron Samedi* and his wife, *Manman Brijit.* These are generally considered the most accessible of the Lwa, as they need not be accessed through *Legba* the gatekeeper, like the Rada and Petro Lwa. Every Vodouisant may access his or her personal and or family Gede (as some may hang about the house, so to speak). They may be petulant; they may be prankish or even highly sexualized in nature. The more powerful Gede are given the title of Baron and are depicted in Haitian Vodou as wearing a black suit, top hat and dark glasses as well as other imagery adorned with skulls and/or crosses. Mambo Chita Tann describes the Gede as follows: "*Gede push the boundaries of good taste and behavior, daring the world: "What are you going to do, kill me?" They provide levity for the Haitian, who for three centuries has lived a hard life and sometimes needs to be reminded that despite all its difficulties, life is still a beautiful thing worth remembering, especially after you don't have it anymore."*[79]

Finally, there is a variety of Lwa that reside outside of these aforementioned groupings (or are perhaps only marginally related to the Petro Lwa). These are considered to be lower in the spiritual pecking order (in terms of being revered), but should not be discounted. These are often referred to as "bought" Lwa, in that they, almost like spiritual chattel, may through transaction be foisted upon someone to whom the "purchaser" wishes to do harm. Mambo Chita Tann describes this group of "other"

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[78] Ibid. Kindle LOC 1963-1964.

[79] Ibid. Kindle LOC 2048-2049.

spirits as follows: "*They are genuinely dangerous, capricious, demanding, and hard to handle… If you are lucky, dangerous Lwa will just ignore you if you try to communicate with them. If you're not so lucky, something worse could happen. Some of the dangerous Lwa will automatically harm those they consider strangers; it's their nature. Just because you really want to pet a snarling dog does not mean it's going to be a good idea to stick your hand through the gate and hope for the best*."[80]

Haitian Vodou is syncretic[81] with Roman Catholicism – As French and Spanish missionaries sought to convert Haitian slaves to Christianity, Bondye became associated with the Christian God and some of the major Lwa with the Saints.[82] (Some say that this syncretism was originally a way to mask the practice of Vodou from unwitting slave masters). While the French and Spanish colonists were eventually defeated on the island of Hispaniola, the Catholic Church and related mission work continued and Catholic symbols and saints continued to be entwined with Vodou. For this reason, a majority of Vodouisants also proclaims belief in the Roman Catholic faith and, to varying degrees for varying families of Vodouisants; the practices contain many elements or images associated with Catholicism.

Some of the most notable associations between Lwa and Catholic Saints include:

- Legba (or Papa Legba) – Often in the Rada context, Saint Lazarus (since Legba is an old man on a crutch) or, in the context of Petro, Saint Peter (as the keeper of the gate).
- Loko – Saint Joseph (protector of the church)
- Danbala Wedo – Saint Patrick (or, for some, St. Moses).
- Ayida Wedo – Virgin Mary

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[80] Ibid. Kindle LOC 2174-2176.

[81] *See Generally,* Stephanie L. Budin "A Reconsideration of the Aphrodite-Ashtart Syncretism*"* in *Numen, Vol. 51, No. 2* (Brill, 2004), 97. Gods and spirits may expand their role or power within a given culture when that culture comes into contact with surrounding cultures. A god for instance may take on a broader role or different categorical attributes through being mixed with another similar deity from an outside, influencing culture. Scholars refer to this dynamic as *syncretism,* which is a process of interpreting the traditions and religion of cultures such as Haitian Vodou through a comparison to other religious practices and/or deities (such as Roman Catholicism).

[82] "*Haitian Vodou*", Wikipedia, accessed on August 5, 2015, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haitian_Vodou.

- Ezili Danto – a Madonna figure

Haitian Vodou ceremonies are conducted in temples called *Hounfors,* many of which have various spaces for various purposes, such as *peristil* for song and dance ceremonies as well as *badji* or alter rooms. The alters contain a variety of candles, images of saints, bowls, bottles, oils, pieces of cloth, plants and the like. As one Mambo states, "what items are on an altar (and why) may not make any sense to an outsider, but a Vodouisant will be able to tell with a quick glance at an altar table which spirit(s) it is designed to serve and how."[83] Vodouists will call upon Lwa through ceremonies of music and dance, as well as the presentation of offerings and the creation of alters, in an effort to please and form a personal relationship with the various Lwa.[84]

Vodou is not a solitary practice; rather, it is often engaged in communally, with family or *sosyete*. While there is not central authority or doctrine for the practice, there are règleman or rules that provide standards on the methods for invoking Lwa.[85] These rules are very important, as Vodouisants strive to maintain harmonious relations with these Lwa, but as discussed in some examples below, this balance does not always occur.

Fundamental to Vodou beliefs is the notion that everyone has his or her own spirit; however, the Lwa spirits are considered to be more powerful and able to displace the practitioner's spirit during the ceremony. Thus, through prayers and songs and rhythmic drumming, the Lwa are called upon, often resulting in a spirit becoming embodied in a participant and speaking and acting through the participant.[86] Perhaps it is this notion of "possession" that causes people to associate Vodou pejoratively with witchcraft, zombies or sorcery (e.g. sticking pins in voodoo dolls). Sadly, the rush to assume "embodiment" is tantamount to demonic possession is pervasive – One well-known conservative televangelist, Pat Robertson, recklessly quipped that the tragedy of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti was God's retribution for the country's "Satanic Vodou practices".[87] In stark contrast to Robertson's judgmental statement, a journalist who recently traveled to Haiti to observe Vodou practices comments: "*As with any religion, there is a dark side to*

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[83] Ibid.

[84] *Ibid.*

[85] Tann, *Haitian Vodou: An Introduction to Haiti's Indigenous Spiritual Tradition*, Kindle LOC 1022.

[86] *Ibid. See Also, Spirit of Haiti – Voodoo*. Dir. Jacques Holender. Nemesis, 1992. Film.

[87] "*Pat Robertson: Haiti "Cursed" After "Pact to the Devil*". CBS News. (January 7, 2015), retrieved from www.cbsnews.com/news/pat-robertson-haiti-cursed-after-pact-to -the-devil/

Vodou, when channeled through a Bokor (a sorcerer of sorts) but this is not common practice, and in fact, it's extremely rare and often looked down upon by many Vodouists themselves."[88] The key point here is that calling upon a spirit to be a guide or advocate for a successful pregnancy or successful harvest (e.g. life-affirming events) is a far cry from "Satanic" practices.

While the precise series of events has been somewhat blurred by legends overtime, historians agree that slaves' meetings occurred in the north-central plantations for the purpose of planning a revolt. August of 1791 a houngan named Boukman and mambo named Mayanet participated in a Vodou ceremony wherein the Petro Lwa spoke through them to the participants about organizing and revolting against their enslavement.[89] While the particulars of which Lwa participated and what types of sacrifices were made at that ceremony, unquestionably that Vodou ceremony, as well as the infrastructure that Vodou provided for communication and organization, sparked the most successful slave revolt in history. Thus, Vodou provided the matchstick that flamed the most successful slave revolt in history. [90]

A logical question to ask is: If Haitian Vodou provides a resource for survival and meaning-making and for expressing anti-assimilation and rebellion to culture-crushing oppression and racism, how does it intersect with other religious practices (i.e. does it contradict or compliment)? It is my contention that considerable commonality exists in the *function* in which Vodou and other more traditional religions (in the mainstream

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[88] Helen Pow, "*Inside the rituals of Haiti's 'Vodou' faith: Powerful photographs capture priestesses as they invoke spirits and perform sacrifices*". Dailymail.com. (November 11, 2013), retrieved from http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2499453/Anthony-Karen-Vodou-Inside-rituals-Haitis-Vodou-faith-Mesmerizing-photos-animals-sacrificed-worshipers-overcome-spirits-ceremonies-intriguing-Caribbean-religion.html

[89] Tann, *Haitian Vodou: An Introduction to Haiti's Indigenous Spiritual Tradition*, Kindle LOC 426-430. *According to that legend, Mayanèt, Boukman, and the gathered slave leaders offered one of Hispaniola's native wild pigs to the spirits and drank some of its blood in order to seal themselves in a pact to achieve their freedom. Some versions of the Bwa Kayiman legend suggest that a Petro Lwa named Ezili Danto was given the sacrificed pig; others say that Danto was actually a human being at the time— one of the slaves who attended the ceremony and helped with the sacrifice— and that she would later become a Petro Lwa alongside Mambo Mayanèt.*

[90] Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History*, 5, 19. The revolution initiated by Vodou participant Boukman gained further traction under the leadership of a former slave named Toussaint L'Ouverture, who as previously explained led the triumphant slaves to, in 1804 (having overthrown French rule and oppression), established Haiti as the first free black republic in the world.

sense) methodologically problematize the social condition. By "*function*", I am not speaking of specific Biblical doctrines, beliefs or ceremonies, but rather the resources through which Haitians can search for meaning-making (an inward quest), including one's orientation and response (i.e. anti-assimilation, rebellion or other communal movement) to the shared experience.

"Function" then may be thought of as the desired purpose or outcome: that is, the suffering becoming endurable and/or curable by the individual practitioner as well as his/her community. Hence, in this rubric, the resulting function may be the achieving of – on both the *communal* and *self* level - catharsis, meaning-making and/or action (such as the anti-assimilation or rebellion described above). Given these valuable liberative qualities, Vodou expands the notion of "religious sensibility" beyond mainstream Eurocentric religious hermeneutics.

All this said, I do believe (based upon my interviews with many Haitians) that there is considerable variation in each individual's experience with Vodou, depending upon their hometown; whether or not they grew up in a family that practiced Vodou; and, if so, the unique qualities of their specific family practice; the degree of assimilation of that practice with Catholicism; and/or the degree to which instead fully confess and claim a Christian faith to the exclusion of Vodou. While each individual Haitian's experience may vary, it is nonetheless inextricably tied to their cultural identity. To this point, each Haitian I interviewed understood and appreciated that Vodou played an important role in the independence of Haiti, that it is an integral part of their culture, that it does in fact connect them with the heroic ancestors and that there is an unquestioned belief in the mystical / magical qualities and occurrences that still continue today. That said, there seems to be considerable difference in the level of appreciation of Vodouisants' motives for the contemporary practice of Vodou, which contributes greatly to the shroud of confusion.

As a follower of the Christian faith, I am not suggesting that Haitian Vodou is a replacement or proxy for Christological commitments. But, I am growing in my appreciation of Vodou's life-affirming and community-building history in Haiti. It is important to redeem these rich and affirming traditions from the intent of perhaps some practitioners today who, like practitioners of any other religion, use or distort the religion for self-serving, harmful or narrow-minded purposes. At this point in my studies, I have definitely arrived at the point where I believe Haitian Vodou deserves to be redeemed from an image polluted by popularized stereotypes (largely American stereotypes) and, commensurate with its unique history in Haiti, to be reclaimed as an integral part of the "common fund".

Section 4: Complicity and Aftershocks

Having explored above in Section 1 in some detail the "will-to-power" loop or cycle in both the Dominican and Haiti, I continue to wrestle with a growing sense that the United States is somehow complicit in many of the tragic elements of the island's history. Indeed we have invaded each side of the island -each country- twice in this century alone: Haiti in 1915 and 1994; Santo Domingo in 1916 and 1965.[91]

Thus, on both sides of the island, when individuals like Trujillo or the Duvalier father, then son, come into power and remain in power, one must problematize the relationship that the U.S. has had with those leaders. Laurent Dubois' book, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History* does just that – Dubois examines the ways in which the United States has helped "*shape the conditions that have resulted in violence and underdevelopment there...*". As a historian, Laurent Dubois examines Haiti's troubled present by engaging with its complex past. Certainly there is much to celebrate in Haiti's past: as referenced above, in 1804, the triumphant slaves (having overthrown French rule and oppression) established Haiti as the first free black republic in the world.[92] Haiti's founding revolution is the only successful slave revolt in the history of the world.[93] Yet, nearly two centuries later, Haiti's history belies the full promise and potential of that revolution; that promise and potential have yet to be fulfilled. Dubois, as discussed below, articulates how the race fueled hostility that this rebellion engendered among colonial powers (the French and United States in particular) and served as a dampening and overbearing force that contributed greatly to the present-day burden Haiti bears as "the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere". Despite all odds, the Haitian people remain resilient. Against this backdrop, this section explores the ways in which the actions of the United States and other countries –in the interest of slavery, the Cold War and economics - have contributed to the unrealized potential of Haiti.

Fear of Slave State: Dubois recounts the history of how the United States (while willing to trade with Haiti and make profits from such enterprise) refused to recognize Haiti as a political entity, despite its stable government shortly after it won its independence.[94] Dubois argues that the reason for the U.S.'s refusal to do so was clear: Haiti's leaders were black. The manner in which these leaders had come to power "*offered a potentially inflammatory example*" to blacks in the U.S. Dubois describes, that (in 1822) "*the U.S. South had been shaken by the discovery of a conspiracy organized by a slave named*

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[91] Wucker, *Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, and the Struggle for Hispaniola*, Kindle Loc 104.

[92] Laurent Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History* (Metropolitan Books, Kindle Edition, 2012), 5.

[93] *Ibid,* 14.

[94] *Ibid,* 138-139.

Denmark Vesey, who was said to have been inspired by the Haitian Revolution."[95] The racist's logic went: If it could happen there, it could happen here.

Dubois further argues that not only might Haiti's story provide empowerment to slaves in the U.S., he argues that the Haitian Revolution "*represented a powerful refutation of dominant racist theories about the incapacities of blacks for leadership and self-governance. If Haiti could abolish slavery, might not the rest of the world follow its example, and justice finally prevail?*"[96] With these fears as motivation, it took the U.S. government nearly 60 years to recognize Haiti's existence.[97] But, as explored in more detail below, recognition of Haiti as a political entity only served to encourage further economic/commercial exploitation.

Economic motivations and externalization: The U.S. certainly isn't the only entity that has - whether intended or not - harmed the country from an economic policy perspective. In considerable detail, Dubois describes how when the French agreed to recognize Haiti as a political entity they did so by contemporaneously hi-jacking its future: The French demanded that the nascent nation pay a crushing indemnity of 150 million francs (approximately $3B in today's U.S. dollar value) to compensate former slaveholders. The Haitian government, Dubois explains, had to resort to taking out loans from French banks – at steep interest – to make the payments. He recounts: "*By 1898, fully half of Haiti's government budget went to paying France and the French banks. By 1914 that proportion had climbed to 80 percent"*.[98] As a result, Dubois notes that from the very start of Haiti's independence, the money it could have used to build infrastructure (roads, schools, hospitals, etc.) had to be redirected to servicing the initial debt as well as

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[95] *Ibid.*

[96] *Ibid,* 141-142.

[97] *Ibid,* 153. "After some deliberation, both the Senate and House passed the measure. On June 5, 1862— nearly six decades after Haitian independence, and almost four decades after France had officially recognized the independence of its former colony— the United States at last officially accepted the nation's existence."

[98] *Ibid,* 7-18. Dubois further states, "with the indemnity, Haiti suddenly became a debtor nation, an unlucky pioneer of the woes of postcolonial economic dependence."

additional Loans taken out – including from the United States - to cover the mounting interest.[99]

As bankers in the United States began to voice their concern that Haiti might not be able to cover the payments, the U.S. took action to occupy the country to oversee the Haitian's use of funds.[100] Thus, the U.S. Marines arrived on Haiti's shores, culminating in nearly two decades of occupation. In addition, the U.S. government would supervise Haiti's Banque Nationale d'Haïti until 1947.[101] Dubois explains the dynamic of this U.S. occupation in such vivid terms that it deserves being quoted in its full length: "*Indeed, there has never been any widespread reckoning of what the United States did in Haiti during those twenty years, and today few people are even aware that the occupation ever occurred. Instead, the most successful writings produced in the United States about the occupation were largely self-congratulatory about its impact, and they portrayed American soldiers and officials as being forced into brutal actions by the backward habits of the Haitian population. These works refined and disseminated a set of tropes about Haiti—stereotypes of naïve and fatalistic peasants, manipulative religious leaders, and a secret world of dark sorcery— that have remained startlingly powerful to this day. The combination of silence about the political and economic impact of the occupation on the one hand, and a great deal of noise about the supposed nature of Haiti and its culture on the other, was in itself a devastating consequence of the U.S. invasion of the country*."[102]

Fear of Communism: So what was the modus operandi behind the occupation? Dubois argues that one cannot overlook the Marxist paranoia within the U.S. at the time. In 1933, while the marines were still in the country, Dubois reports that beyond watching over financial concerns (with U.S. boots on the streets), the U.S. was engaged in a

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[99] *Ibid,* 103. "Year after year, Haiti's population watched as money that could have been used to build roads, ports, schools, and hospitals simply vanished. In 1838, according to Victor Schoelcher, about 30 percent of Haiti's total annual budget was spent servicing the national debt, and almost 50 percent went to the military. By contrast, less than one percent was spent on education. "Everything you need to know about Haiti's government is summarized in that…".

[100] *Ibid,* 204-205. "As this cycle continued, it was increasingly easy for foreign bankers to claim that there was a danger they would eventually not be repaid. …The Haitian government, the United States had concluded, could no longer be trusted with its own money."

[101] *Ibid,* 295. "Even after the marines departed in 1934, the Haitian government still contained a powerful U.S. official. The fiscal representative remained there until 1941, and the Banque Nationale d'Haïti would remain under U.S. supervision until 1947."

[102] *Ibid,* 296.

campaign against fledgling leftist leaders within Haiti.[103] Thus, when the U.S. backed Haitian military officer Paul Magloire, who came to power as president (1950) after the U.S's occupation came to an end, he boldly (in an effort to garner the favor and tolerance of the U.S. government), "*signed an anticommunist pact with the Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo and actively attacked union organizers. 'The people of Haiti are immune to Communism,' he announced, 'because the goods are well distributed among everybody*.'" [104]

By the time François "Papa Doc" Duvalier came to power (1957), he did so in an environment Dubois describes as being manipulated by a powerful set of actors and agendas ranging from the U.S. Congress, the State Department, the U.S. Military and the CIA.[105] Simply put, Dubois argues that the tyrannical rule of the Duvaliers was a result of their ability to manipulate the U.S. within the context of its Cold War agenda and Marxist paranoia.[106] History proves, Dubois argues, that while the human rights record of dictators like Papa Doc and then Baby Doc Duvalier (or Trujillo in the Dominican Republic for that matter) were certainly unappealing to Americans, their anticommunist rhetoric was too appealing to let go of, especially as Cuba fell to Fidel Castro in 1965, giving Communism a foothold in the Caribbean. Given the allure of Duvalier and Trujillo's anticommunist rhetoric, the U.S. turned the other cheek upon countless

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[103] *Ibid,* 295.

[104] *Ibid,* 318.

[105] *Ibid,* 333-334. "While Duvalier was extremely adept at gaining control over the institutions of Haitian civil society, that would not have been enough to sustain his regime if he had not also been able to outmaneuver the most powerful outside force he faced: the United States. At the time, Washington's approach to Haiti was (as it so often has been) uneven and fragmented, with different actors— the president and Congress, the State Department and the diplomatic corps in Haiti, the CIA and the U.S. military— each pursuing their own agenda."

[106] *Ibid.* Dubois argues that Duvalier understood that the broader Cold War context provided him with ample opportunities to manipulate the U.S. government to his own ends.

atrocities, injustices and oppression upon the island and, instead, strengthened ties with those regimes.[107]

The Unfinished Work of Liberation Theology: Unbeknownst to many Americans today, Haiti's current predicament has roots in the bygone U.S. policy of protecting slavery and other actions justified for protecting the US during the Cold War. These bygone policies raise an additional point that I believe is worth reflection. How did the nexus of Latin American liberation theology with Marxism influence the U.S. policy in the region, if at all? A short exploration of the rise and fall of Bertrand Aristide, a preacher turned political activist turned enigma, may be instructive.

During Claude Baby Doc Duvalier's reign in Haiti, John Paul II delivered them a severe message: "*There must be a better distribution of goods, a fairer organization of society, with more popular participation, a more disinterested conception of service on the part of those who direct society*." [108] He further appealed to the minority of those who enjoy power and wealth to "*understand their urgent responsibility toward all their brothers and sisters*." [109]

As described above in Section 1, "Baby Doc" Duvalier robbed the coffers so significantly that he did not leave any of the spoils for the leaders of the armed forces. In turn, the graft-hungry military enabled the will-to-power cycle to yet again gain momentum; hence in 1986 Baby Doc was forced to flee the island. As Duvalier was being routed off the island (on a U.S. Air Force plane heading for France), a young preacher turned political

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[107] *Ibid,* 348-349. For instance, Dubois recounts: "In July 1969, Nelson Rockefeller, then the governor of New York, came to Haiti in a high-profile visit and was photographed smiling and shaking hands with Duvalier. The visit marked an era of intense and open cooperation. A new U.S. ambassador to Haiti, Clinton Knox, lobbied so intensely for aid to the Duvalier regime that some Haitian officials apparently dubbed him an honorary Tonton Makout. Soon the Nixon government officially ended the embargo on the sale of arms to Haiti that had been put in place after Duvalier's 1963 attack on the Dominican embassy, and in 1971, one million dollars' worth of weaponry was bought by Haiti from the United States. In the early 1960s, the Kennedy administration had considered Duvalier a threat to democracy and Caribbean stability; a decade later, he had firmly established himself as one of America's most favored client governments in the region."

[108] *Ibid,* 116.

[109] *Ibid*.

activist, Bertrand Aristide, gave voice to themes of liberation theology upon the island.[110] As appealing as his message was to the populous in the countryside, those in power within Haiti's churches (loyal to the ruling minority) were threatened by the message (it seems they too were used to living in the comforts of the controlling minority).[111] They attempted to stifle Aristide's voice, transferring him from his parish in Port-au-Prince.[112] Scholar Michele Wucker describes Aristide as having the "*power for change… to stand up and begin to create a new mythic history*."[113] Yet even Aristide could not escape the will-to-power cycle (described above in the reflection on *Why the Cocks Fight*).

In 1988, while Aristide continued to speak out against oppression and the injustice of the ruling regime, he was expelled from the Church. Taking up the image of the fighting cock as his logo, he was the candidate brought forth by a new political party, the National Front for Change and Democracy (FNCD).[114] He won the presidency of Haiti in a landslide victory and is considered today as Haiti's first truly democratically elected president.[115] Yet, as he wrote a new constitution, spoke openly about what he perceived as the exclusionary power of capitalism (its rewards only going to the elite), and vowed to end the corruption and improve the situation in life of the Haitian populous, including the sugarcane cutters who migrated seasonally to the DR, he too fell to a coup. Seeing his direction as a threat to their historic power and entrenched position in the wealthy and powerful minority, the military leaders organized yet another coup on September 30, 1991 (less than eight months after he was brought to power). While Aristide escaped to the United States, Dubois states that the "*army carried out brutal reprisals against his supporters, killing at least twelve hundred over the next few days and many thousands more in the following years*."[116]

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[110] Wucker, *Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, and the Struggle for Hispaniola*, 146. "In what we call theology of liberation, we look at what is going on and we ask ourselves, "What would Jesus do? What would Jesus say confronted with this situation: people are hungry, people have no jobs, I don't agree with this situation, I'm going to change it. And he would do something. All of us trying to do something for the poor are doing what Jesus did," Aristide told the American journalist Mark Danner."

[111] Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History*, 356.

[112] Wucker, *Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, and the Struggle for Hispaniola*, 124.

[113] *Ibid.*

[114] *Ibid,* 126.

[115] *Ibid,* 127.

[116] Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History*, 363.

Dubois describes in detail how to this day there remains controversy and mystery about the circumstances that led up to Aristide's ouster. Aristide was accompanied out of Haiti by U.S. officials, "*who claimed that they were simply helping him to flee to safety; Aristide himself, however, described the event as a kidnapping*".[117]

Following the second U.S. occupation of Haiti in 1994, Aristide returned and was reinstated as president to complete his term (ending in 1996). Given the constitutional provision that no President could serve consecutive terms, Aristide's prime minister and confidant, René Préval, was elected to succeed him. Aristide would then be elected a second time in 2000. After a tumultuous three years, his second term ended in a coup as well in 2003.

The timing is interesting to say the least. In April of 2007, upon the Bicentennial of Toussaint L'Ouverture's death, Aristide declared that France owed Haiti $21 Billion in restitution (the current day value of the money that France made Haiti repay following the revolution). After all, but for this crippling repayment France (and the U.S. by extension) enforced upon Haiti, Haiti's trajectory following the revolution would have indeed been much different. France's reaction to Aristide's demand for reparations was that Aristide, the first democratically elected president, should be removed from power. Could it be that world powers, not to mention the elite in Haiti, were simply made too uncomfortable by Aristide? (At the time, some scholars believe that 1% of all Haitians controlled over 50% of Haiti's wealth). Was his advocacy simply too radical to those most interested in preserving the status quo?

Dubois articulates the quick rise and fall of Aristide as a mystery that remains unsolved and a promise that remains unfulfilled. Perhaps, Dubois states, it was because powerful people were alarmed by Aristide's anti-capitalism message (that is, the nexus between his liberation theology and the Marxist principles that the U.S. fought ardently to suppress in the Cold War).[118] Still others claim it was just the perpetual loop or will-to-power cycle… Could it be that the preacher turned politician could not guard himself against the

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[117] *Ibid,* 364.

[118] Timothy Schwartz, Ph.D., *Travesty in Haiti: A True Account of Christian Missions, Orphanages, Food aid, Fraud and Drug Trafficking* (Smashwords, Kindle Edition, 2012), Kindle Locations 1807-1814. "Condemning capitalism as a "mortal sin," Aristide raised the minimum wage and implemented reforms that militated against privatization and the proletarization of the Haitian poor... Seven months after he was elected, a group of CIA-trained and -financed military leaders packed Aristide aboard a plane and sent him into exile— for the first time … The Bush administration looked rather guilty. Its leaders were, of course, ardently in favor of democracy and, publicly at least, the coup appalled them. But Aristide and his reforms were apparently not what they had in mind when they said 'democracy.'"

temptation of corruption that Aristide "so eloquently" denounced? To this day the debate among Haitians continues about whether or not Aristide was involved in embezzlement schemes; whether he voluntarily fled or was forced out; and, whether or not the United States was the puppeteer in much of the dynamic. How are we to reconcile those who on the one hand claim he was overcome by the loop effect and/or was a communist with those who say he, as the first democratically elected president in Haiti simply had a populist agenda to give voice to the voiceless poor? Apropos to the debate, one scholar on the subject states, "*Vicious dictators and totalitarian autocrats…are not twice elected president by overwhelming majorities*". Dubois concludes his studies of Aristide with the poignant comment: "*Regardless of their opinion of Aristide, all those who look back at the 1990s can share a sense of mourning that yet another moment that seemed to offer hope for real and profound change in Haiti fell prey to the seemingly inescapable cycle of crisis and decline*."[119]

The unrealized potential of liberation theology, as described in the context above, leaves me to wonder whether it can be "retooled", escaping its Marxist roots and instead focusing on the constructive tradition of the Haitian Revolution; and therefore contribute toward the "common fund" in the same manner as (I argue) the Mirabal sisters? Indeed the rich history of Haiti demonstrates the dogged perseverance and divine right to break chains by any means necessary. The challenge is how to replace the destructive myths with sustaining constructive ones. The terrific legacy of the Haitian Revolution and the unfinished business of liberation theology provide a foundation to advance the dialogue and activism related to the unfinished work of social and economic justice in Haiti.

So how is the United States perceived in Haiti today? During my field study in Port-au-Prince and Jacmel, the topic of the impending Haiti Presidential election "run-off" was inescapable. Just one week before I began field study in Haiti, 54 candidates participated in the Presidential election on October 25, 2015 (the incumbent President, Michel Martelly, who is also a popular singer in the country, was prohibited by the Haitian constitution to run for another term). Since no candidate received a majority vote, the two top finishers will be heading to a run-off on December 27th, 2015. The candidate, Jovenel Moise, who reportedly received the most votes in the initial election (approximately 33%) is from the incumbent President's party (a party named "Haitian Party of Bald Heads", after Martelly's bald head) is Jovenel Moise. He will compete in the run-off against Jude Celestin, who reportedly received approximately 25% of the vote. Celestin is joined by the third and fourth place finishers (who reportedly received approximately 15% and 7% of the votes respectively) in claiming election fraud.[120] (The fourth place

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[119] Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History*, 364.

[120] "Haitian Presidential Election", Wikipedia, accessed on November 29, 2015, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haitian_presidential_election,_2015. See Also, Counseil Electoral Proviso Haiti (Elections Octobre 2015, Resultats Preliminaires, President 1er TOUR).

finisher, notably, is the candidate of the party of former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who himself was twice overthrown). A week after these results were published, while I was in Haiti, protests were still ongoing.

After decades of dictatorships, coups and reported election fraud, there is certainly a terrific degree of general mistrust in the election process, which the Haitians I interviewed know is squarely on their politicians and failed political system. But what was also very apparent is the feeling that the U.S. is continuing to meddle in the process - not for the benefit of fair elections, but for the purpose of furthering the U.S. interests. Whether this is true or not is beyond my comprehension and certainly seems unlikely, but what is clear is that there is a pervasive distrust, especially from the younger generations, of the United States. One young man whom I interviewed shared that the supporters of Celestin (the second place finisher) believe that U.S. is hoping to engineer the "handoff" from incumbent Martelly to his protégé Jovenel Moise. As I waded through the process of interviewing about a dozen young men and women during my field research, it was hard to pinpoint the source of this belief about the U.S. involvement in the current election morass. But, one obvious source to consider is that it comes from the politicians themselves. In response to such claims, another young man stated that political challengers in Haiti always play the "U.S." bias card against one another, especially against the incumbent party.[121]

Despite intra-political mud slinging as being a logical source, it does point to a distressing fact – there seems to be a persuasive distrust of the United States that these politicians are tapping into. I believe it irresponsible for us in America to assume that corrupt, elite-favoring Haitian politicians (who are trying to redirect attention from themselves) are the sole source of the pervasive belief by Haitians that the U.S. in complicit in the country's problems. The suspicion toward the U.S. comes from obvious sources. We have occupied Haiti twice in the last century (1915 and 1934). On some accounts, in one moment we seem to have actively supported Aristide yet in others we are

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[121] Regarding the United States, one interviewee relayed that politicians in Haiti play the "US" bias card against one another, especially against the incumbent president (i.e. the grassroots guy our guy with populous momentum will play this against the incumbent or against his rivals. Older interviewees had a different view altogether. For instance one elderly woman expressed that she knew of the U.S. involvement in the politics of Haiti, but said those decisions were up to the Haitian president.

believed to have helped train the forces that overthrew him.[122] Our military trained the very military that intimidated and bullied the common Haitian in favor of ruling dictators. When coups have occurred in the recent decades, it seems that the departing president (e.g. Baby Doc Duvalier or Aristide, as examples) flee to asylum aboard U.S. arranged flights). Further, in advance of the October election, the United States did provide $30 million in aid for Haiti's Presidential election process – And, given the pervasive accusations of financial mismanagement in the current regime, it does seem logical that many Haitians would assume this aid would be misappropriated to help support the current President's protégé.

Thus, while many in the United States perceive the work of U.S. Non Governmental Organizations ("NGOs") as well as missionary efforts as being supportive of Haiti, many Haitians have a different perspective. Certainly my data set was limited – I interviewed only about a dozen individuals, mostly males between ages 25 to 40. And, as referenced above, it is hard to verify and/or pin point the source of much of the speculation regarding the U.S. involvement. One young man perhaps said it best, "We think of Haiti as part of the Americas or Latin America. This is a concept that joins the United States to Haiti. The United States needs to help its fellow Americans. It is shameful not to support a country in the Americas." He believes that the countries in the Caribbean that have ties to other European nations are doing much better. Of course this statement is oversimplified and loaded with a host of places where one can challenge the logic. But the sentiment rings through: There is a pervasive sense that this cohort is saying that by getting involved the U.S. is now complicit and must take a more active role in rectifying the situation down in Haiti.

Before moving on from this discussion of the U.S. involvement in Haiti, a logical question is what about the U.S. involvement in the Dominican Republic? They too have been occupied by the U.S. military twice in the last century (1916 and 1924). For many Haitians, there is something notably different about the U.S. involvement in Haiti and the Dominican: skin color. Racism is a remnant of colonialism and the U.S. regrettably stands among the many colonial powers that grew their own interests by a practice of dehumanizing people of color. The world's first black republic remains just that: black. The skin-color obsession on the Dominican island is inextricably tied to the U.S. involvement on the island in other ways as well. Dominican President Trujillo – the light-skin obsessed dictator who killed tens of thousands of Haitians – was an installation of the U.S. Marines.

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[122] One 28 year-old male interviewee expressed that his generation believes that the US has historically acted in a way that may have contributed to Haiti still being "on the ground". He referenced various occupations by the US. He spoke at length about Aristide and now Martelly as a US engineered presidency.

Others I interviewed point to the difference between the Dominican economy and the Haitian economy. As the Dominican economy has left its neighbor's economy behind, the U.S. understandably has more economic interests in the Dominican, both from an import and export perspective. Several Haitians with whom I met simply believe that the U.S. will always be on the side of Dominicans in any dispute between the DR and Haiti. As one young Haitian lawyer with whom I met said "The U.S. has picked its champion on the island".

[As I expand this working paper through further research and fieldwork, I will add more content regarding how the Dominicans view Americans in light of our involvement on their side of the island].

Section 5: ***"Our" Work upon the Island***

As I mentioned in the introduction to this paper, for nearly the last decade my wife and our children and I have been working with NGOs (non-governmental organizations) engaged in health-related or education/vocation-related initiatives on the island of Hispaniola.[123] It is precisely these experiences that exposed me to the fact that so many of these efforts, while focused on sustainable social, economic and/or spiritual development are often mired by their own agendas. A quick example may be instructive. In 2008 I began working with a "point of use" water filter manufacturer based in the Dominican Republic (as previously mentioned, this particular non-profit company manufactures and distributes an affordable ceramic water filter that is 99.9% microbiologically effective). This NGO had a factory in the Dominican Republic as well as (for a period of time) a factory in Haiti. My role was limited. I assisted this NGO with funding and support to build a new manufacturing facility in order to greatly increase its output and to provide a facility to train local distributers, as well as charitable groups, who wanted to incorporate a local and sustainable clean water initiative into their service.

In 2010, the earthquake hit Haiti. Our efforts to expand the operation proved timely and the filter was indeed impactful on the island of Hispaniola in a manner that would not have been possible without the newly increased capacity. Money flowed in from NGOs throughout the world to purchase filters to give to those in dire need. Several months

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[123] We have been working with a "point of use" water filter manufacturer on the island (this particular non-profit company manufactures and distributes an affordable ceramic water filter that is 99.9% microbiologically effective) as well as with a foundation that educates (academic support, individual tutoring, literacy programs), trains (vocational, health) and empowers young Dominican and Haitian girls living in extreme poverty.

after the earthquake, however, I began to notice that our plan to provide the ceramic filter to the working poor through local distributor/educators was faltering. Further, while the situation in Haiti was far from improved, the world's charitable attention had shifted elsewhere and, accordingly, so had the money behind the orders. In short, we were effective at raising charitable donations to *give* filters away for application in acute crisis situations like the earthquake or isolated cholera outbreaks, but we were not sustainably addressing longer term, chronic health/poverty issues. This experience provides a context and lens now through which I now examine the work of other NGO or charitable organizations.

Timothy Schwartz's book, *Travesty in Haiti: A True Account of Christian Missions, Orphanages, Food aid, Fraud and Drug Trafficking*, examines the apathy and political agendas permeating the foreign aid agencies as well as the tendency of massive charities to move in response to acute disasters and needs, but to do so with complex agendas. These are real issues that I have observed and challenges that must be confronted, should these NGOs and mission organizations desire to see the Haitians as well as Dominicans find the self-determination I claim can emanate through this common fund, as defined in Section 2.

Schwartz, trained as an anthropologist, wrote *Travesty in Haiti* after studying health statistics on behalf of a large international charitable organization within a remote, highly impoverished region of Haiti between 1995 and 2005. Schwartz describes the site of his study as a region with approximately 130,000 inhabitants "*that progress and time seem to have forgotten, a region that, although only seven hundred miles from Miami, appears to exist almost completely outside of the modern world*."[124] Schwartz laments that the Haitian State is truly non-operative across the board; for the majority of the country's population living in rural areas, he states it has been that way for centuries.[125]

With this economic dynamic, NGOs and churches have proliferated within the country. Yet, while at first blush this sounds like a benevolent dynamic, Schwartz describes from his anthropologist viewpoint (and supporting data) how the decentralized and independent aid given to the Haitian people through these NGOs and churches has disabled local production, upset the market economy (as thin as it may be), and, perhaps most discouraging, "*robb(ed) Haitians of initiatives to invest their own funds in production and competitive social services*".[126] As a corollary to the economic condition, there has been a vast diaspora of Haitians to either the Dominican Republic (seeking jobs

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[124] Schwartz, *Travesty in Haiti: A true account of Christian missions, orphanages, fraud, food aid and drug trafficking*, Kindle Locations 525-533.

[125] *Ibid,* Kindle Locations 4391-4393.

[126] *Ibid*, Kindle Locations 4460-4463.

in the cane fields, for instance) or to the shores of the United States.[127] For these reasons, Schwartz argues alongside other scholars that the current "aid" or charity dynamic in Haiti is not accomplishing its aim of addressing economic, health and educational challenges.[128] The lessons from Haiti largely carry over to the Dominican as well.

Against this backdrop, Schwartz provides his account of nearly a decade of fieldwork in Haiti in rather unabashed terms: "*by 2000, I no longer was an objective researcher. I was deeply angry at what I perceived to be the widespread fraud, corruption, arrogance, greed, self-interest, and apathy that afflicted the entire development community, which was, in my opinion, a total failure, serving only to make the poor poorer and the rich richer. … I wanted to prove I could do something to help the people there. But, alas, there was nothing I could do*."[129] These, of course, are dire words that paint a rather bleak picture. But amidst his profound frustration, I believe he leaves the reader with two key themes for further reflection: the failure of foreign aid and related polices and the massive diaspora of Haitians. Schwartz also suggests some practical potential solutions for further contemplation.

Failed Foreign Aid: Central to the failure of foreign aid that Schwartz describes is the lack of coordination and accountability. In essence, he argues that when money is poured into a cash-starved country without infrastructure and with a history of corruption in the government, the stage is set for disaster. Said differently, if foreign aid is the only source of wealth coming into a country there are going to be many hands – well intentioned and otherwise - trying to get into those pots. Schwartz describes, "*(p)oliticians, schoolteachers, craftsman, contractors, they were all feeding at the trough of foreign aid. It was the singular economic force.*"[130] Thus, despite what started with good intentions ended up, he argues, being squandered on "*shoddy, poorly thought out, and even damaging projects in which no one was held accountable; the food was being indiscriminately distributed during harvest seasons when it was not needed, crashing crop prices for … peasant farmers whom the NGOs were supposed to be helping*."[131]

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[127] *Ibid.*

Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History*, 366-367. Dubois argues that the current strategies of NGOs and Charities do not address "the broader issues of poverty, ecological devastation, insufficient educational opportunities for the youth who make up the majority of the population, a dire lack of water, food, and health care."[128]

[129] Schwartz, *Travesty in Haiti: A true account of Christian missions, orphanages, fraud, food aid and drug trafficking*, Kindle Locations 3370-3376.

[130] *Ibid*, Kindle Locations 1134-1140.

[131] *Ibid*, Kindle Locations 1143-1149.

Compounding the effects of lack of strategy and accountability Schwartz argues that his first-hand observations led him to conclude that embezzlement is rampant.[132]

Schwartz supports his arguments and conclusions regarding the paradox of foreign aid with data. He reports, for instance, that real income in the region he was studying had fallen from per capita US $ 54 in 1977 to US $ 22 in the mid 90's.[133] Rates of malnutrition for children under the age of 6 years experienced nearly a 50% increase.[134] Further, the rates of children and women suffering from sexually transmitted or other debilitating diseases increased steadily as well during the same time frame.[135] If these statistics are even remotely correct, one cannot challenge his conclusion that something is terribly broken.

Diaspora: The economic devastation and the sense of hopelessness have yet another deleterious impact: Many Haitians – including the best laborers, the most educated and perhaps the most industrious – simply want out of Haiti. The flight of Haitians into the Dominican Republic has been well documented throughout this paper. Hundreds of thousands of Haitians have migrated to the other side of the island. Throughout history, the Dominicans try to send them back with devastating socio-political consequences. Haitians also have been migrating to the United States. Schwartz reports that between 1970 and 1991, a total of one hundred thousand Haitians reached the United States shores by treacherous boat journeys.[136] During that same time period he reports, "*more than one million elite and middle class Haitians boarded commercial flights and emigrated to the United States, France, and Canada (Haiti had a population of about six million during the 1980s). Some 90 percent of these migrants came to the United States*."[137]

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[132] *Ibid*.

[133] *Ibid*, Kindle Locations 1094-1100.

[134] *Ibid*. "Malnutrition among children zero to seventy-two months increased from 30 to 46 percent. Life expectancy had dropped from fifty-two to forty-five years; more than one infant in ten was dying before their first birthday; 20 percent of children did not survive to the age of five."

[135] *Ibid*. Schwartz reports, "(e)ach year 6 to 10 percent of women suffered from sexually transmitted diseases such as chlamydia, HIV/ AIDS, and syphilis; and each year another 10 percent of the population experienced debilitating diseases such as malaria, typhoid, and hepatitis."

[136] *Ibid*, Kindle Locations 1759-1767.

[137] *Ibid*. Schwartz states "(e)ntry was achieved legally, by applying for immigrant status, and illegally, by skipping out on nonimmigrant visas".

These alarming statistics create somewhat of a sociological conundrum: On one hand I applaud the determination to improve one's station in life at any cost; on the other, I wonder how can Haiti ever improve its economy if the most industrious of the population leave?

There are no simple answers to the failures of foreign aid and to this massive diaspora. Schwartz does offer some recommendations. As a foundation to his set of recommendations, Schwartz believes all projects should be coordinated by a central agency in order to ensure integrity to the process (including the implementation of the reforms for which he is advocating) and to provide an infrastructure for fairly and competently monitoring performance.[138] With this coordinating agency in place, Schwartz then argues it may be possible to implement the following:

- *Provide access to credit for sound productive ventures that can yield profits and stimulate the local economy*.[139]
- *Help farmers and entrepreneurs gain access to both local and foreign markets and eliminate competition with supplemented foreign produce by forbidding its importation or allowing for the imposition of tariffs*.[140]
- *Provide a mechanism for NGOs to recoup investments, spinning their project off as an independent "sustainable" enterprise and move on to another area.*[141]
- *Promote entrepreneurialism with the aim of marketing goods and accessing new technologies of all kinds*.[142]
- *Promote private enterprises, motivating people through self-interest but in a way that contributes to the good of the whole community.*[143]
- *All projects should be designed, promoted and executed on the basis of competitive market principles and with the aim of stimulating the local market.*[144]

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[138] *Ibid*, Kindle Locations 4541-4550.

[139] *Ibid,* Kindle Location 4571.

[140] *Ibid*, Kindle Locations 4583-4584.

[141] *Ibid*, Kindle Locations 4597-4598.

[142] *Ibid*, Kindle Locations 4610-4612.

[143] *Ibid.*

[144] *Ibid*, Kindle Locations 4674-4675.

- *Link technical assistance to overseas volunteer and student experience programs.*[145]

The role of the central coordinating agency that Schwartz proposes is then to monitor and evaluate the performance of the NGOs in a transparent fashion. Haitians from a variety of backgrounds (including some in education and some who work for NGOs) seem to support this call for more coordination. Haven spoken with many Haitians on this topic of NGOs, I cannot deny the undercurrent that something was unsettling to many of them about the onslaught of NGO's in the country after the earthquake in 2010. It is not that they are unappreciative or that they do not recognize the good intentions and good deeds of so many of the NGO's and charitable organizations. Rather, they seem to know more of the story as the intended beneficiaries of the effort than perhaps those in countries, like the U.S., that provided a substantial part of the funding for those organizations. Below is a sampling of the stories that were shared with me. Admittedly the specific instances or examples they shared are difficult for me to verify and my sample set is rather small, but nonetheless they are authentic Haitian voices and ideas; for that reason alone their points are important.

One young man relayed his understanding that worldwide nearly $10 Billion USD was

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[145] *Ibid*, Kindle Locations 4745-4759. Schwartz argues: "The most successful and powerful States hire foreign experts and consultants to introduce new technologies at home. Policy planners can help do this in Haiti, without paying consultant fees, while simultaneously facilitating all the previous suggestions by exploiting the recent and widespread trend among U.S., Canadian, and Western European families of sending members abroad for experience and community service. A virtual explosion in ostensibly non-profit organizations oriented toward volunteer work has occurred in the past two decades: Cross Cultural Volunteers, International Student Volunteers, Global Volunteers, Village Volunteers, Experience Corps, Youth Challenge, Volunteer United, Operation Smile, and CUSO-VSO are just a few of the organizations that together send tens of thousands of developed world citizens overseas each year to help impoverished people. This is to say nothing of the proliferation of overseas university programs that bring tens of thousands of college students overseas to perform community service. Somewhat ironically, most pay dearly for the opportunity. Perhaps at the risk of generalizing, there is clearly - despite claims to the contrary - a profit motive at work. The students and professionals pay fees ranging from $ 3,000 to $ 10,000 per trip. Many get college credit and the experience is listed favorably on Curriculum Vitaes. Development should tap into this volunteering phenomenon and use the students to help with infrastructural projects, newspapers, computer labs, agricultural experiment stations and tree farms. University intern programs could be associated with agricultural schools. Stimulating interest in Haiti without having to make the investments would be a matter of promotion and incentives."

committed to Haiti after the earthquake. He said that most Haitians are aware of the terrific amount of funds that came into the country, but they (according to him) feel it was largely wasted through exorbitant salaries paid to the foreign staff. This same individual shared an account of his work on a project with a well-known NGO. His project was funded with more than enough money (in Haitian metrics) to fund the building project. After 4 or 5 months, however, the coffers were dry and no one could account for how or why that was the case. Another unrelated individual gave a similar account of a clinic being built by NGO money and abandoned one year later.

Others voiced a belief that the real beneficiaries of the NGO's were the foreign workers who came into the country to work on behalf of various NGOs, made the above Haitian market wage for their services, and then left the country (taking those wages along with them). This same young man shared his perception that he was aware of many NGOs doing the same type of work in the same areas (i.e. overlapping), such as Cholera treatment and prevention/education, without any coordination.

Another young man offered his nearly identical sentiments regarding the waste and lack of coordination, but offered that he still believed NGO's are the best way for Haiti to develop because if the money were given directly to the government it would "disappear". Thus, he believes NGO's are capable, with the right direction from the Haitian people, of governing themselves better than the Haitian government.

A young Haitian lawyer with whom I met offered a more stinging (and perhaps more informed) criticism of the NGO experience in Haiti after the earthquake. In his experience, the NGOs are now largely gone and the country, especially the government, is worse now than before. In his experience, the "best and brightest" among his Haitian peers who were working in the public sector could not resist the appeal of "easy money" and left their public sector jobs to join NGOs to make higher wages. As a result, the most promising human resources were stripped out of the government at a time when possibly they could have made a lasting impact. Perhaps, he says, things could have been different if the NGOs were not trying to accomplish their own agenda, without coordination and often in "competition" with the Haitian government. Instead, he believes, they should have focused upon reinforcing the Haitian government (to execute its priorities), watching over the expenditures and distributing money as needed based upon the accomplishment of clear objectives, related milestones and associated budgets, all informed by knowledgeable local resources.[146]

He also shared that in his community (Jacmel), the NGOs actually drove up prices for

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[146] This particular young man shared his belief that NGOs would build a house that should cost $5,000 USD and should be built by 5 people based upon local standards and customs and instead an NGO would fund a work force of 20 people to work that same project and in the end spend 4 times the amount.

local goods and services. As the foreign workers came in and earned the higher NGO wages, those who sold consumable goods (store owners) or rented homes in Haiti recognized the opportunity and raised prices. As such, that short-term spike in prices had a limited financial benefit to some local merchants, but this did not lead to any systemic or sustainable economic improvement. As most of those who made the higher NGO wage have since returned home, he believes (although, as I mentioned above, I have no data yet to support it) that the prices did not fall back into alignment as merchants held on to a hope that they could sustain those prices.

There is clearly a sentiment among most with whom I spoke that these organizations were/are in Haiti to help, but lack direction and coordination because the public management system (government) that they are in Haiti to help lift up has no program or structure to help them efficiently and effectively coordinate the efforts to meet the needs of the people. "Because we cannot organize ourselves", one young man shared, "we are not able to get the full or lasting advantage from all of the NGO money." To summarize, the lost opportunity was to first reinforce the Haitian government, assist in culling out *their* priorities and the related objectives upon which to focus, and then providing much needed assistance with budget management and accountability.

To this point (of reinforcement, priorities and accountability), I heard on two occasions during my interviews about a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper for Haiti published by International Monetary Fund in 2008. (IMF Country Report No. 08/115, March 2008). The paper was prepared in consultation and collaboration with staffs of the World Bank and the IMF, as well as nearly 3,000 stakeholders and development partners. (In other words, these were the priorities articulated by a cross-functional group of Haitians and their interested development partners). With terrific optimism, the Paper laid out a budget from 2008 and 2010 for making a "qualitative leap forward" and "addressing major challenges to be faced by 2015". [147] With the aim of creating a modern, competitive economy and retooled and modernized State / public management system (while leveraging the cultural creativity and historical heritage of the country), the paper laid out a three year plan to bring improved financial management and fiscal policy to the economy, to modernize agriculture as well as basic infrastructure (transport, electricity, telecommunications, water and sanitation, etc.), to develop tourism, to modernize the state (i.e. democratic governance) and to promote greater social equity through education and health improvement initiatives.[148] The implementation cost of the Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy during the three-year period between 2007-2009 was determined by the Haitian government, the development partners, including many international agencies and NGOs, to be $3,864,000,000 USD.

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[147] *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper for Haiti*, International Monetary Fund (IMF Country Report No. 08/115, March 2008), 7.

[148] *Ibid*, 9.

Certainly there is no guarantee that such a comprehensive strategy could have ever been fully implemented. Moreover, the paper clearly did not purport to articulate a strategy to eradicate poverty. Rather, it's aim was to vastly accelerate the process of improving sectors referenced above and, for instance, reducing the rate of poverty (measured at the rate of USD 1 per day) of 55.0 percent in 2007 to 47.1 percent in 2015 and more than doubling the per capita GDP growth rate within the same time frame.[149] Indeed there was optimism, for in 2006 and 2007 the Haitian economy was on an accelerated growth path and in 2008-2009 Haiti posted a 2.9% growth rate, the highest in the Caribbean.[150] On January 12, 2010, however, the earthquake obliterated that trajectory and, along with it, much of the optimism. The 2010 earthquake caused losses in the order of 120 percent of GDP and a 5.1 percent drop in the growth.[151]

In 2014, when the same Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper was updated, the plan objectives were the same: it was just that the paper cast its vision now over a time frame extending to 2030 rather than the 2015 milestones articulated in the earlier paper.[152] This extension of the vision makes sense – the focus post earthquake was and is upon urgent measures to meet Haiti's short-term crises most exacerbated by the disaster. Yet, the extension is nonetheless sad – The vision and hope for incremental improvements to those core tenants of financial management, modernized agriculture, basic infrastructure, a modernized state and social equity has backslid. The Haitian cross-functional team is looking at an additional 15-year period to address those same challenges while working to re-establish the baseline (i.e. reconstruction) that existed prior to the earthquake. Equally perplexing, the three-year development plan called for in the 2014 paper had increased to USD 7.115 billion from 3.864 billion.[153]

There is no denying that the earthquake produced an overwhelming need for acute foreign aid and that crisis management after a natural disaster like the magnitude experienced in Haiti is perhaps akin to war-zone triage. But, one must wonder could the $10 billion have accomplished more if there was coordination and a philosophy of advancing local self-determination? Or, in the alternative, if $10 billion could be raised through the worldwide awareness of the earthquake, is there a way to do it again? That is, could there be agreement upon a comprehensive *Haitian* strategy and plan to lift up

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[149] *Ibid*, 78.

[150] *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper for Haiti*, International Monetary Fund (IMF Country Report No. 14/154, June 2014), 3.

[151] *Ibid.*

[152] *Ibid.*

[153] *Ibid.* 18.

Haiti?

This concept of relying upon NGOs to reinforce the Haitian government and to cull out *their* priorities, then provide budget management and accountability, may be a thorny concept for Americans to get their heads around. A study by the Brookings Institute in 2004 reported that only 15 percent of Americans had confidence in the integrity of NGOs.[154] Only 11 percent believed such charities spent money responsibly. One author who writes about the source of general institutional distrust in America cites what he calls a "cavalcade of trust draining experiences" over the last few decades from the two most prominent NGOs in the United States, the United Way and the Red Cross. Allegations included instances of executive officers stealing money as well as claims that they exploited disasters such as 9/11 to obtain donations that were then allocated toward other non-related budgetary items.[155]

Furthermore, the reported instances of NGO failures by Schwartz, above, certainly give one reason to pause for concern. But, after considering the Haitian voices with whom I spoke during my field study, I am reminded of a speech I once heard from Ernesto Sirolli, a consultant in the field of economic development, entitled "*Want to help someone? Shut up and Listen*". In Sirolli's experience in Latin America, Africa and other locations throughout the world, humanitarian aid organizations often arrive in a foreign country with a set of preconceived ideas and, not understanding the wants of the locals nor respecting their experience and knowledge, projects with the best of intention fail simply because they are not in synch with local customs, beliefs and practices. He claims you must take the time to sit with the local people and find the consensus regarding what it is they want to accomplish and respecting this, *then* help them find the knowledge (and provide the support) to accomplish those objectives. His bottom line: before executing on *your* plan and priorities you must first "shut up and listen!" to make sure you understand *their*s.

When considering the similarity in the comments from many of those with whom I spent time in Haiti, Timothy Schwartz's experience and observations above, as well as Ernesto Sirolli's considerable wisdom, the theme of local self-determination rings loud. Perhaps the $10 billion of NGO foreign aid that was spent in the last 5 years could have had a greater impact if those in charge did not listen through the filter of their own context and biases, but rather spent more time listening with a clean slate.

Section 6: The Urgent Need of the Common Fund

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[154] Paul Light, *The Continued Crisis in Charitable Confidence* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2004).

[155] Hugh Heclo, *On Thinking Institutionally,* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 23.

During my time over the last several years in the Dominican Republic, and more recently in Haiti, I am amazed how people who share such a relatively small island can know so little about one another. They are familiar with general stereotypes, but those are largely promulgated in what appears to be an effort of the ruling elite or political party to deflect attention from *their* shortcomings and instead direct the focus upon "others".[156] That aside, very few Dominicans or Haitians have exposure to neither their counterpart's history nor knowledge of the key actors, for better or worse, in that history. For instance, when I asked people in Haiti if they knew of Trujillo or the Mirabel sisters, nearly universally the answer was "no". Some Haitians may have heard of the brutal Dominican dictator Trujillo, but knew very few details. Similarly, virtually none of the Haitian cohort I interviewed had heard of the heroic Mirabel sisters. The same lack of familiarity existed when speaking with Dominicans about Haitian leaders/dictators such as Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier or his son Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier, or about revolutionary heroes such as Toussaint L'Ouverture and Jean Jacques Dessalines.

This remarkable lack of exposure appears to be a result of the limited primary educational curriculum. One Haitian educator with whom I spoke said they do not teach the children about the past Dominican leaders (and their conflicts with Haiti) in school because it would "incite" them and they want students focused on their future. Largely, he said, if they teach anything about the perpetual discord between the Dominican and Haiti, the punch line of that lesson is that the Dominican is still upset over the 20 year occupation and/or Haiti is still upset over the division of the landmass of the island as a result of the Treaty of Ryswick in 1697. Beyond this, he said he believed that they largely learn only what their family may hand down to them.[157]

Even when I spoke with young Haitian men and women in their 20's who had completed their schooling, I was told that the schools do not teach much about the past after the historical figures of Haiti's revolution and independence. (So, for instance, when I

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[156] One interviewee stated that he feels it is the politicians that want to pit them against one another so that the government can use it as a diversion or excuse for other issues they are mishandling domestically.

[157] This particular educator offered that there is no core curriculum in primary school regarding the island's history and the individual teachers have discretion regarding what they choose to teach. Most do not venture into the murky waters of the Dominican / Haitian history. Similarly, another young Haitian man, who is a recently seminary graduate and who studied for over three years in the Dominican, offered that during his 3 plus years studying in the Dominican, he never heard much at all about Mirabel sisters nor did he hear much about the bad acts of Trujillo toward the Dominican people or Haitians. All he recalled hearing was Trujillo's bias for lighter skin.

walked into a classroom in Port-au-Prince, I saw a chalkboard with the names Dessalines and Henri Christophe - another slave turned key revolutionary leader - printed upon it from a recent lesson). The "middle parts" of Haiti's history (especially the failures), I was told were not spoken of in school. If students get exposure to that information, it was from family.

A similar dynamic appears to apply in the Dominican. When I engage young people in the Dominican Republic in discussions about Haiti and Haitian history, the extent of their knowledge seems to be (generally speaking) that each year they celebrate each February 27 on account of the date in 1844 upon which Haiti's occupation in their country ended. Further, they are generally up to speed with the dialogue I mentioned earlier about the frustration over the Haitians that are in their country without paperwork.

This concept of one's family – rather than school curriculum - as the source of information about failed leadership in their respective countries or relationships between their countries raises another dynamic that will likely seem unfamiliar to many Americans: When I spoke with one older Haitian in particular about Papa Doc, she reflected back upon her childhood and how "things were better" for her and her friends. Children, she reminisced, would play in the streets. Port-au-Prince was beautiful and she recalled it even decorated for Christmas. She stated, "I would play in the park on Sundays with my friends, sisters and my parents in the park near the palace...". I must have been visibly shocked to hear this (for wasn't this the same man who used his Tonton Makout forces to terrorize anyone who criticized him?). Sensing my bewilderment, my interpreter immediately interjected, "oh yes, many of the older generation will say this."

When I spoke with other young men and women about this older woman's observation, the pattern held true. One young man said he never learned of the Duvalier father and son in school, but he did learn from his parents that Papa Doc lead with a "strong hand". He recalled being told by his parents that Papa Doc was a doctor who treated a lot of people in the countryside and became very popular. It was the son, Baby Doc, he was told, who initiated the downward spiral.

Testing this impression a bit further, I played devil's advocate with some of my younger interviewees, asking them leading questions such as "wasn't the economy and crime rate much better under Papa Doc?" Several in my limited cohort of interviewees acknowledged that they had heard this from older generations, but felt now they had more freedom to speak out if they did not like what was going on in the government. As one individual stated, "you could not speak about political reality then like you can now." I got a very real sense that this was a crucial and cherished freedom for them, although there seems to be some debate regarding how to value the cost and benefit of this right. One exchange in particular demonstrates this debate. When I posed this question to two young men at the same time, they had the following response and exchange: "When old people talk about Papa Doc they often speak of it being a "better" time. Younger people

do not believe this part of the Duvalier story because you did not have the same freedoms that you have today. You could not speak your mind back then. Many things have changed in Haiti since the Duvalier regimes, but that does not mean it is a good time to go back to." In response, the other young man offered, "I believe it was better then because you had rules about what was right and what was wrong. The freedom to speak your mind has come at too high of a costs. Back then we had respect for one another. Too much freedom has led to too much disorder. We need someone to lead our country in s strong way, but not a cruel way. We need rules and enforcement of those rules."

There is a tragic urgency, in my opinion, to initiating a wider educational initiative. When I asked one Haitian interviewee about his outlook for the future, he solemnly stated, "It is difficult for me to be focused on the future because everyday I need to think about feeding and providing for my family. Thinking of the future makes me feel old". Another Haitian young man, with whom I shared the stories of the great Dominican heroines (the Mirabel sisters), said people need to hear these stories. Similarly another Haitian interviewee said that it was the reciprocal lack of education about their brothers and sisters on the other side of the island that allows each side to be manipulated (largely by their political leaders) about the other side.

An interview in Americas Quarterly in 2014 with two of the most celebrated authors on the island of Hispaniola, Edwidge Danticat (from Haiti) and Junot Díaz (from the Dominican Republic) provides helpful color to this pervasive lack of understanding between the two countries that occupy the island.[158] The interviewer asked each of them, "What do you think most Haitians/Dominicans don't understand about the other side?" Their responses are enlightening:

- DIAZ: *"Some folks on (Dominican) side know a lot more about their neighbor than others. Some Dominicans are in fact descended from said neighbor and might know a thing or two because of it. Yet there is no question that there's not enough real contact, and that the anti-Haitian derangements of certain sectors in the Dominican Republic have helped to widen the gulf between the two nations, and have made it harder for our communities to be in fruitful communion except through the most reductive, divisive, and—on the Dominican side—sensationally racist generalizations about one another. But if I have to answer you most specifically: [neither side understands] we're sisters and brothers, that we share a poor, fragile island, and that without true solidarity we won't make it.*

- DANTICAT: *I agree that it has a lot to do with who you're asking, and also where you are... (I)n many places on the island, people who grow up in close proximity to one another are practically indistinguishable physically. There are*

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[158] Andre, Richard. *The Dominican Republic and Haiti: A Shared View fro the Diaspora* in Americas Quarterly, Summer 2014.

also a lot of people who understand that we share a common struggle, and especially that poor people on both sides of the island are battling similar types of detention and immigration policies in the diaspora. Perhaps we need to hear more about these people. Often in the dialogue we bring up our historical scars, but not our historical bridges. Because our neighbors are solely defined by what they did to us, rather than what we can do together. That being said, I think some —certainly not all—Dominicans have a very limited, almost stereotypical idea of what a Haitian person looks and acts like. And it often has to do with the people some are most prejudiced against: the people who work in the bateys [sugar plantation towns]. When I used to travel to the D.R., I would have to spend the first 15 minutes of a lot of conversations going back and forth with someone trying to convince me that I'm not really Haitian because they feel they know what a Haitian is supposed to be…It is grounded in a kind of inflexibility of sorts; an inability on the part of some to see us in a variety of ways: as neighbors, friends, allies, and as brothers and sisters in both a looser and broader sense."

Having argued that education is the missing link to the common fund, I endeavored to find an example to prove it is possible (i.e. this is more than just an academic exercise). In so searching, I have come across The Mariposa Foundation outside of Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic. It would be disingenuous of me to say that the situs of Mariposa is an exact proxy for the conditions in Haiti. That said, the experience of The Mariposa Foundation provides a model approach upon which expansion can be made. (It will be my focus in upcoming trips to Haiti to test this assumption).

The Mariposa Foundation began in 2009 with the objective of educating (academic support, individual tutoring, literacy programs), training (vocational, health) and empowering young Dominican and Haitian girls living in extreme poverty. The foundation's theory is that developing young women is the key to stopping the cycle of poverty on the island of Hispaniola. That is, when a girl's life stays on track it will have a ripple effect on everyone around her, having (they claim) a "multiplier effect within her community". Mariposa's stated objectives, which I had the opportunity to observe in operation first hand, are as follows:

- Educating, empowering and employing more girls each year: Girls receive training in various industries (hospitality, education, business) and are given the tools they need to become financially independent.

- Promoting humanitarian values and social consciousness: Mariposa seeks to improve Dominican-Haiti relations on a local level through the girls it educates and trains. All girls at Mariposa must volunteer to work within the community on various community development projects.

- Providing health education and resources to empower girls (engaging the family in the process to the extent possible) to be decision makers for their future. The goal of this specific initiative is the reduction of teen pregnancies and child marriages in the community: Nearly 50% of women who receive less than 4 years of primary education become pregnant during their teenage years according to the UNICEF).[159] 28% of girls 11 to 15 are reported to experience at least one unwanted pregnancy.

- Creating environmental consciousness in the local community: the girls receive lessons on the ecological/environmental issues that negatively impact the island.

- Replicating the model: Mariposa desires to teach other NGOs how to accomplish the same set of objectives through knowledge sharing (conferences, workshops, etc.).

To help accomplish these objectives, Mariposa has successfully tapped into the trend (referenced by Schwartz in Section 4) of U.S., Canadian and European families, schools and churches of sending members abroad to assist in reformative, justice-oriented projects. These differ from the "feel good" approach of the standard mission trip I have observed over the years.

By and large it has been my experience that the typical mission-oriented approach to "serving" in third world countries has been to strengthen the faith of the missionary participant and thereby lead to confessions of faith, but they often have very little impact upon sustainable improvements in the "whole person" (that is the social, economic and spiritual developments of those in country to whom the mission is ostensibly directed). The trend that Schwartz refers to and that I observed at Mariposa is to go beyond simply delivering a promise of salvation to the poor (that of entering the kingdom upon *death*) to

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[159] "UNICEF Gender Action Plan 2014-2017", United Nations Children's Fund. http://www.unicef.org/media/files/UNICEF_Gender_Action_Plan_2014-2017.pdf (accessed July 21, 2015).

helping them in their fight against injustice/poverty or oppression such that they can achieve their full potential in *life*.[160]

Schwartz described this as a proliferation of overseas high school and university programs that brings tens of thousands of students to perform true community service.

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[160] I make this observation from personal experience. At the risk of being long-winded in a footnote, I share in full an excerpt from my application to Chicago Theological Seminary wherein I articulate the personal experience I had which led to my commitment to the whole personal development concept articulated herein: "The most defining moment of my spiritual journey occurred on my first mission trip in 2007 to the Dominican Republic with my wife and our two young daughters (at that time ages 10 and 8). A group of about a dozen other members of our church accompanied us. On this particular day, we visited Batey San Jose, a "work-camp" where sugarcane cutters live. We spent the day painting their cinder-block dwellings as well as their school (built by earlier missionaries). We interacted with the children and mothers, the former playing soccer or baseball, the latter showing us their homes and their babies or braiding hair. Some in our group with medical training were assessing acute medical needs.

After a long hot summer afternoon in the batey, we concluded our service activities and began to congregate by the vans. As we prepared to leave, the dynamic changed considerably; the children and mothers all seemed to join up with someone from our group with whom they had connected during the day. As we opened the van doors, a true frenzy broke out. Children and their mothers began asking for our watches, sunglasses or hats - anything. One mother – clearly more desperate than the rest - actually thrust her child within the van doors and begged, "Please take my sick baby." The whole moment was so well orchestrated that I instinctively realized that this was not the first time they had said "goodbye" to missionaries in this fashion.

At this point I was numb from the range of unfamiliar emotions: the observation of such profound poverty to the bewilderment of the unexpected dynamic of our departure. I went back to our hotel in Playa Palanque and took a long run in order to unwind; and I wept. As melodramatic as it may sound, my heart broke for the poor in that very instance and has never healed. In that moment I was very connected to God and to my faith in a way I had never before experienced.

Following this flood of emotion, I began - as I typically do - to analyze how I arrived at this emotional peak. I vividly recall being so confused by what transpired during the course of the day. Frankly I wondered, in what exactly had I taken part? Was I part of any real change? Did I impact a single person? Was I a deliverer of false hope? Certainly, I observed, there was not any demonstrable change since various church groups had gone to Batey San Jose in prior years. I recall thinking about the story our mission trip leader told me about the water well the prior mission group had installed. It had been dismantled and the parts sold.

Once home, I could not get these conflicting emotions out of my mind and eventually they manifested into an actionable "whole person" development hypothesis.

These student groups (who have paid for such an opportunity) at Mariposa work for weeks – many for months – in support of the educational and social objectives listed above. The value of these services to Mariposa is profound: in my interview with the founder of Mariposa, Patricia Suriel, I learned how these services help Mariposa to be increasing-sustaining. An increasing percentage of funding comes from hosting and providing services to these groups and visitors.

The labor-value of the service learning groups, Suriel reports, is approaching about $250,000 per year. Perhaps most significantly, these groups help to raise international awareness and turn hundreds of visitors into advocates each year.

Mariposa is able to measure its success by important objective landmarks such as literacy in basic Spanish; grade reached in school (finishing primary or secondary schooling); healthy sexual choices (lower rate of teen pregnancy); as well as eventual vocational placement.

Importantly, as I was spending time with the staff as well as interacting with the volunteers, I began to see the "common fund" take shape through the vision of Mariposa. Girls, aged 8 to 12, of Dominican, Haitian/Dominican, and Haitian descent were united through education, through community outreach projects, and through shared experiences. This was the holistic approach in operation. This interaction is not simply by chance. It is clearly by design. The legacy of the Butterflies is ever present to the girls. They learn of the Mirabal sisters through direct interaction with the author and Dominican icon Julia Alvarez (author of *In the Time of Butterflies)* who gives of her time as an Honorary Co-Chairwoman to the foundation. Similarly, the daughter of the Dominican Heroine Maria Teresa Mirabal serves as Honorary Co-Chairwoman.

Concluding Thoughts – What Can American's Do?

At this point, I feel compelled to switch roles from "arm chair" anthropologist to theologist and share emergent Christological and other faith-based commitments (and opportunities) I perceive in this "common fund". Certainly, as I reference numerous times throughout this paper, I believe the common fund is a source through which Dominicans and Haitians may draw strength, find commonality, empower determination (on both the *communal* and *self* level), as well as constructively shape their identity moving forward. But, does this mean that the rest of the world should turn their attention elsewhere and leave the challenges solely up to the Dominicans and Haitians? I think this does not need to be the case, nor is this what I believe God intends.

In addition to the student service learning groups, it is my proposition (and experience) that there exist many working professionals internationally who have hit their stride and

are at the top of their careers and are asking "*is this what it is truly about"?* Perhaps they have worked tirelessly for years to build their careers and accumulate wealth so they could provide for their families and obtain all the material items that our society tells us are the hallmarks of true success. Yet, as driven, compassionate humans, many are left asking, *"is this my life's purpose? Will this be my legacy?"*

I see the opportunity for theological praxis that is capable of reaching these individuals who are situated to pour into the "whole person" development of the poor. That is, those who are willing to find and give their time, rich with professional talents and the treasures that accompany their success, and desirous for a deeper, more purpose-filled relationship with their own family and their God. Indeed, I have seen others who walk in similar shoes as mine, travel to the Dominican Republic or Haiti and be instantly inspired to give of their time, talents and treasures to help work for social and economic justice.

These opportunities, of course, are not confined to any denomination or faith orientation. As I identify as Christian, my theological commitments are based upon that orientation. From this personal faith and theological perspective I can attest that the blessings the Lord has returned to me are beyond comparison to the money and time my family has given to the initiatives I describe above. We have grounded our children and provided them purpose and inspiration. The memories they made while serving along side us will no doubt help shape and define their life purpose. And, perhaps the greatest blessing - our passion as a family for the people on the island of Hispaniola led us to Emilie. To loosely paraphrase the lessons from Proverbs 11: when I have had the courage to trust God and give freely and refresh others, God has returned even more than I could have ever imaged.

As a final note on this issue, I believe the Lord can perhaps use me to help reach these individuals. Indeed I can attest that the more I give the more I get. The irony is that I was not a generous person by nature. I had to get my heart broken before I was able to realize the axiom in Deuteronomy 15:10- *Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to.*

In developing this section of theological reflection, I offer that perhaps the most important issue facing society - that demands a theological response - is to inspire those who can give to do so in proportion to the necessities of the poor and/or oppressed and according to the ability of themselves as the givers. On this topic, Matthew 26:11 speaks clearly to me: *The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me.* In this passage, I recognize that there will always be poor people in this world. In this regard, since the "demand" side of the equation (the amount of poor people in the world) is infinite then the "supply" of people willing to serve them is perhaps the only aspect we can fully identify, develop and expand.

To conclude, there is an obvious question regarding my reflection: have I accomplished my objectives for this paper? Recall from the introduction that my objectives were many: to unpack these multi-layered issues in furtherance of my responsibility to help Emilie understand the issues so she can approach life – the secular and worldly – with *her* authentic African/Haitian/Dominican/American Heritage; to ground my vocation objective (that is, the "whole person" development initiative about which I speak throughout this project) in a solid cultural understanding; and, most significantly, to uncover the "common fund" for which I was searching. With respect to the first two objectives, I believe I may count those as accomplished. With respect to the third, given the depth I envision for this common fund, I believe a foundation has been established upon which to build.

Throughout the course of this project, visiting with so many encouraging and hopeful people in both the Dominican Republic and Haiti, I came to appreciate the following axiom: We cannot change the past through advancing this common fund, but perhaps the people of Hispaniola can decide how they are going to view each other, and themselves, in the present as well as to determine how they are going to live collectively in the future. In advancing this notion of a "common fund" throughout this paper, I am not naively suggesting that centuries of race and ethnicity issues (and related tension) can simply be swept aside. Nor am I suggesting that the legacy of failed leadership in the Dominican and Haiti, as well as the contributory actions of the United States, can easily be unwound. However, it is my firm belief that there exist yet unrealized resources through which Dominicans and Haitians may draw strength, find commonality, empower determination (on both the *communal* and *self* level), as well as constructively shape their identity moving forward. The roots are present and real.

This "common fund" initiative will not solve all the challenges facing the island. Critics may also note that such an initiative will not directly impact the supply of other basic services (such as health services and the efforts to fight endemic and epidemic diseases, for instance). It may not directly impact economic development, including the development of jobs that both sides of the island so desperately need. It will not directly improve the infrastructure or the governance of public services. and the rule of law and democracy. But it could very well help the rule of law, security and democracy.

Perhaps the framework of this paper provides a receptacle for and the initial contents in such a fund, but the work is certainly ongoing. But that is not to say that these initial contents are not in and of themselves constructive, powerful and sustainable, for they represent a combined history of self and communal determination symbolized by truly iconic moments; that these moments then, by any possible measure, "illuminate the history of humanity and civil rights" on the world stage. From a theological perspective,

the beginning contents of this common fund offer a medium to engage with God to question suffering and demand change that continues to provide the fund with even more depth and power. Perhaps, too, like-minded individuals or NGOs in the U.S. can be motivated to lend their considerable experience and resources to further develop the set of possible solutions that are capable of adding yet even more depth to the common fund. Without question, there is a fantastic legacy that is ripe to be expanded upon as a source from which to draw strength, find commonality, shape identity and empower future communal and self -determination. I am hopeful that these two wings of the same bird will take flight.

Appendix 1

As referenced in Section 3, this Appendix contains various comments shared with me by Haitian as well as Dominican interviewees. Furthermore, this Appendix highlights the interaction I had with three different individuals: a former Vodou houngan (priest) who has converted to Christianity; a young Christian pastor who grew up in a home that practiced Vodou and Catholicism (although he did not practice Vodou); and an actively practicing Vodou houngan.

Throughout the process of conducting field research, I recorded comments interviewees made, which, to me, highlight some of the legends, myths and even intra-island / intra-country confusion that exists regarding the practice of Vodou. Some of the more notable comments include:

- *"Today it is largely based upon the calling of bad Lwa so that people can get ahead of others or get back at others."*
- *"It is used now mainly to do dirty things against one another."*
- *"For the Christian it is bad."*
- *"At some point (Vodou) changed and became a way for people to act upon their enemies or to be protected by their enemies."*
- *"It is just for the wicked… I know of a gang leader who was shot at by his enemy and the bullets from the shotgun just fell at his chest."*
- ***"**I once heard the testimony of an older Vodou priest who was a young priest at the time Papa Doc was coming into power. He said he knows that Papa Doc burned a cow alive as a sacrifice and many people speak about this. But, he also knew that Papa Doc took a baby from a pregnant lady's womb and used that as a sacrifice as well. Francois Makandal (a famous leader of the slave rebellion in the 1700's) sacrificed his own baby to seek powerful spirits to help him kill slave owners."*
- *"Politicans still use Vodou spirits to bring aggression to crowds" (referring to the cycle of coups throughout Haitian presidential history as well as the current protests that were occurring during my field study on account of the contested election).*
- *"I grew up in a family that practiced Vodou. In the past, the hounfors were used to treat people because we did not have access to doctors like we do today. Now*

too many people use Vodou to hurt people or to seek protection (referring specifically to "bought" Lwa).

- *"Today people still use Lwa for healing but they also use other Lwa to do wicked things or to seek wealth."*

- *"Vodou is like a stick in a person's hand...you can use it anyway you want...The good part is healing of people... there are priests however that both heal and they hurt...It is a question of the heart."*

The individuals who made the comments above had varying degrees of experience with the practice of Vodou in their upbringing. In order to more profoundly demonstrate the variation in Vodou experience and belief, below I highlight the interaction I had with three different individuals with deep familiarity regarding the practice: a former Vodou houngan (priest) who has converted to Christianity; a young Christian pastor who grew up in a home that practiced Vodou and Catholicism (although he did not practice Vodou); and an actively practicing Vodou houngan. I share these three experiences not to suggest that they are representative of Haitian Vodou in particular; rather, to demonstrate that Haitian Vodou is not a single tradition, but a collection of experiences and personal histories. Indeed, it may mean different things to different people.

Jean Robert is approximately 55 years old and a former Vodou houngan. He says that Vodou has not changed over time, but that the motives and ethics of the Vodouisants is what changed. He articulated that his practice was largely centered upon the healing aspects of Vodou; he primarily served Lwa associated with health and wellbeing. Jean Robert shared, however, that people came to him when faced with any difficult moment and sometimes that was health related and sometimes it was related to a conflict they were having with another person. Over time, he felt that more and more people were coming to him to request that he help them reach Lwa to take action against people. Even though he claims he did not facilitate such action, he said in his small community that when something bad did happen to someone (e.g. a person's health declined, a person lost something of value, a child was stillborn, etc.), some in the community suspected he was involved with it. As such, he constantly felt he and his family were at risk of some misguided attempts at retaliation.

Jean Robert also expressed that he felt a sense of apprehension about trying to heal people. He believed many of the Vodouisants who came to him for healing services were victims of some form of spiritual attack. Once he removed that bad spirit, he felt he was at risk of retaliation from that spirit. Reflective of this risk, he pulled from his shirt pocket a twenty-year old picture of his third daughter lying in her coffin. She died when she was in her early teens. He attributes her untimely and unexplained death to this notion of retaliation. Thus, while he believes he only used his function as houngan for positively-intended outcomes (healing) he believes that he could not escape the consequences of

those who used Vodou for negative outcomes. For every good consequence he facilitated he believed there existed a countervailing negative consequence. This is not to say that he felt *he* was directly responsible for the negative consequences. When he did something good, he did not feel he directly provoked a Lwa to do harm to him or his family. Rather, as I understood him, he believed that other people felt he was somehow involved with helping other Vodouisants do bad things and therefore someone in turn sought a mambo or houngan or bokor to do something retaliatory against him. As one author and practicing mambo described, "*(i)n cases where a mambo or houngan or bokor is hired to do magic for a client, the ethical consequences do not belong to the magician, but to the client. Just as "guns do not kill people; people kill people*." Vodouisants believe that magicians for hire are not responsible for the results of their magic— the person who paid for the magic to be done is the responsible party.[161]

Jean Robert could not achieve balance in the spiritual world and he decided to leave Vodou. He has since converted to Christianity. I do not claim that Jean Robert's experience is typical of other houngan. Rather, I share his experience to demonstrate the personal, action-oriented, give-and-take dimensions of Vodou. I also believe his experience suggests that it is not Vodou that has lost its life-affirming and community-building qualities, it is the practitioners' intent that may have changed or evolved. I believe it is also instructive to understand that Jean Robert still believes deeply in the power of Vodou and still believes he has the healing gift. As he explains, he has just come to believe in the Christian God and choses not to practice Vodou any longer.

Another young man I interviewed is a recent graduate of a Baptist seminary in Haiti. Nicholas is now a Baptist pastor who has never practiced Vodou, although he grew up in a home where his parents practiced Vodou in a syncretic relationship with Catholicism. While Nicholas believes Vodou is in conflict with Christianity, he absolutely believes in the power of Vodou. Similar to my comments above regarding Jean Robert, I preface this discussion with the statement that I do not believe Nicholas' view is by any means a generally held view of Vodou by Haitians. The point again here is to note that intent may vary among practitioners.

As a seminarian, Nicholas believes that the Petro or Gede Lwa (or other non-Rada Lwa), once initially provoked centuries ago, put Haitians on a path whereby they were perpetually destined to be subject to the negative powers or consequences of Vodou. The theme that stood out to me from my time with Nicholas was that he believes there is always a consequence with Vodou. In his experience, Vodou creates conflicts between good Lwa and bad Lwa. This conflict is inherent because Vodou mambo or houngan today are often asked to produce a bad consequence for someone else in order to produce a requested "good" consequence for the client. He believes that too many people now use

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[161] Tann, *Haitian Vodou: An Introduction to Haiti's Indigenous Spiritual Tradition*, Kindle LOC 1120-1123.

Vodou as a form of what I would paraphrase as "prosperity gospel". They want to get ahead, even if it comes at the expense of another.

Similar to Jean Robert, Nicholas feels that modern applications of Vodou are perhaps creating a spiritual imbalance because more people are now using it for negative purposes rather than positive purposes. Notably, even having been through a Christian seminary, Nicholas is not advocating that Vodou is not real. He believes, for instance, that a man in his neighborhood is often possessed by a spirit that makes the man behave like a goat. The point here is that these two individuals, Jean Robert and Nicholas, did not have a conversion experience with Christianity whereby they felt that the curtain was pulled back on vodou to reveal some type of farce. This is not the case at all. Vodou is action oriented and they just choose no longer to participate.

After meeting with Jean Robert and Nicholas, I next had the opportunity to meet with a practicing Vodou houngan up the river valley from Jacmel. We met outside his small *badji* or alter room, which is no more than 8 foot by 8 foot in diameter. By its physical appearance alone, it was clear that this hounfor was not equipped for large communal ceremonies. Speaking through an interpreter, over the course of our visit he distinguished the various groupings or, as he called them, "branches" of Vodou as well as the key Lwa within each branch (Rada, Petro as well as some of the Gede who are local to his community). He also expressed the importance of understanding that in addition to these "natural" Lwa (those within the group which he is skilled in calling) he is also skilled at calling the "bought" Lwa referenced above that many of the Vodouisants in his community seek out. (He was forthright in sharing that he is often asked to facilitate purposes beyond healing that certainly run the spectrum into harmful or vengeful intentions). For that reason, his smaller badji had somewhat (and I don't mean to be crass) transactional feel to it. This is not to say it was not authentic, but rather that I came to believe during the course of our conversation that many people sought him out for a specific purpose or outcome.

My time with this houngan also reinforced an important lesson. When I attempted to engage him in the specifics of the Lwa that were natural to him, including the names and attributes of the local Gede spirits, he was very direct that he did not want to share this information with me unless he is "called to work for me". In this moment, I realized that I was not asking to be taught a doctrine like Christianity wherein someone is under an obligation of sorts to share the faith with me or try to advocate why his/her belief is the "right" belief. I believe it is important for students of religion, especially of Haitian Vodou, to understand this point. As I have no ancestral or experiential ties to any Rada or Petro Lwa, I have no claim – inherited or otherwise – to Vodou. He, in turn, has absolutely no obligation to share it with me. In this moment, all I could do is offer my story as to why I wanted to understand more about Vodou (including my daughter's Haitian heritage) and hope to gain his trust (i.e. I was not a Christian missionary with the aim of discrediting or converting Haitians from this practice).

With these guideposts in place, he did lead me toward a much deeper understanding and appreciation of the fact that Vodou is an activity-based, somewhat fluid and personalized experience (rather than a fixed doctrine). Furthermore, he led me to a deeper appreciation for the role of the houngan and mambo and his or her distinctive abilities. For instance, he stressed the importance of the method, care and order with which Legba and then the preceding Lwa (Marassa, Kafou, Loko, etc.) who are accessible by him are called upon. Without such order and care, Lwa would be offended and trouble would ensue. The key to being a houngan, he expressed, is knowing the formula (who needs to be called for what purpose and in what order and who, for instance, should never be called together).

In general terms (purposefully guarded) he shared with me how he became a houngan, leaving the physical world and entering the spiritual world where he learned of the Lwa with whom he would have the ability to interact initially and how that set grew through practice overtime. To this point, while there may be thousands of different Lwa various houngan or mambos relate with perhaps only a handful of the total pantheon. As their subsets of accessible Lwa within the major Lwa groupings differ so do the capabilities of the individual houngan or mambo.

Prior to concluding our visit, he did allow me to enter his *badji*, the entryway for which was adorned with symbols of various Catholic saints associated with various Lwa. As expected, on the alter was a variety of candles, images, bowls, bottles, liquids of some undeterminable sort as well as the heads of various dolls. Further, as expected, the selection of items made little sense to me as an outsider, but each item certainly looked functional and not merely decorative. Perhaps it was this very functional feeling of the space that gave me a sense of reverence for the place (and perhaps even a foreboding sense that being irreverent could be consequential).

As we departed, he took me to a small personal alter behind the *badji*. This alter was in the shape of a cross and was adorned with imagery of a snake and a scull. In the center it contained a small cavity for him to insert various paraphernalia. He explained to me that this was his alter for Jean Baron (recall from Section 3 that *Baron* is the title given to the more powerful Gede Lwa). He described this Baron as one whom he calls forth in order to finish the job that he was hired to do. He said if someone does not pay him, he inserts one of three baby doll heads accordingly: one that was crying, one that is dead and one that looks crazy. He said he mainly uses the crying baby head to punish those who do not pay or insult him as that is the one that curse the victim to not sleep. On that note, we handed him a small wad of cash, hoping it was sufficient for his time, and left for the airport.

Where the line of demarcation exists between reality, legend and myth in many of these accounts, I will never uncover through my study of Vodou as a non-initiate / non-practitioner. Indeed as these above comments reflect, even among those living on the island of Hispaniola there is a myriad of experiences and beliefs regarding past and current Vodou practice. Thus, Haitian Vodou is incapable of being encapsulated ina single-story. Furthermore, each individual brings his or her own motives and objectives to the practice. Nonetheless, for the reasons outlined in Section 3, I have come to appreciate that elements of Vodou (especially those associated with the revolutionary events) can be viewed as powerfully life-affirming and community-building in Haiti's history. As such, it is an important constituent to the "common fund*"* to which I have been advocating throughout this paper.

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