

URBAN DWELLINGS, HAITIAN CITIZENSHIPS:  
HOUSING, DAILY LIFE AND MEMORY IN PORT-AU-PRINCE, HAITI

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## **ABSTRACT**

Vincent Joos: Urban Dwellings, Haitian Citizenships: Housing, Memory and Daily Life in Port-au-Prince, Haiti  
(Under the direction of Rudolf Collredo-Mansfeld)

Port-au-Prince is today the site of top-down urban planning practices that deeply affect the lives of its residents and the site of vernacular urban reconstruction by Haitian people who attempt to assert their right to the city. After the devastating 2010 earthquake, the state and many NGOs and UN agencies established and administered vast tent camps or provided temporary shelters designed to meet minimal housing requirements to people affected by the earthquake. However, many people refused to live in these hazardous camps and, instead, implemented housing solutions of their own. Staying or moving into the old districts of Port-au-Prince and the surrounding areas, people started to negotiate their access to resources such as potable water or electricity and their right to use public space for economic activities. Some of these displaced persons live in houses that belong to the national patrimony, like the Gingerbread Houses which are today included on the World Monument Watch List. Though they seem to be able to negotiate their right to stay in these houses with owners, the stability of their settlements is nonetheless threatened by new exclusionary spatial arrangements established by a state that is demolishing neighborhoods at whim. This research explores how displaced persons are appropriating the cultural patrimony of their city to create habitable dwellings and culturally rich neighborhoods, and how these spatial practices shape the collective rights that emerge amid new security apparatuses and destructive urban practices that reduce access to urban space. People are

using the cultural patrimony of their city as a situational basis for the production of new rights and spaces of belonging. This use of a material culture echoing the colonization, US occupation and brutal oppression of the masses in Haiti warrants serious attention as it presents a vernacular response to disasters in which fruitful visions for the future of Port-au-Prince arise.

To Mira and Simon, for their love and courage,  
To my grandmother Angèle Joos who fought all her life for justice, liberty and equality,  
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**INTRODUCTION**  
**THREE ETHNOGRAPHIC VIGNETTES: HOUSING AND HAITIAN DAILY LIFE**

\*\*\* Fanmi Excellent \*\*\*

In 1992, Kettly Excellent lived in Figaro, a small rural enclave shaded by the avocado and mango trees that dot the mountains surrounding the nearby little town of Gros Morne, in the north western Artibonite region. She lived with her mother, father, two brothers, and her aunt and uncle in a 50x50 yard courtyard surrounded by Candelabra cacti and circled by juniper, breadfruit, palm and *kenep* (Spanish lime) trees. As the only girl of the family, she slept alone in a *ti kay pay*, a small one-room house built of wattle covered by clayey mud and roofed with straw. Her mattress was laid on the clean pounded earth floor next to a chair where she piled her folded clean clothes. Her brothers each lived in a similar structure. As Kettly states, “Life was simple, and for kids, houses didn’t really matter. You’re never inside but to sleep. If you stay inside, it means that you’re sick... or that you’re doing spiritual activities [*fè travay*]. And that can bring you problems.” The courtyard, located between a 15 foot wide dirt road and the fertile Gros Morne valley was the center of family life and remains for Kettly the place she cherishes the most.

In the courtyard, the house that formerly belonged to her grandparents serves today as a *kay spirituel*, a house inhabited by *Zanj*—Vodou deities her parents “serve” and are protected by. The structure is a white-painted wooden shotgun house, and represents one of the many species



of shotgun houses we find all over Haiti. Generally, shotguns are narrow rectangular houses with a small gable front porch, usually no more than 12 feet wide, with rooms arranged one behind the other. This railroad apartment-like structure is also the main architectural and land division pattern in dense urban areas where a wide assortment of shotgun houses lot the landscape.

The *kay spirituel* is an important structure in the Excellent courtyard as it protects the family and, since 1982, provides *siro miel*—honey—through a big beehive that spans the inside and outside of a side door (Figure 1). The production of honey provides supplemental income to the family and is a sign of good will from the *Zanj* who inhabit the house. As Ketty's father explained to me, the honey can only be collected by the family *houngan* (Vodou priest), who is the only one to possess keys to this particular house. He comes by weekly to open it and *travay* (work) with the *Zanj*. In order to live in harmony with the *Zanj*, Ketly's parents and one of her little brothers engage in various spiritual practices and leave offerings around the trees that surround the courtyard.





*Figure 1 Fanmi Excellent's kay spirituel with the beehive (Joos, July 2014)*

Kettly's mother lived in a 12x30 feet two-room house made of timber and lime next to the outdoor kitchen of the courtyard. Making lime is time-consuming and expensive and having a lime house is a sign of high social standing. As Kettly's father, Monsieur Excellent, explained: "You need to find the right rocks at the bottom of the river. They can be very big. You need several people to drag them here in the courtyard. Then you heat them up on a big fire for hours. It demands a lot of wood. Finally, you finely crush the stones. It might take you up to two days to make a good pile of lime" (Field Notes, July 12, 2014).

Monsieur Excellent also lived in a small two-room lime house, near the burial ground of his parents and ancestors located in the center of the courtyard (*Figure 2*). The burial ground is marked by a circle of small stones covered by a larger rock. As Monsieur Excellent explains, you can feel the *souffle*—a puff of wind—when placing your hand next to the stones. The spirit of his ancestors is still alive and presides on the *lakou* he inherited in 1976 when his father passed away. The *lakou* or "courtyard" is a quintessential spatial structure of rural Haiti where extended families collectively live, cook, share food, organize agricultural work and engage in spiritual

practices. Living in peace with Zanj is a way to honor ancestors who live in spiritual form in the *lakou* and fields Monsieur Excellent still cultivates at 76 years old.



*Figure 2 Lakou Excellent: Monsieur Excellent's house and the ancestor's grave on the left, under the rocks. Joos, 2014*

The *lakou* is often ruled by a patriarch who handles internal conflicts or relations with other *lakou*. These are very important since many agricultural tasks demand a large workforce. Working in *kumbit*—groups of people who lend their labor in a well-organized gift economy—is vital for generating a little income from extra crops. Given the exorbitant price of a visit to the clinic in case of health problems, having a little cash at hand is necessary. The Excellent children generate income through their labor and use it to buy the necessary goods and clothing their parents need. Their little yearly income is often syphoned into medication and the expense of visits to the doctor.

Ketty's aunt and uncle once lived in the one of the two oldest house of the courtyard, a modest wooden light green and pink shotgun house with a steep roof and a shaded front porch. Their children lived in Port-au-Prince with Monsieur Excellent's younger sister, who moved

there with her own children in the seventies so they could attend high school and so she could make a more substantial income as a domestic worker in the house of a military officer, a native of Gros Morne.

In 2014, there were no more *kay pay* houses. Only the shotgun houses made of lime or wood stood in the *lakou*. Kettly had left in 1992, when she was 16, to join one of her cousins in Port-au-Prince, in Rue de L'Enterrement—Funeral Street—where they both worked as cooks in a small restaurant. There she married a man who owned a house in an alley of this dense neighborhood of Port-au-Prince and started a *ti komès* (small business) next to her dwelling. To this day, Kettly and her two daughters sell cigarettes, cold drinks, small bottles of rum, individually packed cookies imported from the Dominican Republic and various dry goods she buys weekly at Machè Ti Tony, a gigantic warehouse located on the northern side of the capital. Being centrally located is crucial for business since it is the only area of Port-au-Prince (and Haiti) where electricity is available almost 24/7. Ice and cold drinks businesses thrive in this part of the city, where temperatures frequently reach over one hundred degrees Fahrenheit. Kettly is a shrewd businesswoman who also sells seasonal goods such as school uniforms in August, or Christmas and Valentine's day items, to a clientele she has known for many years. Building relations of trust and reciprocity, as she learned to do in her *lakou*, is essential to maintaining her business. As such, she is able to send her children to school and to send a little money back home, to be used mainly in case of health emergencies. She is independent from a husband with whom she only shares a roof but with whom she very seldom engages in conversation. If she could, she would divorce him, but the house doesn't belong to her. Kettly is a hard-working woman who dreams of going back to her native mountains, but doesn't have any choice but to work hard in order to meet the educational and financial needs of her family.

I met Kettly in September of 2013 through her brother, Brunel, a 32-year-old man who had just moved to Port-au-Prince to live with his sister and find employment. I had started to come on a daily basis to Funeral Street, a residential area and busy mile of straight road located between the administrative center of Port-au-Prince, the Grand Cimetière, and the commercial downtown. Brunel has a wife and a son who live in the inner city of Gros Morne (*Figure 3*), where he worked as a security guard in a gas station until he was fired to make room for the owner's cousin. He finished high school in Cap Haïtien, speaks French fluently and has a good grasp of Spanish and English. In 2008, he graduated from a reputed Cap Haïtien technical school and worked there as a plumber for a year. As he states:

I moved back to Gros Morne quickly because the salary didn't allow me to live in Cap Haïtien. I could barely make ends meet with what I made... when my employer bothered to give me my salary. Your parents make a big sacrifice, send you to school. You work hard and the whole family thinks you'll be able to help. And you work long hours, day or night, on Sundays, but you don't make a living.... Just a little money for you, and only you, to survive. I moved back to Gros Morne in 2010, got married and found a little job. Security guard. Unrelated to what I studied. Even with diplomas, *ti neg lakou* [rural black folks] like me can't make a living in this country [ou pa kapab fè kob pou viv nan peyi sa]!

Brunel didn't like Port-au-Prince either, but at least he could help his sister and generate a bit of income to bring home when he had the chance to catch a ride up north. Brunel longed for his family, his church, his friends, his hometown with its gentle mountains, its mild weather and its clear rivers. When I asked him if he would move abroad if he could, he firmly told me that he would never leave Haiti unless he was forced to. To this day, Brunel goes back and forth to Gros Morne, taking up small jobs here and there and bringing back plantains and dried peas from his parents to his sister in the capital.



Brunel does his best to cope with the boredom and frustration of not being able to put his skills to work. He works out every morning for long hours and coaches a few kids and friends in a tiny makeshift gym where men lift iron at all hours of the day and night. He watches all the soccer games broadcast on TV at Reynald's house, where a dozen of men or so pay ten gourdes each to watch important games on his flat screen television. In the evenings, Brunel sits on the front porch of another of our common friends, Latéral, and enjoys a cold Guinness or Fruit Champagne soda pop, when he can afford it. "Potoprens raz, man!—Port-au-Prince is boring, man!" Indeed, with his many skills and his sharp mind, Brunel could perform many interesting jobs. However, he is stuck in a small part of the city, hanging out with friends who share the same fate. I spent long hours with him during my stay in 2013, walking in the city, travelling back home with him and meeting his family, or simply chatting while sitting next to his sister's vending stand. He would often go up north unexpectedly and I wouldn't see him for weeks. We would talk on the phone and I could feel that his morale was good when he was with Senna and William, his wife and two-year old child, in his native hometown.



*Figure 3 The Gros Morne Valley*

The Excellent family's fate is far from uncommon in Haiti. While Kettly and Brunel wish to live in their home province, they don't have a choice but to live in a dense urban area in order to finish school or to find income-generating employment. Most often, leaving one's province is not a choice but a necessity in a country where most schools, hospitals, and industrial, state and NGO development projects are concentrated in the capital. Many people would take jobs in the newly built subcontracting factories in the northern part of the country, such as in the newly built Caracol industrial park, but the demands of these jobs are far, far greater than the benefits they offer. Working a formal job in the public or private sector also doesn't guarantee the possibility of a decent life (Schuller 2009). A person working in a factory makes at best \$4 a day in a city where the cost of life is 26% more expensive than in Montréal, Canada (Robledillo 2015). Many Haitians therefore put their skills to work in the informal sector, where financial gains are minimum but where social rewards and solidarity are substantial. As I will detail later, the *lakou* spirit and social values traverse the capital in many ways.

\*\*\* Monsieur Invité \*\*\*

Monsieur Invité is a short, stocky man who sells rum and cold beer from the gate of his home at Kalfou Tifou (*Figure 4*). This is a central and busy crossroad in Port-au-Prince that leads into the plaza Champ de Mars—the Elysian Fields—and intersects with formerly uniquely bourgeois arteries of the capital.



*Figure 4 Monsieur Invité (Joos, January 2014)*

Monsieur Invité knows an infinite number of jokes and entertains his clientele with stories he crafts from his sharp sense of observation. He was born in the neighborhood of Turgeau, Port-au-Prince, in 1948. That part of the city is today a dense area adjacent to the capital's center where schools, gas stations, state ministries, restaurants and commerce buildings coexist with the residences of Haitians of all social strata. Even with its intense traffic, the main artery of Turgeau is pleasant to walk. With its old and elaborate gingerbread houses compressed between functionalist concrete buildings, this one-way street that steeply climbs the Morne l'Hopital mountain is an urban archive where the rural Port-au-Prince still transpires. As Monsieur Invité states:



Before the 1970s, this whole place looked like the countryside. Turgeau was a dirt road. You had big houses surrounded with lush gardens. They looked like little farms. People grew corn, eggplants, greens [fey]. You found all kinds of fruit trees: mango, kenep, abriko, korosol, cachiman.... You had horses and donkeys in the front yards of these large properties. I remember the sounds of birds in the morning and the frightening sounds of bats, frogs and insects at night. You had so many trees that you wouldn't go outside at night, it was just scary, pitch black... During the day, you would hear all kinds of street vendors chanting: "bel chou, men bel chou, m gen bel ti chou!" [cabbage! Ask for my pretty little cabbages!] Seven-up vendors would use their bottles to play music. Ting Ting Ting! I knew everyone who lived on Turgeau, the rich, the poor, the old, the young.... My mother worked for a woman right here, in the big house behind me. She was like a white woman, but you know, she was Haitian. She was Syrian and Haitian. They sold food in bulk. Her husband was never there. I can't even remember his face. They were good to my parents. My father passed away when I was a baby, and they allowed my mother and me to remain on their property. I still live in the house where I grew up. They left Haiti in the early 1970s. By then, the sons, who lived in New York, rented out the whole house. They divided the rooms into small apartments and rented the place. I collected rent for them and made sure everything was alright, security-wise. All the people who live there today have been there for a long time. We never have security problems. When they need something to be fixed, or whatever, they call me. I sell stuff here all day and night, so I can see who comes in and out. After the 2010 earthquake, one of the owners came and told everyone to stop paying rent. He left us the whole property. We just pay for the electricity we use, that's it.

The house Monsieur Invité talks about is a two-story gingerbread house built at the turn of the twentieth century. Lodged at the bottom of a large courtyard, the eight-room house is invisible from Turgeau. Though it seems on the verge of collapsing, the house didn't budge during the 2010 earthquake that destroyed more than 70% of Port-au-Prince's built environment (Katz 2011). Through an agreement with the owner, seven families live inside the house without paying rent. Monsieur Invité's nephew set up two tents in what used to be the entrance hallway after his house was destroyed in the earthquake. Monsieur Invité and his wife live 100 feet from the house in one half of a white and blue shotgun house while his daughter and grandchildren live in the other half. Before the earthquake, the courtyard over which Monsieur Invité presides was empty and served as a soccer field each weekend. Monsieur Invité, a soccer fan himself, organized competitions for the youths of this now socially mixed neighborhood until the

earthquake reshuffled the whole organization of this part of the city. Madame Méliandre, his wife, explained:

Before the earthquake, we had a small selling booth at the entrance of the house and that's all. But now, we have mechanics storing cars and trucks in the courtyard and working here. People we've known for a long time. There is a woman who cooks food and sell it next to our booth. Another woman runs a tailoring business from the front porch. The sidewalks of Turgeau are so full of vendors that it became impossible to walk on them. You step out our place and you walk into merchandise!



*Figure 5 The gingerbread house Monsieur Invité manages in kalfou Tifou. Joos, 2013.*

Monsieur Invité allows his close network of friends to use the property to do business, but has set limits to what people can do. According to him, “the house should remain a house” and shouldn’t become a commercial space where people come and go. While certain commercial activities indeed take place within domestic spheres, vending transactions take place in the

streets. Ti Bobo, the mechanic who stores trucks and cars in the courtyard, only uses them for spare parts, and repairs cars in the Monatuf neighborhood, a mile west of Turgeau. Monsieur Invité takes pride in the beauty of the house and is deeply attached to what he calls his *katye jeneral*, his headquarters. He's a familiar character in Turgeau who maintains his respectability and the respectability of the house he manages by controlling access and by setting limits to what people can do there. In this way, he follows the rules of the owner, who forbade their renters to transform the house into shops.

\*\*\* Faustin and Judelande \*\*\*

Mount Olive is a small town of 4,500 inhabitants, located in eastern North Carolina. It is renowned for its pickle production and its fertile farmlands. In 2010, more than 2000 Haitians taking jobs in the giant meat processing plants located around Mount Olive settled in and around the downtown neighborhoods of this railroad town. Most Haitians settling there came from Florida where the job market plunged in 2008. The majority of them readily found employment in the Butterball turkey plant located 10 miles away in Duplin county.

Faustin, his two daughters and his wife Judelande came to Mount Olive in 2011. Using her van, Judelande drives Haitian workers to the surrounding factories and helps people translate their various paperwork into English. Faustin works at the Butterball plant where he cuts frozen turkeys all day long. The job is hard and dangerous. In 2014, at the end of an evening shift, a big frozen bird fell from a hanger onto his right hand. Faustin was badly hurt and underwent physical therapy for two months while remaining at work on the assembly line.



*Figure 6 Faustin and Judelande, Joos, December 2013*

The four of them live in a five bedroom blue Victorian home adjacent to the railroad tracks, in a green and quiet neighborhood in the northern part of Mount Olive. They share the renting costs with another Haitian family and a friend who travels back and forth between North Carolina and Cap Haitian. Judelande, a talented cook, often prepares delicious Haitian dishes for the whole household. They buy food in bulk in the Haitian markets of Miami once a month but buy fresh produce and meat in the surrounding supermarkets. While they didn't know each other in Haiti, each co-renter of this spacious, early-twentieth-century house have known and worked with each other since the early 1990s when they all settled in Florida. Hailing from the provinces of Haiti, they all left Haiti during the military coup years (1991-1994), a period of intense state violence coupled with a crippled economy due to an international embargo. Faustin and Judelande met in northern Miami while working in a Publix supermarket. They both held two jobs and conducted side businesses such as house painting for Faustin and homemade bakery delivery for Judelande. As Judelande states:

We miss Miami and Florida. And we certainly miss Haiti. Faustin and I are from the southern countryside of Haiti, not far from the city of Les Cayes. It is a beautiful place, with white sand beaches, good food and all kinds of fresh fruits. We'd like to go back but

we support our families in Haiti while trying to build something for us there. Everyone in Mount Olive sends money back to Haiti. Everyone... Faustin and I go at least once a year to Port-au-Prince, where most of our brothers and sisters live, and to Les Cayes where we have property. We hope to retire there one day, to open a food store or a small restaurant not far from Les Cayes.

When coming back after a long day of work, Faustin plays Bob Marley on his stereo and relaxes by painting amazing pictures of Vodou scenes he remembers from his childhood. His colorful paintings present many small details of rural life in Haiti, and Faustin, who never received formal art training, has the ability to reproduce fine motions that give beholders the impression that the pictures move before their eyes. "I am not a Vodou practitioner. I am Adventist and never engage in Vodou. But when I sit down and paint, this is what comes to my mind. It was all around me when I grew up, I've seen so many ceremonies, healings or offerings to the Lwa. It's part of our culture and there is a beauty to it."



*Figure 7 Faustin Dumé, "Oungan" 2012*



While Faustin quietly paints, people sitting on the porch come and go in the living room. The big house is open to longtime friends who swing by to have a meal or to simply hang out. The kitchen is always in use and the smell of spicy Haitian food often fills the house. People talk about Haiti and their various future life projects on the island, they talk about the difficulties of working in surrounding factories, while Judelande and Faustin recreate some of the tastes and visual textures of the island. Their home fills with the sounds of Haitian Kreyòl and the warmth of food; art and friendship strikingly contrasts with the work environment they confront every day. Their house is a communal space where people can culturally express themselves and find the necessary energy to confront the hostile work and social environment of Mount Olive.



*Figure 8 Faustin Dumé, "Ceremonie Lwa" 2012*

## Housing and Citizenship

“The right to the city is not merely a right of access to what exists, but a right to change it after our heart’s desire. We need to be sure we can live with our own creations [...]. But the right to remake ourselves by creating a qualitatively different kind of urban sociality is one of the most precious of all human rights.” (Harvey 2003: 236)

Port-au-Prince is often described as an urban inferno in Western media. The Mercer Institute’s 2015 report on “The Best Cities in the World” ranks Port-au-Prince as one of the worst ten cities in the world for its infrastructure, economic and political instability, and general living quality. After the earthquake that took the lives of more than 200,000 people and destroyed or damaged most of the built environment on January 12, 2010, parts of Port-au-Prince are indeed still in bad shape. The main downtown artery, Grand-Rue, a once vibrant commercial corridor, is now filled with ruined and collapsed buildings. The neighborhoods adjacent to the seashore are often invaded by the trash that flows through the ravines that are supposed to carry wastewater and rain water directly into the sea. An April 2015 article in the Huffington Post by a filmmaker who spent 68 hours in Haiti uses the words “dangerous”, “abysmal smell”, “dirty”, “rotting”, and “gray water” to depict the capital (Duffy 2015). His text and photos of children in dirty onesies walking among the trash are typical of most articles we find in Western liberal and conservative news outlets. This side of Port-au-Prince undeniably exists, but it doesn’t represent the whole of a very fragmented city. It coexists with green and quiet neighborhoods and thriving commercial arteries.

Many large neighborhoods of the city, such as Martissant, Christ-Roi or Bois Verna are functioning ones. Most people there have access to potable water and electricity, and the roads repaved after the earthquake carry motorized and pedestrian traffic, which allows for informal business activities. Even in the seashore slums, one will find well-built and well-ventilated

houses in which people take pride. Because I walked the city as much as I could, I was able to enter lush courtyards and to spend time in modest yet comfortable houses from which people organize their private and public lives. If Haiti is such a bad place to live, why are people getting so attached to their dwellings, neighborhoods, cities and villages?

Houses are not mere shelters, but are crucial for a person to organize her own work, to express her religious practices and cultural appurtenances and to find peace and stability in a city where the crowded streets, dense traffic and weak infrastructure make most workdays tedious. People fashion their lives, transform the city and become historical and social actors by tapping into and cultivating their domestic settings. Kettly and Brunel's life in their native *lakou* prepared them to work collectively with people from multiple social spheres and to conduct business by using facets of various domestic spaces to generate work activities. Monsieur Invité and his family's life are organized around a complex set of residences they care for and manage to generate social and financial capital. Faustin and Judelande, even if away from the island, fully contributes to the Haitian economy by sending remittance and are creating Haitian cultural spaces where they express their traditions within U.S. cities generally hostile to blacks.

People's domestic practices and stories about their homes open windows into their own histories and their relationships with art, politics or work. Homes and cities have more than economic and instrumental values: they are space that people use and transform to meet their own needs and desires, or, to quote David Harvey, spaces from where "we remake ourselves by creating a qualitatively different kind of urban sociality" (Harvey 2003: 236). By describing people in their home settings, this dissertation aims to understand the dialectic relations between built environments, the architectural and social legacies they carry, and people's ability to imagine, navigate and transform Port-au-Prince in order to form their own social and cultural



networks. Urban citizenships develop as politics of connection and exchange through the production of the city. Urban practices and imaginaries allow for forms of belonging and sociality that go beyond the nation-state citizenry in a country where people “have largely become extremely adept at functioning without [the state’s] assistance, even in times of catastrophe and crisis” (Dubois and Casimir 2010). Through the descriptions of people’s material engagements with the city, I attempt to shed light on vernacular forms of autonomy built around domestic practices.

While I travelled extensively in Haiti and in Port-au-Prince, I mainly worked in the old downtown neighborhoods where the colonial street grid and architectural and patrimonial remnants still materially channel and influence daily life.



Figure 9 Regional Map of Haiti

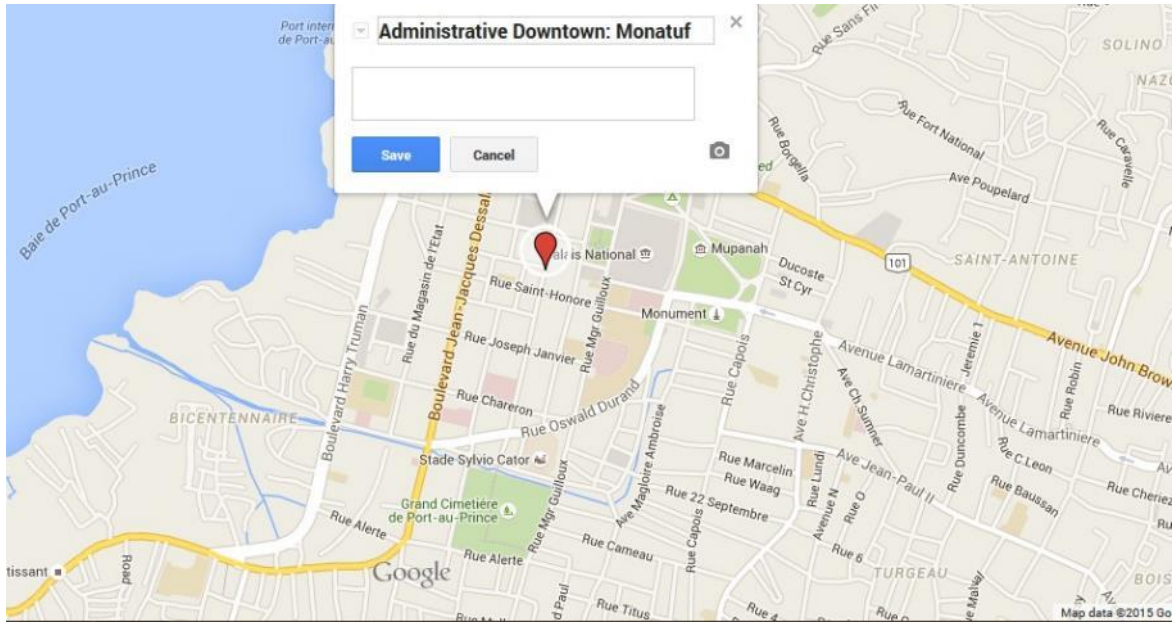


Figure 10 The Administrative Downtown of Port-au-Prince



Figure 11 Colonial Port-au-Prince - Moreau de Saint-Méry, Louis-Médéric-Elie, 1785

Port-au-Prince is an old port-city of the New World that was designed in order to favor export economies. The part of town where I did the bulk of my fieldwork, in the administrative sections of the capital, is a residential and commercial hub where the majority of Haitian urban black middle classes lived until the early 1980s. It is a place where historical layers of the French colonial period, the revolutionary era, the various American occupations and the dictatorships are perceptible in monuments, architectural designs and narratives about people's lives in this neighborhood. I paid especially close attention to cultural, mnemonic and work practices unfolding around patrimonial structures such as the shotgun houses and gingerbread houses built in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Talking to people about houses and their histories and uses opened narratives about history and daily life in parts of the city where the traces of many national and local struggles for autonomy are still visible. In addition, I studied state and NGO-sponsored "reconstruction" projects in and around the capital to understand the different visions of the city at play in the planning of a post-earthquake capital.

By specifically looking at the vernacular creation of dwellings in this part of the city, this dissertation points to a peculiar material engagement with various forms of patrimonial architecture that formerly stood as markers of social distinction. Patrimonial architecture anchors people's right to the city—a practiced set of collective claims unfolding in daily life that potentially generate discourses and political agendas (Lefebvre 1970), in historical context of the reformulation of social hierarchies and cultural agency. By considering working-class Haitians to be creators of the city, this work repositions a traditionally marginalized part of the population as actors in the fabric of the social, cultural and physical geography of Haiti. In addition, I treat houses as animated elements: spaces of belonging where the history and culture of marginalized persons can be expressed and performed. In doing so, I recast the Haitian patrimony as a

situational basis from which alternative forms of remembrances, discourses and practices can emerge.

This leads me to my main research questions: What are the imaginaries and aspirations embedded in the production of habitable dwellings in the historic districts of Port-au-Prince and, in turn, to what extent are these emergent spatial practices shaped by a built environment echoing the colonial past, the United States occupation, a violent history of class conflicts and the omnipresence of humanitarian actors? In order to address this problem, I ask two key questions about work and dwelling: [A] In what way do the material demands of settling into and provisioning patrimonial homes give rise to inhabitants' political and cultural agendas? [B] How does self-consciousness about the cultural value of one's home and neighborhood empower new residents, widen their routes in the city and open economic opportunities amid exclusionary forms of top-down urban planning?

Before tackling these questions, I will sketch a brief overview of Port-au-Prince, where I worked for most of my fieldwork. Understanding the city as a former French colonial project will help us grasp why the idea of an economic extractive model still resonates in the top-down urban projects that disrupt Haitian people's lives today.

## **French Colonial Urban Planning**

In the 1772 revised version of his *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations*, Voltaire paints a scathing portrait of the French Saint-Domingue colony and reveals the barbarism that sustained the fulfillment of newly created consumers' needs:

It is thanks to the buccaneers that France accedes to half of the island of Saint-Domingue. It is thanks to their arms [and the damages they inflicted on the Spaniards] that France settles here permanently....

In 1757 there were about thirty thousand people in the French part of Saint-Domingue. Also, there were a hundred thousand Negro or Mulatto slaves who worked on sugar, indigo and cocoa plantations, shortening their life expectancy for the sake of our new tastes, fulfilling new needs that our fathers didn't know. We buy these Negroes on the Guinea Coast, the Gold Coast and the Ivory Coast. Thirty years ago, one could buy one Negro for fifty pounds. It is about five times less than a fat beef. Today in 1772, this human commodity costs about fifteen thousand. We tell them that they are humans like us and that they are being redeemed through the blood of a God who died for them. Then we make them work as mere beasts. We feed them poorly: if they run away, we cut their leg off, and once we give them a wooden leg, we make them use their arms to spin the sugar mill! And we dare speak about people's rights! The small islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe that the French started cultivating in 1735 supplied the same commodities as Saint-Domingue. These are dots on the map and events that peter out in the history of the universe; but these lands that we barely recognize on the globe are responsible in France for the annual circulation of sixty million commodities. This trade does not enrich a country; on the contrary, it kills its people, it causes shipwrecks; undoubtedly it doesn't do us any good; but since people have created new needs for themselves, France doesn't pay the high price foreigners ask for commodities that are superfluous but that have become necessary (Voltaire 1963 (1809): 341-342 – my translation).

In this scathing critique, Voltaire points to the rise of consumer capitalism in France and industrial modes of production of exotic goods based on slavery. While the Atlantic trade killed French people, it also enriched a powerful merchant bourgeoisie in French ports such as Nantes and especially Bordeaux. Once the Saint-Domingue colony erupted in revolt in 1791, Bordeaux's economy dwindled and the whole region entered a recession (Duby 1972: 743). Nevertheless, French economic and industrial power grew exponentially and its port cities thrived in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the heyday of the Saint-Domingue colony (Butel 2007).

France's economy grew in proportion to the depletion of natural resources in the Caribbean colonies. However, as Voltaire notes (and as analyzed in Trouillot 1997), French Caribbean colonies were "dots on the map and events that peter out in the history of the

universe”. In 1787, France exported 22% of the commodities it produced to its Caribbean colonies while receiving from them 37% of its total imports (Butel 2007: 151). This trade, which was fueled by slavery, considerably enriched the monarchy and a powerful nascent merchant bourgeoisie. By tracking the history of Port-au-Prince, I want to point to an essential cog in the colonial mercantile machinery France would build in Africa and Asia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: the centralization of all political and economic activities in urban ports. As such, Port-au-Prince is a prototype in the centralized colonial handling of French economic affairs.

Port-au-Prince was an urban experiment of the French empire, the main function of which was to facilitate the economic, administrative and military management of the colony. Located in the middle of a coastal ark linking the northern and southern regions of the French part of Saint-Domingue, Port-au-Prince was a commercial node linking scattered inland plantations to the main internal markets and to the metropolitan monarchy. It also had the advantage of being distant from foreign strongholds in the region, with which French merchants and traders were banned—to little avail—to enter into business (McClellan 1992). Its strategic location gave it great advantages in the “course to centrality” over other important port-cities on the island (Anglade 1982; Butel 2007).

As with subsequent colonial enterprises, French authorities put in place a system of political and economic suffocation of outposts they thought they couldn’t fully control in order to tightly channel the routes of goods and capital through one strategic location. Though religious infrastructure was well distributed within the island, administrators made sure that provincial parishes could not grow on a commercial or military level. For instance, in Croix-des-Bouquets, a parish contiguous to Port-au-Prince, only “one surgeon, one locksmith, one saddler, one baker and one butcher” were allowed to ply their trades (Corvington 2003). This growth limitation was

accompanied by the allocation of the majority of the budget to the development of the capital and the sending from France of skilled workers, urban planners, architects and construction material (de Vaissière 1909). The general suffocation of provinces, and later the economic strangling of the peasantry, would become common tactics during the American occupation and the Duvalier dictatorship (Trouillot 1991; Dubois 2012).

If recent analysis of urbanization in Haiti posits the American occupation (1915-1934) as the prime vector of centralization (Etienne 2013, Lucien 2013), it is important to note that Port-au-Prince had already evolved as a dense urban area with concentrated wealth and power under French colonial rule. While the most visible form of centralization is the recent demographic regrouping of people in dense areas of the capital, the military and administrative centralization began in 1749, when French royal powers sought to tighten their control of the fragmented island economy. The “spatial linkage of economy, society and power” in many former French colonial port cities precludes their growth today (Rabinow 1995: 17). Hence, the evolution of Haiti’s capital is the result of a specific form of colonial political economy that used technocratic and spatial practices to consolidate itself. As Ileri (2012) notes:

[P]orts have historically functioned as both spatial mediums shaping core periphery relations and as spatial terrains for flows of people, goods, and ideas. Such flows have been fundamentally shaped by commercial relations, which has also created new lifestyles and in turn changed the built form of urban space, demonstrating the intricate relationship that has always existed between social structure and the physical form of port cities.

The main consideration of colonial administrators was not the edification of a city but the development of a port. Until today, “commercial relations” still dictate the shape the city takes regardless of its residents’ desires and their often anti-capitalistic relations. Since the devastating earthquake of 1751, authorities knew that the bay of Port-au-Prince was suitable for urban living.

However, given the strategic and central location of the port, social consideration vanished. In French colonies, ports gave rise to cities that often grew on land unsuitable for urban density, such as the often-flooded Abidjan (Njoh 2007). Though Port-au-Prince has been destroyed several times by earthquakes, floods, fires and sieges, its thriving port activities have made it an urban phoenix that grew even larger during the multiple reconstruction periods that have punctuated its existence.

While French Saint-Domingue was the least urbanized of French Caribbean colonies on the eve of the 1789 French Revolution, with 94% of its population living in rural areas, the port cities of the island were commanding daily life on plantations (Butel 2007). As historian Paul Butel notes:

From a quantitative viewpoint, the colonial urban texture may look very weak [...] Qualitatively speaking, urban life was essential. Cities were at the heart of Caribbean [antillaise] society and economy. Port cities were not only the commercial outlets of plantations. They actually controlled quotidian life on the plantations, by supplying enslaved persons and capital [...] Cities were decisions centers, seats of administrative and judiciary powers that had a bearing on the daily life of planters (Butel 2007: 232-233 – my translation).

The traders and merchants of Port-au-Prince gained political and economic power in the colony as they acquired property, coordinated hinterland trade with shipping activities and, more importantly, functioned as bankers and managers of plantations whose owners lived abroad. In the meantime, an important group of affranchised people of mixed descent, “les gens de couleur libre” or *Mulâtres* (hereafter mulattoes), gained economic importance as they inherited land and businesses. They became political competitors to white traders as they sought equal status in the administrative and legislative spheres (Trouillot 1989). Port-au-Prince quickly became one of the main markets of the island, providing plantations with enslaved workers while at the same time



providing a refuge for Maroon slaves who deserted the plantations (Laguerre 1982). The regrouping of royal administrative, judiciary and military powers, coupled with the emergence of a powerful class of traders and plantation managers, gave Port-au-Prince a structure divided into “three spaces of economic domination” (Anglade 1982): “La Plaine”, the agricultural plains surrounding Port-au-Prince, generated agricultural revenue through smaller markets linked by roads and dirt paths to the capital; le “Bord-de-Mer”, the merchants’ wharf, generated trade revenue; and “La Ville”, the city, representing colonial and religious authorities, generated revenue from tax properties.

I conducted my fieldwork in Monatuf, a neighborhood of “La Ville”. La Ville formed around the harbor area, which originally comprised the port itself, the merchants’ warehouses and the Croix-des-Bossales market where produce, resources and European goods were sold alongside enslaved persons. The market area, built on swampy lands, was also the main slave cemetery. This is still today the main market of Haiti and the core center of economic activity for the majority of the population. Renovation projects haven’t changed the squalid aspect of this enormous market, where the products of the peasantry’s hard labor is sold with minimal profits.

Beyond the shore, French urban planners drew a gridiron pattern of streets and divided it based on land use activities. Two socially segregated residential areas were built, one to the east in the commercial area along the port, and one to the west in the administrative district, the Champ de Mars. French authorities carved out spaces for large streets, and private parties started to build their residence in the hills of Bel-Air, an area reserved for white elites and planters. In 1751, the Morne-à-Tuf neighborhood (hereafter Monatuf) was erected on a flattened mound of soft volcanic rocks that were later sold in France as prime construction material. Large rectilinear streets were dug in this part of Port-au-Prince to facilitate the mobility of people and goods.

Before 1804, in Monatuf, white menial workers, free and enslaved craftsmen and workers, shopkeepers, military officers and administrators of lesser importance coexisted, comprising an “urban population that works hard all day long to make ends meet without getting the opportunity to enjoy distractions” (Corvington 1992: 54). Monatuf fostered forms of urban life and sociality vastly different from the narrowly regulated modes of existence in the plantations, and was a place where political ideas moved quickly and where demonstration were common.

The division of habitable land remains today, in the form of rectangular parcels with little frontage but ample courtyard space—usually, facades are no more than 16 feet wide. Hence, Monatuf, despite many periods of destruction of its built environment, has retained its original rectangular shape and dimensions. It is one kilometer long and four hundred meters wide. Three large streets run parallel to the coast and are cut by smaller perpendicular streets that hold hundreds of narrow rectilinear buildings. Often supplied with side galleries, these buildings hide a maze of narrow corridors and alleys that create many alternative possibilities for circulating in the capital. As such, this area has been difficult to control and has been the locus of many political and revolutionary activities (Gaillard 1982).



*Figure 11 Shotgun house in Port-au-Prince, Haiti with a double entrance (Upton, 1986)*

As Haitian scholar Georges Anglade argues, understanding the complex geography of the capital requires us to take “the street as the main unit of analysis” (Anglade 1982). Ethnographic analysis of daily life and household economies in Monatuf reveals that downtown dwellers are attached to their neighborhood and to their mode of existence, and that common ideas for the renovation and amelioration of this area have emerged through the daily sharing of urban space and resources. I mainly worked in this neighborhood and paid attention to the afterlife of the colonial street grid and to the remnants of the colonial-era houses that dotted this part of the city. Most people in Monatuf live in shotgun houses, an architectural form I will explore in this

dissertation. Some of the standing shotgun houses date back to the colonial period and are today the sites of intense vernacular economic, spiritual and social activities.

While contemporary Port-au-Prince neighborhoods are deemed incoherent and insalubrious by state authorities, there are not such stark social divisions between neighborhoods within the limits of the old colonial city. Downtown Port-au-Prince presents a socially mixed population, even though many members of the bourgeoisie have moved elsewhere in the city, to neighborhoods such as Pacot and Turgeau, or to nearby mountain towns such as Pétion-Ville, Thomassin and Fort Jacques. The 1804 Haitian Revolution enabled Port-au-Prince to escape the racial gentrification suffered by other French Caribbean cities in the nineteenth century. As a result, Port-au-Prince's center has remained a popular residential area where social interaction is fostered by multifunctional land use activities taking place in a small area. It is only recently that downtown residential areas have been described as tumors to urban order that must be removed.

The colonial past of Port-au-Prince is discussed here because it is the basis of many present governmental reports on the capital's downtown, which have in turn fueled destructive urban planning projects. Moreover, my ethnographic work serves as a lens through which I read the capital's history and not the contrary: history is not mere context, but a lively and structuring force that penetrates quotidian routines, ideologies, imaginaries and sentient bodies. The people I worked with meander through streets and urban interstices built in gruesome conditions by enslaved persons under the authority of French architects and urban planners in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. This has serious implications in the ways people think about their belonging in central urban spaces and their own central role in the constitution of the historical fabric of Haiti.

## **Doing Fieldwork in the Old Port-au-Prince**

This work is based on years of passionate armchair research on Haiti and on a total of twelve months of fieldwork and archival research conducted in Haiti between May 2012 and June 2015, supported by a National Science Foundation grant and various fellowships. My work also draws on my ethnographic and photographic documentary work with the Haitian diaspora community in Mount Olive, North Carolina between December 2011 and June 2015. Thanks to the Hugh McColl Fellowship, I was able to conduct six months of fieldwork in the Haitian communities of Eastern North Carolina in 2013 and built strong relationships with Haitian artists, poets, cooks, shopkeepers and factory workers who live in the formerly exclusively African American neighborhoods of Mount Olive. My work among the Haitian diaspora is an important aspect of this dissertation, as Haitians who live abroad are the main economic foundation of today's Haiti. The remittance economy keeps many Haitians afloat on the island. Haitians living in the U.S. not only contribute to the well-being of many in Haiti, they also powerfully fashion the historical and cultural fabric of the Haitian nation in an island where the effects of the racist handling of Caribbean affairs by the U.S. still determines the fate of many emigrants.

During my stays in Port-au-Prince, I worked very closely with my friend and collaborator, art historian Aland Joseph. I met him in September 2013 while researching the history of gingerbread houses in the eastern neighborhoods of the capital. Aland works as a high school teacher and in his free time studies patrimonial and monumental structures in Port-au-Prince. We readily began to converse and collaborate on a number of projects after we met through a common friend. Our ongoing collaboration resulted in the publication of co-written articles in Haitian newspapers and journals. Parts of this work will be translated in this

dissertation. Aland and I share a passion for endless urban walks and often met to wander in all corners of the capital in order to map the artistic and architectural diversity of Port-au-Prince's built environment. Aland taught me urban Kreyol and Haitian art history by guiding me in and around the houses, churches, art centers, schools, museums and public places where great and obscure Haitian painters, sculptors, architects and writers live or had lived. We always motivated each other in the weird exercise of knocking on unknown people's doors. In turn, I taught Aland all kinds of technical niceties in documentary photography and provided him with the technology necessary for him to accomplish his long-term cataloguing of public urban aesthetics. Together, we have built and continue to build a large bank of high quality images in which we strive to balance aesthetic and documentary qualities. Both of us work against the sordid imagery often used to portray Haiti and Port-au-Prince.

On a daily basis, with or without Aland, I walked the streets of the central districts and stopped at times in places ventilated by electric fans to write notes on what I observed. I took *bwa fouyiè* and *tap-tap* (buses or pick-up trucks) when I needed to go to Pétion-Ville or the far outskirts of the city. Like the majority of Port-au-Princiens, I hit the roads and sidewalks to get places or to simply wander aimlessly in the city. By repeating this exercise, I became familiar with the patterns of street vending and with the common practice of creating ephemeral social bonds in the city. In this regard, Port-au-Prince can be tiring: walking, instead of driving, means that you are in a constant dialogue with people who watch out for you and grab you by the shoulder to help you avoid a motor bike or a pothole, as well as people who want to know what a red-faced guy is doing in the streets of a city where most white NGO workers are forbidden to walk (Wagner 2013).

Walking with Aland provided for a far different experience. Aland is one of those people whom Barry Lopez, in his essay *The American Geographies*, describes as “people in whom geography thrives.... Their knowledge is intimate rather than encyclopedic, human but not necessarily scholarly. It rings with the concrete details of experience” (Lopez, 2006: 223). He has an intimate knowledge of Port-au-Prince and of its people. During most of our walks, Aland pointed to the scars of the 2010 earthquake and talked about his many wounds associated with losses of relatives and friends. Hence, while I do not specifically analyze the 2010 disaster, its shadows fall upon my whole work. Aland is “noir Haïtien”, a black Haitian who often faces discrimination from his own compatriots of lesser shades of blackness or from other blacks who ensure the private security of homes, supermarkets and institutions. I will return later to this important aspect of Haitian society.

The phenotypic difference between us carried a lot of ethnographic weight, but we used it to our advantage. At the end of one Sunday on which we unsuccessfully tried to find an urban *lakou* in Bel-Air (Lakou Kenep, which we later found), Aland told me anxiously:

I think you haven't noticed yet, but I need to tell you.... In the popular neighborhoods, you need to let me do the talking. That way, we will weave a great network of relationships. In the gingerbread neighborhoods, you will be the one knocking on doors and talking. Speak in French at first. You could get access to many folks in the popular neighborhoods, for sure, but people will trust you more easily if you're with me. I would never get access to most houses we visit if you weren't playing the role of the French scholar. The color of our skin opens different doors.

Indeed, Aland's network of friends, and the ease with which he established contact with people who saw him as one of their own, had great significance for this work. I will develop how whiteness and blackness ethnographically played a role in this work, but also how the “color question” models social hierarchies to this day in Haiti. As in the U.S. South, being black in

Haiti means facing larger structural barriers than the minority of whites and people of mixed ancestry that still control the lion's share of the economy (Trouillot 2013). My work is a succession of collaborations with Haitians and people living in Haiti. These collaborations took many forms, which I will detail in the dissertation. From organizing a painting exhibit at UNC, to crowdsourcing funds for friends in urgent need, teaching photography or simply participating in the remittance economy since 2012, I privately help Haitian friends who, in turn, became my teachers and consultants. All the people I interviewed and photographed received transcripts to revise (I read my notes and transcripts aloud to those who couldn't read). Aland and I also printed all the portraits we took and handed them out to our collaborators. This often strengthened our bonds with the people we met. A few times, we operated as photographers at weddings, school ceremonies and communions. In brief, we entered into a rewarding gift economy where we did our best to share our ethnographic material and to co-interpret it with our consultants.

Photography is not a side occupation but a method of inquiry in my fieldwork. The large appendix of photographs Aland and I took makes for a sensory channel words cannot build. Eliciting interviews with photographs, talking about people's private collections of photos and asking people to pick the photographs that best represented them gave insight into the visual culture of the city and the country. The excellent photographic work Aland did on the covert demolition of central districts of Port-au-Prince in May and June 2014, and our recorded discussions of his images, gave us the material to write a full-length newspaper article. This let me experience the demolition of neighborhoods where I had a lot of friends and did a lot of work, as I was sick at the time with chikungunya, as were the majority of my Haitian friends. Taking pictures, visually documenting the daily life and vernacular patrimony of Port-au-Prince,



enables us to render the dignity of working class material culture and to create an archive with multiple meanings.

Finally, walking the streets of Port-au-Prince and getting to know Aland's family and friends enabled me to build solid relations with a number of people while enjoying ephemeral and instructive social relations. My recorded interviews were exclusively conducted with people I knew well, and most of my work aims to details the life histories of a handful of individuals with whom I spent a lot of time. My work is not primarily quantitative, but it does rely on systematic observations and detailed field notes I painstakingly wrote after tiring days of fieldwork. I combine photography, historical research, peripatetic knowledge of the city and information gained through long-term friendships and collaborations to sketch a portrait of a land and people whose quotidian lives are seldom represented. It is not the wretched Haiti of the swampy slums of Port-au-Prince, nor the magical Haiti depicted by the Haitian Minister of Tourism, with its pristine beaches and lush mountains. While both these worlds indeed exist, the Haiti I spent most time dealing with doesn't look mysterious, exotic or extraordinary. The Haiti I came to know is an island, and a diaspora in foreign lands, where people work hard and inhabit well-kept homes and neighborhoods that do not differ dramatically from the old middle class districts of small southern U.S. cities.

## **Literature Review**

This research analyzes the two main divergent discourses and exercise of rights at play in the present reconstruction of Port-au-Prince: 1) the collective right to the city (Lefebvre 1968; Harvey 2009) exercised through popular spatial practices, and 2) the individual human right to adequate housing framed in liberal understandings of property rights (Leckie 1992; Moyn 2010). In his definition of the right to the city, Henri Lefebvre argues that people should not only freely

access urban resources but also have the right to reshape the process of urbanization by changing and producing the city themselves (Lefebvre 1968). Since the right to the city points to a common rather than an individual right, I will investigate the collective politics embedded in the sharing of space and the negotiation of resources this entails (Nonini 1998; Mitchell 2003). Beyond utilitarian goals, the right to the city and the right to produce space involve the “question of what kind of people we want to be, what kinds of social relationships we seek, what relations to nature we cherish, what style of life we desire, what aesthetic values we hold” (Harvey, 2012: 4). Hence, investigating the construction of dwellings and neighborhoods gives insight into intimate conceptions of individual and collective selves and opens inquiries about the multiple social, ecological and cultural relations humans sustain to remake themselves (Park 1967; Lefebvre 1970; Harvey 2009). In turn, I explore the changes the state and NGOs have brought to the real estate market and to clarify in what ways their presence contributes to the privatization of public space and unoccupied space, a process that often threatens ideals of urban identity and citizenship through the fragmentation of urban space (Balbo 1993; Harvey 2012). Such material struggles, however, are not confined to the sphere of rights discourses. They take on new meanings when situated in an engagement with the remnants of the cultural patrimony of Port-au-Prince and with the scarce infrastructure of the city.

As this research focuses on the use and appropriation of houses labeled as ruins or “endangered species” (Phillips 1984; Langenbach et al. 2011), I envision the shotgun houses and gingerbread houses not as static objects but as animated spaces of activity that partially shape cultural, social and political practices and discourses (Humphrey 2001; Murray 2008). If anthropologists have noted that built environments receive their signification from both physical construction and social appropriation (Amerlinck 2001), scholars departing from a symbolic

interpretation of space have delineated that architectural designs and urban settings in turn shape human behaviors and values (Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003; Stoler 2008; Van der Hoorn 2010). As Daniel Miller argues, the homes and material culture filling it appear “as both our appropriation of the larger world and often as the representation of that world within our private domain” (Miller 2001: 1). The ephemeral nature of objects implies changes and shifts of their agency, meanings and use (Gell 1998; Colloredo-Mansfeld 2003). It is therefore important to track the history of the different representations and remembrances of the patrimonial houses I am interested in to understand the shifts of meaning they have gone through over the years and what they symbolically and socially reflect for their present occupants (Hanson 2003; Williams 2004; Clapham 2005). The use or re-consumption of deteriorated buildings belonging to the national patrimony is not seen as a mere occupation of empty shells by squatters but as a process that underlies the production of emergent forms of cultural meanings, politics and social relationships (Trouillot 1995; Benjamin 1999; Dawdy 2010; Navaro-Yashin 2012). Ruins are not only the symbols of past historical processes, but are also the testimony of changing regimes of power and economy. They thereby have the potential to disrupt chains of legitimacy that are based upon notions of heritage, through human engagement with fragments and spectral traces (González-Ruibal 2008; Stoler 2008; Holloway and Neale 2008). By tracking the process of ruination and the transformation of ruins into resources, I investigate the emergence of spatial practices woven into these houses as a domain of affective interactions between material environments and people and will analyze how these interactions have changed through time (Brennan 2004; Thrift 2008; Navaro-Yashin 2012). The materiality of place has to be understood in its relations with human actors whose capacities of expression, invention and imagination have to be taken into account in the shaping of new urban practices (Thrift 2008; Navaro-Yashin 2012).

In order to interpret architecture, places and their meanings in Port-au-Prince, I draw on folklorist John Michael Vlach's work on Haitian houses he wrote in the 1970s and 1980s. Vlach did fieldwork in the historical districts of Port-au-Prince in 1974. My work takes place exactly forty years after his research. Vlach demonstrated that the southern U.S. ubiquitous shotgun house, symbolic of the urban working-classes and of sharecroppers settlements, originated from Port-au-Prince, Haiti and spread in the U.S. South from New Orleans, a city that comprised 50% of Haitians in 1809 (Vlach 1991: 63). While Vlach's work is useful to think about the spatial use of shotgun houses, his work deals mainly with formal architectural aspects of vernacular homes. As Vlach mentions, shotgun houses in downtown Port-au-Prince were first the main colonial structures that housed white menial workers, white small businessmen and free peoples of color during the colonial era (Vlach 1975). After the 1804 independence of Haiti, these houses remained in possession of mulatto and black middle-classes who used them as residences and workshops (Corvington 1992). However, Vlach didn't talk about the present life and practices of people living in the houses he studied in Haiti and in the U.S. South. While I draw on his insights and detailed descriptions of shotgun houses, my work mainly focuses on what people do with and within their houses. I am also interested by the memories people associate with their houses and the types of history that emerge from engagements with material structures. In this regard, anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot and his brother, novelist Lyonel Trouillot provide a conceptual and heuristic frame in which the city appears as a subaltern archive. Both of them revisit the history of their country by interrogating the silences that punctuate official history. By writing about race, gender, the ideological and institutional remnants of Duvalierism or by interpreting the various neighborhoods with literary or ethnographic devices, Rolph and Lyonel Trouillot show how people live, think and become historical actors by transforming and using

the material and architectural remnants of past political and revolutionary regimes (Trouillot 1997; Trouillot 2014). While Michel-Rolph Trouillot uses an ethno-historical lens to interpret coexisting historical narratives in order to read the various present hierarchical structures of Haiti and its place in the global economy and historical imagination, Lyonel Trouillot uses poems, newspaper articles and complex novels to reconstitute the atmosphere and popular daily struggles of present day Port-au-Prince. Both of their work strongly influence my dissertation, and my conversations with Lyonel Trouillot help me to think about the micro structure of the city and its fragmentations.

Reconstruction efforts in Port-au-Prince do not unfold in an isolated post-disaster moment of ecological and social crisis but in a broader framework where disasters overlap and last for long periods of time (Redfield 2006), affecting primarily the most vulnerable population of Haiti (Farmer 2006, 2011; Button 2010; Oliver-Smith and Hoffman 2012). In a city where the weak public infrastructure has been destroyed by disasters, people and their informal and improvised practices of everyday life, and the interdependent social and economic networks constructed through these practices, form a type of human infrastructure that sutures together various fractured spaces (Simone 2004; Breunlin and Regis 2006). The creative processes implied in the production of habitat direct my attention to the social attachments, urban imaginaries and vernacular uses and diversion of infrastructure as they are anchored in the Haitian history of coping with disasters (De Boeck and Plissart 2004; Mains 2012). Infrastructure is here defined as the system that enables the circulation of goods, meaning, people and power, considered to be forceful vectors of sociality (Anand 2011; Simone 2012). Hence, exploring infrastructure means also tracking people's mobilities and access to urban resources

and networks and tracing the possibilities of establishing urban belonging and citizenship through infrastructure (Graham and Simon 2001; Larkin 2008).

Finally, as my informants directly engage with the material history of their city, I will examine their spatial practices in relation to the social history of Haiti. As Haitian geographer Georges Anglade argues, analyses of the centralized “Republic of Port-au-Prince” and of the antagonistic class relationships that traverse it must take into account the nodes of resistances created by the masses to disrupt the unilateral accumulation of natural and financial resources by a small economic elite and occupants (Anglade 1982; Dubois 2004).

Spatial practices, such as the sharing of households and land in which families and neighbors reinvent and organize communal responsibilities (Fick 1990; Dubois 2004; Mintz 2010), have been essential in the economic survival of rural migrants and have proven crucial in the creation of indigenous solidarity networks after the 2010 earthquake (Fatton 2011, Dubois 2012). This calls for an investigation of the different relations between groups and individuals, such as patron-client ties or kinship affiliations, which influence the use of urban resources and private spaces by displaced persons (Mayer 2009). As the vast majority of displaced persons have ties to rural areas, and since Haitians have become extremely adept at functioning without the assistance of the state (Trouillot 1990; Dubois and Casimir 2010; Marcelin 2011), this research considers past spatial practices and experiences, embodied space and transnational and translocal networks of Haitian people as powerful vectors of cultural citizenship and of (re-)creation of new vernaculars (Rockefeller 2010; Brickell and Datta 2010; Low 2011).

Recent scholarly work has focused on the problem of structural violence plaguing the population living in the peripheral neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince, and has described Haiti as the site of entanglements between citizens, weakened national institutions and foreign

organizations following their own political and economic agendas (Bell 2001; Farmer 2006, 2011; Caple James 2010). Building on the many studies of political violence, suffering and concomitant NGO practices in Haiti, I take a new approach by focusing on popular responses to disasters and self-implemented solutions in the face of the recurrent problem of housing scarcity, and explore the political and cultural elements at play in the practices of a fringe of the population that have often been denied agency.

**CHAPTER ONE: THE PERPETUAL RECONSTRUCTION OF PORT-AU-PRINCE:  
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC EXAMINATION OF THE RIGHT TO ADEQUATE HOUSING  
IN CONTEMPORARY HAITI**

On January 12, 2010, around 5 pm, 33-year-old Fresnel Lajan picked up his daughter from her grandmother's house located at the bottom of Route de Delmas, a heavily trafficked road in northern Port-au-Prince. Fresnel and his daughter Anita, who was 8 years old at the time, lived thirty minutes away from her grandmother. While climbing the Delmas road, Anita insistently asked her father to buy *fresko*, the equivalent of the American snowball—a paper cone filled with shaved ice topped with fruit syrup. In May 2012, Fresnel recalled:

I bought her a fresko with strawberry syrup and bought myself a fresko with passion fruit syrup. We sat on the sidewalk of a gas station to rest and enjoy our treat, right next to the fresko vendor. All of a sudden, everything around us started to shake. I felt as if I were flying. The noise was deafening. It was like an atomic bomb or like thousands of planes over our heads. I just remember the red roof of the gas station going left and right so fast. I was squeezing Anita. It lasted a few seconds. We were lying on the ground. Anita was under my body and we remained there for a few minutes. I can't remember well. Anita was screaming, buildings were collapsing all around us and a cloud of white dust was all over the place. The gas station was standing, we were alive. In shock but alive [tet mwen te cho, me nou te la]. No injuries, nothing. If I hadn't bought fresko for my little girl, we would certainly be dead. I learned later that plenty of pedestrians died under the rubble. We walked back to our place in Delmas 32. It took us two hours. Everyone was screaming, people walked, ran, screamed or cried. I thank God every day because he put a few gourdes in my pocket and made me buy fresko. Sonya [Fresnel's wife] was alive, our apartment hadn't collapsed. Only the top of the building collapsed. I lost my mother, my uncle and so many friends. My mother was cooking in a small corridor in Delmas 9 when buildings crushed her body. It took us days to get her out of there. My wife, my daughter and I are alive because of a miracle. A miracle.... To this day, I barely sleep. I



am scared of having a roof over my head. My wife feels the same way. I can't stop thinking about my mother. I saw her alive twenty minutes before the earthquake. She was 55.... We moved back in the same apartment. It's been damaged but for now it is okay [li a peu près]. It's a feeling that never leaves you. You think about it every day....

I met Fresnel while I was visiting a gingerbread house in the Pacot neighborhood, a bourgeois enclave of western Port-au-Prince where he worked as a security guard. Fresnel has been guarding this house since 2008, when new proprietors moved in and started to renovate it. As he later told me, he also did carpentry work and babysitting for them. He had a good relationship with his employers, who allowed him and his family to plant a tent in the courtyard and to stay there for about a year.

Fresnel commutes every day to Pacot from Delmas 32, a dense and popular neighborhood on the northern outskirts of Port-au-Prince. Delmas 32 was badly damaged by the earthquake. Many concrete apartment complexes, school buildings and stores completely collapsed. Fresnel's two-story apartment building was damaged and the second floor collapsed. Fortunately, the building didn't collapse entirely because of the timber frame construction. Fresnel has been repairing the damage since 2010. He and his family live in a quiet alley where potable water and electricity are available most of the time. He attended a technical school in Delmas where he learned construction techniques, and built most of his two-story home himself, using safe building techniques that allowed most of the building to stand during the quake. As a talented carpenter and skilled mason, he is able to slowly rebuild his small apartment building on the land he inherited from his mother.

With its shaded backyard and many windows, Fresnel's two-room apartment is well ventilated. The bright orange indoor walls contrast with the light green tiles of the floor. The walls are decorated with family pictures, a poster of Michael the Archangel defeating the fallen

angels surrounded by red plastic flowers and a colorful painting depicting a market in Arcahaie, Sonya's hometown. The apartment contains two comfortable bedrooms, a small living room with a beige sofa whose arms are still covered with plastic and a small bathroom. The backyard kitchen is well equipped: Sonya cooks pralines in a gas oven and crafts fruit liquors from an enormous pan she heats on a charcoal stove. She sells what she cooks along with a few dry goods like canned fish, tomato paste and cans of Jumex fruit juice on Rue de l'Union not far away from where they live.

On January 12, 2010, Sonya came home early and was watching TV in her bedroom when the earthquake happened. She tried to run away from the house but couldn't stand, as the ground was forcefully shaking. Her former vending spot was still under rubble in 2014 when I walked in the neighborhood with Fresnel.

The second floor of Fresnel's building was rented by the Defils family, who have known Fresnel since he was a child. Gérard Defils, his wife Mériane and their two daughters Jaliane and Edith are members of the same Adventist church in Delmas 17 where Fresnel's mother faithfully brought him every Saturday since he was a baby. Gérard is thirty years older than Fresnel and has always acted as a father to him, providing words of wisdom and pocket money when needed. Mériane and Sonya often worked together in the courtyard while the girls were playing together. Even if Gérard paid a small rent to Fresnel, they all considered being of the same family. They shared meals, watched TV together and collectively prayed on a daily basis. Each of them moved fluidly in both apartments which felt, according to Sonya, like a big family house.

During the 2010 earthquake, half of the upper apartment collapsed and injured Gérard and one of his daughters. They moved with family members to the nearby town of Croix-des-Bouquets where Gérard and Jaliane could receive healthcare. Knowing that Fresnel would not be

able to fix the upper apartment for a long time, they applied for a house in a state-sponsored residential complex that was being built in the Monakabri region, 20 miles north of Port-au-Prince.

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Massive housing projects are presently in construction in the northern Port-au-Prince region on land “with the charm and farming potential of an Arizona parking lot” (Katz 2012: 183). Since 2012, more than six thousand housing units have been built around half-finished abandoned industrial parks in the Monakabri area in what the state calls the “Village Lumane Casimir”. Six hundred of these dwellings have been delivered to people who thought they would work in the factories surrounding these state-sponsored settlements. However, the promised factories never came. Former Prime Minister Laurent Lamothe calls these projects “social housing” and argues that people affected by disasters benefit from such constructions. However, many of these people are not the victims of the 2010 earthquake or of the recent massive destructions of urban neighborhoods in Port-au-Prince or Cap Haitian, the second largest city of the country. They are people chosen on their ability to perform physically demanding work and to pay rent (Shamsie 2013; Ayiti Kale Je 2013). In the meantime, the state destroys urban neighborhoods with suitable houses that survived the earthquake, without relocating the residents. This chapter tracks Haitian state definitions of the international “right to adequate housing” and tracks its interpretation and implementation under an export-oriented economic agenda while analyzing life conditions of a family in Village Lumane Casimir.

The destruction of entire residential neighborhoods and the simultaneous state-sponsored and internationally funded building of housing units in industrial areas has been the main urban developmental scheme in Haiti since the end of the 1970s (Fass 1988). During the Duvalier

dictatorships (1957-1986), the state never hesitated to demolish entire neighborhoods without warning, especially in the working-class areas of downtown Port-au-Prince (UNCDF 1984 cited by Fass 1988: 360). Current Haitian state practices in the domain of housing and industrial policies are thus anchored in a history of evictions and authoritarian urban planning aimed at facilitating industrial activity.

Haiti's urban housing problems did not suddenly emerge after the devastating 2010 earthquake, but have plagued the country since the "wild centralization efforts of the 1915-1985 period" (Anglade 1987). From 1915 to 1934, American occupants militarized the provinces' administrations, repressed rural cultural practices, seized vast stretches of land to grow cash crops and cut the provinces' budgets to centralize all administrative and economic activity in Port-au-Prince in the name of modernization (Casimir 1982, Trouillot 1991, Dubois 2012). During this period, urban planning in the capital aimed to regroup all commercial and industrial activities around the port in order to foster an export-based economy. In order to control the zones adjacent to the port, the Americans evicted residents and seized public and private property at whim (Corvington 1992). While the population of the capital grew, housing became scarcer and less affordable, which led to the construction of slums by displaced rural and urban residents, especially around industrial zones. The Duvaliers used similar urban developmental strategies, often crafted by U.S. experts who worked for the Haitian state and who privileged industrial growth in the capital and cash crop agriculture in rural areas (Arthus in Polyné 2013). This led to the withering of regional towns and markets and deprived many Haitians of cultural practices woven around ancestral spaces and communal occupation of land.

In the 1970s, finding decent lodging in the capital became very difficult, and dense neighborhoods of makeshift structures began to grow in the outskirts of Port-au-Prince. Delmas

32 is such a neighborhood. People moving to urban areas, in principle, had rights that allowed them to find housing in a difficult rental market. Legislation preventing illegal evictions and legal frames pertaining to the right to housing existed and were even enforced during the dictatorship period. In July 19, 1961, for instance, a set of laws were adopted to protect the poorest from evictions and rent augmentations. Many more laws pertaining to housing rights made their way into the Haitian Civil Code during the Duvalier era, especially when international NGOs started to forcefully intervene in state affairs towards the end of the 1970s (Beaubrun 2013). However, none of these legal frameworks prevented the state-enforced displacement of populations in rural and urban areas and the construction of hazardous dwellings in places not well-suited for settlement. Instead, these laws legitimized the destruction of dwellings that were deemed unfit (Fass 1988) and helped displace people to tightly controlled state-built settlements alongside industrial parks in the Port-au-Prince region.

The centralization of administrative and economic activities had two main impacts: population growth in the capital and massive emigration. More than 200,000 people left Haiti during the Duvalier regimes (1957-1986), and more than 800,000 new people settled in Port-au-Prince, which had counted only 140,000 inhabitants in 1950 (Godard 1988). Many of these people built dwellings in the northern parts of the capital in places subject to floods and landslides. These neighborhoods were often subject to state-sponsored destruction, such as the 1967 demolition of La Saline, a neighborhood of “straw houses” inhabited by more than 5,000 rural migrants that was burned under the supervision of the *Makout* militia (Schaffner 2006). The goal of these demolitions was to clear up space for industrial and commercial activities while relocating people into state-built “cités ouvrières”—workers’ subdivisions (Di Chiara 1988).

Between 1979 and 1986, about 4,000 housing units were built. Much of the construction was concentrated in two neighborhoods, Saint-Martin and Cité Simone (Paul 2002). Both attracted thousands of people who couldn't access social housing and who built makeshift homes alongside state-built concrete structures. Cité Simone, which was Francois Duvalier's flagship working-class housing project—today known as Cité Soleil—has developed into the largest slum in Port-au-Prince, with more than 400,000 inhabitants living in dire sanitary conditions. Residential-industrial complexes have been major failures, as they were built in very dense slums where mass unemployment was and remains the norm (Paul 2002). Most of these projects materialized while economic policies and structural adjustments were imposed by International Financial Institutions (IFIs) beginning in the 1970s, turning “Haiti into a supplier of the cheapest labor in the Western Hemisphere for the export assembly manufacturing industries established by foreign and domestic investors” (Dupuy 2010).



*Figure 13 Houses in Cité Soleil (Joos, September 2013)*

Between 1986 and 2010, more than a million Haitians converged on the Port-au-Prince region to seek better opportunities and formal employment. The industrial growth in the capital and its concomitant infrastructural development attracted an average of 75,000 rural migrants a year from 1982 to 2003 (Verner 2007, Tobin 2013). They arrived in a city almost devoid of housing infrastructure and had to build dwellings “in any vacant space and peri-urban space of the city” (UN-HABITAT 2009). The southern part of the capital and adjacent communes [the equivalent of incorporated towns in the U.S.] grew rapidly into dense urban areas. The state did not have the means to supervise construction practices. Hence, until 2010, hundreds of thousands of structures “typically built quickly from cement, concrete, and bricks, by friends and family” spread on the mountains’ flanks surrounding the bay and in the agricultural and forested areas located between Léogane and Port-au-Prince (Tobin 2013). Very few state-led housing projects

were built during the post-Duvalier period. The few small-scale housing projects built during the Aristide and Préval presidencies (Hamilton 2013), along with fragmented efforts by international organizations to build housing projects, couldn't address the many problems confronting urban citizens, even before the earthquake.

The post-disaster discourses of displacement, housing rights and “reconstruction” of Port-au-Prince is puzzling in light of Haiti's recent history. After all, what is to be reconstructed and under which laws? From 2010 to 2014, a dazzling array of uncoordinated housing projects has emerged in Port-au-Prince. Four main categories of housing/sheltering projects can be identified from that period: 1) minimal forms of shelter provided by NGOs and institutions, primarily focused on the most urgent survival needs of Internally Displaced Persons; 2) state-sponsored housing projects built alongside industrial parks in northern Port-au-Prince and the northern regions of the country; 3) newly built houses and apartments in urban centers and in the provinces (built by NGOs and private companies); and 4) rehabilitation and renovation of existing housing structures and neighborhoods. Besides one major project, the rehabilitation of the Martissant neighborhood, the two latter types of projects are often small scale and one-off. As a Haitian employee of a foreign NGO working in the construction domain humorously put it: “look out for two bright red dots in a gray ocean of concrete. There you will see our contribution to the housing crisis!” (Joos, Field Notes 09/2013). In the meantime, a lot of informal bricolage in the housing domain (vernacular or institution-sponsored) has arisen everywhere in the capital. Often, these projects reuse construction materials gathered from the ruins of the earthquake or from state demolitions.

By exploring the life of a family in a recently state-built social housing project—the Lumane Casimir Village in northern Port-au-Prince— I explore three rationales that intersect in



this “right”: humanitarian need, labor rationalization and questions of human dignity and the aesthetics of dwelling. The recent state-built structures and the waves of brutal evictions and demolitions in the post-quake moment are strong reminders of the Duvalier era and of the economic plans of that period. The present residential projects are a major component of economic policies based on export and cheap labor defined by two powerful actors: the Clinton-led Interim Haiti Recovery Commission, which has been given management powers under an emergency law; and the present government (Dupuy 2010; Lindstrom 2012). Bill Clinton’s “Building Back Better” United Nations 2006 report serves as the basis for American action in Haiti. The report contains many propositions that call for community-driven and long-term infrastructure construction that would primarily help populations affected by the disaster. However, almost five years after the earthquake, it seems that Proposition 8 of the report, stating that “governments and aid agencies must create the conditions for entrepreneurs to flourish”, has been the main driver of the present reconstruction process (Clinton 2006). On the ground, “much of the so-called recovery aid has been devoted to costly current programs, like highway building and H.I.V. prevention, and to new projects far outside the disaster zone, like an industrial park in the north” (Sontag 2013). The actual “reconstruction” directly benefits the industrial sector, both in construction contracts and in infrastructure that transports goods and low-wage workers. An important body of laws related to housing exists, but these laws are often truncated or diverted to serve other purposes.

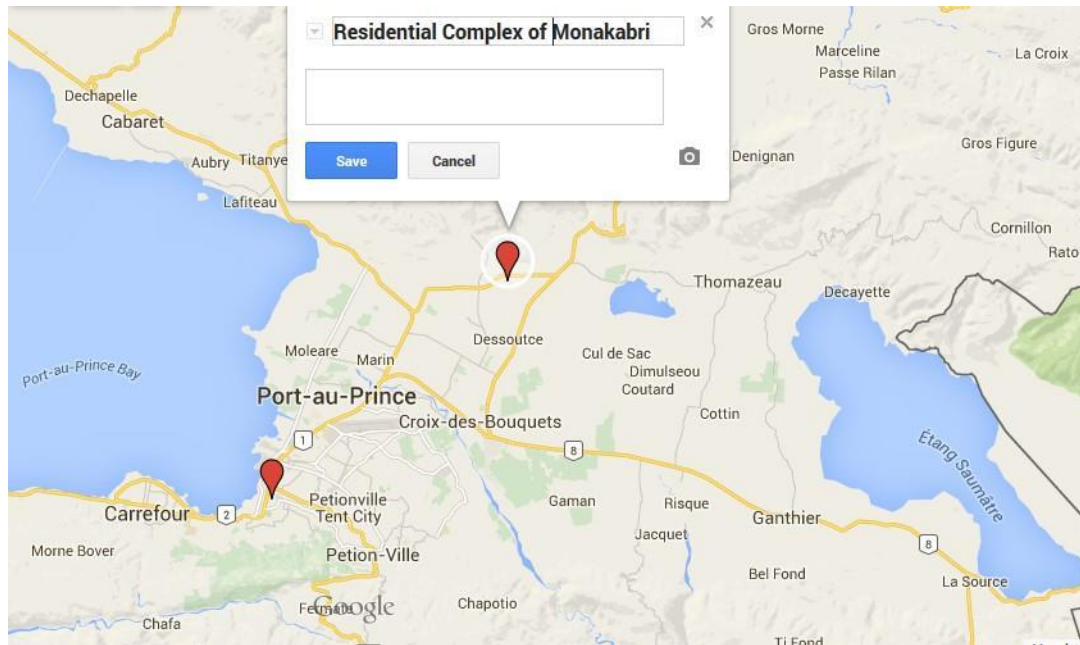
Present housing projects are inconsistent, and hark back to divergent interpretations of the human right to housing present in many international treaties Haiti has ratified since 1986. Indeed, the disregard for the human right to adequate housing or its farcical application are a common trait of many state-sponsored and internationally-led projects. This historically

anchored disregard could be explained by the fact that “under most constitutions housing is classified under state policy and not as part of a bill of rights [and is] aspirational and non-justiciable” (Morka 2010). However, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights has a constitutional value in Haiti and many approved and ratified treaties and international agreements pertaining to the right of housing have made their way into the Haitian legislation (Beaubrun 2012). The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (hereafter, ICESCR), for instance, was approved and ratified in 2012. It contains many binding requirements concerning adequate housing, such as availability of potable water, electricity, ventilation and transportation that are regularly trampled by the regimes that adopted it. Below, I will describe a state-sponsored housing project in order to discuss how divergent notions of economic, social and cultural rights compete in this specific settlement.

### **Village Lumane Casimir: a Utilitarian Microcosm**

In Haiti, the export agenda backed by the United States is often used to legitimate blatant misappropriation of funds and disregard for constitutional laws pertaining to the housing sector (Ayiti Kale Je 2012). I take the newly built Lumane Casimir Village, a grid of rectilinear streets comprising 3,000 housing units in the arid plains north of Port-au-Prince, as an ethnographic anchor for this discussion. The construction of this village was funded by Venezuelan Petro-Caribe funds and built by Constructora Hadom, a Dominican construction company directed by Felix Bautista, a controversial Dominican senator accused of bribery for obtaining reconstruction contracts in Haiti (Monitor 2012). The Casimir reconstruction is spearheaded by the present Haitian president, Michel Martelly. The actors involved in Casimir frame their work under the international right to adequate housing; however, the habitat provided to a fringe of the

population is far from adequate. I take the different dwelling experiences of a working-class family as a primary ethnographic focus.



*Figure 59 Monakabri, a thirty minutes drive northeast of Port-au-Prince*

During my fieldwork in Haiti, I got to know Mériane and Gérard Defils and their two daughters, who are fictive kinship to Fresnel and who became close friends of mine (all informants' names have been changed). The Defils moved into the surrealistically-monotonous Lumane Casimir Village (hereafter, Casimir) in April 2014. As a family of four, they occupy a tiny house located at the edge of the housing project. Their side window gives a view of the desert, an expansive land filled with cacti. A solid wood table takes up most of the space in the living room, while the beds completely fill the two white-painted bedrooms. Gérard built shelves that are nailed to the walls, where a vase filled with yellow and red plastic flowers stands next to family photographs. The family stores their food in a chest freezer they cannot use because of lack of electricity.

Mérianne complains often about the heat inside the house and the poor materials with which it is built: flimsy plywood doors, already broken plastic pipes and a fragile water tower (which was broken when I came back in June 2015). The two-bedroom, 280 square-foot concrete house includes a 50 square-foot covered porch where the kitchen and bathroom are located, a 6.5x16.5 foot living room and two 8x8 foot bedrooms. The house is located in the middle of a row of identical tiny houses; there are ten feet between the rows and seven feet between houses. Each of these hard-edged bunker-like units is painted in shades of industrial pastel, and the untended spaces surrounding these structures are dusty and arid.

Casimir is a new construction that stands out in a parched area that has been urbanized only since the 2010 earthquake. The northern regions of Port-au-Prince have been long thought of as possible extensions of the capital, despite the aridity of the land, the lack of potable water and the potential difficulties of bringing electricity and human activity to this sun-scorched area (Katz 2012). Informal settlements that sprawled after 2010, such as Canaan, located a mile away, contrast strikingly with Casimir, as they present a patchwork of blue tarp roofs and half-built gray cement structures on the otherwise desiccated hills alongside the national highway. Indeed, Casimir is a vast grid of small pastel-colored buildings, which might give the impression of a permanent military encampment or of an expansive field of mini storage facilities, the pastel colors notwithstanding. The units come in two sizes: one-story and two-story. In the middle of the grid-like village, a sports complex with basketball courts and community buildings stands surrounded by barbed wire, not yet open to the public.



*Figure 14 View from the rooftop of G. Defils (Joos, May 2014)*

As Gérard Defils told me, “Port-au-Prince and Casimir are like day and night [c’est le jour et la nuit].” Defils explained that Casimir felt like a dead town compared to the bustling commercial arteries of intra muros Port-au-Prince where street vendors sell goods on the sidewalks and where transportation is always available. The Defils mentioned several times that their mobility was limited in Casimir and that they missed the always available *tap tap*, the painted buses or pick-up trucks that function as shared taxis. The deserted landscapes around them made them feel far away from the urban economic and social activities they were engaged in before the earthquake.

Casimir is located south of the fragile ecosystem of Trou Caïman, a vast freshwater lake surrounded by saltbush flats and rice plantings. It is a bird sanctuary and an important source of water for the entire Port-au-Prince region (Woods and Sergile 2001). Casimir itself is built amid a flat alluvial plain where tall cacti thrive and where salty waters comprise much of the phreatic

table. Sharp winds blow dust into the mostly-empty village, and the few recently installed decorative plants barely withstand the weather. On the northern side of the village, there is large-scale construction underway—what seems to be factories.

The village was built using an advantageous loan given by the Venezuelan government through its Petro-Caribe program. Originally, the funds were requested for the demolition and reconstruction of Fort National, a downtown neighborhood destroyed in the earthquake. The Unit for Housing Construction and Public Buildings (hereafter, UCLBP), a para-ministerial institution created after the earthquake, had even published the master plan for the construction of apartment buildings in that part of Port-au-Prince, but the project was quickly abandoned. Puzzled UCLBP administrators saw their funds for downtown housing reconstruction mysteriously vanishing and learned, in 2012, that the most important state-sponsored housing project would be built not under their supervision, but by an independent contractor (Ayiti Kale Je 2013). The Dominican firm Constructora Hadom, whose president, Dominican senator Bautista, is suspected of corruption in Haiti (Piera 2012), has been supervising the whole project. As the Haitian journalists who published a thorough report on the dense opacity surrounding the project note: “the public subventions the private” by creating an immediately available pool of workers “paid the lowest salaries in the Western hemisphere” (Ayiti Kale Je 2013). The Casimir project was conceived before the earthquake happened and even if Haitian Prime Minister Laurent Lamothe touts it as a major social housing achievement, it is nonetheless a place built first and foremost for factory workers and not for people affected by the earthquake or in need of housing.

Gérard Defils, who now lives in one of the small units, speculated that he got access to a house not only because he was severely affected by the earthquake but also because two women

in his family, his wife and his daughter, could make viable workers for the factory that will open soon. I first met Gérard Defils in September 2013, while visiting Fresnel in Delmas 32, a very dense neighborhood of a commune adjacent to Port-au-Prince. He was temporarily staying in Port-au-Prince, in my friend's house, in order to claim his retiree pension that hadn't been paid for more than four months. Defils explained in both French and Kreyol:

I have been living in Delmas 32 since 2005 because we wanted my two daughters to go to good schools. My wife also wanted to move in Delmas 32 when I retired, so she could do *ti komès* (small business). She made *tablèt* (pralines) and sold other little things in Delmas. I worked for the state as an agriculture consultant and as an agronomy teacher for more than thirty years. We were living between the Cabaret region and Delmas before we moved there for good. Delmas 32 was a good place for us: the rents were affordable and *ti komès* worked reasonably well. We had electricity most of the time and we had access to clean water nearby, at a public fountain. We were with Fresnel and his family. They are dear people to us.

On January 12, 2010, I was sitting in the living room on a chair and my two daughters were sitting on the floor. My wife was outside with our neighbors, downstairs. We were watching TV when we heard a rumble [*comme un long coup de tonnerre*].... The next thing I knew is that one of my daughter and I were under some rubble. Half of the upper apartment had collapsed and my other daughter was in the part of the living-room that hadn't collapsed [photo 6]. My wife and our neighbors helped us. My left leg was broken and my knee doesn't work anymore, I can barely walk today. My youngest daughter lost a finger on her left hand and she still hurts. We were cared for by a doctor in Croix-des-Bouquets. I am from that area and I have family staying north of Croix-des-Bouquets. We remain with them today, waiting until the state delivers us houses in Monakabri [another name for Casimir]. We cannot afford to live in Port-au-Prince, the prices of the rent in Delmas have skyrocketed since the earthquake.



*Figure 15 Photo of G. Defils standing in his collapsed apartment, 2011*

Defils had also come to Port-au-Prince to visit acquaintances working for the state, who eventually helped him getting a home in Casimir. He had formally applied for a house in 2012 because his family met the criteria that would make them officially eligible. Among many possible and hidden rationales, the UCLBP first played the humanitarian card: priority would be given to physically handicapped people. Defils had taken photos of himself in the hospital and kept all his medical paperwork as proof of his physical impediments since, according to him, many people pretended to be handicapped to access services. Second, according to David Odnell, director of the housing department of UCLBP, three criteria had to be met: “1) You have to have been affected by the earthquake, 2) the person has to have a family of not more than 3-5 people, and 3) the person must have income” (Odnell quoted by Ayiti Kale Je 2014). However, Defils knew that people had started to move into Casimir and that most of them didn’t meet any of the aforementioned criteria. Besides showing photos of his destroyed home and presenting all required paperwork, Defils exchanged favors with his relatives working for the government in



order to secure a home. He liked the Casimir project because access to schooling was provided, at first in Croix-des-Bouquets through free transportation, and later on-site. When he signed the application for a house in 2012, administrators working in Casimir stated that people living there would be given a job and that a system of lease-to-own would enable inhabitants to become home owners. However, none of this information was written in the contract and nobody knew at the time what the price of the lease would be. Nothing was said about the nature of the job, either.

In December 2013, President Michel Martelly officially inaugurated Casimir and symbolically gave keys to the seventy-five police officers who would live here and run the police department. At that point, many applicants understood that they would never own their houses and would pay a sum equivalent to that of a rent in Port-au-Prince, where most of them generated some form of income (Daudier 2013). Moreover, it quickly appeared that the promised services, such as a health center, schools and transportation would not be implemented in the short run. A mini-industrial park was in construction in the area, but nobody knew when the promised jobs would be delivered (Haiti Kale Je 2014). Many international donors and organizations back the Clinton-Martelly economic plan of growing the assembly and garment sectors, which formulated during the 2011 Invest in Haiti Forum; they therefore did not investigate or ask any questions concerning the opaque Casimir project (Yaffe 2011). Executive powers appropriated funds meant to “build back better” the existing cities, to instead build industrial settlements through the Unity of Housing Construction (UCLBP). This institution, able to bypass ministers and opaquely pick a master plan and a dubious construction firm, built a large urban environment without any respect for ecology and adequate standards of living.

## **Inadequate State-Sponsored Housing**

I first visited Gérard and Mériane Defils in Casimir on May 18, 2014. When I arrived at 8 am, they were sitting in the shade of the vacant house facing their new home and listening to a battery-operated radio, as power didn't come during the day. We went into the house and visited the premises. Gérard made me take measurements of his house. "They promised us 30 square meters and we don't even have 24, porch included!" Both my informants asked me not to record any audio but allowed me to write notes. At the same time Gérard insisted that I take pictures of his house, of his own photographs and of the official documentation he had in possession, knowing that I would hide sources and blur faces in photographs. He wanted to have proof that the house he had recently acquired was delivered with many defective features. I later gave our common friend Fresnel the pictures I took that day. Mériane was the most vocal in our conversation, as Gérard was sick with Chikungunya, a mosquito-borne disease that was ravaging the Port-au-Prince area at the time. I will reproduce excerpts of the notes I have taken during our two-hour vivid conversation and discuss them in the frame of the right to adequate housing. Mériane, with her soft voice punctuated with laughter, explained that the house didn't conform to any of her expectations and that severe limitations on the ways she can use her space made her regret their move here. She often referred humorously to the papers she received and to the training they had to go through to compare official discourse and concrete details of life in Casimir:

First of all we had to get a loan from my sister-in-law who lives in Florida to move in. We received the news that we were accepted in March 2014 and we had to move in quickly, within two months. They made us pay 11500 HTG as "entrance fees" [equivalent to \$250]. Then we had to pay upfront six months of rent: 9000 HTG [\$195]. After that, we had to pay 2500 HTG [\$55] to activate electricity and water services. On the suggestion of my sister-in-law, we also bought a new freezer, so I could open a small cold drink business.

We thought we would not pay rent but installments towards the ownership of the house, but we are still unsure. If this is a rent, it is much more expensive than renting a house in Delmas, where we previously lived. We signed up for a property, not a rental place. We have no deadlines and we don't know if the rent prices will stay that way.

Then we paid a fee for services, but so far there are two buses every hour going to Croix-des-Bouquets: it is 20 HTG [50 cents] a roundtrip. This is the only service we have so far, and it's very expensive. The bus doesn't go far. It leaves you at a gas station where you have to take other means of transportation to go to places. Motorcycles, tap-taps and taxis are not authorized in the area. There is no way but to take the bus. It costs 50 HTG per day to send my two daughters to school in Croix-des-Bouquets, and they commute at least an hour and a half a day. Look at the paper! It looks pretty on the paper! I would love all of this: school, clinic, information center, transportation! But now, we can't afford to go to Port-au-Prince or to visit family in Croix-des-Bouquets too often because it's a tiring and expensive trip. We go when Gérard needs to see the doctor and when we go, we stay a few days to fix all we need to fix in town. There is no doctor here, even if they said there would be a health center.

We paid for water and electricity. First, electricity only comes from 5 pm to 8 pm, and sometimes it comes during the day and night, at any time. We bought a freezer before I moved here, thinking we could sell cold drinks and store food. But now it sits there in the living room as a storage box. Then, the water they provide is salty. You cannot even wash yourself with it. If you do, your hair becomes all white and your clothes get stained by salt, your body is itchy all day. I cannot even cook with that water. The sink pipes are broken because of that salty water, it destroys all our appliances. It works in the restrooms, but we have to fix up the pipes often. Every day, we have to walk about fifty minutes to get water. You can go by the road but it takes more time, so we cross the dusty field right there to get access to a public water fountain. Gérard cannot walk, so I go with the daughters during daylight, so it is not dangerous. When they go to school, they bring back water with them. Sometimes, I go by myself in the morning, especially if I see people I know heading to the water fountain

The house is poorly built. It is not well ventilated. Beginning at 5 pm, staying inside is unbearable, it is extremely hot. It is like a small oven (*se tankou yon ti fou*). At night, mosquitoes invade the house. There are so many that they get under the mosquito net and make a lot of noise. The most outrageous for me is the size of the house. We never lived in big houses, but 24 square meters is a very tiny space for four people. We were told 30 square meters. At least, if we could go on the roof to catch a breeze in the evening... but we can't. We don't want any problems with the police. So many of them are living here right now! So, the girls have to sleep in the same bed when they thought they each would have a room. They are 13 and 16 and at that age, you need more privacy. Hopefully we can hang things on the walls, it's not forbidden! I feel it's the only thing I can do to make this house more like my house (*fè ti kay sa ti kay pa m*). You have all these police officers living here and still, things are stolen. At night, I even have to take my charcoal and my cooking set inside. They promised us a gas stove but I still

cook with charcoal, as you can see. Thieves come at night, they steal pipes, toilets, anything they find. Some of these houses are squatted, but nobody is doing anything about it. We have to lock ourselves in, and it doesn't help with ventilation.



*Figure 16 Inside the Defils' dining room (Joos, June 2015)*

This excerpt strongly indicates that UCLBP, the government institution in charge of selecting families who will inhabit the village, does not respect the terms of the contract and in effect sponsors an expensive, restrictive form of housing that violates key clauses of the ICESCR, a treaty ratified in 2012. Casimir's small units and its placement in a fragile ecosystem unsuitable for human habitation combine to render the project woefully inadequate. The notion of adequacy, determined in part by ecological, climatic, social and economic factors makes the right to housing much more than four walls and a roof. The right to adequate housing implies the "legal security of tenure, availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure, affordability, habitability, accessibility, location and cultural adequacy" (CESCR 1997). The 200 families living there demonstrated in front of the administrative office in May 2014 to claim their

right to property or to at least clarify the terms for becoming proprietors. However, it seems that the state wants to keep a certain level of flexibility in their tenant policy, as the factories that will soon open there need healthy workers to function and, hence, need the possibility of evicting people unfit for long hours of hard work on the lines. Gérard didn't want to go to the demonstration but supports the claims of his fellow co-renters. The presence of so many police employees is worrisome to the Defils as they do not prevent theft and seem to be there for other purposes. When we discussed the paperwork and community training the Defils received, they told me that police forces are here to control the population living in Casimir rather than to protect them.

“The state will ask us to go if we are not useful for the factories. They need healthy workers that can rent houses.” Gérard's fears stemmed from the fact that he worked hard to secure a home in Casimir, and had a personal stake in its humanitarian facade. While critical of the overall project, he still believed that the promised services and employment will change life in the village. Both he and his wife worried about their stability in the area, and also about the fact that their daily life was under tight scrutiny. Indeed, administrators of Casimir Village seek to regulate social aspects of life by tightly controlling economic opportunities and social relations in this place. Mériane provided me with some insights into the intrusion of the Unity of Housing Construction (UCLBP) administration in her private life through the providing of mandatory training and constant supervision of her activities:

We had to go through a seminar to learn how to live in a community and to learn the rules of the village, as if we didn't know how to live in a community! In fact, they gave us plenty of restrictions and rules. First, we cannot use outdoor space: we cannot build anything and we cannot even garden and grow vegetables or trees. We cannot even put a table outside and sit. All that we do has to be under our small porch. We cannot use the roofs of our houses for anything, not even to dry linen.

Then we do not have the right to do any business (*ti komès*). Gérard and I moved in with a freezer, drinks to sell and many dry foodstuffs we expected to sell here. But this is forbidden. Doing *ti komès* here can get you in lots of trouble. Anyway, there is no electricity, so selling cold drinks is not even an option. We cannot use the space we pay for to do what we normally do: selling things outside your house, sitting and talking with neighbors in the shade of a tree or an umbrella. We cannot even build a small gallery to store our things and have some shade for us.

Since many members of the present government tout the Duvalier regime as a model for controlling the masses in Haiti, fears of returning to a totalitarian state that controls social life in industrial areas by subsuming it to the public sphere are legitimate (Sprague 2012). What Mériane describes is a forceful intrusion of the political into aspects of the domestic spheres she feels should remain her responsibility. It is also an insidious manner to undermine her culture, understood as daily practices, in the guise of modern hygienism and social uprightness.

Domestic economies are part of the public realm. They promote skilled work that preserves independence in a country where the work imposed by capitalist systems is closer to animalistic labor. As Haitian geographer Georges Anglade has written (1982), Haiti's low wage workers are subjected to the harshest disciplinary techniques within factories, and the state makes sure that workers do not rebel or organize to ask for better working conditions (Anglade 1982: 33). In the case of Casimir, the attempt to shrink domestic economies and confine them to the household seems to be an attempt to direct the workforce towards factory labor and to discipline a predominantly female workforce (Ong 1987). However, there may be other interests at stake, as the factory construction site was still only half built and abandoned in June 2015. The rules may instead provide a basis for evictions. The liminal space between the shadowy household and the bright light of the agora, where most Haitians have found freedom and

autonomy, tends to disappear when subjected to a political agenda that positions an illusorily free-market economy as the only option for the alleviation of Haitian poverty.

The present industrial/residential projects in Haiti aim to rebuild an economic system that led to dense urban areas and the pauperization of rural provinces. Export-based economies based on manufacturing demand international competitiveness, which translates into increased worker productivity and low labor costs (Smelser 2013). Heightened productivity demands tight control of labor, which in the Haitian case demands coercive measures to control space and commerce.

However, a conundrum remains: the housing units were finished well before the factories were supposed to come—and they never came. Casimir village, with its rules and its houses resembling storage containers, was in June 2015 populated by 600 families, most of whose members were unemployed. Rents rose again in April 2015, and people who vehemently protested and demonstrated in front of the UCLBP administrative building were evicted in a brutal fashion. “Some people were thrown out of their houses soon after the April demonstrations,” Mériane told me during the interview I conducted with her in June 2015. “They were humiliated. Policemen threw their belongings on the sidewalk in front of everyone. They try to intimidate people...” In the meantime, more than a half of the built environment of Casimir is already in ruins. Aland Joseph and I noticed that at least 200 apartments were starting to fall apart during a visit in May 2015.



*Figure 17 Unfinished yet abandoned apartment buildings in Casimir (Joos, June 2015)*



*Figure 18 Inside an unfinished apartment- Joos, June 2015*



## **The Rise of Housing Rights and the Politicization of the Domestic Sphere**

The urban residential built environment in Haiti is extremely diverse and ranges from light makeshift structures to large secluded villas. However, the majority of Haitian urban dwellers live in apartments and houses built of concrete that are rarely larger than 400 square feet. According to an employee of the Minister of Public Works, “the houses themselves are decent, well-kept and well-ventilated but are located in places with no access to water, electricity and trash collection” (Field Notes 2012). Moreover, these concrete dwelling are located in hazard-prone landscapes (Sietchiping 2010). Housing rights exist in the national legislation and clearly call for the construction and maintenance of basic infrastructure. However, the various state institutions which could provide urban services such as trash collection are underfunded, and as a result function only sporadically and only in “priority areas” of the capital (i.e. downtown Port-au-Prince). As we have seen with the case of Bolosse 4<sup>ème</sup> Avenue, ravines that should function as drainage systems in the rest of the capital are clogged with detritus that increases the risk of floods, render the air unbreathable and attract mosquitoes.

The 2010 Haitian National Recovery Plan stated a need of nearly four billion dollars for new developments, but none of this money was to be allocated to housing. Only \$150 million from “other sources” would be allocated for housing projects (Traesberg 2011). Indeed, such a sum has been disbursed by the government to build residential industrial complexes. Providing basic urban services such as potable water and trash collection within the metropolitan area has largely been ignored, and the major international organizations and foreign states supporting the reconstruction efforts do not wish to strengthen the public sector or to subsidize it directly (Farmer 2011).

Haiti's legislation is dotted with many laws pertaining to the right of housing, many of which stem from international treaties ratified by the Haitian state after the fall of the dictatorship in 1986. Housing rights were mainly administered within the framework of individual nation-states before the United Nations created precise legislative tools pertaining to housing (Leckie 1992). According to Ajurn Sengupta, former executive director of the International Monetary Fund, though the right of housing was an element of the right to an adequate standard of living in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it only became important when the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (hereafter, ICESCR) was signed in 1966 and entered into force in 1976 (Sengupta et al. 2005). Its position as an "economic, social, and cultural right" makes it subject to interpretation: states like the USSR and China, at the time, saw this right in an instrumentalist fashion, whereby the state would provide housing through enactment of legislation and planning of housing construction; the U.K. and U.S.A., however, had a *laissez-faire* vision of the state's role and saw the right to housing stemming from the creation of economic conditions that would allow the private sector to make housing available (Craven 1995). Only in 1994 did a thorough definition of the right itself appear in the General Comments of the ICESCR. As a discrete right, its position in the human rights hierarchy changed and pushed states to implement regulations that would ensure "adequacy". Here, the right to adequate housing was defined as the "right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity [and must be read] as referring not to just housing but to adequate housing, [which means] adequate privacy, adequate space, adequate security, adequate lighting and ventilation, adequate basic infrastructure and adequate location with regard to work and basic facilities—all at a reasonable cost" (UN, 1994.) The ICESCR General Comments expanded this definition by stating that adequacy also referred to legal security of

tenure, availability of services and infrastructure and cultural adequacy (ICESCR, 1997). The latter category aims to guarantee “the expression of cultural identity and diversity, including the preservation of cultural landmarks and institutions” (NESRI 2014). As a precise definition of the right to housing arose, states were supposedly obligated to put in place regulations such as construction norms and to build infrastructure to guarantee security and mobility.

In October 2012, the Haitian Parliament voted in favor of the ICESCR, making the government’s obligations binding (Joseph 2012). This new set of laws reinforced and gave greater precision to Article 22 of the 1987 Haitian Constitution, which stipulates that the state “recognizes the right of every citizen to decent habitat, education, alimentation, and social security” (Beaubrun 2012). The ICESCR relies on nation-states to incorporate its elements in national legislative frames. In the end, the state decides who gets access to housing and what gets defined as culturally adequate architecture. Each set of rights included in the Covenant is filtered through state administrations, which have to interpret them in order to enforce them as national laws. Nation-states often use one part of the definition of adequacy to the detriment of other aspects of the right to housing. Security in particular often takes precedence over other improvements in neighborhoods. For instance, the efforts by Haitian Police and the U.N. forces to dismantle Cité Soleil’s gangs in 2007 were not accompanied by other measures that would have improved employment or basic infrastructure. As a result, once the security programs stopped, “the problems they were trying to contain re-emerged even more virulently” (Marcelin, 2011: 28.) The fact that the Haitian Parliament adopted the ICESCR is not a guarantee of progress, but could be an instrument that furthers government control over the private lives of its citizens.

The state can sometimes prove effective and benevolent. The government of Préval partnered with the Haitian-led organization Foundation for Knowledge and Freedom (FOKAL) and several NGOs to rehabilitate some of the neighborhoods of Martissant, a densely populated area of southern Port-au-Prince. FOKAL used the existing legislative framework to define the role and capacities of certain state institutions in the handling of urban problems such as trash collection, maintenance of ravines, building of roads, bridges and staircases, and compensation of people evicted from state-owned land (Couet 2014). While imperfect, this participatory project had positive impacts on people's lives. For instance, state institutions such as the Service Métropolitain de Collecte de Résidus Solides (trash collection) started to come to these neighborhoods and collect trash on a weekly basis, which greatly helped improving sanitary conditions in this part of the capital. The Martissant project, though spatially limited, proves that the state has the ability to implement laws that improve living environments.

Haiti is often described as a weak state, especially by International Financial Institutions pushing for structural adjustment and privatization, because it supposedly lacks the capacity to implement public projects. It is more useful to talk about a *dormant state* in which institutions have the potential to create and manage infrastructure. In the Martissant case, we witness a state that respects the international treaties it has signed and the constitution it adopted in 1987 for the well-being of its population.

This capacity to build infrastructure becomes even clearer if we shift our focus to moneyed interests. In the case of the construction and administration of the residential/industrial complex Lumane Casimir Village, we also witness the state as a potent actor. As anthropologist Charles Hale mentions, "in areas of high economic priority such as tourist enclaves and free trade zones, for example, the state leaves little to chance, relying on a battery of regulations and

prohibitions enforced with immediate recourse to coercive power” (Hale 2011: 196). In the present case, the state misuses funds and forcefully disregards the legislation and binding international treaties, and instead implements housing projects that do not fit any standards of the ICESCR. Casimir was built in less than two years and required the mobilization of considerable administrative and logistical capabilities. It is a forceful demonstration that the Haitian state isn’t a weak or a failed state, but an entity that has the potential to implement important projects on its own.

### **Economic Efficiency and the Right to Adequate Housing**

In the past decade, Haiti’s export economy has been fostered by trade agreements with the United States. The Haitian Hemispheric Opportunity through Partnership Encouragement Act of 2006 (HOPE I) gave preferential access to U.S. imports of Haitian apparel. In 2010, these trade agreements were extended until 2020 under HOPE II, along with the Haiti Economic Lift Program (HELP) Act of 2010, which improves access for the United States to Haitian exports (Hornbeck 2010). These agreements have fostered the creation of industrial parks in the Haitian countryside and raised the number of people working in garment factories for low salaries. Such factories are located in free-trade zones and do not generate revenue for the state (Shamsie 2013). Industrial sites are generally built in joint ventures by the state, foreign nation-states and foreign investors. Major projects like Caracol, an industrial park built in northern Haiti in 2010, include housing units for workers, though these are only built once the industrial park is fully functioning. Moreover, factory workers in these areas have the ability to find lodging on their own terms. The Lumane Casimir Village is peculiar in the sense that the workers’ habitat has been built well before industrial facilities.

The state strongly enforces rules that Casimir's inhabitants have to follow, such as the curtailing of domestic informal commerce or of non-state approved construction. In other words, the state intrudes into the private lives of its citizens, hypothetically to discipline them into becoming productive factory workers. Another hypothesis Gérard suggested in June 2015 is that the village's houses might soon be sold to private companies or individuals, as the rent prices soared in 2015. More and more people are in danger of losing their homes, as the promised jobs never appeared. It appears many interests have stakes in this residential park.

Hannah Arendt's distinction between the political and the social is useful for understanding the slippery notion of adequate housing and its relation to private lives. The right to adequate housing expands the field of governmental "administration of things", since the state bureaucracy is now obligated to ensure the respect of living standards beyond just the utilitarian realm, for instance, in cultural adequacy (Arendt quoting Engels, 1972: 272.) With the adoption of the ICESCR, Haiti's government now has the power to intervene in household economies and family life. Hence, the state has the potential to intrude on the domestic sphere and regulates activities like *ti komès* that have been the basis of autonomy for many families (Laguerre 1974).

Arendt's distinction also rests on the dichotomy between labor and work. Labor, the repetitive, quasi animalistic activities meant only to sustain life, is regulated by a set of laws despotically administered by the household head. As such, labor is strictly economic and does not produce anything that is permanent, as it caters to individual biologic needs. Work, however, "is the activity which corresponds to the unnaturalness of human existence", that "provides an 'artificial' world of things, distinctly different from all natural surroundings" (Arendt, 2013: 7). "Work is inherently public [and its fabrications are] the preconditions for the existence of a political community" (Yar 2014).

Arendt draws yet another a sharp distinction between the political and the economic, arguing that the latter should not enter the realm of public governance as it concerns primarily individual and private aspects of life. Blurring the lines between public and private is a risk because it places the political further from its goals, such as equality and freedom, to render it a mere administrative process of day-to-day matters. In the present case study, it seems that the basic political/public elements pertaining to the right to housing have disappeared from the Haitian government agenda. Clearing ravines of detritus and repairing inadequate water drainage system and electrical networks are seldom happening. However, the state executive power displays a strong preference for the possibilities of social interventions and control of domestic spheres, hypothetically to attract foreign investors or, at least, to provide a malleable workforce for the entrepreneurs who will soon establish their businesses in Casimir. In this case, the security clauses of the adequate right to housing are privileged, while cultural practices such as *ti komès* are prohibited.

Arendt's dichotomies of work and labor become problematic when plunged into ethnographic analysis, but are useful for grasping how new international legislative instruments have expanded the domain of domestic state intervention. Domestic work in Haiti is not mere labor but skilled work, often performed by women, that stands at the basis of social life and rights discourses. Subsistence agriculture and selling of foodstuff in houses and markets regulated by custom, religious practices and social capital compose a large part of the Haitian economy and provide the model for political life in rural areas and among migrants who inhabit or traverse the capital (Mintz 2010). Produce markets, for instance, are the locus of a thriving economy where a majority of women gain financial autonomy and social prestige through highly organized transactions that go beyond monetary exchanges. As Haitian scholar Georges Anglade

notes, subsistence agriculture, collective organization of work on small properties [*compagnonnage*] and markets have historically served as alternatives and modes of resistance to the plantation and post-plantation capitalist system (Anglade 1986).

Culturally articulated around spiritual practices and Kreyol as a common language, the nineteenth century Haitian peasantry created a system of self-governance based around a single spatial feature: the *lakou*. The *lakou*, as described by Comhaire-Sylvain (1961) and in the introduction of this dissertation, is a courtyard around which several homes are gathered, where spiritual practices are performed and where work is organized collectively. Urbanization and spatial constraints do not allow urban residents to recreate the spatial features of the *lakou*, but many elements of the *lakou* system, such as credit systems, social obligations within kinship groups and commerce as the basis for autonomy strongly endure in today's Haiti (Beckett 2008). The *lakou* system is not a bounded cultural structure that defines the Haitian nation as a whole, but a mode of autonomy and moral integrity that creates hierarchies and social and economic possibilities. It has enabled peasants to create families and to control the land as they wish, for the privileging of food production. Historically, this peasant mode of organization has stood in direct opposition to the export-oriented economy (Dubois 2012). Today, in residential/industrial complexes like Caracol in northern Haiti, or in Casimir, disciplinary techniques aimed at resorbing domestic work resonate as attacks against Haitian popular autonomy in which female economic practices are the platform of self-sufficiency.

Local governments could “construct properly equipped marketplaces for the women who sell rural produce [...], the Haitian state should develop trade policies aimed at protecting the agricultural sector, and take the lead in fixing roads and ports, confronting deforestation and improving systems of water management” (Dubois and Jenson 2012). At a macroeconomic level,



this would also entail countries like the United States changing their own export policies and stopping the Haitian importation of subsidized agricultural goods such as rice (Kushner 2012). Changes would have to be implemented on several institutional levels at once to properly implement structural changes.

Efficiently improving access to adequate housing does not necessarily mean focusing only on urban dwellings and their immediate and superficial problems. It does not mean creating jobs at all costs while lodging workers in highly supervised and dreadful industrial and residential parks. Rather, it requires looking at the larger horizon of possibility that lies beyond alleviating only present suffering. It demands large scale decentralization and the growth of economies that allow the majority of Haitians to live in freedom and autonomy. The state might retreat from its current level of control, or at least allow citizens' participation in their own housing projects. As we will see, individual modular houses are coveted in urban and rural districts. They allow people to express their aesthetic preferences and to use their houses as they see fit for family life or business. Vernacular architecture also allows Haitians to use their building skills, rather than being forced to use housing units built by foreign companies that disregard the full definition of "adequacy" and people's desires.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE OLD PORT-AU-PRINCE: POLITICS, POETICS AND NOSTALGIA

Field Notes, January 16, 2014:

Three days after the national commemoration of the devastating earthquake of January 12, 2010, state employees stuck up posters featuring images of a projected modern and orderly downtown Port-au-Prince on the *tôles rouges* (red metal fence) surrounding the dozing construction site of small concrete vending kiosks on the Champ de Mars, the main public plaza of the capital. I was taking a walk with my friend Luckson Jeudi, who took an indefinite leave of absence from his job in Queens, New York, to open a small business from his light green shotgun house on Rue Charéron, a busy downtown artery. Luckson, like other people living in his neighborhood, had only heard rumors about state urban planning projects in the old Port-au-Prince. He was quite startled when he saw computer-generated images of the future “Cité Administrative” with its two four-lane roads and its lines of administrative and commercial buildings that would replace the residential part of town where he lives. “Shit man.... That’s us,” he said in English. The project implies the demolition of a large portion of the actual residential downtown, a one mile by one mile grid of rectilinear streets honeycombed with many corridors,

alleys and courtyards, known as Monatuf or Le Morne-à-Tuf. This is where Luckson grew up and now lives.



*Figure 19 One of the poster displayed on Champ de Mars showing the future downtown of Port-au-Prince*



Figure 21 A Rooftop view of the Monatuf in downtown Port-au-Prince (Aland Joseph, April 2013)

These images stirred debate among a small group of bystanders of five to seven men. They all agreed that these demolitions would displace hundreds of families, but most of them asserted nonetheless that the downtown area should be completely demolished—one man said, “n dwe l kraze net-net-net! Ki kapital gen bidonvil nan mitan lavil?—we should destroy it completely! In which capital do you see slums in its downtown parts?” The words *modernize* (modernize) and *fatras/netoyie* (trash/clean up) are used often by supporters of the project. Luckson vehemently opposed people depicting his neighborhood as dirty, chaotic and dangerous by arguing that thousands of *moun de byen* (good people) live and engage in well-organized activities there. He also insisted that people would lose all their memories and personal histories (“se memwa yon bann moun yo ap kraze la!”).

Luckson was born near Place Saint-Anne, lived until age eight at Rue de la Réunion, and went to live for three years in the Artibonite region with his grandmother before settling with his mother in Rue Charéron. He knows the many networks of friends and neighbors who care for each other there. His front porch, at the end of the afternoon, transforms into a masculine circle of friends, over which an older university professor who lives on Rue de la Réunion presides. They like to talk about the Haitian past and the changes in the neighborhood—with the Grand Cemetery so close, talking about funerals is far from uncommon. Luckson always insists on personal memories linked to specific places—schools, churches, radio stations, cemeteries, alleys, restaurants and friends’ homes. He told me more than once that losing the landscape of your childhood is losing a bit of yourself. In many ways, people show attachment to their houses, apartments and streets and recognize the cultural, religious and historical importance of the urban landscape they inhabit. It is not the messy slum often vilified by government officials and foreign media but a place that the urban proletariat and members of the black middle class have created.

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This ethnographic vignette reflects a profound divide in terms of urban desires and perceptions between people who are well acquainted with the central districts of Port-au-Prince and people who seldom venture into these neighborhoods and who support to top-down urban planning projects. The idea of a city split into a poor, chaotic and popular downtown informally built along the seashore, and fluid and affluent neighborhoods perched on the flanks of the mountains, was a leitmotiv in the interviews I conducted in Port-au-Prince. As French journalist Laurent Gaudé stated in a widely discussed article published in the newspaper *Le Figaro* in 2013, the downtown area of Port-au-Prince has become a vast shantytown where the “geography is implacable: at the top, the lords; at the bottom, the forgotten masses” (Gaudé 2013 – my

translation). However, Port-au-Prince's geography is even more fragmented than it seems from behind the tinted windows of an SUV. Though some residents of the "top" echelon of the city fully agreed with this characterization, many of my informants grappled with the idea of a dichotomous geography in order to invalidate it. They pointed to the social and economic diversity of the bourgeois neighborhoods and of the central districts of the capital. While there are stark differences between the neighborhoods east and west of the Champ de Mars (in terms of income, density, infrastructure, dwelling size and type of habitat, etc.), both seem to exist as places where people have developed deep connections through participation in political events, music, poetry and sacred practices.

Parts of Monatuf, the site of much of my fieldwork, may be in bad shape and bear the scars of the 2010 earthquake, but the neighborhood is far from being completely ruined. Many buildings, both old and recent, survived the earthquake. For example, the beginning of Funeral Street is still marked by the eighteen-room house of the founder of the Haitian Republic, Alexandre Pétion, built in 1770 using paraseismic architectural methods right after an earthquake that destroyed the entire city of Port-au-Prince. At the northern end of the street stands the Grand Cimetière (Grand Cemetery), which means that Funeral Street, called Revolution Street before the 1986 ousting of "Baby Doc" Duvalier, is the last stretch of the city a great number of deceased go through before being buried.

I use the expression "historic districts" to describe old Port-au-Prince because of the presence of a built environment that strongly echoes colonization, occupation and dictatorships. I also use this expression because my friends and informants talked at length of historical matters. Monatuf has been and is an important political stage. It has been destroyed many times for its strategic importance, and people working in the many funeral businesses that dot the main street

have a lot to say about their clients. The remnants of the black middle classes here, who led successful careers in the state apparatus during phases of Black Nationalism, extensively discuss their historical role and the urban texture that is part of their social and spatial selves. Sitting on the front porch of Luckson Jeudi's house allowed me to glimpse the desires for independence of a population that has been the target of brutal urban planning and international campaigns of military "stabilization". The foreign and local administrators of the Haitian state, allied with powerful actors of the private sector, have profoundly transformed what was historically the site of centralization of authority. Monatuf is a residential neighborhood that touches an ever growing built environment belonging to the state. It is a liminal space where administrative centralization processes are both orchestrated and contested.

This rapidly changing urban landscape can be read and used as a sort of archive. It is a fleeting archive where clues about life in the urban hyper-center of Haiti come in the form of oral history, patriotic poetry, musical recordings, architecture, infrastructure and spontaneous conversations that I encountered in homes, streets and corridors every day. This peripatetic ethnography was also backed up by archival research in the same neighborhood, in the Bibliothèque Nationale on Rue du Centre. Reading Haitian memoirs and newspapers articles about the neighborhood brought to the fore the fact that Monatuf was both a political theater destroyed many times by fires, earthquakes and military attacks, and also an experimental urban surface where the building infrastructure meant to foster export economies led to brutal eviction of residents of many social classes.

While the figure of my friend Luckson Jeudi is not the focus of this chapter, the conversations and walks I had with him constantly inform this work, as he vividly remembered the changes his neighborhood underwent during time of disaster or times of seeming stability. I

use the life *in* and the life *of* this neighborhood as an archive that opens windows into the workings of the state and its diffuse presence in everyday life.

Examining boxes of archives at the Bibliothèque Nationale, where a 1967 issue of the newspaper *Le Matin* coexisted with a 1935 issue of the newspaper *Le Nouvelliste*, I was able to compose a text out of fragments of the life history of Ulrick Rosarion, a Haitian poet who lived in Monatuf from 1931 to 2014. The written record of his life and its settings, as well as his poetry, called for a text to piece them together, as did my conversations with residents of the neighborhood who remembered him. I thus gained access to non-chronological and fragmentary windows into the past through the clues I gathered about his life and art.

By forging longterm bonds with some residents of this historically tumultuous part of the city, I had conversations about personal attachments to places, homes, neighborhoods, public gardens and corridors and explored people's own documentation of life. This part of town lies in the shadows of the administrative nerve of Haiti—le Champ de Mars. I had access to a rich vernacular archive made of material culture, sounds, oral narratives and written poetry. The dense vernacular architectural and the oral and written archive, where the personal encounters larger historical processes, point to the need for cultural belonging and historical reckoning in sectors of the city constantly traversed by the specters of violent regimes and urban planning.

Once I was seated behind the high metal doors of private homes, everything slowed down and the street noises retreated. My informants and I talked about our geographical and historical surroundings in a personal manner. I recorded interviews, took notes, re-wrote from memory numerous conversations, photographed documents and manuscripts and, often, simply sat with my guests, listening to music or chatting with them and their other guests in their shaded courtyards. In this central part of the capital, I think about my informants' houses as a part of



their biographies and of the city's history in three contrasting contexts: 1) the house being “on the grid” and tied into the physical infrastructure of water, sewer and power, 2) as a social matrix of respectability and the spaces where life is staged, and 3) as an economy or base for enhancing productive labor and thrift.

In this chapter, I will describe and analyze personal archives—understood as assemblages of place, materiality, oral history, documents and practices—that will enable me to talk about the *sense of history* of the part of town where I conducted fieldwork in 2013 and 2014. My informants were historians of a certain kind: often they were “gathering the facts, weighing them critically, and synthesizing a personal account that [was] full and true” (Glassie 1999: 78). In this part of the dissertation, I focus on the “personal archives” of several men who receive recognition for their talents as local historians. Precisely, I will detail the life and works of Ulrick Rosarion, a former judge and “Commissaire du Gouvernement”, who wrote extensively about Haitian history in French, in the form of metric poetry. Mèt Rosarion published five books from 1970 to 1984 and wrote many unpublished poems about the role of women in Haitian history, great battles against the French and the life and death of Haitian revolutionary and intellectual figures. Mèt Rosarion's aesthetic practices are in dialogue with the material and spectral traces of an older tradition. Understanding the agency of these spectral traces helps to shed light on the forces that shape national belonging, statehood and culture. I thus interrogate the meaning and impact of Duvalierism as an ideology and a political practice and bring to the fore the traces of the longest Haitian dictatorship, in order to think about the material nature of urban lives as they are intimately enmeshed with the Haitian state. More specifically, I examine the dictatorships' influence tied to the modern class structure and urban configuration of the city, embodied in the one character of Ulrick Rosarion.

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## **Mèt Rosario: Narrating and Living the Revolution(s)**

### **Urban Black Middle Classes and Political Ascension**



*Figure 22 Ulrick Rosario (Joos, March 2013)*

Ulrick Rosario was born in Port-au-Prince on November 11, 1932. “Le jour de l’Armistice Français”, as he liked to say—the day of the armistice that marks the end of World War I. He still lived in the same two-story shotgun house where he spent his childhood, on Rue de L’Enterrement, when I met him in September 2013. Sitting right in front of the prestigious

Saint-François hospital, which was being rebuilt at the time, his gray and orange house didn't stand out from the rest of the built environment. The house is a two-story timber and concrete shotgun comprising six rooms, an outdoor kitchen and an 8x24 ft. side courtyard covered by shade trees. The façade of the house is, however, peculiar. The front porch is surrounded by a heavy metal fence that makes the house resemble what Haitian architect Albert Mangonès called the “carceral architecture” of the Duvalier years (Mangonès 1974). In brief, the front entrance of the shotgun, which is traditionally the entry point into the house for visitors, is barricaded, and guests enter the courtyard through a thick metal door opening onto the left gallery of the house.



*Figure 23 Ulrick Rosarion's house on Rue de l'Enterrement (Aland Joseph, August 2015)*

The house's paint was peeling away and the back walls of the house had been seriously damaged by the 2010 earthquake. The two most spacious upstairs and downstairs rooms, located in the back of the house, were not used for this reason. Mèt Rosarion's nephew, who lived in the

courtyard in a tent stamped with the Apple logo, preferred, like many people I met in Port-au-Prince, not to sleep under a roof. Besides the heavy protective armature surrounding the house and rendering it secure, almost bulletproof, nothing indicated the house belonged to a family where many men had worked in the highest spheres of the government. It was a house cherished by the people who inhabited it and who liked to speak about its history and functions.

Ulrick Rosarion was eighty-three years old when I met him. He had suffered a stroke in 2004 that impeded his speech and forced him to express himself slowly. Nonetheless, he was an alert man who said a lot in few words and who often referred to some of his writings and documents to make a point. My friend Carl, who works as a mechanic in Rue Charéron, introduced me to him. Carl, who grew up in the area, knew Mèt Rosarion well as a man who was a respected intellectual and state figure in Port-au-Prince and a good neighbor to many people.

My other friend Reynald was Rosarion's neighbor and protégé when he was a child. Rosarion taught him French and made him read many books of poetry and history. Reynald, who is in his early forties, showed great respect to his elder even if he confessed that he sometimes disagreed with him. Carl and Reynald, who knew him best, could sometimes finish his stories about his own life and choices.

When I met him in 2013, Ulrick Rosarion lived with two male family members, one living in the upper bedroom in the front of the house and the other in the courtyard, along with a woman who cooked and worked for him, and her little girl, of whom he took great care. The woman and her daughter lived downstairs in a well-ventilated and well-furnished bedroom. Rosarion was always described to me as an altruistic man, a man passionate about education and history who made sure his children and his younger neighbors had access to good schools, books

and supplies. Reynald became interested in Haitian history and literature under the guidance of this man who never hesitated to shelter him during the hard periods of his life.



*Figure 24 Léandre Rosarion on the left and his son, Ulrick Rosarion on the right who both were lawyers in Port-au-Prince (Joos, March 2014)*

We all called him by his official title: Maitre Rosarion, or in Kreyol, Mèt, which would translate as “Your Honor” in American legal language. It is usually the title given to court authorities in regions that have been influenced by the Code Napoléon. Mèt Rosarion worked for the state for forty-three years without interruption. His career was launched under the Duvalier regime, in which he reached the highest positions in the justice system. He started as a court clerk in 1961. In 1967, he became judge at the Tribunal de Paix de la Section Est de Port-au-Prince, and served in that role until 1975. He often said that this was the most interesting part of his career and the period he liked the most. From there, he entered the government and remained “Substitut Commissaire du Gouvernement près le Tribunal Civil de Port-au-Prince” until October 1985, and acted as the equivalent of a U.S. Federal Prosecutor until he, in his words,

regressed to a subaltern position of Judge of the Civil Tribunal of Port-au-Prince until the ousting of Jean-Claude Duvalier in February 1986.

It was after the dictatorship that Ulrick Rosarion accepted the highest positions of his career within the state. In April 1986, he became Commissaire du Gouvernement au Tribunal Spécial du Travail—Commissioner of the Government at the Labor Tribunal—where he served as one of the state prosecutors in labor litigations. In 1996, he became Substitute Commissioner for the Court of Appeals of Port-au-Prince and in 2001 for the Court of Cassation. At the end of his typed curriculum vitae, Ulrick Rosarion wrote: “Nota Bene: 43 years of service without interruption”.

Ulrick Rosarion followed somewhat in the footsteps of his father, who worked in similar positions in his youth but who took important decision-making positions under both Duvaliers to end his career as a Secretary of Justice in the mid-1970s. Ulrick Rosarion’s longevity in the high spheres of the legislative body is surprising, given the turbulent political landscape before and after 1986. Keeping a position in the Duvalier state was quite challenging, as both dictators never hesitated to kill on a whim even their closest collaborators. For instance, in 1967, François Duvalier initiated the military trial of nineteen members of his own military guard, on tenuous suspicions of conspiracy, and had them killed before his eyes. He later recognized that he had killed some of his most loyal men, but assured himself he was in the lineage of great revolutionaries like Mao Zedong and Lenin in that he was operating a revolution inside the revolution (Dupuy 2010; Abbott 1991). The killings of major official figures went on throughout the entire dictatorship, such as the killing of president Dumarsais Estimé’s cousin, Rameau Estimé, by secret police chief Luc Désir, who was himself evicted from his position by Jean-Claude Duvalier in 1980 (Colon 1986). Remaining in high administrative positions in the Haitian

state wasn't, and isn't, an easy task. When I asked him about his uninterrupted career, Mèt Rosarion explained:

Everyone knows I am UN-COR-RUP-TIBLE! All presidents offered me a car and a chauffeur. I never accepted, I never took anything from the state. I always walked to work [Je marchais, Monsieur!] I talked with everyone, I lived a simple life! I like to write, to sit outside and talk with friends. Everyone knows me. I was a righteous judge and a guardian of the rule of law. I am a legalist! A legalist! My knowledge of the law earned me the respect of all presidents. (Fieldwork notes, March 23, 2014)

Mèt Rosarion often stated his devotion to the law and didn't like what he deemed to be extra-legal political practices. For instance, he told me that he didn't like the Tontons Macoutes—Milice de Volontaires de la Sécurité Nationale, or Militia of National Security Volunteers—precisely because they were supported by the state and yet functioned as a paralegal system of “volunteer militia”. His condemnation wasn't a moral one, however, even if everyone knew that the Macoutes detained, tortured and killed thousands of people without trials. The state and its servants should all be under the rule of law, according to Mèt Rosarion, but nothing was ever said about the nature of these laws. I will never fully know to what extent he was complicit in the waves of brutal arrests and mock trials that punctuated the Duvalier eras. Nor will I know his margins of choice and his role during the periods of intense political violence that have plagued the country since 1957. Working for the Haitian state also meant, for many people, living in fear: fear of losing your job in a country where unionizing was severely repressed; fear of losing your life if the dictators decided that you were working “against the Revolution”.

To me, Rosarion was an old poet, not an active agent of terror, when we first started to talk in October 2013. I nonetheless never ceased to think about his ties to the dictatorships, about his ability to remain in positions within so many governments and what this meant about the static nature of the Haitian state, its malevolent efficacy and the pressures state workers and



officials created or endured. From the documentation I found about him, he stands as an ambiguous jurist who both supported and worked against Duvalier, once using anti-communist laws against Christian activists in the early eighties, once using anti-corruption laws to sue Jean-Claude Duvalier right after his 1986 ousting. Through snapshots of his career, I will discuss ideas of class, race, state and the material and ideological traces those regimes of terror left behind. In this way, I will make an attempt at an “anthropology of Jean-Claudisme” (Trouillot 2014): the Jean-Claudisme, a period when Jean-Claude Duvalier took the reins of power in order to implement his “economic revolution” (1971-1986), was marked by the receding of the black middle classes in state affairs and of the *noiriste* ideology that sustained their consolidation during Dumarsais Estimé (1946-1950) and François Duvalier’s (1957-1971) presidencies. Mèt Rosarion’s judicial practices had a direct impact in the establishment of the Duvalier dynasty. In 1971, he wrote new emancipation laws and directly emancipated a then-nineteen year old Jean-Claude Duvalier, as we can see in the photographed document (photo). Being from a family of hard-working black men from Port-au-Prince who found state niches in which to exercise their skills during the Estimé presidency, as well as being a flexible bureaucrat, had far more impact on Mèt Rosarion’s career than his ideological tenants. This didn’t prevent him from participating in the dictatorship and from serving under dubious laws and institutional systems, as I will discuss in a specific case in a later section.

### **Race, Class and Duvalierism**

Mèt Rosarion is from a social class that neatly stood out as a cohesive community from the 1940s up to the 1970s: the black middle class Estimé and Duvalier strengthened and used as an ideological category and as a support group. Mèt Rosarion’s house was filled with memories of his family and its own role in the legal branches of the state. Photographs, diplomas or



furniture acquired in the 1960s all recalled a time when many blacks found stable employment in the civil and military fields. Mèt made me tour his home several times, knowing that I was interested in historical structures. The historical value of his house resided, for him, partly in the fact that it was a hiding place for François Duvalier, before and after his election:

He worked with my father in Dumarsais Estimé's government. They were close friends. [Pointing to his own bed] He offered this bed to my father. He came here to hide and slept in the bedroom upstairs that was shattered by the earthquake. Right there! And during his presidency too. He felt safe here! The house is safe! Duvalier made mistakes but he was a great man! [Duvalier a fait des erreurs, mais c'était un grand homme!]



Figure 25 Léandre Rosarion's Law Diploma (Joos, May 2014)

On the walls of the house, Mèt's father's first nomination hung in a wooden frame. Léandre Rosarion, whose photograph stands on Mèt's bedside table right next to his own portrait (see photo), was a young lawyer when President Dumarsais Estimé nominated him as a public prosecutor at the Civilian Court of Port-au-Prince on February 1950. Shortly after, Paul E.

Magloire, a powerful military member, came to power during a coup that temporarily swept away an emergent black political class, which had consolidated itself during the short-term presidency of Estimé by working in the public administration and the military. François Duvalier, then Minister of Health and Labour, publicly condemned the coup and went into hiding until a general amnesty was declared in 1956, a year before his fraudulent election (Nicholls 1996). He kept close to a small group of then trustworthy friends—including Léandre Rosarion, himself also removed from power by the Magloire military coup—and moved from house to house at night, hiding all over the country, according to Mèt.

The ousting of blacks from power in order to assert the dominance of the mulatto bourgeoisie (which happened forcefully during the Louis Borno presidency in 1922-1930 and under the presidency of Paul E. Magloire in 1950-1956) is a recurring political event, but it is a simplifying frame through which the history of Port-au-Prince and Haiti is narrated. This narrative uses the narrow lens of the struggles within small political factions with financial ramifications, but doesn't tell us anything about the life of the majority of Haitians, since these political factions are only changing heads on the body of the same extractive system. Hence, the story of the conflict between the racially binary mulatto bourgeoisie and the black middle class excludes the majority of Haitians from the historical fabric of the nation (Anglade 1990: 457) and tells us mainly about the life of the advantaged urban classes of Haiti. However, as Nicholls states, "the 'superficial' interpretation" works well for understanding Duvalier's ascent to power (Nicholls 1996: 194).

"Middle class" works as a social category that marks the boundaries of a certain group mainly located in Port-au-Prince only for a short-lived period in the twentieth century. It is more an ideological and discursive tool that allowed Duvalier and his close friends to share power with

existing economic elites in an exploitive system Duvalier refined and strengthened. While the black political middle classes that had emerged from military and educated elites were powerful political actors, the “black middle class” that emerged under Duvalier was small and politically powerful, but was never the engine of a social revolution. This contained urban class struggle happening in small circles centered around administrative and power structures didn’t affect the majority of Haitians living in rural provinces.

Peasants and small land owners outside Port-au-Prince had long been excluded from political life and created their own hierarchical structures and economies based on the freedoms they found in small-scale agriculture during colonial times (Mintz 1976). The presence of the state, however, was felt in the form of capillary taxation that shrank the meager financial profits the large Haitian peasantry was able to draw from its hard work. This exclusion of rural dwellers was put in place in the early nineteenth century under President Boyer (1818-1843), but only worsened with time, to culminate with the Duvalieriste regimes.

The structure of the Haitian urban upper classes changed through two major impulses: the above-mentioned Estimé/Duvalier moments, when administrative positions opened up for blacks who previously could only move up socially through the military, and the American occupation. As Laurent Dubois notes, “for many Haitian elites, the shock of occupation was also a shock of recognition. American attitudes towards Haiti’s population and culture, they realized, often uncomfortably paralleled their own” (Dubois 2011: 286). As I will detail later, the intellectual movements based on critique of the American brutality united, for a brief period, artists and scholars from various social classes and castes in a search for Haitian identity and “authentic” culture. François Duvalier was intellectually active during this period while being employed by

the Americans as a doctor participating in the campaign to eradicate yaws throughout the country.

As Rolph Trouillot notes, if foreign journalists described him as a nonsensical madman, Duvalier actually prepared his ascension to power very carefully, and methodically laid down his conservative ideology throughout the nation (Trouillot 2000). His politics, based on the social ascension of a black middle class seen as the enlightened elements of the black Haitian masses, brought back a colonial lens to the reading of the Haitian social structure and the role of recently expanded black elites.

According to Alex Dupuy,

[T]he significance of Duvalierism was not the form in which it exercised power, but rather that it expressed the rise of the black nationalists as the dominant political force, restoring the precarious balance that the black bourgeoisie and middle class had achieved with the mulatto bourgeoisie under Estimé but lost under Magloire (Dupuy 2007: 39).

Instead of changing the social hierarchies by redistributing resources and revenue to the black majority of Haiti and using the middle classes as the class that would clear the path to economic autonomy for the whole country, as he proclaimed he would do in his writings, François Duvalier consolidated the economic and status position of a small black elite that shared “the spoils of the extant economic system” (Dupuy 2007: 40). This economic system, which was based on cash crop agriculture, led to massive land grabs, while foreign industrial investments and cheap labor in fields and factories didn’t change. Duvalier shrank budgets for education, health and social services to develop a repressive apparatus that monopolized the bulk of state revenues throughout the whole Duvalier dictatorship (Holy 2011). The meager budgets allocated to fragmented state departments mainly served to pay for the salaries of an ever growing state

workforce hired, like musician Ti Manno sings in his 1983 hit “Exploitation”, “because the bosses liked them and never for their skills.”

François Duvalier couldn't be clearer than when he writes in 1967 in his *Breviary of the Revolution*, a little red book published soon after the killing of close members of his guard: “We, the middle classes, we, the professionals, small business people, workers, artisans, peasants and intellectuals, we, for whom Liberty and Independence are our sole reason to live, we, who cannot live abroad or be foreigners in our own country, we, for whom Haiti and only Haiti is the beginning and the end of everything, we shall never despair to sort between us and through our own means our own affairs” (Duvalier 1967: 133). One of the lasting effects of Duvalierism, beyond permanent economic depression, ecological catastrophes and pauperization of all provinces and provincials within the capital, is the consolidation of a diligent middle class that worked for the state and its survival. Not all people who climbed the social ladder during Duvalier's regime, however, participated in the organized looting of the country's cash and natural resources.

From many conversations and readings about Monatuf, people living in this part of the city mainly subscribed to values associated with middle class respectability—material humility, monogamous households, church attendance, religious education in French and often devotion to the state and to the person of François Duvalier. Under Duvalier, as we can see, upper-class values did not really change, even if a superficial politics of cultural authenticity based on blackness do mark governmental discourses in the first phase of Duvalierism (1957-1971).

As historian Matthew Smith argues, under Estimé,

the dominant anti-milat [anti-mulatto] rhetoric supported by the regime was weakened by political affiliations between noiristes [black power proponents] who opposed Estimé and conservative members of the military.... [This] partially explains the ease with which

Duvalier was able to marshal political support from rival political forces while maintaining a noiriste position in 1957 (Smith 2009: 6).

As previously said, Duvalier and his supporters share many values with the mulatto bourgeoisie they verbally attacked but eventually associated with in business ventures and in the sharing of state revenues. Repression of some members of the mulatto bourgeoisie, mainly intellectuals opposing the Duvalier regime, began in 1963, when Duvalier tightened his grip on power through widespread repression and forced exiles. Hence, when talking about black elites in this chapter, I describe a self-aware group of people who possess “material, symbolic and political resources” and who, in Haiti, gain their position through belonging to the bureaucracy and distinguish themselves by their use of French, modes of consumption and place of dwelling (Thomaz 2005: 136).

Again, the color lines that appeared in rigid forms in Duvalier’s writings tended to dissolve when we approach the high spheres of the military and state administration. Nonetheless, the elite designation didn’t only belong to this small economically advantaged population. The black middle class, which emerged in the twentieth century with the expansion of a centralized state administration under the American occupation, and continued to gain power under Estimé and Duvalier, stands out as a cohesive network. The contours of this network are visible in the architectural remnants in the neighborhoods they inhabited and in the values of middle class respectability they upheld during their participation in structures of power.

Monatuf, the neighborhood where I worked, was filled with small houses belonging to former members of the military and former state workers who, for the most part, had left to live abroad, starting in the early years of the Jean-Claude Duvalier dictatorship. From the architectural archive the black middle classes left behind in Monatuf or in the Bas-Peu-de-Chose neighborhood, modesty in size and ornamentation seem to characterize the houses and

apartments of this self-aware class of people. Within the extractive system itself, it is important to distinguish members of the regime who used their function to accumulate individual wealth and prestige from people, like Mèt Rosarion, who saw their role as neutral servants of the state and whose hard-working values and humility set them apart. Of course, the latter conception isn't without crucial ethical problems. In the following section, I interrogate the ideological underpinnings of the term "middle class", which is usually used as a sociological descriptive category. The middle class, in a very specific period in Haiti's history, serves as a political vector of values and as a tool to maintain power. Its supposed dereliction under Jean-Claude Duvalier's late years fueled the critiques of his regime by old guard Duvalierists in the 1980s and remains today a powerful discursive element that fosters nostalgia for the ideological purity of the early Duvalier years.

### **Consolidating and Using the Black Middle Classes**

In May 1959, two years after his election, François Duvalier suffered a stroke. His then close ally and friend, Clément Barbot, who organized the Tontons Macoutes militia and who helped to impose the structures of civilian terror, called the son of their friend Léandre Rosarion to help him. Duvalier's official doctor, Jacques Fourcand, had made a diagnostic error, but Dr. Bernardin Rosarion came soon after the stroke and saved him from certain death. Bernardin, son of Duvalier's trusted friend Léandre and brother of Ulrick Rosarion, became one of the rare persons to be in the presence of the dictator on a daily basis. He quickly became one of Duvalier's personal secretaries as well as one of his doctors. He held similar positions under Jean-Claude Duvalier.



*Figure 26 Mèt Rosarion showing the room where Duvalier slept when hiding in his house (Joos, May 2014)*

Mèt Rosarion's brother is therefore a well-known pillar of the two Duvalier regimes. He is a founding member of Fondation François Duvalier, created in April 2007 to commemorate the life and works of Duvalier and to impose the conditions for the return of his son Jean-Claude to power (Le Nouvelliste 2007). While Mèt Rosarion liked to remember his father Léandre, the name of his brother Bernardin never came up; neither is he present in the rest of the house, nor in photographs or documents. When I asked Mèt about his brother, he just told me that he was Duvalier's doctor and that there wasn't much to be said. I didn't bother him again with this question, but felt that there was a distance between Rosarion and his brother, who was ostensibly part of the Duvalier intelligentsia and an apologist for the dictatorships. The Rosarions were close to the Duvalier regime and participated in it as powerful actors. However, Mèt Rosarion never reached the very highest echelons of the state and never worked on a daily basis with the Duvaliers.



Léandre and his sons Bernardin and Ulrick personify the ascension of the black middle classes to administrative and judiciary power. However, it seems that they had very different perceptions of what it meant to be a statesman and a member of the middle class. Mèt Rosarion led an ascetic life in the modest family home on Rue de L'Enterrement and didn't talk publicly in favor of the Duvaliers like his brother flamboyantly did. I also noted that while Mèt Rosarion often talked about François Duvalier's accomplishments—mainly the rise of a small educated black elite—he rarely mentioned Jean-Claude Duvalier, whom he knew well and worked for nonetheless. Mèt Rosarion admired his father's generation and in a sense adopted their nationalist aesthetics and ethics.

What Mèt Rosarion saw in François Duvalier sheds light on his own ambiguities. He rarely talked about politics, but on a late afternoon in March 2014, Reynald, Carl, Aland and I had a conversation with him on the subject. Mèt Rosarion was emotional during our conversation and often placed his right hand in front of his eyes. I will reproduce here a bit of the conversation we had in French as I reproduced it in my field notes with the help of Aland:

*Rosarion:* François Duvalier was a revolutionary. He was a hunted man.... He was a doctor who knew the Haitian people well. He was a writer who wrote about Haitian people. We can't like everything in a man. I would have liked for him to build more schools. But he was a great man.... He liked this house. It was like a secret bunker! He was a man of the people [homme du peuple]. And a man of culture and science. Very few men achieved what he did....

*Joos:* Who was your favorite president?

*Rosarion:* Dumarsais Estimé....

Mèt Rosarion surprised us when he sobbed when stating the name of Estimé. A tear rolled down his cheek, and he took his head in his hands and paused for a long time. He then lit a cigarette and told us: "Estimé voulait l'égalité de tous les Haïtiens dans un état de droit...." Later

the same month, while showing me a picture of the inauguration of a tribunal in Saint-Marc in which he participated in 1975, instead of talking about the period of the photo, he told me: “I like Estimé because he built this country. Schools, cities like Belladère... Belladère was beautiful... [Belladère était belle, Monsieur....] Bridges, beautiful parks and theaters in Port-au-Prince.... If you saw the Bicentenaire years ago.... The pride of Haiti! He was truly a man of culture who worked for all.”

The Bicentenaire was a world’s fair held in 1949 for the bicentennial of Port-au-Prince as a capital that left behind a theater, parks, fountains, urban art, many buildings and restaurants on the seashore of the capital. Its evocation brought to my mind the image of the Bolivar statue that is standing in the only remaining public park of the 1949 Exposition. Mèt Rosarion was fond of the performer Antonio Aguilar and of his songs and movies, in which Latin American revolutionaries like Emiliano Zapata or Pancho Villa were the main characters. We knew Mèt was up and sitting in his courtyard in the afternoon when we’d hear “El Corrido de Emiliano Zapata” playing loudly on his CD player. Mèt Rosarion knew the lyrics by heart and enjoyed singing along for his friends: “Con mi guitarra en la mano voy a cantar el corrido, de un general afamado por todos muy conocido. Nació Emiliano Zapata en un risueño pueblito, del estado de Morelos que se llama Anenecuilco.” The song is a ranchera that details the rural and popular origins of Zapata and his military and political accomplishments. In a way, it is very similar to Mèt Rosarion’s poems, in which social origins and military bravura are leitmotifs. When Mèt Rosarion talks about Francois Duvalier and doesn’t talk about Jean-Claude Duvalier, I sense that his political views have been defined by the qualities he admires in Aguilar’s revolutionary characters, and have crystalized from the transcendent words and deeds of these charismatic heroes. Lyonel Trouillot, in an incisive article about Jean-Claude Duvalier, states a major

difference between the father and son regimes in a reading of their personal trajectories and personal ethics:

Between François Duvalier, doctor coming from the disadvantaged middle classes, hard worker and ascetic to the point of mysticism, cultural ideologist, patient politician who made his career in public administration, who grew roots in particular groups while effectively perverting popular opinion (on questions of color, social injustice, conflicts between the city and the country...), who subdued the armed forces, who raised a body of National Security Volunteers in his own pay, fought against the Vatican and the United States and nullified all Haitian civil and political forces; and Jean-Claude Duvalier, profession: son of president; merits: son of president; social origin: son of president; way of life: spending money and partying, there seems to be a world of difference. We could then start by thinking about Jean-Claude Duvalier's personality, and borrow from the psychology or sociology of inheritance to understand how and why, receiving a dictatorship as a present, Jean-Claude Duvalier only took personal advantage of it until, one day, History came and told him: citizen, the party is over [my own translation].

[En effet, entre François Duvalier, médecin originaire des classes moyennes défavorisées, bucheur, ascète jusqu'au mysticisme, idéologue culturaliste, politique patient ayant fait carrière dans la fonction publique, posé ses bases dans certains milieux en opérant une perversion efficace de la sensibilité populaire (question de couleur, injustices sociales, contradiction ville campagne...), dompté les forces armées, levé un corps de Volontaires de la Sécurité Nationale à sa solde, bataillé contre le Vatican et les Etats-Unis, réduit à néant toutes les forces politiques et la société civile haïtiennes; et Jean-Claude Duvalier, profession: fils de président; mérite politique: fils de président; origine sociale: fils de président; manière de vivre: dépenses et bamboche, il semble bien y avoir un monde. On pourrait donc partir de la personnalité de Jean-Claude Duvalier, avoir recours à la psychologie ou à une sociologie des héritiers pour analyser comment et pourquoi, ayant reçu une dictature en cadeau, Jean-Claude Duvalier s'est contenté d'en jouir jusqu'à ce qu'un jour l'Histoire vienne lui dire: citoyen, la fête est finie.] (Trouillot 2012: 9-10)

François Duvalier is a spectral figure on Rue de l'Enterrement, and especially in the house of Mèt Rosarion. His presence, perceptible in material remnants such as a fractured tomb in the Grand Cimetière, a small iron framed bed and papers signed by his hand, is felt even more strongly through a certain asceticism and a precise idea of how the black middle class should behave and think. It is akin to what Gérard Barthélémy named Duvalierism without Duvalier, an ideology based on a return to the values of the early François Duvalier and a refusal of "macoutism", seen as a totalitarian derivative of the regime (Barthélémy 1992). It would be hard

to define what middle class means in today’s Haiti; however, the ethos associated with this term powerfully traverses Monatuf. Thus, the spectral aspects of the black middle classes—an ethos of hard work and humility and a good dose of brash nationalism—filter their way into the present. As an ideology, post-Duvalierism takes many forms but generally refers back to the revolutionary “giant Man that [Duvalierists] salute as a Demystifier” (Barthélémy 1992: 8). The nostalgia of a “pure” Duvalierism, seen as the “noiriste” philosophy cleared of its dictatorial and terrorist aspects, is far from uncommon in Port-au-Prince and resonates through the material traces it left in the city.



*Figure 60 Ruins of a fountain with statues reflecting the Afrocentric aesthetic period of 1946-1950, built in 1949. Place d’Italie, Bicentenaire, Port-au-Prince (Joos, January 2014)*

## The legacies of 1946

When referring back to Estimé and the 1946 revolution, as he often did, Mèt Rosario referred to the intellectual roots and the political breakthrough of black Haitians who entered the Estimé government after years of exclusion during the American occupation. The post-Duvalierists take this moment to be an ideologically pure period of their racial nationalism and classism. It is important to understand this moment to reflect on the existence and abstract use of the notion of the middle class, the urban remnants it left behind and its function and life in the Haitian state.

Between 1915 and 1946, vibrant intellectual movements used Haitian folklore and history to craft a nationalist ideology respectful of Haitian linguistic, cultural and historical specificities. Jean Price-Mars' ethnographic studies, *Ainsi Parla L'Oncle*, were the intellectual compass of this politically diverse generation of intellectuals who saw their first political victory in the election of Sténio Vincent, in 1930, himself heavily influenced by the intellectual nationalism of Mars (Nicholls 1975). In his ethnography, Price-Mars attacked a Haitian political and economic elite he accused of borrowing European values and ways of life. It was a harsh critique of a bourgeoisie lost in what Price-Mars coined "collective bovarism," namely a form of alienation stemming from European values, lifestyles and ideals held by the elites. Price-Mars called for an acknowledgment of Haitian peasant culture, one that valorized Kreyol, Vodou and the revolutionary history of the country. Anthropologist M.R. Trouillot sees in that movement a cultural revolution, in the sense that vernacular art, practices and religion were for the first time the basis of a political and aesthetic program (1986). These debates on national identity and culture and the rich body of work left by Haitian intellectuals such as Price-Mars and Jacques Roumain are essential to understanding the present moment in Haiti, since the presence of

foreign actors, the weakness of the state and the silencing of Haitian culture, history and agency are forcefully bringing to the forefront the Haitian struggles and intense debate surrounding the occupation.

After the end of the occupation in 1934, “two intimately woven ideologies” stemming from the nationalist folkloric movement of the 1920s emerged (Nicholls 1975: 662). “L’*école des Griots*” was an intellectual school founded by François Duvalier, Lorimer Denis and their elder Louis Diaquoi, a native of the Gonaïves, a town located two hundred miles away from Port-au-Prince where Léandre Rosarion grew up and studied. The school’s journal *Les Griots* became the main organ of racial nationalists. The group founded its racial and social thinking on the works of Price-Mars, considered their “Evangelist”, but used blackness, African origins and Vodou to make claims about the bio-psychological nature of the Haitian Geist.

Duvalier and Denis, as the main political activists of this group, extensively wrote about a collective personality based on essentialist African attributes such as docility and savagery that fully achieved its potential under “a dictatorship which works for order, truth, and the common good”, as stated in a *Les Griots* editorial of 1938 (cited by Dash 1998: 76). This romantic view of Haitian collective sensibilities distorted and simplified the peasantry’s folklore to assert a very urban and class-based notion of black power, and established simplistic racial binaries to circumnavigate questions of class inequality. As such, the “bourgeoisie mulatre”—the mulatto bourgeoisie—became the nationalists’ prime political target, as it represented a class of businesspeople and land owners blinded by their economic liberalism and French-centered values. To Duvalier, only a black elite could counter the mulatto bourgeoisie that had betrayed its country by collaborating with foreign powers and that manipulated the masses behind a democratic façade.

Grandiloquent tirades against the mulatto bourgeoisie abound in the thick volumes of Duvalier's published works. The "noiristes"—the prolific cultural group from which Duvalier stems and that advocates for racial views of culture—called for an energetic black dictatorship led by elite members of the growing black middle class. Through an alliance with the black peasantry and urban proletariat, this group of enlightened politicians would negate the collective bovarism of a mulatto caste whose economic liberalism, freedom of speech and French-oriented culture were foreign to the Haitian Geist. The mulatto-black binary became the prism through which Duvalier manipulated public opinion to consolidate the power of a small group that, in fine, shared state revenues with the vilified mulatto bourgeoisie (Leconte 1999). The noiriste ideology impregnated the cultural, artistic and political landscape with radicalism. Duvalier and Denis represented the most racist and anti-communist fringe of *Les Griots* and the most politically determined. They acted as organic intellectuals and spread their views by using a wide array of methods. To this day, noirisme is still a force to reckon with in Haiti.

Haitian Marxists clearly saw that the noiriste racial binary only simplified complex Haitian social structures and was not a structural revolution, but a strategy for claiming seats at the revenue-sharing table. Jacques Roumain, ethnologist, botanist and founder of the Haitian Communist Party, notes that the racialization of politics in Haiti was "the mask under which black and mulatto politicians would like to hide the class struggle" and feared the "danger of black middle-class politicians who would like to exploit for their own ends the [proletariat's] justified anger" (cited in Hurbon 1995: 114). For Roumain, for instance, Vodou wasn't the manifestation of warrior and tribal qualities directly stemming from its African "nature", but the syncretic popular religion of the lumpen-proletariat. This sociological rather than racial view of Vodou led him to conceive of social inequalities as the result of economic processes and class

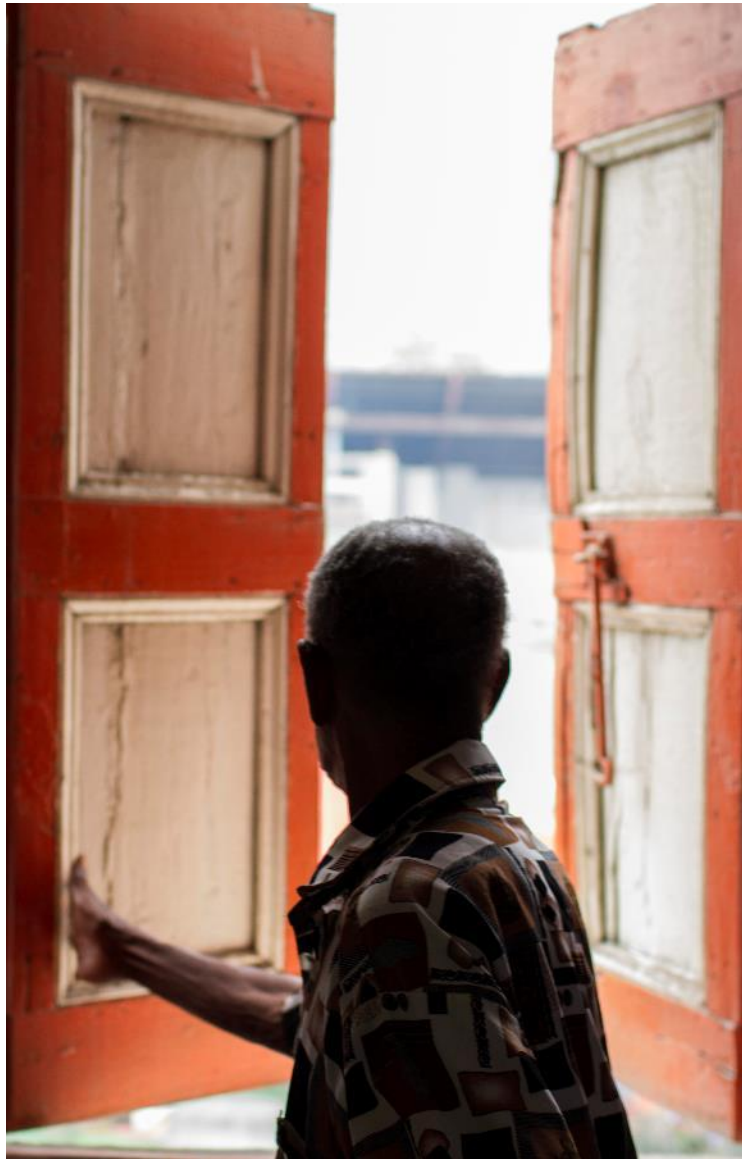
struggles, where color lines blurred within exploited categories (Ramsey 2014). Rather than the empowerment of the black middle classes, Roumain campaigned for a broader redistribution of wealth and power throughout the population. While his ideas and writings got international attention, Roumain's Indigéniste communism didn't become the hegemonic doctrine of Haiti. Noiriste ideologists were fierce anti-communists and linked Roumain's political views to a new form of mulatto bovarism, since Roumain came from the mulatto intellectual bourgeoisie. Aesthetics and politics from *Les Griots* that emphasized Jean Price-Mars' psycho-racial positions to argue for the need of a charismatic black despot became prevalent in the black political spheres of Haiti.

The Indigéniste impulse, even if traversed by many political currents, resonated mainly in Port-au-Prince. *Les Griots* was edited by poet Carl Brouard, who received funding from his father, then mayor of Port-au-Prince. From its inception, *Les Griots* was already an urban cultural publication and a vehicle for the ideas of a certain stratum of the Port-au-Prince black middle class. With the election of Estimé in 1946, many members of the Indigéniste generation came to power. Estimé believed in the leading role of a black educated elite, but also had some similarities with the socialist ideas of Duvalier's adversary, Daniel Fignolé, a fierce labor leader. In brief, during most of his presidency, Dumarsais Estimé chose not to impose a dictatorship on Haiti and tried to govern through consensus. According to Duvalier, his refusal use force was the reason for his failure to impose a black-led system (Duvalier 1967). When Estimé came to power, he initiated a system of social security, doubled the salaries of workers and protected Vodouyizan from Christian repression. While taking popular measures, Estimé was also behind monumental construction in Port-au-Prince that swallowed the bulk of the state budget. He wanted to make Haiti's capital a tourism hub where Afro-Haitian folklore would be performed



and celebrated. His less than five years in power left behind what is arguably the largest urban legacy in the form of the Bicentenaire, which was a world's fair spread over a square mile on Port-au-Prince's seashore. As Kate Ramsey has shown, the 1949 opening of the fair, where folkloric singers and musicians such as Lumane Casimir and the Jazz des Jeunes—a combination of American big band jazz and traditional Haitian music—was the culmination of Indigéniste aesthetics. The remaining musical fountain (see photo), with its clear Vodou and African influences, is one of the few remainders of a fruitful cultural politics that left its imprint in the urban landscape. Though most of the Bicentenaire is now a crowded popular neighborhood, and the palm trees, casinos and restaurants of Estimé's vision of Haitian modernity have disappeared, throughout the central neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince there is still nostalgia for an orderly city where the African roots of Haiti are celebrated. The remnants of urban features the cultural spirit of the Estimé period and the middle class values that are still embodied in great parts of the city affect daily life in the central districts of Port-au-Prince.

*Les Soupirs du Silence: Poetics of Black Revolutions*



*Figure 27 Morne l'Hopital on the horizon - Joos 2014*

While recovered Afrocentric values were celebrated at the world's fair of 1949, the majority of black Haitians inhabiting *anba lavil*—the lower wards—did not enjoy the fruits of cultural and political recognition. In the first part of his haunting quasi-ethnographic work

published in 1949, *Les Parias: Documentaire – The Outcasts: a Documentary*, Magloire Saint-Aude describes the central districts of Port-au-Prince and the diverse populations that inhabit and use it. From the Chinese hotels of the Grand Rue to the little bistros encircling the Grand Cimetière, Saint-Aude sketches the life of black middle class outcasts wandering in the streets of the capital and describes the mundane events of daily life in Monatuf, Bas-Peu-de-Chose and of the small neighborhoods that then dotted the western part of town.

The first part of *Les Parias* focuses on two state employees: a simple secretary and a section chief who walk through the streets and enter into ephemeral relationships with objects, places and people. The tone is resolutely pessimistic. The city seems like a maze where disease and death are part of the quotidian social fabric. Unemployment and lack of opportunities push many men to wander aimlessly in the city, to knit relationships around a shared bottle of rum or a cold Seven-Up and to observe dusty streets where boredom seems to reign. It is only in the second part of the book that the word “paria”—outcast—comes up, when the main character, Desruisseaux, a journalist who clearly resembles Saint-Aude, engages in a romantic relationship with a white Frenchwoman married to a member of the Haitian bourgeoisie. Saint-Aude depicts a bourgeoisie engulfed in wild partying and heavy drinking, and describes a Haitian journalist disturbed by the colonial nature of his relationship. The journalist is angry towards the woman, whose chic manners push him back to the poor streets of the capital where he never seems to find an anchor.

This book, which haunted me while I was walking the streets of the old districts of the capital, sketches the disarray of a generation of black intellectuals who, even when they found employment in state structures, nonetheless felt they did not belong either to the bourgeois circles of the capital or to its poorest parts. The Indigéniste political moment (1946-1950) that

should have propelled them, a generation of well-educated and knowledgeable black men, to the forefront doesn't seem to change their lack of position in a rigid social hierarchy. This book, a suite of cold and fragmentary descriptions that pairs well with a city whose allure changes from street to street, reflects the *mal de vivre* of a social class François Duvalier would often use for ideological ends. As the dictator states in a letter sent to the Vatican in 1965: “[my philosophy] is of a spiritualist nature, and joins the Christ’s ideas in His will to ameliorate the fate of the poor and to end the tragedy of the brave middle class, reservoir of intellectuals full of talent and dreams, who lead the lives of outcasts [la brave classe moyenne, réservoir d’intellectuels plein de rêves et de talents, qui mène une vie de paria]” (Duvalier cited in Paquin 1988: 260). The leitmotiv of the brave hard-working middle class relegated to the rank of outcast, and the legitimate rage that fills Saint-Aude’s book, shed light on Mèt Rosarion’s individual ethics and vision of people of his position.

I took this historical detour to anchor Ulrick Rosarion’s life and poetics in a precise cultural context where class and race are powerful determinants of careers and ideological leanings. I will translate and analyze some of Mèt Rosarion’s poems to interrogate the cultural legacies of Duvalierism and of the noirisme aesthetic. Mèt Rosarion published five books of poetry: *La muse frivole* (1970); *Ma lyre à la jeunesse* (1972); *Voix des saisons* (1983); *Les soupirs du silence* (1983); and *Le temps des fruits* (1986). I was able to read *Les soupirs du silence—The whispers of silence*—at Mèt Rosarion’s house. He allowed me to photograph the book and its handwritten manuscript. I was also able to find and read a tragic play he published in 1996 at the Bibliothèque Nationale. *Les Dernières heures de Boisrond-Tonnerre—The last hours of Boisrond-Tonnerre*—is a tragedy in three acts relating the return and death of Emperor Jean-Jacques Dessalines at Pont-Rouge in Port-au-Prince. As Mèt explained:

There are two sides to my poetry. A patriotic side. I wanted young people to know our heroes and martyrs. I wrote about women too. I honored their role in Haitian history. They were also heroes. The other side is more personal and sentimental. It talks about love, the pains of love, it talks also about children and the beauty of life. But Dessalines is the main character of my works. Toussaint, Capois, Boisrond. A poem on Massillon Coicou. But mainly, it is Dessalines, his exploits and the tragedy of his death.

In *The silence of whispers*, the first section of the book is dedicated to Haitian history and talks extensively about the great battles fought by “belligerent blacks” and their chiefs. The second part of the book comprises sentimental poems about love, nature and feminine beauty where the words “bird”, “flowers” and “wind” recur often, such as in poems like “The orphan and the little bird”, “Your arms... or nothing”, “The loyal spouse” and “A beautiful love”. Needless to say, the two sections of the book present a stark contrast. The patriotic poetry is essentially martial. In many respects, such as vocabulary, classic versification and use of standard grammar, it resembles the French nationalist poetry of Paul Déroulède, who urged the French youth to take up arms before and during World War I. This resemblance holds even in the “stylistic errors” Mèt Rosarion apologizes for in his preface. Images of glorious deaths on the battlefield, of thunder, war, blood, agony and military bravura abound, for instance in the poem “J’étais à Vertières”, which in some ways sheds light on the title of the book:

“Wounded men, dying under the sky of Charrier [a famous battlefield in northern Haiti]  
In both camps, death counted its victims  
O, day of truth, you were so sublime!

Des blessés, des mourants sous le ciel de Charrier,  
Dans les deux camps la mort dénombrait les victimes  
O jour de vérité, que vous fûtes sublime ! (my own translation)

This poem recounts the most important battle the Armée Indigène of Jean-Jacques Dessalines fought against the French Napoleonic forces. In November 18, 1803, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, his general François and thousands of “soldats indigènes” defeated the remnants of

Napoleon's army. The French military expedition, meant to retake control of the island and to relaunch a slavery-dependent plantation economy, cost the lives of 50,000 French and European soldiers (Le Glaunec 2015: 53). Vertières marked the end of the "Saint-Domingue expedition" and open the path to Haitian independence. It was the first major defeat of Napoleon and the "military tomb of an inhuman regime, of a racist intention" (Trouillot in Le Glaunec 2015). The battle itself has been the subject of many Haitian poems and historical narratives and is a frequent subject of conversation. November 18 is a national holiday, and the battle is an event that fuels and inspires many types of political and cultural discourses.

However, as Lyonel Trouillot reminds us, since Vertières is the apex of the anticolonial revolution, it "doesn't exist in the History written from the colonial Library" (Trouillot in Le Glaunec 2015: 7). While Napoleon is the object of a vivid cult of European amateur historians, reenactors and influential castes of intellectuals, the history of Saint-Domingue and of the Napoleonic economic and military disasters are not part of the French "national novel", as French historian Jean-Pierre Le Glaunec reminds us. Likewise, Michel Rolph Trouillot has analyzed "the many ways in which the production of historical narratives involves the uneven contribution of competing groups and individuals who have unequal access to the means for such production."

The poetry of Mèt Rosarion, full of interjections to readers and particularly to an indistinct Haitian youth, should be read in the light of subaltern history of Haiti in relation to France. The historical records of Haiti are located elsewhere, so Rosarion uses popular references and writes vernacular poetry to fill the void in historical texts and cultural memory. It is a call for remembrance and forms of politics based on a selective nostalgia for heroic times. As a foundation for the ideological shades of his writings, Mèt Rosarion recalls a tremendous

historical event that has been relegated to the footnotes of world history books until recently. He relies on a type of revolutionary poetics that has been actively silenced, one that is meant “to persuade large audiences [and] represent the stakes of freedom and domination” (Jenson 2011: 9). Mèt Rosarion crafts a poetic archive of Haitian history since “most historians ignored or simply skipped whatever record there was” (Trouillot 1999: 101; Jenson 2011). While he doesn’t use archival material to write his poems (most of what is required to study the revolutionary period is in France), he uses popular references such as the writings of Thomas Madiou, a 19<sup>th</sup> century historian, to reflect on the present meanings of historical events and processes that clearly still affect Haiti on the local and global cultural and economic stage. Vernacular poetry here fills the voids and silences of the past to ideologically inflect the current destiny of the country.

In “J’*étais à Vetières*”, Mèt Rosarion writes in the voice of Dessalines, who feels his death is near. The narrator recalls the heroic moments of the battle and gives an injunction to the Haitian youth, an injunction to remember and to act accordingly, to honor the sacrifice he and his soldiers have made for the freedom of Haitians. In this poem that he deems crucial to his works, Mèt Rosarion calls upon the African origins of the Armée Indigène soldiers to remind Haitian youths of their intrinsic warrior nature and of the duties these qualities call forth:

They didn’t recede, these Stars of Africa  
In order to conquer this dot in the universe.  
They didn’t recede, knowing that victory  
For them, was not superfluous.

Youth of the present day, the future belongs to you;  
May this command: “Forward!” guide you in your life  
And invite you to your duties and to progress until the end  
And oblige you one day to die for the Fatherland  
In labor, love and the firmest will  
To build a country eternally strong.

Ils n'ont pas reculé ces Astres de l'Afrique  
Pour pouvoir conquérir ce point de l'univers  
Ils n'ont pas reculé, sachant que la victoire  
A leurs yeux n'était pas illusoire.

Jeunesse de ce temps, l'avenir est à vous ;  
Que cet ordre : « En avant » vous guide dans la vie,  
Vous invite au devoir, au progrès jusqu'au bout  
Vous oblige un jour à mourir dans la patrie  
Dans le travail, l'amour et le plus ferme accord  
A bâtir un pays éternellement fort. (my own translation)

As described above, Vertières is a recurrent historical theme in Haitian culture and has been used by ideologists of all political tendencies to frame their arguments. Under François Duvalier, Vertières became a desubstantiated rallying cry for the Duvaliériste revolution through a repetitive and shallow narrative based on clichés about the battle (Barthélémy 1990). Vertières is, however, far more than a stultified Duvalierist theme. It is a reference widely used in Haitian historic literature and a popular cultural motif since it is, as Lyonel Trouillot puts it, “the consecration of a defeat, the one of an army sent by the greatest conqueror of his times, but mainly it is the defeat of a colonial and racist system based on slavery put down by the force of weapons” (Trouillot 2015). As Le Glaunec forcefully writes, Vertières left “traces more or less visible, erased or confused traces, neglected and rediscovered. A common tension is sketched through these traces” (Le Glaunec 2015: 207). Rosarion’s poem was written at the beginning of the 1980s, at a time where Duvalierists of the old guard become critical of Jean-Claude Duvalier, his lack of ideology and his disinterest for historical questions. Read in the shadow of another of his poems entitled “They loved us so much...”, we can note a certain despair and a sense of historical and cultural loss, a call to fathers who could be the men of the 1946 generation or the founding fathers of Haiti:



[talking about Toussaint Louverture and Dessalines]  
For fraternity, rights and justice,  
Freedom for all and equality,  
Of death they drank the gloomy chalice.  
Why so many blanks and absurdities  
In the wake of our age?  
What fate guided us among so many wrecks?  
Look at our gardens, our fields, our houses,  
They bear the weight of their cruel absence  
Never our heart will heal [...]  
Have pity upon us from where you are  
For our saddened fields nothing is certain without you  
For in the future may our harvest be better  
Our children happier, and the sun more radiant.  
On us, have pity, Generals.”

The poem may describe the situation of the early 1980s, of an ideologically soft Duvalierism that had lost the memory of the ideals and struggles of Dessalines and Louverture, despite the fact that Duvalierism discursively engaged with the 1804 revolutionary ideals. The landscape and built environment of Port-au-Prince itself bear the scars of an absence of political guidance from this time. According to my friend Luckson Jeudi, who was in his twenties when Duvalier began his slow political showdown in the early eighties, Port-au-Prince began to unravel:

the city started to be very dirty and the trash problems started then. We started to have big problems with water, electricity, potholes in roads and so on. In Artibonite [a very fertile rural region north of Port-au-Prince], irrigation systems weren't maintained, the population started to move to the city because staying in the provinces meant hunger and lack of work. In the meantime, carnivals kept being bigger and bigger by the year. The more the city became crippled by maintenance issues [des problèmes de voirie très communs], the more the regime invested in lavish partying [bamboche de grand luxe]” (Field Notes September 2013).

Port-au-Prince's infrastructure problems worsened greatly in the last phase of Duvalierism, at a time when Ronald Reagan and his administration financed Jean-Claude's kleptocracy while turning a blind eye on social welfare and environmental issues. Even

newspapers and magazines that supported the regime started to report, in the early 1980s, problems with sanitation, lodging and demographic pressure in the main coastal cities of Haiti. At the Bibliothèque Nationale, while perusing newspapers of that era, I found many anonymous articles calling for a change. For instance, *Le Matin*'s issue of June 20, 1984, states that “many people living in Port-au-Prince say that tap water is of dubious quality and may be the origin of the present waves of intestinal infections and fevers. In some places, water is brown and stinky.” Starting in 1984, many articles in *Panorama*, *Le Nouvelliste* or *Le Matin*, all known for being obedient to the regime, relate the widespread famine in the country, and describe the trash infested neighborhoods, the growing numbers of mendicants and the general sclerosis of state institutions in all basic domains of public service.

In terms of Haitian periodicity, the coming to power of Reagan clearly marks an era of laissez-faire, not only in terms of the economy but mainly in terms of human rights. The Reagan era marks a period of Haitian political trials accompanied by press propaganda accusing Christian activists, the leftist diaspora, crypto-communists and many more imaginary enemies of impeding the state's ability to carry out its basic functions. While enumerating the country's problems, newspapers also published absurd and repetitious articles against those who block the Jean-Claudiste “economic revolution” (Nérée: 1988).

Hence the possible interpretation of “They loved us so much...”. The dereliction of the country Mèt Rosarion talks about could be, according to him, the result of anti-revolutionary movements who tried to undermine the Duvalierist state, i.e., political opponents and Christian activists whose critiques of the government gained more and more traction in the 1980s. The next section delves into Mèt Rosarion's career in order to shed light on these ambiguities, not to

judge Mèt Rosarion (though ethical claims from my part are inevitable) but in order to reflect on the nature of the Haitian dictatorial state and what remains of its arbitrary and absurd practices.

### **Jean-Claude Duvalier and the Political Fading of Noirisme**

In October 2014, Lyonel Trouillot wrote an incisive and ironic article about the recent death of Jean-Claude Duvalier. “The very pale colored tiger”, as he named him, perpetrated an even more evil system of extraction upon the already devastating tyranny that was left to him as his heritage:

We cannot doubt. We were his toys and his power was to be able to play. We forgot to tell this to today’s children, how easy it was to die from non-natural causes, how the luxurious lives of others spread shamelessly right next to others’ misery, how much the State was Me and My super ministers and My tontons macoutes and My army that served My executive functions, how much I could take anything, ask for everything: cars, women, guitars; beaches and buildings, cash and public goods....

The death of the fallen prince doesn’t stop us from holding the regime accountable, to ask for explanations from those who remain his sycophants and beneficiaries and to think, without complacency, about its role in history. Duvalierism made the worst even worse. Jean-Claudisme was the remnants of this evil politics, a senseless hodge-podge: both noiriste and mulatriste, technocratic and obscurantist, arbitrary and made of incredible delights. When heirs come to power, they often limit themselves to playing with this power!

Car, ne nous y trompons pas. Jouets, nous fûmes, et jeu fut son pouvoir. C’est ce que l’on a oublié de dire aux vrais enfants d’aujourd’hui, combien il était facile de mourir de cause pas naturelle, combien le luxe des uns s’étalait sans vergogne devant la misère des autres, combien l’Etat c’était « moi » et Mes supers ministres et Mes tontons macoutes au statut de mineurs, et Mon armée inféodée à Mon exécutif, combien Je pouvais tout prendre, tout requérir : voitures, femmes et guitares ; plages et immeubles, devises et biens publics...

Et le décès du prince déchu n’interdit en rien de continuer de demander des comptes au régime, à ceux qui restent de ses sbires et thuriféraires, et de penser, sans complaisance, sa place dans l’histoire. Le duvaliérisme a jeté du pire sur le pire, le jean-claudisme fut les restes de ce pire, un micmac vide de sens : tout ensemble noiriste et mulatriste, technocratique et obscurantiste, sur fond d’arbitraire et de folles jouissances. Le propre des héritiers, quand ils sont au pouvoir, ne se limite-t-il pas souvent à ne savoir qu’en jouir ! (my own translation)

In 1980, Jean-Claude Duvalier became the target of critiques by old Duvalierists and famous popular figures when he married a member of the mulatto economic elite, Michèle Bennett, whose family held some of the most successful coffee plantations and export businesses of the country. (Today, Marché Ti Tony, which belongs to her nephew Tony Bennett, is one of the largest importers of dry goods—the Bennett family is still very well-off and continues to generate revenues from their land holdings in Haiti.) The last phase of Duvalierism (1980-1986), as Trouillot notes, was an era where many new and old actors of commerce, without distinction of color castes, openly took advantage of the revenues generated by subcontracting industries and by widespread taxation on locally produced goods. The “economic revolution” of Jean-Claude Duvalier and the influx of U.S. capital into Haiti, as Michel-Rolph Trouillot notes, accelerated the internal divisions of the country.

Regrouped in and around Port-au-Prince, factories largely reinforced the centralization of people, energetic resources and capital in Port-au-Prince. The cost of living soared as the rural workforce left the fields to work in the city, the price of electricity skyrocketed everywhere and most of the infrastructure built by the state benefited voracious American subcontracted factories instead of providing for the basic needs of the population (Trouillot 1988: 235).

Hence, the structural failures of Haiti could not be blamed only on the Duvalier clan’s greed. These failures are based on a type of centralized economy that the U.S. had promoted since the 1915 occupation, and continues to promote. As such, “Jean-Claudisme” cannot be conceived of as an ideologically empty state, even though it abandoned the noiriste and classist rhetoric of François Duvalier. While political grandiloquence seems to have petered out during the second phase of the regime, strong ideological tenets were indeed guiding the “economic revolution”. The main elements of the Jean-Claudiste period were an export economy that

avored cash crop agriculture, foreign subcontracting businesses, mass tourism and the growing role of an international aid program that slowly but surely started to assure the social functions.

Starting in the 1970s, many members of the Haitian black middle class started to leave the neighborhoods where they had thrived and slowly emptied the residential neighborhoods of Monatuf and Bas-Peu-de-Chose, which were their urban strongholds. This latter neighborhood is annually celebrated by members of the New York diaspora who left the country and this neighborhood en masse during the reign of Jean-Claude Duvalier. By the time of this exodus, Jean-Claude had replaced the violence of his father with a slightly more discreet yet efficient apparatus of repression. The brief period of “liberalization” that allowed the flourishing of independent radios, magazines and newspapers between 1976 and 1980 didn’t stop the regime from repressing its opponents or supposed opponents, who often “disappeared”. Waves of repression such as the massive arrests of 1963, 1964 and 1967 were followed by forced and voluntary exiles of entire families, who often left their houses and belongings behind. Jean-Claude Duvalier was more moderate in the public use of brutal force, even if the regime still arrested whomever it wanted at will.

1980 marked a shift in repression, as the state transferred coercive powers to tribunals. As U.S. economic interests were at stake in Haiti, Reagan’s government needed signs that the rule of law prevailed in Haiti. I will detail below some of the judicial and ideological changes the state went through under Jean-Claude Duvalier by detailing an episode of Mèt Rosarion’s career.

In his “Report on the August 1981 trial and November 1981 appeal of 26 political defendants in Haiti”, lawyer and human rights activist Michael S. Hooper relates the mass arrests that led to the exile of many Haitian journalists and scholars and details a parody of a trial, over which Ulrick Rosarion presided:

On August 25, 1981, twenty six people were tried and convicted in Haiti for arson and plotting against the internal security of the state. Eleven of the defendants were members of the Haitian Christian Democratic party, a fledging political party that was organized in 1979 by Sylvio Claude, one of the defendants. Two others were journalists who were imprisoned during the mass arrests of November 1980, which eventually resulted in the forced exile of a number of independent Haitian journalists and scholars. Following a trial which lasted nineteen hours on a single day and night, all twenty-six defendants were convicted of arson and plotting against internal security. The verdict was handed down at 5:00 A.M. Twenty-two of the defendants were sentenced to fifteen years at hard labor and four to one year in prison [...] In political cases particularly, the Haitian justice system offers virtually no protection to the individual who falls out of favor with members of the government. The trial of 26 people in 1981 was in part in response to these criticisms, from human rights groups and others, that no political prisoners are ever brought to trial. It was, in fact, the first political trial in Haiti, since the Duvalier family came to power in 1957. Ironically, this trial, as much as any incident in the last several years, illustrates the extent to which the rule of law has broken down in Haiti.

Before these trials, political prisoners were directly killed or jailed, and often tortured in the infamous Fort Dimanche prison, at the Caserne Dessalines or in the basement of the Palais National, as was the case for Rameau Estimé. The trial was deemed “in accordance with Haitian Law by the U.S. Department of State” and marked a new era in Duvalierism: the growth of judicial powers that gave a legal facade to political terror in order to maintain the Reagan administration’s support, which supplied financial aid to Haiti until 1987. With the election of Reagan and the pact he signed with Duvalier in September 1981 (Executive Order 12, 3 24 issued on September 29, 1981), it became virtually impossible to seek refuge for political asylum in the United States. The National Guard promptly began sending back boats and refugees to Haiti, even though serious infringements of human rights in Haiti were well-known. From 1981 to 1991, of 23,000 Haitians who applied for political asylum in the U.S., only eight got their petitions approved (Farmer 2003: 276). As Laurent Dubois notes,

the Carter Administration’s emphasis on human rights led to an easing of political repression in the late seventies, during which journalists—notably those at Radio Haiti—began criticizing the government from within. With the election of Ronald Reagan, Duvalier’s regime once again lashed out against its political opponents (Dubois 2014).

During the Carter years, budgets for the Haitian Ministry of the Interior and Defense dwindled from 50 million HTG in 1976 to 12.4 million in 1977, while the budget for the Ministry of Justice almost doubled from 1976 to 1978, from 4.8 million to 7.8 million HTG (Holly 2011: 48). In the meantime, the end of the 1970s marked the end of the relative liberalization of press freedom. In a brash yet humorous radio editorial entitled “Bon appétit, Messieurs!”, just a month before the mass arrests of journalists and the destruction of his own radio studios in November 1980, independent Haitian journalist Jean Dominique sensed the tone of the official press changing while a nightmarish and stronger judicial apparatus emerged (Dominique 1980). I reproduce here Laura Wagner’s excellent description of this important shift in Haitian politics:

By November 1980, it was clear that Jean Claude Duvalier’s regime would soon target the opposition, silence the press and curtail certain fragile liberties. These limited, tentative freedoms had been gained through the efforts of Haitian independent journalists and human rights activists between 1977 and 1980, as the Duvalier regime reluctantly capitulated to political pressure from human rights-oriented aid donors, particularly the Carter administration. In November 1980, however, Carter had lost his bid for reelection and a Reagan presidency was on the horizon. For the Duvalier regime, a Reagan presidency meant an opportunity to roll back progress on human rights.

In the preceding months, the independent media (such as Radio Haiti, the weekly magazine *Le Petit Samedi Soir*, and various small publications) had been covering a variety of issues unfavorable to the Duvalier regime: mounting opposition to the dictatorship, emerging political parties and labor unions, “boat people” fleeing economic and political oppression, previously-unreported peasant uprisings, corruption, toxic waste dumping, and human rights violations. In October 1980, *Le Nouveau Monde*, the official government paper, published an editorial announcing that the “party was over” (“*le bal est fini*”). Journalists were harassed, arrested, intimidated, sometimes facing spurious charges in court.

On October 20, Jean Dominique responded to these events with his prophetic editorial “Bon appétit Messieurs”, foreseeing what would happen when the independent press in Haiti was silenced.

On November 28, about a month after this editorial aired, the regime undertook a brutal crackdown on the press, political parties, labor union organizers and human rights activists. More than a dozen journalists were arrested at Radio Haiti, some tortured and later expelled out of the country. The station was closed and its studios physically destroyed. The rest of the Haitian media was effectively silenced until Jean Claude Duvalier was forced to leave the country in 1986.

*“Therefore, gentlemen, the official journalists — the country is yours and yours alone from now on. And all will be beautiful, all will be peaceful, all will be idyllic, all will be pink and wonderful. However, the Haitian people run the risk, one beautiful morning, of waking up to a ghastly, unbearable smell, a putrid, nauseating stench! In surprise, they will pinch their noses and ask, “but what is this, what has happened?” The official press, they will not tell them. They will go and look for it themselves, and oh, they will not have to go far, as meanwhile the country will have become a trash heap, the panye fatra of the rest of the industrialized world.... Will you dare, gentlemen of the official government press? Will you dare risk your paychecks, your jobs, your positions or, who knows, perhaps your lives, to denounce in time, as we have tried to do in March and April, the project that would turn Haiti into the trash heap of American cities and factories? Would you dare, gentlemen of the official press?” (Wagner 2015)*

The civilian judicial body, which was severely weakened during the first years of the Duvalier regime to the profit of a powerful Military Jurisdiction and later of the militias (Trouillot 1990: 151), made a tragic come-back through a budgetary surge and through the enactment of legal decrees which made official the possibility of trials where only the “official cocks” could sing (Holly 2011). The large political trial I detailed above marks the creation of legal macoutism. Allied with traditional militias, this new legal process, as Dominique notes, muffled the voices of journalists denouncing the Jean-Claudiste economic “revolution”. In this particular case, journalists who uncovered secret trade deals that enabled American businesses to bring their toxic waste to the island seem to have trigger a forceful response from the people who would have financially profited from the deal.

A year or so after Dominique’s prophetic editorial, a state headed by the Duvaliers, the Bennetts and their rich allies of the Bord-de-Mer, the maritime commercial area of Port-au-Prince (Anglade 1982) indeed made sure that the country was their own and only their own. The rhetoric of state propagandists indeed painted an idyllic portrait of Jean-Claude’s Haiti, but to no avail. Soon, large fringes of the population would take to the streets and would “dechoukè”—uproot—the dictatorship.



On Tuesday, August 25, 1981, the twenty six political opponents were led to court in handcuffs and had to walk through double rows of military police armed with Uzi guns, who threatened and ridiculed them. The plaza in front of the Palais de Justice was encircled by Tontons Macoutes, and most of the people sitting in the tribunal were armed and were taking notes on who was attending the trial. In this Stalinist atmosphere, at 10:30 A.M., the Accusation Council, a team of government prosecutors among which Ulrich Rosarion served as a Sub-Commissioner for the Government, read accusations of which the prisoners were unaware until that moment. Of the twenty-six appointed defense lawyers, only five showed up at the tribunal, and an hour and a half before the trial began, four of these five lawyers withdrew themselves from the trial (Hooper 1981: 18). Members of the judiciary body later explained that, according to the Code of Criminal Procedure, only those accused who were charged with a specific crime could seek a lawyer, and since the crimes were not charged until the first hours of the trial by Rosarion and his colleagues, none of the defendants had access to legal counsel.

The twenty-six defendants were mostly between 20 and 40 years old and members of the hard-working middle class of Haiti (including an accountant, a secretary, a cartoonist, a chauffeur, a zoologist, a tailor, etc.). At the trial, they learned that they were accused of something they never participated in—arson and plotting against state security—and were condemned a few hours later to fifteen years of hard labor. Three people got a one-year prison sentence, which was often similar to the death penalty in those days (Nérée 1988). The Hooper report is chilling and presents a Kafkaesque trial where existing criminal codes and laws were invoked to silence political opponents. With this new form of political repression, the arbitrary and expedited justice of the Macoutes entered the legal sphere of the state, and organized trials

that reflected its blind practice of “justice”. In this sense, being a guardian and servant of the law strictly meant to obey the whims of the dictator and his henchmen.

I found the Hooper report in the Digital Library of the Caribbean after Mèt Rosarion passed away in June 2014. I observed and knew from Reynald that Mèt Rosarion almost never talked about this period and regretted the renewal of state brutality in the 1980s. Reynald told me many times that Mèt was bitter about his role during the last and catastrophic years of the rule of Jean-Claude Duvalier. However, Mèt Rosarion never ceased to work as a state jurist and maybe didn't have the choice of stepping down or refusing to participate in this parodic judiciary system. Again, I expose the case here not to judge Mèt Rosarion, but to understand the role and power of the black middle class in the state apparatus. As Simon Fass explains, the Ministry of Justice under Jean-Claude Duvalier comprised 1,250 employees, half of whom were not needed to fulfill the mandate of that department (Fass 1986: 59). In other words, many people worked for the state but didn't have any function in it. Many institutions that existed in a dormant state could be activated when the government needed them. They were supplied with a complacent middle class and could invent laws that paved the way for dictatorial decisions disguised as institutional systematicity. As such, the state is not a fixed entity with an immutable body of laws that govern all, but a malleable and dormant entity.

I will take another example of Mèt Rosarion's career to further this point. On April 18, 1986, Ulrick Rosarion, then Commissaire du Gouvernement (state prosecutor), issued instructions for the investigation of members of what he referred to as the “Duvalier criminal organization.” He nominated Emmanuel Dutreuil as the main investigative judge. The same year, a case was launched against Luc Desir for crimes including murder and torture, especially against members of former president Dumarsais Estimé's family. The corruption case lingered

and was reopened in 1999, 2008 and finally in 2011, when Jean-Claude Duvalier came back to Haiti and lived freely in his luxurious residence in Pétiion-Ville. Starting in 2008, the case of corruption and bribery was supplemented with charges of crimes against humanity. Several dignitaries of the Duvalier regimes were mentioned in the case. Mèt Rosarion's brother, Bernadin Rosarion, was accused of participating in financial crimes, crimes against humanity and "acts of corruption, abuse of authority, embezzlements of funds, gang association" (RNDDH 2012: 5). Mèt Rosarion only stayed a month in the position of Commissioner of the Government at the Court of First Instance and quit this political tribunal in May 1986 to work for the Labor Court. In moral terms, as a friend of Mèt Rosarion and an interpreter of the written and aural traces he left, I feel a certain ambiguity when considering the political legal cases in which he was involved. For most of his career, as Reynald told me, Mèt Rosarion worked on small cases, since the executive powers bypassed the tribunals for important issues or simple repression. Some documents Mèt showed me detail his day to day functions. Mainly, he took care of land litigations, burglaries and thefts or petty crimes. His role in major prosecutions seems to have been sporadic, and yet it informs us about the malleable nature of Haitian bureaucracy and of the rule of law.

I could placate an interpretive grid and state that, like many old guard Duvalierists, Mèt Rosarion condemned a profligate and shapeless state and advocated for the return of Indigéniste/noiriste values. However, Mèt Rosarion also wrote and promulgated the act of emancipation of Jean-Claude, in effect tracing his legal path to power. He co-presided over the most important and yet, legally speaking, the most arbitrary trial of the Duvalier era, which marked a period of intense repression of political dissent through legal workings. In brief, Mèt Rosarion is an important legal actor of the Jean-Claudiste dictatorship and, in the meantime, the

first state figure to launch an inquiry into the financial crimes of the late dictatorship. While his role as a jurist escapes interpretation, his stature as a member of the black middle class who saw in François Duvalier the incarnation of revolutionary ethics is undeniable.

The Dessalines Mèt Rosarion talks about in his poem is, in this regard, closer to the person of François Duvalier, who thought of himself as its reincarnation (Brazier 2010: 272). After all, the Dessalines of Mèt Rosarion speaks French and not Kreyol. He's the Emperor who speaks from Port-au-Prince and who doesn't allude to his provincial origins. In a sense, he is not the revolutionary who "formally renounce[d] the unjust custom of transmitting [his] power to [his] family" (Jenson quoting Dessalines 2011: 104). He is the incarnation of what Michel-Rolph Trouillot names the elite's conception of the "Father-State", where the personality of the people in power matter more than the political direction of their prerogatives. Simply put, the French-speaking Dessalines of Mèt Rosarion's French poetry is the revolutionary voice of what we could name a "Class-State", which was slowly eroded with the abandonment of noiriste and classist politics by Duvalier's son. In this regard, the poem "Ils nous aimaient tant...", in which Mèt Rosarion decries the disappearance of the founding fathers from the physical Haitian landscape, tells of a nostalgia for a bygone era where the ideals of the Haitian middle class have been crushed by military repression in 1950.

### **A Theory of the Dormant State**

"No matter how peripheral, ephemeral, or free-floating the charismatic figure we may be concerned with--the wildest prophet, the most deviant revolutionary--we must begin with the center and with the symbols and conceptions that prevail there if we are to understand him and what he means." Clifford Geertz, 1983

Mèt Rosarion often spoke of education and of the lack of schools in Haiti. On the afternoon of February 2014, as we sat in his courtyard talking about his granddaughter, who was

coming back from school, Mèt Rosarion told me that he had written here and there about the necessity of educating the masses: “Christophe avait ouvert des universités. Boyer les a fermées. L’éducation, c’était un acquis de la révolution” (field notes February 10, 2014). We can see the political binary of black/mulatto in this statement: Christophe represented black Haitian enlightenment and Boyer mulatto mercantilism and the self-serving interests of the bourgeoisie. However, Mèt Rosarion’s poems tell us more about his thoughts on what the state should do and on the influences it should draw from. In his intriguing poem *Ces femmes martyres*, which is dedicated to “revolutionary women without sepultures”, Mèt Rosarion points to the often unspoken role of women in the egalitarian ideals found in Haiti at different times in history. Talking about the last days of the Haitian revolution, Mèt Rosarion writes:

The blood that will be shed in the days to come  
Will give birth to a state where justice will reign.  
Slavery and torments will be memories.  
Everywhere, schools will educate the youth,  
Universities will form doctors;  
Urbanites and peasants full of wisdom  
Will be useful workers of the state.  
Many hospitals will strengthen our physical health,  
Of a state climbing the path of faith,  
We will become pacific citizens  
Who will only follow their own laws (Rosarion 1984: 51-52)

In a poem where he attributes these ideals to the struggles of heroic revolutionary women, Mèt Rosarion describes exactly what the Duvalier regimes didn’t sustain: the promotion of democratic ideals, public good and the advancement of all Haitians through education. In this light, his nostalgia for the Estimé period makes more sense. While the many competing ideological currents in the short Estimé presidency doesn’t allow for a clear reading of his political agenda, Estimé’s role as a Secretary of Education under president Sténio Vincent and the nomination of leftist Daniel Figiolé as Minister of Education and Public Health tell of his

interest for social questions. Mèt Rosarion admired Fig nolé because he was a fierce orator. He told me once that “Haiti missed its chance when he left Estimé’s government” (Field Notes, March 2014). Fig nolé, an anti-communist from the politically left aisle of the noiriste movement, cherished the idea of a Haitian style New Deal and wanted to reinforce state investment in public services. He lived in exile for the whole period of the Duvalier regime and came back to Port-au-Prince in February 1986, welcomed by thousands of supporters, only to die a few months later. Fig nolé, along with the repressed voices of martyr women, still embodies the unfulfilled promises of a political movement that would better the fate of the black lumpen-proletariat. However, at the time he wrote this poem, Mèt Rosarion worked for a state that could not even assure the basic infrastructural needs of the country. Only a small minority of regime affiliates, the traditional bourgeoisie and traders of “le Bord-de-Mer” (the Port-au-Prince seashore where large warehouse assured revenues to small groups), along with “apolitical” members of the state administrative apparatus, could access resources such as electricity or potable water in Port-au-Prince. Many drowsy political ideals may have infused the stultified state of Jean-Claude Duvalier, as Gérard Barthélémy has shown, but none of these ideals could be expressed or put into practice between 1957 and 1986. Instead, the Duvalierist state became an assemblage of myriad institutions that often had the same roles to fulfill but which were left totally uncoordinated. The education system collapsed, agriculture was suffocated by illegal smuggling of imported goods by members of the government (Lundhal 2002), and health infrastructure, especially in the provinces, dramatically unraveled. Mèt Rosarion’s wishes for an egalitarian welfare state were crushed by the regime he helped to bring to power and maintain.

Haiti generated revenues through custom tariffs, taxes and creatively cruel methods, for instance, the imposition of fees on Dominican planters and Haitian workers working in the

Dominican Republic (Dubois 2012). The mechanics of extraction worked well and, besides filling the hidden coffers of the regime's barons, served to finance an apathetic and mammoth administration. In 2011, in an important essay that describes the functioning of the state since 1957, Haitian political scientist Daniel A. Holly paints a portrait of state administrations as static entities where incompetency is a leading organizational tool used to cater to the financial extractive goals of the president and his clique. With a rapid drain of local experts who went into exile or disappeared into the regime's jails, François Duvalier was left with few Haitian agronomists, urbanists, economists, etc. to work with, and instead hired international experts and unqualified bureaucrats to manage the state's minimal functioning (Arthus 2013). Holly goes through state budgets and institutional history to describe a system where government functionaries were chosen from among loyal Duvalierists who did not have the needed background to fulfill their functions. In the meantime, competent subordinates do not have the powers to execute their tasks. Since formal work was scarce and lay-offs arbitrary, bureaucrats were compliant and docile. Most of them worked in anemic institutions where "objectives are imprecise, where mandates overlap, where coordination is quasi-absent, where centralization is sterilizing and excessive and where the managing of the workforce is absurd" (Holly 2011: 47).

From 1962 to 1987, state "incompetency [was] notorious... but desired" and was orchestrated through the anarchic proliferation of new institutions without clear long-term objectives (Holly 2011: 41). An administrative jumble was thus created on a whim by the dictator in order to place loyal friends or to respond to an immediate need, as in the creation of the Office National de Logement (National Office for Housing) created in 1976 to coordinate an international and national urban renewal project in the Saint martin neighborhood (Fass 1982).

Indeed, the urbanism sector, to this day, is managed through a dazzling array of institutions and ministries that compete with each other in order to obtain budgets and prerogatives. This takes place in an administrative maze where larger entities such as state administrations, regional administrations and communes also compete for the same goals. “All of this takes place in the most complete indifference of rulers. This indifference should not surprise us though. This will for inefficiency is a way to govern” (Holly 2011: 44). Hence, under the Duvalier regimes, floating administrative entities only assumed the minimal responsibilities, such as levying and repartition of tax revenues and maintaining minimum public services essential for society to function. It is worth pointing out that minimum public services such as trash collection or public health mainly functioned in Port-au-Prince, while the provinces were withering due to lack of budgets (the meager budgets they had were totally controlled by the central administration in the capital; see Anglade 1982).

As stated above, the Ministry of Interior and Defense took the lion’s share of the budget. In 1975, it represented approximately 30% of the whole state budget, which was more than justice, education and agriculture combined. Mèt Rosarion worked in an institution that employed hundreds of workers. The Ministry of Justice’s budget, until the early 1980s, mainly served to pay the salaries of its employees (Moise 1999). Furthermore, even though the constitution forbade interference from the executive in the courts’ decisions, the tribunals where Mèt Rosarion worked were frequently bypassed by the Duvaliers, who frequently used declarations of states of emergencies in order to use military tribunals over which the two dictators could easily preside (Lundhal 2002: 273). While the Duvaliers systematically use military tribunals, the practice was far from new in a country where many presidents came from the army or were under the direct authority of the military.



State institutions were, for the most part, fragmented and anemic administrative entities that didn't have the means to fulfill their mandates. In the meantime, an all-powerful dictatorial executive could activate any branch of the government when he felt the need. As shown in the mock trial in which Mèt Rosarion co-lead the accusation, the judiciary branch, which before Duvalier used to be a civilian parapet against authoritarian tendencies, suddenly became a major institution meant to root out political dissent. While the Haitian Duvalierist system functioned through ghostly structures assuring a minimum of public services, the Haitian state, with its reserves of bureaucrats and jurists and its ever-changing and ever-growing legal gray literature, could become a very potent structure when some of its branches were awakened.

Laurent Dubois provides a remarkable example of state efficiency when describing the 1983 eradication campaign of swine flu co-lead by the Haitian government and the U.S. Agency of International Development:

The only way to stop the disease from spreading, they insisted, was to slaughter the entire existing pig population in Haiti. Unlike many other government efforts in the countryside, this one was carried out with remarkable efficiency. 'We didn't imagine the Haitian state was capable of such determination and effectiveness', an economist who studied the situation later remarked (Dubois 2012: 352).

More than two million pigs were slaughtered, which worsened the economic tragedy of rural Haiti. While the state seems to be only a dysfunctional structure unable to meet any objectives, I argue and will ethnographically show that it potentially has the means and determination to carry out projects the national government and foreign allies deem to be important.

In this regard, instead of defining the Haitian state as a "failed" state, a "weak" state, or like Daniel Holly does, as a "ghost" state, I choose to define it as a *dormant state*. The dormancy of the state is not only traceable in the dozing appearance of state institutions or the forgotten

bodies of gray literature where conflicting laws coexist and can be mobilized for contrary purposes. The state is far more than an institutional entity and, as Benita Parry notes, enters “the social fabric, the intellectual discourse and the life of the imagination” (Parry 1993: 24). Hence, the dormant state also lies in spectral traces of revolutionary desires and the presence of leaders in the form of tombs, statues, buildings or bodily and material remnants. These remnants haunt the Haitian social body, with which these diffuse symbolic, ideological and affective elements are inherently associated.

As such, the patrimonial structures of Port-au-Prince, the revolutionary poetics of an old poet or the never-ending discussions centered around political leaders, their qualities and their legacies are part of an affective archive with multiple meanings and ideologies that can be reactivated by the sovereign state or the social body itself. In this regard, François Duvalier’s claims of reincarnation are far from being peculiar. In many ways, the Haitian state—understood as a transcendent authority and its administrative structure—is akin to the European state from which it inherited, through colonization, its centralizing tendencies and its charisma-based authority.

In *The King's Two Bodies*, historian Ernst Kantorowicz describes how political authority in modern European monarchies relies on the king’s two bodies: a *corpus natural*—the king’s body physical body that passes away with his death—and the *corpus mysticum*—the mystical and enduring body of the king accompanied by its attendant administrative structure that permeates society (Kantorowicz 1957). While Haitian revolutionary and counter-revolutionary leaders activated telluric political machineries to eliminate opponents or buy allegiances, the vast majority of them also took titles: Emperor, King, President for Life. They used political symbols and spaces—statues, street names, the National Palace, the golden crown of Emperor Soulouque

or the many material markers of power that are today displayed in the Museum of National Pantheon in the very heart of the capital—to ensure the legacy of their political practices and ideas.

The bodily remains of political leaders, their immaterial presence in the form of a “corps astral” (ethereal body) or in the form of Lwa (Voudou divinities such as Ogou Dessalines) and their enduring materiality in the form of houses, books, codes of laws, etc. are as important as the *corpus naturale* of the mortal political leader. In the meantime, these ethereal legacies that I have attempted to read in verses of vernacular poetry are carried on by the social body that enables what Clifford Geertz names the “inherent sacredness of sovereign power” (Geertz 1983). But taking the city, country and traces of political power as texts isn’t enough, and doesn’t render the complexity of polyphonic embodiments of the state.

As anthropologist Uli Linke suggests, the diffuse presence of the state is to be seen in more than its symbolic, discursive or imagined cultural forms. “Political worlds have a visual, tactile, sensory and emotional dimension: the life of the state has a corporal grounding” (Linke 2007: 206). When Mèt Rosarion sobbed while stating the name of his favorite president, there was more than the “effect or symptom of the ideo-symbolic machinations of national discourse” at play. His visible emotions pointed to an ambiguous embodiment of a collective national culture that couldn’t be enclosed in a readable system of political signification. In other words, the state enters our subjective experiences and moves in our bodies in seemingly imperceptible ways. It partially enters our gaze and nourishes our anxieties, notably by relying on outward signifiers such as race and class identification.

As I will show later, following anthropologist Towns Middleton, anxiety as a social bodily affect fuels political possibilities and impossibilities through the spread of rumors,

unequal distribution of resources and categorizations that bear on individuals feelings of belonging. While the state may seem weak or ghostly from a bureaucratic viewpoint, I argue that its potency lies in its most invisible affective features. As Foucault notes, it penetrates our lives as “the eye of power [that seeks to gain] access to individuals themselves, to their bodies, their gestures and all their daily actions” (Foucault 1980: 148). Even more surreptitiously, it penetrates our senses and “engrafts itself in and through the memory of the senses” (Linke 2007: 6). As such, in its affective abilities, the dormant state is a capillary, omnipresent force that awakens in the contact zones between subjectivities and administrative apparatuses.

As a country often attacked or supervised by foreign states and international institutions, the issue of sovereignty, of its material and immaterial markers and of its affective presence are key issues for understanding the present feelings of estrangement and the nationalist/anti-nationalist sentiments that constantly come back in conversations, aesthetic creations and daily routines in Haiti. Hence, the notion of a dormant state is multi-faceted and the dormancy of certain political legacies can be felt within the state as social body, as in repressed political desires or nostalgia for autocratic forms of power; and in the state as a sovereign power whose prerogatives are undercut by an all-powerful “republic of NGOs” that inefficiently cater to many social needs in a chaotic and fragmented fashion (Katz 2012).

Through the life story of Mèt Rosarion, I have shown the complexity and plurivocality of revolutionary poetics and ideologies, nationalist feelings and ambiguous positions vis-à-vis realpolitik through the conflicting values at play in one man’s state career. I have also explored the role of pallid institutions in the erection of what Rolph Trouillot names a totalitarian system. In the reminder of my dissertation, I will refine this notion of a dormant state by ethnographically analyzing an omnipresent state that surfaces unexpectedly in the detours of

conversations, in personal opinions and in historical narratives, or that forcefully appears in the guise of government-sponsored social housing projects erected in the middle of barren areas of the country. In other words, the state I describe is not only a monolithic Leviathan transcending the population and landscape it governs, but also an immanent process that affect the states of individuals and networks through lack or profusion of local, national and global governance. Far from being the often vilified weak state or failed state, I argue that the Haitian state(s), while superficially seeming etiolated and incoherent, still contains its germs of egalitarian practices and, in addition, its autocratic impulses.

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**DAILY LIFE IN THE SHOTGUN NEIGHBORHOODS:**  
**FEMALE ECONOMIES AND AUTONOMY IN DOWNTOWN PORT-AU-PRINCE**

In this chapter, I detail and analyze the life history of Clomène Firmin, a *ti komèsan* (small business person) who, until May 2014, ran several commercial activities from her shotgun house located in the heart of Monatuf. As previously seen, Monatuf is an area where the ethos and material culture of black middle classes durably marked this part of the capital. Clomène lives in the house where she formerly worked as a maid for a woman who held a job in the Presses Nationales, a state owned printing company. While the owner left the house to settle in Canada in 1997, her presence still partially orders the life around her house. In order to reflect on the material, moral and social texture of economic exchanges that are not hierarchical, I describe the material settings that enable Clomène to do business. Clomène is a 43 year old woman who was born in the region of Grand' Anse, in Chambellan, a small commune located in the mountains at the southwestern tip of the island. She was fourteen when she moved to Port-au-Prince in order to perform domestic work for a family inhabiting the *katyè popilè* (popular/low-income neighborhood) that started to expand after 1986 on the location of the Bicentenaire international fair, on the southeastern shores of the capital. When I met Clomène, she was living

with her husband Alain and her three children, Bob, Francesca and Kyra who all went to reputable schools in this part of the capital.

Since the 2010 earthquake, her sister Monique and three of her children lived in Clomène's house, as their apartment in Delmas 32 collapsed a few days after the disaster. "It's a miracle," Monique told me, "none of my seven children were hurt. My oldest one, Enzy, got badly injured on the head but he's now doing okay. He lives with his father in Poste Marchand." Clomène's family and Monique's family coexisted peacefully in a 13x48 ft. four-room shotgun house. The house was probably built in the 1910s, given the stucco Greek columns sustaining the gable and ornamenting the front porch that became fashionable during this era in the Caribbean (Crain 1994). The house has a corrugated iron steep roof and high ceilings, elevated floors tiled with pink and green earthenware tiles. Its well-built timber, brick and cement structure enabled it to resist the earthquake. "I was cooking in the courtyard and the house began to shake hard. It was like everything bent to the right and to the left like a palm tree shaken by high winds! Two little rooms I had built in the back courtyard collapsed completely [krazè net]. I sort of rebuilt one but we don't inhabit it, it's a *ti kay* for the Lwa [a small house for Vodou deities]." The back courtyard comprises a small outdoor bathroom with a deep well, and an area covered by a tin roof that covers the kitchen and the three large chest freezers that enable Clomène to lead a sustainable cold drink business. There is a four foot wide corridor on the left side of the house and a 16x16 ft. front courtyard closed by an iron gate that opens onto Rue du Champ de Mars. Clomène runs her business from her back courtyard while Monique sells fruits from the front courtyard starting in late afternoon, when she is done with her daily chores such as going to the Kwa Bosal market, cleaning the house, and cooking. Both sisters were able to generate a

sufficient income to make their families live and often told me they deemed their lives in this part of the city very agreeable.

In this chapter, I detail Clomène's life history and business practices to explain how a working class – namely people who are working and making enough to get by - that has been present since the neighborhood's early days maintains itself in a place constantly reshaped by local responses to global economic and political fluctuations. In addition to standard techniques of participant observation and interviews, I use what sociologist Margarethe Kusenbach terms “go-along methods” where “fieldworkers accompany individual informants on their ‘natural outings’ and – through asking questions, listening and observing – actively explore their subjects’ stream of experiences as they move through, and interact with, their physical and social environment” (Kusenbach 2003: 463). Drawing from a patchwork of recorded interviews, notes, audio recording of go-along situations (walks, rides or interactions within Clomène's home), and of written excerpts of conversations, I offer a rough sketch of the map of an incredibly vast and complex network of female vendors. In addition, I reproduce bits of interviews I conducted with Clomène's lifelong friends to map the life of working class people in the Monatuf neighborhood. To provide historical and ethnographic density, I combine ideas, words and vignettes in novels, historical narratives, archival material and many small conversations recorded in my field notes. The mobilization of spatial, social and economic knowledge and forces among Haitian women is built on a long history of woman-led autonomy that still infuses the streets of the old districts of the capital.

I mainly use information I gathered between September 2013 and June 2014. Clomène, her husband Alain and her children Bob, Kyra and Francesca remain dear friends of mine; they opened their house to me and shared with me their insights and intimate thoughts. I only



recorded interviews with people I knew well, generally after a long period of interaction. I gathered pieces of interesting conversations in written form, remembering the words as best as I could, usually along with my field associate Aland Joseph. We often sat in small bars, restaurants or in Clomène's well ventilated house to take a break from the smog filled streets and high temperatures, and in order to set down our observations on paper.

Clomène's house was not only a place where I observed and recorded ethnographic information; it was also my main hang-out, where I often engaged in small talk, helped with various chores, read books to or sketched with the kids, watched soccer and French soap-operas with friends, took naps on plastic chairs, poured buckets of water over my head and dried out sitting on a chest freezer, or played dominoes in the shade of the back porch. Some of these activities often led to in-depth conversations and relevant observations. While I will briefly detail my encounter and relation with Clomène, a friendship between a black Haitian woman and a white Frenchman that inherently brings to the fore power issues of gender, age, class and race, I let Clomène's words and practices guide the analysis.



*Figure 31 Clomène (Aland Joseph, February 2014)*

Rue du Champ de Mars, where Clomène lived until May 2014, is a narrow street where the usual medley of traffic—pedestrians, buses, SUVs, taxis—rush past vending stands that occupy most of the sidewalk space. The majority of the buildings on the street are one or two stories tall, with rectangular bases, small twelve to fourteen feet street façades, and several consecutive square rooms that make the buildings resemble train cars. The buildings range from derelict wooden houses and quake-shattered cinder-block commercial structures to brand new funeral homes, colorful shotgun houses of all shapes and small apartment buildings. On Rue du Champ de Mars, a passerby can encounter wooden vernacular structures as well as functionalist commercial buildings. The street facades are often painted in bright warm colors; the architecture is very diverse and the traffic constant during the day. Commercial specialties divide this rectilinear street. From the Mausoleum Plaza, which marks the western boundary of a street that runs a quarter of a mile straight to the seashore Henry Truman boulevard, there are roughly four 200-foot sections: mattresses and upholstery; new and second hand electronics up to Rue du Centre; imported alcohols and homemade liquors; woodcrafts and handmade furniture often sold directly from workshops with twelve-foot street facades. In between these businesses, many women sell dry goods, fried food, cosmetic products, cold drinks or fruit from the porch of their homes.



*Figure 32 A view from Clomène frontyard onto Rue du Champ de Mars (Joos, March 2014)*

The main arteries of the old city center are full of commercial and professional activities that take place on the semi-private space of the porch or directly on the sidewalks. Behind these commercial and rectilinear streets, narrow corridors meander through an eclectic city and provide shortcuts for pedestrians who go about their business in this part of town. Corridors historically offered “sanctuaries” where “informal social life,” exchange of information, services and goods could (and can) unfold away from colonial, imperial or state authorities (Wade 1967: 73). Behind the street facades, work activities such as casket making or mattress crafting take place in small open spaces or in workshops which, like most of the residences that compose the bulk of the corridors’ built environment, are roughly twelve-by-twelve rooms of cinder block roofed with sheet metal applied over a thin wood structure (see photo). Most commercial activities, however, occur on the street or front porches or in front courts of buildings and houses. Today, this lively section of Port-au-Prince is home to hard-working people. Merchants, mechanics, carpenters or welders exist alongside with students, lawyers, teachers or state

employees in a zone that was mainly populated by the black middle class from 1940 to 1980, as I described in chapter two.

Clomène's shotgun house was located in the "mattress section" of Rue du Champ de Mars, in a district of the capital where merchants with low financial capital navigate a commercial arena where they have historically been "*peze souse* (squeezed and sucked) by the economic elite through inequitable trade practices and tax burdens, without benefit or political enfranchisement" (McAllister 2002: 11). Victims of state-sponsored evictions, repression and inequitable trade policies, the women who sell goods on the sidewalks or from domestic spaces are also vilified by the press, the upper classes and state administrators as agents of "uncontrolled, fast and anarchic slumification [bidonvilisation incontrôlée, rapide et anarchique]" of downtown Port-au-Prince (Malebranche 2000). However, while explicitly acknowledging powerlessness in the face of institutional violence, these women craft economic niches that often financially sustain their families by creatively using their domestic spaces/skills. Most women I spoke with emphasized their hard work, attachments to place, skills, reputations and large yet reliable social networks as factors that allowed them to create spheres of female autonomy in a region where formal work and trade are essentially male-dominated domains. To paraphrase Mintz, the gains of small commerce are financially thin but socially rewarding as the multiple relations based on trust and exchange allow for opportunities and communal help when need be (Mintz 1966).

Massive importations of goods and food from the United States began in 1994 after the end of the coup years marked by economic recessions and the unravelling of Haitian agriculture (1991-1994). They greatly disrupted the local market economies in which women thrived as vendors, intermediaries and bulk sellers of Haitian-grown produce. Tapping into their knowledge

of the geography and popular local trade conventions, many women have found creative ways to diversify their businesses and to adapt to an economic globalization that mainly reinforced male-driven sectors such as customs, wholesale businesses or global consumer retail items (Harley 2007). Moreover, while the desire for formal and stable employment exists, most women I spoke with favor the autonomy and social rewards the informal sector provides. Often experienced with domestic work and subaltern positions in industries and services, many prefer informal commerce since it enables women to work with flexible schedules, engage with people they trust in egalitarian relations and to do the domestic chores that add work hours to their already busy days.

In order to avoid falling into the so-called “resistance trope” that pushes many ethnographers to romanticize precarious and subaltern work practices as acts of rebellion within a binary of power and oppositional acts (Sahlins 1993), I argue that working within markets, while constantly structuring informal commercial networks, shapes and is shaped by forms of economic, spatial and social control that the state and private sector refuse to these women. Following anthropologist Kathleen Millar, I argue that informal commerce provides “a relative degree of control over work activities and time [that] enables [female merchants] to sustain relationships, fulfill social obligations, and pursue life projects in an uncertain everyday” (Millar 2014: 35). In order to understand the opportunities and burdens of informal and formal work, I also detail the budgets, work hours and hierarchical relations of women working in the public and private sector who live in Monatuf. I describe forms of relational autonomy and obligations through analysis of women’s spatial practices, of their self-image and self-understanding, and of the places they deem important to their activities and lives.

These relations and transactions, whether they take place in corridors, on sidewalks or front porches, are constitutive of and constituted by a built environment that stands as a testimony of changing regimes of power and economy. The transformation of this environment into a commercial hub by businesswomen potentially disrupts chains of legitimacy that are based on notions of heritage through human engagement with fragmented and spectral traces (González-Ruibal 2008; Stoler 2008). It also transforms the primary meanings of architectural forms meant to foster family life and not public transactions. However, informal commerce, in this part of town, has been commonplace even if merchants only transited through these streets until recently. As such, commercial trades are not only shaped by a built environment that stands as a messy archive of past political, familial and residential regimes but are also formed by flexible traditional skills learned in the provinces or in the city over a long term period. As geographer Owain Jones notes, “richness, potential and creative, emerges not simply from the moment per se, but from the legacies of the past carried into the present, not least through memory which underpins imagination, creativity and (productive) affective exchange” (Jones 2011: 875). Hence, the practices of women working in commercial spheres has to be understood in its dialectic relation to an environment that conjures up a history of disasters, state brutality, colonial, imperial and international military occupation. Many people who “inherited” living space also inherited a certain set of values and behavioral codes.

This environment, in the meantime, echoes past commercial practices of a neighborhood that was home to skilled workers and merchants when it was erected in 1751. As Mintz and Trouillot argue, enslaved people carved an exceptionally robust marketing system out of the limited liberties they had in selling the product of their gardens or of their artisanal skills (Mintz 1978; Trouillot 2003). These areas of relative commercial freedom were “symbolic domains for

the production of individual selves by way of production of material goods” (Trouillot 2003: 230). The construction of reputations and the use of historical structures and of a grid of streets mapped out during the colonial era anchor women’s practices and lives in a complex social history of disrupted spatial and commercial order. By taking care of their homes and streets and by maximizing the opportunities this dense and mobile space offers, the businesswomen of Monatuf develop spheres of belonging and deep attachments to a part of the city from which they are constantly rejected by state authorities.

As a watermark, I track women’s rights to the city negatively constituted in everyday practices and reflexive discourses. In his definition of the right to the city, Henri Lefebvre argues that people should not only freely access urban resources but also have the right to reshape the process of urbanization by changing and producing the city themselves (Lefebvre 1968). Beyond utilitarian goals, the right to the city and the right to produce space involve the “question of what kind of people we want to be, what kinds of social relationships we seek, what relations to nature we cherish, what style of life we desire, what aesthetic values we hold” (Harvey, 2012: 4). Hence, investigating the transformation of shotgun houses gives insight into intimate conceptions of individual and collective selves and opens inquiries about the multiple social, ecological and cultural relations humans sustain to remake themselves (Park 1967; Lefebvre 1970; Harvey 2009). Talking with my informants about their houses, following and observing them in the places they deem important in their lives while recording information about neighborhoods, buildings, their perception and uses provide “insights into the texture of spatial practices by revealing the subjects’ various degrees and types of engagement in and with the environment” (Kusenbach 2003: 466). Hence, my analysis tries not to divorce spatial settings and human agency which dialectical relations inform the processes leading to autonomy.

## **Vernacular Inheritance of Private Space**

In the mattress section of Rue du Champ de Mars, three mattress vendors face wooden shotgun houses. Close to the corner, at Funeral Street, sellers attract customers by showcasing their finest handmade mattresses on the sidewalks and by cajoling and conversing with passersby. Behind them, the gated front courtyards of houses serve as workshops that are bustling with activity: workers are stuffing mattresses, painstakingly cutting, cleaning and sewing pieces of recycled mattress fabric together and working on various models which range from inexpensive clothing-stuffed mattresses to carefully crafted springs and foam mattresses.

Clomène Firmin moved in this part of Rue du Champ de Mars in 1994, when her daughter Francesca was four months old. I first started visiting Clomène's house in September 2013. A friend of mine introduced me to her and I was readily allowed to be part of the hand-picked circle of friends who were allowed to buy and enjoy refreshments in the front courtyard when her workday was over. Carl, Aland and I started to hang out at Clomène's very often, as it was one of the few quiet places in this busy part of town. The fact that I am a white Frenchman often led to conversations about politics or history and the tense relations between Haiti and my home country. I explained many times what I was doing as an ethnographer and my advocacy for historical recognition and for financial reparations from France often helped me to open meaningful conversations. However, Clomène didn't engage me on the historical level as many men and often did; she readily accepted me as a "moun debyen" (decent or reputable person) since I was recommended to her by her close friend.

Our first conversations were about the rumors of demolitions in her neighborhood and the lack of transparency from the state regarding its intentions. A perceptible anxiety was infusing the whole neighborhood, as the state regularly conducted demolitions of areas it needed to create



parking lots, build governmental buildings, or more recently, to expand the national penitentiary located at the north eastern end of Rue de l'Enterrement. Conversations about our respective positions and my own privileges came much later. However, after I explained my research interests to Clomène, she told me that documenting her house and her life could be helpful to her and her family. As she knew very well, her house was inscribed in the ISPAN list of national heritage sites that should be preserved. While she told me frankly that she didn't have any hope that her home would be spared from the violent state evictions and demolitions, she deemed it important to record her own story. Clomène Firmin is a hard-working woman who is proud of her family's accomplishments and who maintains an excellent reputation in her neighborhood. As we will see, reputation and rumors are extremely important in her line of work; gossip fashions a future made of uncertainty while reputation allows one to conduct good business or get back on one's feet during or after hard times. Therefore, Clomène wanted me to use her real name and to collaborate, working together to document a life she chose and deemed rich and fulfilling.



*Figure 33 Monique selling mangoes in front of Clomène's house (Aland Joseph, April 2013)*

Clomène took great care of her four-bedroom shotgun house and took pride in the house's interior ornamental details. While she stored mattresses in the screened front room of her brick and timber house, she didn't make it the main part of her business. "The real owner of the house wants the front sidewalk free of any activity. She lives in Canada and almost never comes back here, but I respect what she wants. We only use the front courtyard for the fruit business, a few hours at the end of the day. I just store my neighbors' overstock and get a little bit from what I can sell." As previously stated, this part of the neighborhood, until the mid-1980s, was primarily inhabited by state employees, members of the military, lawyers, craftsmen (especially in the funerary industry) and the people who worked for them. Many members of the black middle class that emerged between 1946 and 1970 and consolidated itself through military and civil service lived in this politically charged place (Nicholls 1996: 235).

Many people living here today have work or kin relationships with proprietors who passed away, went to live abroad or moved elsewhere in the city. According to Madanm Batiste, a 85 year-old woman who has lived on Funeral Street since 1938 and who has a very sharp visual memory, a great many of long-term residents began to move away in the late 1980s. Madanm Batiste, who raised Clomène along with her three daughters and two sons in this neighborhood, stated in her soft voice: “30 years or so ago, people started to leave this neighborhood, moving in newly built neighborhoods located in the hills of Port-au-Prince or abroad. I don’t leave my *baz* [headquarters] anymore, I stay here on the porch or inside since I don’t know anyone anymore” (field notes March 2014). Madanm Batiste often insisted that her former daily routines, such as sharing food with neighbors and friends, sitting on the street porch and chatting, have been disrupted since the coup period of the early 1990s (1991-1994) where random political violence, and especially gendered-based violence plagued the streets of Port-au-Prince (James 2010). As anthropologist Erica Caple James notes, this period completely disrupted daily routines and long-term social relations to create forms of “ontological insecurity” that influences “the experience of subjectivity and embodiment on both the individual and collective levels” (James 2010: 133). Between 2003 and 2006 and then between 2009 and 2014, this area of town was not the target of state, gang or U.N. violence. However, the past layers of violent disruption of daily life and the 2010 earthquake profoundly modified social relations in this neighborhood. A sense of mistrust, self-imposed limitations in use of public and private space and anxieties deeply infuse daily lives there. While Madanm Batiste refuses to leave her neighborhood to live in her spacious house located in La Plaine, in northern Port-au-Prince, she complains that micro semi-private spaces have completely disappeared for her, especially after the earthquake, when distant relatives of her neighbors took over the empty space of her shared alley.

In February, my field associate Aland Joseph and I conducted a small survey in order to see who rented and who owned the places they lived in. We drew a map of the neighborhood, numbered street façades and used a random number generator software to determine on which doors we would knock. On this random sample of 50 housing units comprising single houses and apartments in Rue du Champ de Mars and Rue de l'Enterrement, we found out that 8% of these units were occupied by proprietors, 44% were rented and 40% were inhabited by people who had ties to proprietors or worked in these houses. We couldn't determine the status of four places we inquired about because people refused or didn't have time to talk with us. One building was supposedly inhabited by squatters whom my friends identified as "bandi" (thieves), and my friends strictly forbade me to engage with them. This short survey pointed to a peculiar mode of inheritance where the bonds with house owners allowed people to stay indefinitely in the houses they occupied. While I didn't find any apartment unit that wasn't rented ("affermé" or rented for a full year with prices ranging from \$1600 a year for a (roughly) 400 sq. ft. one bedroom apartment to \$3000 a year for an apartment the same size with modern amenities), many single concrete and wooden houses were passed on in a singular fashion.

During this survey, we mainly had short conversations about the renting/owning situation in the neighborhood. We told people that we would not use their real names and that we were gathering information on the neighborhood in order to publish an article in the *Nouvelliste* in order to talk about the rich cultural, historical and social texture of an old neighborhood that should not be demolished by the government. This article was our primary goal and it indeed contributed to exposing the lack of compensation or solutions for people brutally evicted from their homes in May 2014 (Joos and Joseph 2014). I will come back to this article in the next chapter but wanted to mention that the position we took helped us to make durable contacts. This

survey allowed us to know a few people well and to converse with them often during the pre-demolition period (February- May 2014). One of the people we met, Boss Joel, became a key interlocutor during this period. Boss Joel often sutured together for us different periods of political crisis and clarified for us urban changes and the populations they affected.

Boss Joel, who ran a fridge repair workshop, lived in a pink shotgun house on Rue du Champ de Mars since 1974. In those days, parts of the house were used as a tailoring business. Boss Joel was a young tailor hailing from the Saint-Marc region, two hours north of Port-au-Prince, when he started to live and work in this house. His neighbor, the elder Monsieur Léliot started to rent his house in 1965 but has not paid his rent since 1974, date when he saw the proprietor of the house for the last time. Monsieur Léliot doesn't have any idea what happened to the man who owned his house and several others on the block. However, Boss Joel, who "doesn't like to talk about politics" but who only talks about politics, hypothesizes that the "Duvalier regime got rid of him in one form or another. As a man who owned lots of property in downtown Port-au-Prince, he would have been killed by some political group at some point in his life anyway" (Boss Joel, March 2014). Boss Joel's ties to the place where he lived remained unclear and I could not figure out if the proprietors were still around or not. Boss Joel lived with his son, a tailor who operated from the back room where he worked and lived. The middle room of the three room shotgun house was inhabited by his adopted daughters whose parents passed away in the earthquake, a 14-year-old and her 6-year-old step sister who were, in Boss Joel terms, "the apples of his eyes". Boss Joel's house was destroyed at 5am on May 28, 2014. I will come back to his powerful insights on commodification of space and the suffocating political atmosphere that prevents people from protesting in the chapter on demolitions.

Clomène Firmin shared a similar story. After years of difficult low-paid domestic work for family members and people who mistreated her, she came to Rue du Champ de Mars to work for Madame Lucille in 1994 on a recommendation made by Madanm Batiste. Clomène lived in the back room of the house with her baby, Francesca, who was just four months old when she settled in. Clomène developed a strong relationship with Madame Lucille that still binds her to certain social obligation and orients her moral compass today. As Clomène states:

I like Madame Lucille because we lived so well together. When she comes back from Canada, I prepare the house for her. I tell Alain [Clomène's husband] that we need to prepare the house for her. I know she likes shallots, so I buy shallots. I know she likes smoked herring, so I buy smoked herring and I make paté for her [a savory pastry filled with a thick spicy tomato-herring sauce]. She likes meat a lot. So I buy small cases of frozen turkey legs and wings and store them in my freezer. She's not rich and when she comes, she doesn't have money. So I fix the house and prepare her meals because I don't want her to suffer [m pa vle li soufri]. That's why she loves me too. I take care of her. She really likes me.

Her distant family gossips about me [tripotay]. Her cousin and distant relatives do. But she says that I am the one who needs to take care of her house. Her house looks good, and she appreciate that. When she last came in 2004, she felt the house was beautiful and clean. She's very old, she cannot work, so I'm taking care of her. We're like family. If the house is demolished, I have plans to store her furniture and belongings.

Look, she called me one time and told me that she has a relative who lives in one other of her houses in Kafou who called her to tell her bad things about me. Madame Lucille told her: 'Clomène lives here since 1994, and when I left in 1997, I told her to take care of the house. I don't have anything to reproach her.' With age comes wisdom! She called a friend of hers who worked at Presse Nationale, a lady who sometimes comes and have lunch with me. She told Madame Lucille: "I've never seen anything fishy at Clomène's. She's not living a bad life [li pa mennen vyie vi]. She takes care of her baby Francesca, walks her to school, keeps the house clean and in good shape." I have nothing to reproach myself with. But some people of her family who would like to get the house spread gossip [fè twipotay], just things that aren't true. Madame Lucille says: "I know Clomène is not a wreck [epav], she's not a tramp [vagabon]. She's serious and that's why I trust her."

I am very careful not to engage with too many people in the neighborhood [katyè] because people gossip. I know some people here and there but I don't engage with people living too close to my house. I go to people in the neighborhood I know very well, but not very often. You have to be very careful. Madame Lucille always told me not to engage too much with people in the neighborhood, she doesn't want too many of them coming here. And I'm the same, I don't want too many people coming here. I live here by myself, with my children, my friends and my family. I don't go and sit at other people's houses. I

don't like these kinds of things. [M rete nan kay nan pèsonèl, avec pitit mwen, zanmi m, fanmi m. Men m pa ale chita kay moun, m pa renmen yon bagay konsa.]”

In this excerpt of an interview I conducted in her courtyard in March 2014, Clomène explains briefly how she came to live in her house but explains at length how she maintains her reputation while being accused of wrongdoings by people coveting her house. Even if Madame Lucille hasn't come to the house for the past ten years, Clomène “keeps a place in her heart” for her [“m gen plas nan kè pou li”]. Madame Lucille, a widow who held a state job and raised her daughter as a single mother, took Clomène in her home while Clomène was a single mother too. As Madame Lucille's health declined in the late nineties and prevented her from walking great distances, Clomène brought groceries at the market for her, cooked and took care of the house. While Madame Lucille wasn't financially wealthy, she was educated, spoke French fluently and had strict rules for herself as a lady of relatively high social status. As Clomène recalls, she was very elegant, reserved and had high expectations for her daughter as well as for Francesca, Clomène's daughter. Madame Lucille valued her middle-class standing based on formal work, privacy, family and hierarchy which all make the contours of traditional Caribbean “respectability” for many women of her social class (Burton 1997). Even if Clomène does small commerce in the cracks of Madame Lucille's rules by using the front room of the house as storage space, for instance, some of her former employer's values transpire in Clomène's life. *In other words, Clomène inherited a set of values and behavioral codes specific to the black middle-class which praised integrity and respectability* (as seen in previous chapter on the Rosarion family). Church-going, participation in children's school activities, screening of relations for herself and her relatives, absence of neighborly promiscuity and a desire to appear as a morally upstanding woman are values and practices Clomène made part of her own social self.



*Figure 34 Inside Clomène's house (Joos, February 2014)*

Traditionally, working class and middle class values have been described as oppositional categories in the Caribbean. The notion of “reputation” has repeatedly been opposed by anthropologists of the Caribbean to “respectability” in a binary of values and behaviors built against colonial racial and social expectations (Wilson 1973; Miller 1994). Briefly, reputation has been described, especially in Peter Wilson famous *Crab Antics*' ethnography in Providencia, a small Columbia island off the Nicaragua coast, as a form of flexible adaptability where verbal skills, economic guile, personal authority orient social recognition and economic opportunities. In the same communities, middle class respectability is a “counter-value that emphasizes the achievement of rank in the community through acquiring property, forming a stable family, and participating in education and religion” (Wilk 2001: 45). In the case of Clomène and of many people who live in houses where they previously work or lived (as family member, guest, worker, partner, etc.), there is no clear-cut behavioral patterns of respectability or reputation. Living downtown in houses that formerly belonged to a relatively powerful group of middle



class blacks who clearly demonstrated penchants towards respectability oriented values comes with certain responsibilities. Moreover, Haiti's peasantry values property owning as well and makes the home compound the basis for thriving family lives. Land owners, small and large, also share a certain business minded perspective as they use their estate to grow the cash crops in demand and often gain respectability from their ability to succeed in tough negotiations. As the large majority of working class Haitians hail from the rural provinces, these desires of stability and abilities to conduct business through networks of trusted people traverse this area of the capital.

Reputation as perceived self-value is indeed an important element of recognition and economic integration. I often witnessed what Wilson was talking about in masculine circles where the ability to tell jokes, narrate captivating stories or to enter loud commercial negotiations, even for small bags of water, indeed conferred a certain aura to the group's members. But maintaining one's respectability by going to church, being able to talk about cultural matters while crafting solid arguments or taking care of one's family and home are quintessential values of many people I met in Monatuf. I argue that displays of reputation or respectability are *situational* and that the ghostly presence of a cast of middle class proprietor deeply influence people's social, economic and spatial practices.

Clomène fears gossip and fights to maintain her respectability, as shown in the interview excerpt above. She's not "living an old life" neither is she a "wreck", expressions that connote sexual depravity and lack of family values. For instance, she goes to Eglise Saint-Anne, one of the major Catholic churches of Port-au-Prince, every Sunday but keeps her own Vodou beliefs private and serves her Lwa, all of them from the Rada nanchons (benevolent family of Vodou deities such as Freda, Legba and La Sirène whom Clomène serves) in a small hidden space in the

far left corner of her back courtyard. Public display of her spiritual practices, like going to Vodou ceremonies or talking about her beliefs, would cast her as a “*moun andeyò*” – a peasant, but literally a person that is geographically, socially, politically, economically “outside” -- and would potentially make her the target of accusations of witchcraft:

At home, in Jérémie, I would go to *fèt patwonan* [saints’ celebrations where Catholics and Vodouyan participate] and I would never have a problem if I went to a mambo or houngan [Vodou priest] to ask for something or to get better if I’m sick. People are knowledgeable of natural medicine where I’m from, and we know with whom we can work and with whom we can’t. Each family has its own mambo or houngan. Here, in Port-au-Prince, you don’t know who is a good oungan or a charlatan. People do their things individually or go back in the countryside when something urgent is needed [*fè bagay pèsonèl*]. You’ll find people who openly serve in the neighborhood, mostly men. I know a few good people, but even with them, I don’t engage in conversations about my beliefs. People see you going to church, and if you serve or not doesn’t make you a better or worse Catholic. I’m a good Catholic, I love my church.

Clomène and her husband Alain share the same beliefs but both keep them very private. Moreover, Francesca belongs to the powerful Adventist church of the neighborhood and could be expelled for participating in witchcraft if her mother’s practices were known. As she told me half-jokingly, “the preacher says Vodou is dealing with the devil [*sèvi Lwa se sèvi dyab*]. I don’t think it’s the devil but I don’t want to be associated with it. It’s an old tradition for my mom [*yon bagay lontan*]. I respect it as her culture but I don’t want to have anything to do with it. It’s real, it’s powerful and dangerous. My religion condemns it.” While practicing Vodou in certain rural parts of Haiti can be beneficial for one’s reputation and authority, *sèvi Lwa* in certain districts of Port-au-Prince is seen as out of place, non-modern and potentially damaging for members of family who, more and more, adhere to radical Christian Protestant churches that actively fight Vodou practitioners. In the private sphere, as shown with the example of Francesca, people do not have problems combining several forms of religions, spiritual practices and going to different churches to serve various faith-based and telluric needs (Payton 2013). Francesca, like my friend

Brunel whose story opened the introduction of this work, both belong to churches that vehemently oppose Vodou in discourse and on the ground. However, both of them accept their parents' spiritual beliefs.

Madame Lucille was self-sufficient, in a certain way, and didn't have to worry too much about what people thought of her in order to maintain her stable income and the social recognition that came when holding a formal job. This quest of respectability that emerged in the Caribbean under colonial rule somewhat follows Western indicators of social status such as education, work, religion and family life but work against these European based hierarchies by opening social uplift to people of color (Wilson 1973). For Clomène, whose commerce thrives on trust and durable friendships and whose domestic spatial practices are partially shaped by Madame Lucille's expectations, reputation is as important as respectability. One's reputation is based on personal, rather than perceived social, worth and entails a complex individual ethics (Momsen 1993). For Clomène, it means being able to buy and sell the finest and rarest products, for instance. Her skill at commercial negotiations, her vast business network and connections to people from various social strata enable her to buy name-brand clothing at cheap prices. A week before school starts in September, a selected clientele swing by her house to buy fine shoes, pants or shirts for their children. "People know I sell clean and nice clothes and that I sell at a fair price. I don't need to advertise on the radio! The same people have been coming here for years!" As such, Clomène is seen as a "moun debyen" – a good person – who engages in egalitarian relations and doesn't take advantage of people. Again, she doesn't break Madame Lucille's rules by transforming the house into a store but sells to a hand-picked clientele of friends and acquaintances. People who come to buy things from Clomène will have a seat in the living room [fè yon ti chita pale], will drink an ice-cold *gazeuse* and exchange news, as in a

courtesy visit. She balances reputation and respectability in order to remain a good house care-taker while engaging in transactions that demand social skills based on one's reputation.

Clomène is also praised for her display of solidarity with family and friends. For instance, after the 2010 earthquake, Clomène welcomed her sister and her family readily. She also welcomed two old friends for a one-year period who generally come by her place at least once a day to bring groceries or to share a meal with her. Everyone work in and around the house, share the sleeping spots and the food in an egalitarian fashion. I couldn't keep track of who was coming by and their relation to Clomène and Monique and was surprised to see that the house was open for many and the food shared without verbal invitation. The sharing of space and good was fluid in the welcoming atmosphere of Clomène's household. As anthropologist Laura Wagner notes, not sharing food, especially for people from the Grande Anse region, is a serious breach of social norms and a display of contempt (Wagner 2014). Being perceived as an individualist person who only allows her nuclear family to live in her private space would certainly be damaging for Clomène's image and affairs and trap her in *tripotay*. In a sense, she doesn't follow the patterns of respectability by living with so many people in a small space but is, again, balancing this aspect by only allowing people she regards as her family. As she told me, Madame Lucille doesn't have problems with this and understands that the post-earthquake situation called for a wider sharing of private space. For many women involved in small commerce, *tripotay* –gossip- is a great danger. Being identified as a gossip (or “sitting at people's houses” as Clomène states) or being the target of gossip can cost the loss of a selling spot on the street, loss of clientele, opportunities, etc. Preserving one's perceived integrity and honesty –reputation- and following principles that help building reputation are key to good

business and fruitful social life. In the meantime, respectability is also desired and attainable. Women's identities are fluid and are not ascribed to strict social norms and hierarchies.

### **The Race, Class and Gender Nexus**

Before I describe Clomène's business activities and the different kinds of capital engendered by what she does every day, I will first describe the structural and symbolic constraints facing women in *ti komès*. While Clomène's story and trajectory are unique, the physical violence, tense and often humiliating hierarchical relations and lack of economic possibilities she had to overcome are common among women from the provinces who seek employment in Port-au-Prince. Formal work possibilities for Haitian women are scarce. Even working in gruesome conditions in factories for salaries that barely sustain the survival of an individual is seldom a possibility (Schuller 2009). Many women often don't have the choice but to toil as domestic servants in various social milieu. Whether they work for members of the economic elites in the heights of the capital or in low-income families living in the periphery, most of them work long hours and assume a subservient role that has traditionally been recognized as the "nature" of black Haitian women. As Laura Wagner pointed when recalling the story of her friend Mélise who worked as a domestic servant for an abusive employer who underpaid her, *ti komès* – small commerce – is very often seen as the route to independence and self-employment. Domestic work is exploitive and consumes one's time, crushes one's feelings and sense of self-confidence while offering little financial benefits. As Haitian popular singer Ti Manno famously sang in 1982: "Before giving women work – employers ask them to do rollover, and the rollover transforms in overtime – [Avan yo bay fanm travay – yo mande fè overoll – overoll mennen overtime]". Hence, not surprisingly, *ti komès* appeals to many women trying to find freedom by exercising the business skills often acquired in the provinces while

engaging in complex commercial negotiations in markets (any small transaction requires a quasi-ritual amount of bargaining). As women who hail from the provinces often support their family in the countryside by working in the capital (Wagner 2014), it is worth taking the risk to be one's own boss and to try building savings that domestic or factory work do not offer.

Clomène is a black woman who moved from the southwestern provinces right after Jean-Claude Duvalier was ousted in 1986. In Port-au-Prince, she faces the stigma of being “a moun andeyò” – from the provinces – and of being black and female. Like many rural migrants, she was sent to a relative's house in the capital in order to generate extra revenue for her family in the Jérémie region. I will describe the layers of structural stigma a black woman without substantial financial means faces in today's Haiti. For a black woman, building a reputation in Port-au-Prince means overcoming prejudices of class, color and gender. Moreover, historically, economic elites have monopolized import/export businesses, notably through legislative means. Hence, *ti komès* is less a choice than the only arena that offers the possibility of financial and relational autonomy.

First, in a country where 95% of citizens are black, the daily racism black people encounter in Port-au-Prince is stunning. For instance, dark-skinned people are systematically screened when entering a supermarket and have to leave their belongings in storage while shopping. As Haitian journalist Nicole Siméon wrote in 2012, black people are “humiliated, reduced to social outcasts without rational reasons” in their daily errands and are refused the privileges whites and “mulâtres” are offered. As a white man, I could go in and out of every business establishment with my backpack without anybody asking me anything when my friends were systematically asked to leave their belongings in a “protected” locker (this made me stop going to supermarkets and “formal” stores altogether). This clear inheritance of a colonial

society that was racially organized has not disappeared with the strengthening of black political power during the presidencies of Dumarsais Estimé and François Duvalier but was rather reinforced by the latter whose policies solidified the economic powers of Levantine families, and “élites mulâtres” (Nicholls 1996). Indeed, the great majority of shops in Haiti belong to a bourgeoisie of foreign origins (Middle-East mainly) (Fatton 2002: 33). Considered white, these store owners enforce unobvious racial policies at the entrance of their stores and rarely engage with black Haitians. In 2012, I befriended a 23-year-old man of Lebanese origin but was never able to meet him outside his store, since he worked seven days a week, from sun up to sundown. I often talked with him when I exchanged dollars into gourdes in the large two-story market where he worked. At times, I was lucky enough to surprise him during a cigarette break he took outside the store, never more than a few feet away from the security guard. Although he spoke perfect Haitian Kreyòl, he didn’t have Haitian friends and only dreamt about saving money and going back to Italy, where he had lived for a while with his sister. His circle of relations was limited to his immediate family and their small circle of friends. As I complained many times to him about the racial discrimination at the entrance of his store, Franco told me that blacks considered him as a “ravèt” (cockroach) and that he felt his life was on the line at every moment. As a young man in a city where he felt estranged, Franco takes refuge in hard work and lives in his air-conditioned bubbles (store, car, house, apartment, gym, restaurants in Pétion-Ville) that insulate him from the general population. This small vignette marks the sharp divides between the worlds of black vendors working in the informal sector and the Levantine merchant elites who went from being victims of violent racism in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to possessing cast today (Gaillard 1973). The stigma of being cunning, dishonest and unruly is a daily reality for black Haitians who constantly have to prove themselves to be trustworthy. As Haitian novelist Lyonel

Trouillot states: « what we call the Color Question in Haiti is a real problem. This question intervenes in the reproduction of social classes in Haiti. It's been two hundred years that the economic elite is whiter than the rest of the country” (Trouillot 2012 – *jeune Afrique*). For the most part, black people who do not belong to the elite can enter into business relations only with people from their own social circles. Needless to say that opening a store for a Black Haitian comes with many hurdles. As my friend Jean-Jean, a black 45 year-old man who owns a small convenience store in Marlique (15 miles from downtown Port-au-Prince), told me, obtaining bank loans from banks managed by the same “white” elites or simply establishing trust with importers of foreign goods, for instance, are nearly impossible for black men or women.

Secondly, black Haitian women have been represented through what Michel Rolph Trouillot named “Christian hierarchies of civility” that isolated black women as agents of corruption and sexual perversion (Trouillot 1995: 77). Feminist theorist and Haitian anthropologist Gina Ulysse astutely notes that black women have been repeatedly depicted as “‘mannish’ beings, ‘accustomed to hard labour’ and lacking morals and having an unrestrained sexuality that debased them as the archetypal female animal” (Ulysse 2007: 25). Foreign writers repeatedly portrayed Haitian women as “temptresses” and sexually unrestrained, which served to legitimize gendered-based violence at different times of colonization and occupation (Sheller 2013: 170). Until recently, in Haitian literature, black women have been depicted as intimately linked to nature, maternity and hard menial work, ontologically fixing them in categories that denied them rationality or abstract intelligence. Liberal writers such as Jacques Roumain and Jacques Stephen Alexis, who powerfully described the life of people coming from popular classes, portray black women as strong, valiant with hands toughened by manual work and use telluric metaphors to describe them (Latortue 1976). I heard these representations stated in many



circles, either by people who wanted to show their respect for black women or to hold them up as manipulable commodities.

Given the brutal structural constraints black women face in Haiti, it is not surprising to hear Clomène saying that she suffered a great deal in her life – “pase anpil, anpil soufrans”. In the interview excerpt that I reproduce below, we can see how the stigma aforementioned permeated Clomène’s life from the time she came to Port-au-Prince. As she often mentions, she will never return to the life of domestic servant. Ti komès is for her a way to build autonomy and to insure a future for her children. Most of Clomène’s revenues go to her children’s schools and supplies, as she wants her daughters to succeed in the medical or educational field. Clomène’s poignant life history is unfortunately very common:

“I left Jeremie a long time ago (a major city in southwest Haiti). I left Jeremie when I was 10 or 11. In 1982, I remember. I lived in Chambellan, in the commune of Grand Fond. You have to cross a big river to reach my house. It’s a beautiful place with plenty of good food: sweet potatoes, plantains, malanga, lam, mazonbel. Not rice with pea sauce [diri ak sòs pwa – the most common food in Port-au-Prince]! You have so much more produce. Here it’s rice!

I was a child when I left. I was born in November 1972. My mother’s cousin placed me as a domestic servant in a home. It was a tough life, as I told my mom. I washed, cooked for them. The husband overworked me. I cooked for him, made him coffee, showed me how to clean with a wet towel, how to mop. If madame woke up and my morning chores were not finished, she would bang my head on the wall. I cried and cried. If the pan wasn’t clean well she would hit me in the head with it. I know what misery is. Madame did not have children. She was newly married.

I went to stay with my aunt. She was like my dad. I actually ended up longing for my previous employer. My aunt almost killed me by hitting me with pans. If I was long fetching water, she would hit me with a stick. If I went to the market and was not fast enough to come back, I would take the stick. I came to a point where I was asking God to let me die in a car accident. Everyday, everyday. Before I go to sleep I would pray: God, let a car crash me so my misery ends. I was just a kid. I remember three times my aunt hit me very hard. One time, her husband came home with a peanut butter jar. When he opened it, he spilled oil on himself. They said that I had eaten from it and replaced it with oil. I had not eaten anything. I will never forget it. She beat me. Another time, her husband came home with four chewing gum packs. He put them in his pocket and forgot about them. He accused me of eating his gum and beat me and beat me. Another time, my aunt had gold earrings my mother gave her. One day, she misplaced one earring and accused me to stealing it. It was in a jar and she had forgotten about it. She beat me so

hard I still have the scars. I cried, cried, cried. She was a savage person and I've been beat a lot [m manje anpil baton- literally: I ate a lot of stick]. But she would educate you the right way, teach you how to properly speak in public and how to behave.

This is the reason why I manage my own affairs in my own way [m jere bagay m pou kont mwen]. You see my God daughter, she lives with me. I would never beat her like I would never touch my own children. She's my niece and she never knew how to live well with her mother. Ticille was fourteen when the earthquake happened. My sister lost her house in the quake [tranbleman kraze kay yo]. I want her to feel at ease, I consider her equal to my own children. People said we wouldn't get along but we're doing very well! She's still here, she didn't go back to her mom. My sister now has built something in Onaville but she stays here with me. I educate her the right way, because she will need to work one day! She doesn't sit and do nothing. She learns and works. I don't want her to know sorrow [chagren]. I manage all of them pretty well. Suffering is suffering [tout doulè se menm doulè] and if she suffers, it would be like my own children suffering. I protect her. This little girl respects me. She respects me a lot, she's like my child [ban m anpil respè, se tankou pitit mwen].

My aunt lived in Rue de L'Enterrement. We lived next to Madanm Batiste [in an alley of four housing units]. That's where I spent my childhood, in this small corridor [yon ti koulwa, ti koridò]. Madanm Batiste is a good friend. I was friends with elders. Madanm Batiste has a son, Oudi. I call him Godfather. He is good to me, tolerant. They were good to me. I always showed them a lot of respect. Madanm Batiste is from Jérémie. From the city. I come from provinces, in Chambellan. I have an aunt, an uncle, my sister. I love them but I can't go there often. Going to Jérémie is a problem: it's a big trip, you need money. Roundtrip is about 1000 HTG [20 U.S. dollars]. When you arrive, you need another \$300 to buy groceries for your relatives and for giving them a little money. I last went there two years ago, my aunt was sick and I went to visit and help her. They suffer a lot back there. ”

As Madanm Batiste, Clomène's surrogate mother, told me, Clomène's teen years were rough, and she only found refuge with Madanm Batiste who healed her when wounded and who gave her the attention, love and respect she did not receive from her aunt. Because she was a young black teenager from the countryside, Clomène endured many hurdles until she moved to work with Madame Lucille. Historically, representations placing black women at the bottom of the social ladder and that traverse all social and color lines in Haiti and abroad have materialized in legislation and in economic practice that confine black Haitian women to small commerce. Clomène abhors domestic work as it robbed her from her most basic freedoms and chose to enter *ti komès* as soon as she could, since it is the only window for autonomy for a majority of women

in Haiti. As sociologist Mimi Sheller argues, colonial legacies of class, race and gender economic compartmentalization were maintained by the independent Haitian state, notably through the 1826 Code Rural that durably segmented the Haitian economy (Sheller 2013). The 1826 Code Rural reserved the “haut commerce” (cash crops businesses such as coffee, cotton, vetiver, etc.) for foreign and local wealthy merchants who owned mercantile houses on the ports and only allowed women to work in the less profitable internal markets of local food produce. In 1840, married women were granted financial independence through the right to personal income and female inheritance. While the small produce trade was labor intensive and turned low profits, it was and remains one of the only spheres where women can affirm themselves and gain autonomy. As Mintz notes, the fact that women can be in control of economic affairs in the household and can be the prime breadwinner puzzled many foreigners who saw an inversion of what they deem natural gender positions within families (Mintz 1993). In the popular sphere, women have had an active role in wars, household economies, fashioning of peasant autonomous practices and have long been the agents of their own destinies (Dubois 2012). As such, Clomène’s position as the head of her household isn’t surprising. Her businesses maintains her family afloat and nourishes her hopes to see her children fare better than she did, perhaps even having the possibility to study hard and to go to university.

### **Doing ti komès in Monatuf**

Selling cold water and various drinks like the popular Seven-Up, Fruit Champagne or Malta has allowed Clomène to sustain her autonomous way of life. She started her business in 1997, when she bought her first freezer and started to sell frozen meat and cold drinks. She quickly saved money and bought two more chest freezers around which, until 2014, an important network of people gravitated. The chest freezers, in less busy hours, became places where one

could lounge or sit on tables where we played dominos. Rather than being inanimate objects, they are cherished items Clomène and Francesca take great care of and are deemed as more precious as any furniture in the house. As Clomène states:

My freezers make me live! They make me live! I don't make credit. I sell water bags [sache dlo] to four men [Clomène sold to seven clients before the earthquake]. One of them sells in front of a school. You know him, Fred... He takes cold water here twice a day and if he has time, he pays me in the evening. If not, he pays me in the morning. He's an old friend. But I can't make credit.

There's a water truck that comes by every day. I buy from them, then we put the water bags in the freezers, making sure each freezer is always full. I sell drinks in bulk, and as you know, by the unit to people I know. I have lots of clients who come just for a cold drink. All kids and people I know. I've been living in the neighborhood for about thirty years, so I know people!

I do all kinds of commerce [both Clomène and Monique laugh at my interest in ti komès]. I sell beds but right now I don't have any. I sell mattresses. I sell pèpè, I buy pèpè Kennedy [second hand clothes mainly coming from the U.S.] You find them in depots in Carrefour, Tabarre and here, downtown not far from the port. I know how to buy and sell balls of second hand clothes. You buy it by the ball or by the box. They make a little hole in the bag for you to take a quick look, you don't see much and you have to decide fast. Merchants will tell you what you have inside, but well... it's always a surprise. It might be good or bad. You have different kinds of balls: some with shirts and underwear, some with pants and shoes... I don't know for how much they sell now. I haven't sold clothes for a while, I mainly do this before the new school year starts. A ball of good quality with shirts, briefs, panties, bras goes for \$3000HTG. A big box goes for \$25.000. You buy those in groups, with friends. I'm not enough in the business to do that. I buy by the ball. I did that for a long, long time. I used to buy a ball for \$700HTG! It was even \$150 in 1993, 1994. Now, it's very expensive. But the clothes are usually good and beautiful. Almost new. I know how to pick good balls. Depending on the quality of the ball, you make from 300 to 1000 Haitian dollars [5 Gourdes make one Haitian dollars and one U.S. dollar is the equivalent of 50 gourdes] of profit per ball. Sometimes you make nothing. It's a lot of work to sell clothes. I sell from the front courtyard. Lots of people are coming, they try the clothes, they hesitate, and you need to cajole them in buying... I sell the good things by the unit and by bulk the bad clothes.

For a while, I also sold cosmetics but it's a tricky business. If you don't sell fast enough, products go bad. Lipsticks, lotions, you know... Well, I never sit! That's why I'm getting old fast. My body is stiffening. I don't rest enough... Cosmetics... [Monique helped make the list here] Soap, brushes, toothpaste, perfume, shampoo, combs, toothbrushes, make-up, pedicure sets, manicure sets, hand lotion, body lotion... House cleaning supplies: Fab, Baz, chlorox... I sell a lot of different things. But I avoid cosmetics now: you invest a lot and you are not sure to get all your money back. It's hard to sell. It's expensive. It's hard to calculate profits, because it's long term.

With the mattresses: I used to go to Miragoane and buy mattresses. They were less expensive than the ones they make around here in Port-au-Prince. Monique and I

used to travel a lot in the South to bring things to sell, like mangoes and coconuts from Leogane. It became too expensive to make the trips. I only store mattresses my neighbors make and sell them for very little profits nowadays.

In March 2014, I sat inside the house and observed from afar the social life of Clomène's freezers. While dozing on a plastic chair and taking notes about the openings and closings of the freezers wasn't exactly an exciting ethnographic activity, it gave me an idea of Clomène's regular weekdays. Business starts around 6:30 in the morning, while Clomène prepares her littlest one to go to school. She may buy water from the truck or start to sell her water stock very early. During the day, she will open and reach in the freezers about 80 times. When she walks Kyra to school, Monique or Francesca replaces her. They take Clomène's money bag and continue to sell drinks. Indeed, Clomène almost never sits. Often, when I came to have lunch at her house, it would take her an hour or so to finish her plate as she would come and go from the dining room in short bursts. Fred, who sells cold water and *gazeuses* in Funeral Street is her more constant customer. He might buy water up to six times a day or would simply swing by to take a quick shower or to lay down for a moment on one of the freezers while talking about the fresh news of the street. Fred holds a crate full of cold drinks on his head and walks Monatuf about 12 hours a day. His peak hours are before and right after school. He also stands in Rue du Champ de Mars around 4PM when cars are stuck in traffic. When *lekol lage* (school is over), small groups of teenagers who are friends with either Bob or Francesca come and buy icy Cokes at Clomène's and hang out behind the freezers. By far, water sells keep Clomène's business viable.



Figure 35 Inside Clomène's freezers (Aland Joseph, February 2014)

After a full day of work, we sat with Monique and Francesca and calculated the approximate profits each business renders. She buys water in the form of big bags containing each 60 plastic pouches (*sache dlo*) that each contain 50cl. of water. She buys two kinds of water: Alaska, supposedly better tasting than the other brand, Bondlo, which is the one that sells the most in Monatuf according to Fred (for 5HTG you get three pouches of Alaska and four of Bondlo). On a weekly basis, Clomène buys 25 bags of Alaska and 25 bags of Bondlo. The chart below sums up the total household's weekly incomes coming from water sales:

<b>Brand</b>	<b>Buys</b>	<b>Sells</b>	<b>Weekly Profit</b>
<b>Alaska</b>	1250HTG	1500HTG	<b>250HTG</b>
<b>Bondlo</b>	750HTG	1000HTG	<b>250HTG</b>

Clomène told me that she makes about 500HTG of profit on water sales on a good week. However, if rain falls hard during the week, she sells barely half of this. She complements her income by selling about three little crates of *gazeuses* (soda pops of all sorts) each week. Selling 72 individual bottles a week brings 150HTG of profit (roughly three U.S. dollars). Again, she's depending on the weather to sell cold drinks. She often runs out of *gazeuses* and sends her son Bob to fetch a small crate in the neighborhood, from a friend of hers who sells it to her to Kwa Bosal market price, by far the cheapest place in town to find any goods. Clomène also sells beers but it's a very slow selling item. On a month, she might sell a crate of 24 small Prestige bottles (33cl.) and a crate of 20 big Prestige bottles (50cl.). She estimates making about 400HTG of profits of a month with her beer sales. A mattress sells for about 5000HTG and Clomène makes about 800HTG of profit when selling one. She thinks she sells about 20 mattresses a year. With the other items she sells occasionally, such as cleaning products of clothes, Clomène estimates she makes more or less 5000HTG of neat profit a month (which was about \$110 in 2014).

Clomène's expenses during a month are quite high. Her husband Alain pays for the school, clothes and supplies of the two children they had together, Bob and Kyra. Clomène takes care of these expenses for Francesca, who was born before she met Alain. Francesca attends a reputed high school on Rue Pavée, which costs 1500HTG a month. She pays about 500HTG of electricity a month and buys food in bulk (*pwovizyon*) to feed five people, which costs about 10,000HTG a month. She contributes to the food budget with what remains when she pays for Francesca's school and electricity. Alain, who works various jobs in Monatuf and runs a bank *bolèt* – a small kiosk from where he sells lottery tickets – supplies the rest of the needed income for the food and various other expenses.

As Clomène explained, money is often very tight and on bad days, she cuts her expenses on food items. As many Port-au-Princiens, most meals are made of American rice or local fried plantains, Dominican chicken and bean based or onion based sauces. Once a week, Monique will cook *legim* for the whole family, a delicious and spicy stew of various vegetables and salted beef. The traditional foods Clomène and Monique enjoyed as a child in the countryside such a *pitimi* (millet often cooked with beef and spices) or *mayi moulén* (a delicious corn polenta cooked with smoked fish or fat cuts of pork and beans), disappeared from the plates of working class urban citizens as imported foods such as American rice came to replace traditional meals that suddenly became, in the mid-1990s, luxury meals. Fine fresh fruits and vegetables such as avocados, corossols (soursops), etc. have mainly become out of reach for the majority of Haitians living in urban centers. Hence, when a friend takes a trip in the countryside, there are good chances that he or she will come back with watermelons or other expensive fruits people miss to give as presents.

During the mango season, from late April to late July, friends, acquaintances and passersby walk in the front courtyard, buy mangoes by the piece and sit in the shade of small trees while Monique, who is in charge of this business, brings buckets of fresh water so people can wash their mangoes before enjoying them. Clomène's house is reputed for its fresh and rare mangoes directly sourced from small producers in the Léogane region, thirty miles south of Port-au-Prince. As Monique and Clomène explained to me, and as I experienced, you cannot eat any kind of mangoes at any time of the day. The trick is to sell on the sport mangoes you can eat at any time and to fulfill orders coming from clients with rarer varieties of mangoes:

We carry mangoes you can eat on the spot at any time of the day: mango plat, mango fil, mango fransik, mango blanche. People's favorite ones are mango batiste and rozali. But those are very rare in Port-au-Prince. We might get some for two weeks and then they're gone, like mango kanel. This one, if you see it nowadays, you're lucky! These are rare



mangoes, very rare. Mango rozali is very sweet, bright orange in the inside and purple on the outside. That's a mango you suck on. Batiste is a mango that fills you up. I also get mangoes "frazil" like mango muska. These are small mangoes that have lots of taste [ki gou anpil anpil!] but that will give you a big stomach ache if your belly isn't full before you eat them. That's what I mean by "frazil" [fragile].



*Figure 37 Monique selling ripe mangoes, Aland Joseph 2014*

Monique buys mangoes by the basket. Each basket of regular mangoes (such as blanche) contains about 80 mangoes. There is a whole science when buying in bulk: if the mangoes' skins is dotted with small brown spots, it means that they are very ripe. Hence, you can bargain with

the seller to keep the prices down. The smell also indicates if some rotten mangoes are present. Prices fluctuate according to the beauty of the fruits. Monique sells about three to four baskets a week. Each basket contains different species of mangoes. She buys a basket of mango blanches 150HTG and often succeeds to sell the full basket for about 300HTG each week. Additionally, she buys a basket of fransik containing 48 mangoes for 200HTG and sells it for 350HTG. Lastly, she buys either a basket of relatively rare mangoes such as korn, fil, muska or batiste, for 250HTG and sells it for 450HTG. When available, she buys an additional basket of very rare mangoes such as kanèl, rozali, jipon mona or ti bozo for 400HTG and sells it for 600HTG. On a good week and at the peak of the rare mango season, Monique generates 600 to 700HTG of total profit. This allows her to contribute to Clomène's household expenses and to pay the school for two of her children in Poste Marchand.

All the women living at the time at Clomène's worked hard. Francesca often transformed the living room into a beauty parlor on Friday nights and Saturdays and cut hair, did pedicures and manicures, etc. Monique's daughter, Edline, who was sixteen in 2014, often sat after school on the corner of Rue du Champ de mars and Rue de la Réunion in front of a friend's house to sell mangoes or bananas (Monique knew very well how to source rare bananas such as bayonèt, vincent and ti malis). Bob, who was fourteen, repaired TV sets and all kinds of electronic goods with his father. In brief, I've never seen anyone sitting idly. Clomène's shotgun house was always full of activity. Money was tight but the family, since 1997, always got by, even at times when prices of all goods suddenly soared. Mainly, for Clomène, being engaged in *ti komès* was a way to insure her autonomy and to secure a decent life for her children and relatives. As in the case of many rural migrants living in Port-au-Prince, Clomène often sent money in Jérémie to her aunt and cousins, especially in case of disease. She rarely took trips down south, even if she

missed her village and her *lakou* dearly. She gained respect from the people she knew in the neighborhood, for her honesty, hospitality and her skills as a shrewd businesswoman. As her surrogate mother, Madanm Batiste told me:

She was a sweet, sweet child. But her aunt whipped her up and beat her up too often. She had a hard life but now she's doing good. I'm proud of her. I never thought she would pull herself up. Poor thing... [*Pòdyab*] She gave me the mattress I sleep on. She doesn't come to see me enough but we talk on the phone. She runs all day, I know that, like Fifi [her daughter].

Working in the informal sector and doing *ti komès* may seem less enviable than getting a stable and formal job. However, for rural migrants and working class women like Clomène, *ti komès* is a way to enter in relations of reciprocity that are in rupture with the violent spheres of domestic work or poorly-paid factory work. While structural constraints allow few possibilities for low income women, *ti komès* is a dignifying practice and a possible life project for women stuck in factories or working long hours in private homes where they are subjugated to psychological and bodily pressures (Wagner 2014). *Ti komès*, to quote Kathleen Millar, “opens up the possibility of other ways of fashioning work and life” (Millar 2014). In the case of Clomène, it enabled her to sustain the life she desired and to maintain forms of respectability partially inherited from Madame Lucille and the home she left behind.

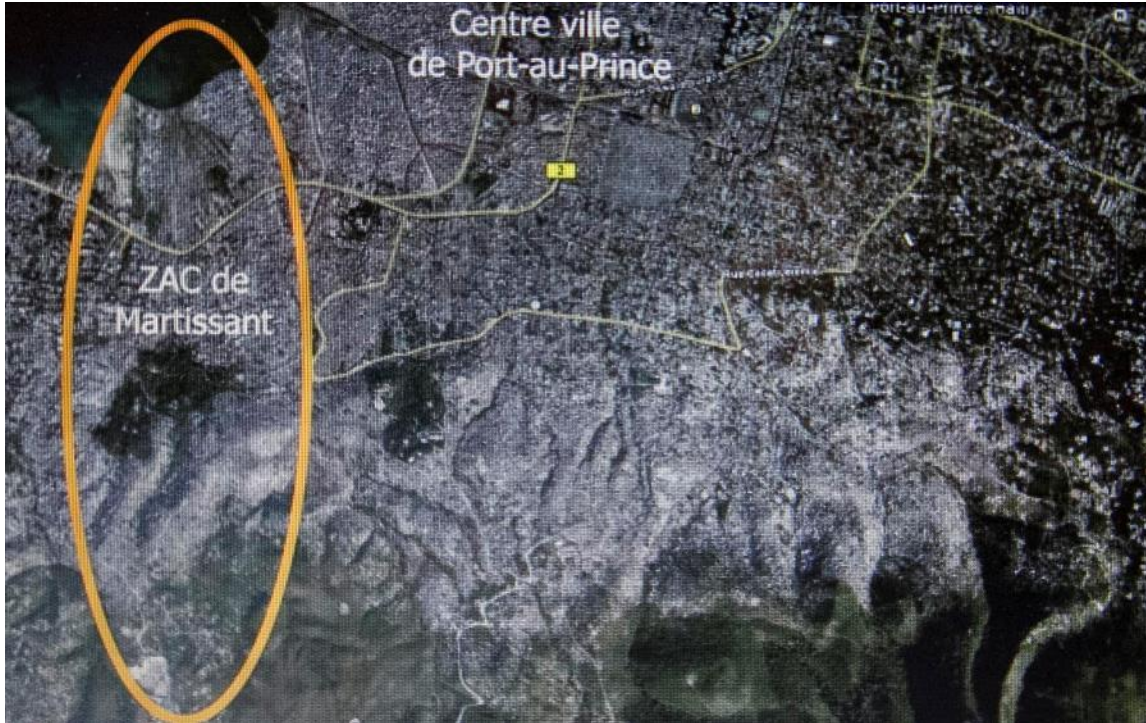
## **CHAPTER FOUR: AWAKENING DORMANT INSTITUTIONS: EXPLORING THE POSSIBILITIES FOR A RIGHT TO THE CITY**

This chapter departs from an analysis of downtown Port-au-Prince to explore neighborhoods that have long been off the grid. In Martissant and Bolosse, two areas of southwest Port-au-Prince I will describe below, trash collection, electricity, potable water and sewage were not part of the landscape prior to 2007. While most of Bolosse was paved in the 2000s, the neighborhood seems to have been completely abandoned by state authorities and international institutions alike. In Bolosse, trash fills up the ravines meant to direct wastewater downstream. There are no schools and no clinics. Martissant, on the other hand, has been the object of a vast urban renewal project that started in the late 1990s and has intensified since 2007. Martissant is slowly but surely improving in terms of available resources such as educational facilities, electricity, water, etc. By contrasting these two neighborhoods, I will reflect on the effect of institutional involvement and availability of resources in people's horizons of possibilities. Following Lefebvre, this chapter aims to shed light on two main components of the right to the city, that is to say, the right to produce and live a rich life in an urban context. The right to the city comprises two main aspects: 1) enfranchisement that gives urban citizens decision-making power in the shaping of their neighborhoods, and 2) appropriation of existing physical space and the "right to produce urban space so that it meets the needs of inhabitants" (Purcell 2002: 103). The right to the city is a catchphrase present in many NGO reports and project prospectus, and it becomes a complex concept when ethnographically considered.

## **Martissant**

While I did most of my fieldwork in downtown neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince, I had occasion to venture a few times in Martissant, a regrouping of very diverse neighborhoods located at the extreme southern official limits of Port-au-Prince. Martissant comprises approximately 400,000 inhabitants and is a very dense district built on the flanks of Morne l'Hopital. The upper parts of Martissant are still semi-rural, with dwellers who live in houses surrounded by small plots of land where corn and peas grow and where *kabri* (goats) wander; the lower parts of it range from hyper-dense popular neighborhoods to agreeable ensembles of houses in apartments located along clean paved roads.

During the same period in which I visited Martissant (January 2014- March 2014), I also spent time in Bolosse 4ème Avenue, a neighborhood located less than half a mile away from Martissant where a good friend of mine lived. Martissant and Bolosse, even if contiguous, present stark contrasts. In brief, Martissant is the object of a vast urban rehabilitation plan while Bolosse 4ème Avenue is completely ignored by the state and NGOs. For instance, while the main ravines that carry heavy rain waters in Martissant are clean and functioning, the ones in Bolosse are brimming with trash. Strong participative state and NGO interventions in the long term have changed the face of Martissant, while decades of neglect in Bolosse 4ème Avenue have left this place devoid of functioning infrastructure. The goal of this chapter is to contrast two adjacent popular neighborhoods located at the outskirts of the city that have been basically off the grid until recently, in order to map institutional involvements throughout the city. By describing the overcrowding of various institutions in Martissant and their total absence in Bolosse, I depart from the central neighborhoods of Monatuf that benefit from reliable infrastructure and housing, which offer people the chance to create autonomous social spheres.



*Figure 35 Martissant, a neighborhood southwest of downtown Port-au-Prince with a large wooded area*

In Martissant, I mainly talked with state employees and an important member of an NGO in charge of a large-scale rehabilitation project, while episodically interacting with people living there. Ethnographic studies of all corners of Martissant abound and my main “street” consultant, Monsieur Jean, told me many times how tired people were of ethnologists of all stripes that carry around cameras and surveys. The parts of this chapter dealing with Martissant are based on Monsieur Jean’s observations and on Lucie Couet’s description of her work as an urban planner in the area.

I interviewed Lucie two years after I befriended her and also base my observations on the long and friendly conversations we had over time. She is one of the few expatriates I met who knows Haiti very well and who has an insatiable curiosity for the country, its culture and its

people. As a leading urban planner for internationally funded local NGO FOKAL since 2007, her work in Martissant is remarkable and offers a positive vision of a functioning Port-au-Prince and of the possibility of fluid and functioning national state institutions. I then build a contrast by describing Bolosse 4<sup>ème</sup> Avenue, where I conducted interviews with Monsieur Alfred, who has fought to get the trash-clogged ravine cleared up since 2008 (the last time it was cleaned up). I draw observations from various ethnographic activities conducted in Bolosse 4<sup>ème</sup> Avenue in February 2014. While the Martissant project proves that the state has the legal and administrative capacity to conduct work beneficial to Haitian citizens, the abandonment of Bolosse 4<sup>ème</sup> Avenue and of a large part of downtown Port-au-Prince (the whole Grand Rue) proves that urban projects are fragmented and that several forms of the state seem to be at play in Port-au-Prince. This chapter presents a fragmented city where the state and the “Republic of NGOs” work hyper-actively on given neighborhoods while completely ignoring others. Port-au-Prince cannot be reduced to its downtown neighborhoods and the cultural and political struggles that take place there. The city presents myriad neighborhoods and streets, all of which are traversed by institutions at different spatial and temporal scales, which alternately transform or ignore local ecological and social life.

### **Martissant: a Socially Mixed Neighborhood**

I met Monsieur Jean through Monsieur Invité, the guardian of a Kalfou Tifou gingerbread house I briefly presented in the introduction of this dissertation. Monsieur Jean is a 64-year-old widow who lives in Martissant 4, a couple of blocks away from the seashore. He rents a one-room apartment at the top of a yellow three-story building and shares an outside kitchen and bathroom with his neighbors. When I met him, I was passing by Monsieur Invité’s rum vending booth where I had stopped by to talk about a soccer game in which Barcelona crushed Rayo



Vallecano 6 to 0. Since I watched the game at an NGO workers' gathering on February 15, 2014, where I vainly attempted to talk with a few drunk compatriots about their presence in Haiti, I had enough material to engage in many soccer conversations for the week. Watching a Barcelona game is very practical for one's fieldwork, since it easily fuels small talk in Port-au-Prince. Lionel Messi, Barca's star player and uncontestedly a soccer genius, is the object of a cult in Haiti. His face is painted on many buses, barber shops' façades, etc.

On that February day, while Monsieur Invité mimicked Messi dribbling through a whole team to score a goal, Monsieur Jean popped up from the vending booth where he was having a nap on a backless plastic chair: "Sitoyien! M gen yon bagay kap interese w!—Citizen! I have something that will interest you!" Monsieur Jean grabbed my arm and started to talk in my ear about secret documents he found in a bin next to the National Palace days after Jean-Claude Duvalier was ousted in 1986. These top-secret papers revealed that the exile of Jean-Claude had long been prepared by the American embassy and contained much more information, according to him. I took his phone number as a courtesy and contacted him a few days later to meet with him, as I was curious to visit his neighborhood. I followed Monsieur Invité's suggestion to meet with him in the morning, as Monsieur Jean was *kokoy* (drunk and tired) most afternoons.

On February 20, 2014, I headed from Pacot to Martissant, where I was supposed to meet with Monsieur Jean at 10 AM. I had the bad idea of walking there instead of taking a cab or a tap-tap. My field notes of the day read:

I left Pacot at 8 AM, had a peanut butter sandwich and a cup of coffee in Rue Christophe, not far from the Oloffson Hotel and chatted with Djeb, the CD vendor who tries to sell me Haitian hip-hop CDs at "American prices". From then I walked on Route des Dalles. Traffic. Crazy Traffic. Around 9 AM, I was stuck 15 minutes in a pedestrian/moto/car/MINUSTAH truck jam. I stood on a bit of sidewalk with a compact bunch of people while nobody that was motorized made a move. The Brazilian MINUSTAH guys looked placid, the moto riders loudly argued while a 1970s beige Mercedes taxi driver and the driver of a beat-up SUV tried to move on what should be a



one way road. I talked with the woman who sold toothpaste and other personal health goods who told me that she usually welcomed traffic clogs that make her sells go up, but who couldn't bear the smog anymore. Neither could I. Some kind of grey sweaty goo started to trickle down my neck. By some miracle, the MINUSTAH truck backed up a bit in a concert of horns and screams. I was able to sneak behind a moto and climb my way out. 10 minutes before 10 AM, all sweaty and weary, I stopped at my friend Ti Michel's vending booth in Bolosse 4ème Avenue and drank a warmish Coke in his shady courtyard. I arrived around 11 or so in Monsieur Jean's street. He came to pick me up, we walked up to his place and sat on his balcony where he poured me a big glass of *kleren* straight out of a plastic jug. I politely refused. Right after that, he went in his room and came back with a bunch of jaundiced photocopies and newspaper clippings. Articles about the ousting of Jean-Claude and unrelated bits and pieces of typed reports covering school swimming programs or transportation taxes coexisted in a strange bunch of documents. Monsieur Jean asked me for 100 U.S. dollars for the whole thing. After explaining politely why I didn't need the documents, I proposed to give him a bit of money and to buy us lunch for the disturbance. We both agreed and the conversation moved on. He took his tie off and we started to talk about various things, but Monsieur Jean had already had too much *kleren* to have a coherent conversation.



Figure 36 The heavily trafficked Route des Dalles (Joos, January 2014)

Not all urban hikes were this intense, but this snapshot gives a good idea of the quotidian walks many men and women working in the upper neighborhoods have to perform before getting to work. I saw Monsieur Jean a few more times after our first meeting. He was willing to talk

about his neighborhood and the changes he had observed since he started to live there in 1993, after his wife's death. He happened to be a cheerful man whose fast-paced Kreyol was filled with proverbs that spiced his chaotic narratives. He repeatedly told me that what I wanted to know about Martissant didn't matter and that the American plot to exile Jean-Claude Duvalier was the sole subject that merited attention. As I will describe, Monsieur Jean was nostalgic for the Jean-Claude era, a time when his wife was alive and his daughters still lived in Haiti before moving to the Dominican Republic after their mother's death.

When I came back for follow-up fieldwork in May 2015, Monsieur Invité told me that Monsieur Jean had passed away in April 2015 in a sudden heart attack: "He was an old man who had diabetes, you know, and he drank quite a bit, which didn't improve his health condition." From what I could gather, Monsieur Jean had been buried in Gressier, on his sister's plot of land. His insights have been important to me, as he witnessed changes in his neighborhood and, like many of the residents of Martissant, he enjoyed the 42-square-acre park that NGOs and local associations were able to preserve. Monsieur Jean remembered the Port-au-Prince of his youth, with its parks filled with palm trees and vegetation and the southern neighborhoods that looked to him like a primitive jungle. I will first touch on the nostalgia that filters into many accounts about the rehabilitation of a large green area of Port-au-Prince.

In *Fonds-des-Nègres*, a novel written four years after the 1957 fraudulent election of François Duvalier, Haitian writer Marie Vieux Chauvet vividly details the tactics that precluded the massive urbanization of the country by recounting the story of a woman who left Port-au-Prince to settle in her grandmother's village in southern Haiti. Instead of finding her family and extended family collectively living and doing agricultural work on inherited land, she witnesses a community on the brink of famine living in treeless hills. Formerly self-sufficient peasants are

evicted by the state from their land and are forced to become wage laborers for agro-businesses or go to the capital with the feeble hope of finding employment. This description of Haiti as a barren place with a desiccated, deforested landscape is a metaphor for the dying of rural economies and cultures, as anthropologist Greg Beckett notes: this metaphor is a leitmotiv in Haitian literature and scholarship that is used to describe an “eroding nation” whose natural and cultural patrimony is fading away (Beckett 2008). This, in turn, fosters a “politics of mourning”, which Beckett describes as a process in which the future is imagined as a restoration of a lost past. Beckett’s ethnography is very important to understanding what is going on in Martissant, an impoverished neighborhood of Port-au-Prince in which a botanical garden and a park have been preserved.

This ecological preservation project is at the root of the urban renewal project of Martissant that started in 2007. The above-mentioned “politics of mourning” motivated the preservation societies who helped launch the restoration of the botanical park in the heart of Martissant, but, in many aspects, the larger urban renewal project departs from this politics. From a retrospective claim—going back to a pre-existing natural state—the societal propositions put forth by urban planners are prospective. The urban rehabilitation project started in 2007 by Fokal adopts the same paradigm as many NGOs working in urban contexts: participatory development in which a wide array of spatio-temporal scales have to be reconciled. Spatio-temporal scales are the different conceptions of time and space implied in different projects: small one-off NGO projects may implement a one-year educational project within a small slice of a neighborhood; a group of people can seize unoccupied land to build concrete structures with the hope of remaining on a small parcel for a long period, and so on.

The problem here is the coexistence of many competing actors with many different desires and timely goals, such as the European Union, which wants visibility for their projects in the short term, and Haitian state institutions, which want to build capacity to act on the whole country in the long term. These scales are never reconciled and popular visions of how to use space are seldom taken into account. In the case of Monsieur Jean, who lived at the periphery of the terrain used by planners for urban rehabilitation, the many projects of Martissant such as recycling programs led in schools, the refectory of the botanical garden or the building of a library, seem completely extraneous to his daily needs, such as better transportation, access to electricity, affordable health centers, etc. As he stated: “It always feels as if you need a ticket. If you live a block too far, you’ll not receive any benefits.”

Haitian novelist Marie Vieux Chauvet described, in *Fonds-des Nègres*, a predatory state that impoverishes its rural populations, who are either forced to cut and sell the trees that grow on their property or move to urban regions. Like many other scholars of Haiti, Vieux Chauvet, while blaming the state, places the poor at the origins of the ecological and urban crisis in Haiti. What Chauvet is not talking about in her novel is the historical role of private land owners: the French families that owned large plantations or habitations during colonial times, or the Haitian elites and newcomers such as Chinese, Syrian, Lebanese, Italian and Corsican merchants who came at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and bought large plots of land around the capital to develop commercial activities and cash crop economies. She doesn’t mention the American occupants who, between 1915 and 1934, illegally acquired vast swaths of land to produce bananas, coffee and sugar.

In Martissant, there is a stunning continuity in family ownership, as Haitian sociologist Michèle Oriol describes in her 2009 ethnography of the whole district. Land-owning families

who possess large plots of land contributed to the fragmentation of space and the diversification of space use on the outskirts of Port-au-Prince. Land owners, in the 1970s started to rent out very small parcels of land, on which people started to build dwellings. Even if populated by about half a million people, most of the mountain surrounding Port-au-Prince, le Morne L'Hopital, is owned by a handful of well-known families (Clavéus, Arréguy, Destouches and Soray, who often provide the toponymy for the spaces within Martissant). The parceling out of land by private owners has made any state intervention very difficult. Neither the state nor the city knows what belongs to whom. Moreover, the lack of plans in the development of the Martissant neighborhood led to the construction of dwellings and streets that are very hard to access either by car or by foot. Trash collection, for instance, is nearly impossible without the involvement of inhabitants who bring their trash to specific spots where it can be picked up by trucks. As Monsieur Jean described:

Port-au-Prince, it's simple. Shit is trickling down in the poor neighborhoods [lamed toujou rive anba]. People throw their trash in the ravines up the hills, and when you live downhill like me, you walk among trash all the time. Now, with the projects in upper Martissant, things got a bit better, but if you walk uphill, you'll find so many people living in places that are unreachable by vehicles. It's like a concrete maze. There's no way it can be kept clean and functional. Wastewaters don't always end up in the ravines. It flows downhill. If you want to fix the place, you need to help people living in these places and help them go back to their province or elsewhere.

Since 2007, an interesting participatory project led by Fokal (Foundation for Knowledge and Liberty)—a Haitian organization mainly funded by the European Union and the George Soros Open Society—nonetheless has brought some positive change to the area. It is not the definitive fix Monsieur Jean would have liked to see, but Fokal's actions changed the face of most neighborhoods in Martissant. Through a long-term process, Fokal involved the population, the state and city authorities in a rehabilitation project of some of the neighborhoods of Martissant. Moreover, they recently finished the fencing and renovation of the Martissant park,

which now includes a public library, a cultural center and a botanical garden. Fokal has also tried to redefine ownership and property in a place where large estate owners still rule on issues of land use and distribution. Though highly problematic because limited in scope and space, the Fokal-led intervention helped to define and reinforce state and communal capacities through the participation of Martissant inhabitants in the infrastructure-building and maintenance effort. Haiti has a precise constitution that was adopted in 1987 and has ratified binding international treaties that can potentially be *awakened* to generate capacity. As I will describe, Fokal has activated some dormant functions of the state by using an existing legal framework.

The Martissant rehabilitation is limited in space and time and embodies the problems the “projectorate model”, including absence of long-term vision, demand for short-term results, dwindling of funds in the midst of a project, change of institutional goals, etc. While travelling through Haiti, I observed many times the ruins of unfinished NGO and state projects in the form of half-finished buildings. The country has become a platform for U.N. military ventures, international business ventures, NGO career-building and lucrative religious missions that drag hundreds of American teenagers to the country in order to “help” Haitians. I often wondered how the 16- and 17-year-old kids that I met at the Miami airport, sporting red t-shirts reading “How may I save you?” are actually saving Haitians. The majority of projects designed abroad do not take into account the desires of Haitians and most often, workers, missionaries and experts do not understand Kreyol or French. The recently revealed massive failure of the American Red Cross, which raised about \$500 million but only succeeded in building six houses on its own, was indeed mainly due to the cultural and language barrier that poisoned relations between “experts” and local workers and target populations, according to a thorough report written by NPR and Pro Republica (Sullivan 2015). Most projects in Martissant, however, are supervised by

Fokal, which coordinates the work of other NGOs and activates state capacities in order to oversee work in these neighborhoods. Fokal is distinct in that it is a non-governmental/governmental hybrid, as I will describe.

The Martissant neighborhood is often described in this way: before the beginning of massive urban migration in the late seventies, this place was, as Monsieur Jean put it, “a jungle, a natural paradise with clear spring waters where you would go hunting on weekends. I lived in Carrefour and would come here with my *fistibal* (slingshot) to catch birds....” Today, the Martissant neighborhood, located at the southern extremity of Port-au-Prince, is a peculiar space. It is a very dense residential neighborhood where middle-class Haitians such as state employees, NGO employees and private sector workers live in decent and comfortable houses and where the poorest of the city create makeshift dwellings or rent small housing units on estates that used to belong –and sometimes still belong to- to prominent Haitian families. Martissant is not a neighborhood, actually, but at least six different neighborhoods with widely different histories and uses. I here mainly focus on Beny, which is home to 50,000 inhabitants and includes both a remarkably beautiful park with many clear springs, and a dense neighborhood made of concrete houses and small homes surrounding it. Monsieur Jean, who lived in a different dense neighborhood not too far from the seashore, saw Beny as a functioning place with “fresh air and solid houses”, but stated that it would be impossible for him to move there, since the rent prices had soared since the rehabilitation of the neighborhood.

### **The Fokal Project**

In the 1990s, people started to move into the Martissant park and botanical garden, which was a problem for soil permeability, among other things. A great part of the park originally belonged to American anthropologist and choreographer Kathrin Dunham, who later rented her

property to a French businessman who turned it into a jet-set tourism resort. In 2007, this area was declared by the state to be a “zone d’action concertée”—a public utility zone—even though this term has no basis in Haitian legislation. It was a term created ad hoc for this specific project of urban renewal and ecological conservation.

According to Lucie Couet, whom I interviewed in May 2014, since 2007, Fokal has partnered with the state, popular organizations and committees of Martissant, and several major foreign institutions. Among them, a French NGO (the GRET), a British NGO (Oxfam), USAID and the European Union helped to transform large parts of this neighborhood through several means: building an efficient trash collection system, reinforcing school programs, building an education network to promote recycling, securing the site of the largest clean water spring of Port-au-Prince and preserving a large public green space in a city where such amenities are almost nonexistent. I interviewed Lucie Couet on July 15, 2014. I will reproduce her words at length, since she is both a scholar of urban planning and a practitioner of the discipline. She clearly uncovers the ways in which dormant state capacities can be awakened by using existing legal frameworks that allow for participatory urban renewal projects:

I arrived in Port-au-Prince in 2007. The city looked like what it is today but the heights of Morne l’Hopital and the massive urban development around Canaan and Onaville that we see today didn’t exist at the time. However, southern Port-au-Prince was sprawling at a fast pace. When I arrived, the security situation was tense. The year before, waves of kidnappings terrified the population, you could still feel this. People were very cautious. The Martissant project was just starting when I arrived. We had the possibility of continuing an existing conservation project. The actual director of Fokal is Lorraine Mangonès, one of the descendants of architect Albert Mangonès, who owned and conserved most of the natural park. The Mangonès family left in 2004, when the living situation was untenable because of the violence orchestrated by Aristide. They nonetheless wanted to preserve this amazing natural space they managed to preserve for many years. They got in touch with anthropologist Katherine Dunham’s lawyer, since she owned the majority of the park. The Mangonès knew that the park could be quickly urbanized, which would put the many spring water sources that feed the capital in peril. They presented a project to the President Préval administration. Préval decided to



compensate the people living on the premises in order to create a park in this part of the city.

Katherine Dunham might have bought property in the 1940s. In the 1960s, she allowed Olivier Coquelin to manage her property, giving him a long-term lease. He was a French guy who opened the first disco clubs in the 1970s in New York City, he knew the global jet-set pretty well. In 1971-1972, he built the Habitation Leclerc while Dunham built a house on another side of the property. He had luxurious bungalows built around a large house with a swimming pool and everything was built in a way so that it seemed to be ruins of the colonial era. There was a modernist twist to it though. Coquelin crafted some kind of delirious marketing around the property, pretending that Pauline Bonaparte (sister of Napoléon) and her husband the Général Leclerc lived there. They never set foot in Port-au-Prince, but the colonial marketing was working. Jackie Onassis, Mick Jagger, etc. came to spend vacation there.



*Figure 37 The Habitation Leclerc built in faux ruins style, FOKAL 2010*

In the 1970s, it was still a very wooded area. Fonds Tamara, located a mile away from here, started to be urbanized in the 70s when suburbs started to be built there. It was small-scale private neighborhoods. It's after the ousting of Duvalier that Martissant overdeveloped. During Duvalier, urbanization was limited because the state controlled people's displacements in the country.

Martissant is very important for Port-au-Prince. Under the Route des Dalles, there is an important network of canalization that brings water to a great part of the city. It was built at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It's a strategic zone. It's the only southern exit of Port-au-Prince with lots of people who work in the center of the city. Martissant is a neighborhood at the heart of the capital.

We used the park as leverage for the betterment of the neighborhood infrastructure. In August 2007, Fokal started to work with the state and asked for funding from the European Union, which arrived in 2008, the date at which the Fokal president, Michèle Pierre-Louis, became prime minister. A great number of Fokal experts went to work for the government at the time, this was a strange combination—they led Fokal, an NGO, and did politics at the same time. It had only been a few months since I got here and my directors were leaving Fokal to work for the state, it was an interesting transition.

Michèle Pierre-Louis, director of Fokal, became Prime Minister and some of my colleagues went to work with her.

In the 1990s, the city authorities gave permission to many people to build in the park—without any existing legal frameworks, the city made up lease titles—some kind of strange authorization anyway. But it helped us to locate who was living there and to work with the population settled there. In brief, people were not squatting but paying some kind of rent to the city. The state asked us to work with these people and to help them move. We launched a dialogue with “renters” of the park, listened to their desires and worked with them to find viable compensations. Then, we worked with the DGI (Internal Revenue Services) to which we explain in detail what was going on. We passed the project to them. They indeed took this project in hand and went on, doing a good job at compensating people. This is rare in Haiti, maybe the first time that state compensation worked on a large scale. Eighty percent of the people that have been compensated for the loss of their home have relocated in the area and have a stake in the betterment of the neighborhood.

When I arrived here things were radically different as compared to today. At the Leclerc residence there were children everywhere. One year later all the residents of the interior yard left. In the meantime we built a grey sheet metal enclosure in order to divide the land and send the message that a project was in progress. That was the most difficult phase because we wanted residents to be part of the project. Besides, it was towards the end of a long period of crime. The Leclerc Residence was used by gangs to go from one part of the city to the other. It was in a dark zone. It was very important to have control over the park area in order to continue the project.

In 2008 we did a study and the history of this neighborhood was a big focus. Michele Oriol was often invoked. Then, in 2009 we started another study about the ravines and their final closing, which allowed us to start reconstruction right after the earthquake: that generated jobs and optimism to see that things were moving. From 2008 to 2012 we also ran discussion spaces: people would sign up for discussion sessions in groups of twelve. Open to organizations and the public, the discussions would last two hours and cover themes such as safety, insalubrity, and citizenship. The idea was to put together people from different areas of the neighborhoods. Their inputs helped them get to know one another, since the violence had created division and conflict among locals. We cannot go everywhere we want and neither can they.

This way, communities from neighborhoods around the park have come together. That allowed us to analyze and understand problems.

In 2008, the EU asked us to make proposals for a project in the area. One of the issues emerging from our discussion spaces was the trash collection. In 2010, we requested a grant for this project and this way we were able carry on our work in the area.

This is how we started our first large construction work on the ravines. In parallel, the GRET did some work too on these ravines and on the well, above the park. They had done a study there in 2009 and launched the project in 2010. Fokal and Gret had a close relationship: Gret’s director was also the president of the board of directors of Fokal and the secretary of health department under Préval.

Before the earthquake, sponsors were not interested in urban issues. That changed with the quake. They decided to finance our Martissant project. In 2010 we did an outline of the project. We also called for bids to remodel the landscape around the Leclerc

residence. A French design office started the study. It was the largest public part of the project.

In 2012 the president of Haiti visited Martissant and proposed to build a University here. Fokal proposed to create an institute for environmental careers. We worked hard on the part about the last properties in the park but we stopped because we were out of money: the granters who had committed to supporting the project changed their mind.

We have formal and informal interactions with the neighborhood organizations. We try to help them, which does not mean much. We help them hold meetings, follow a policy and rules, renew their chairmen and get better structured and organized.

We started to document those who wished and came to our office. Three or four years ago we counted 209 [organizations]. I believe there are really around 70 and the international projects caused the creation of many more. But they are only facades, political scams. With the trash treatment project, we also worked with groups of residents besides organizations. Non-profit organizations use acronyms, form everywhere, and specialize in everything: women's welfare, street cleaning, children's camps, drawing workshops, drama. Twice a year Fokal calls for projects, they make proposals and we finance them. We sponsor, for instance, championships but also constructions of bridges, stairs, lighting. So we usually finance their projects and in exchange we ask them to register in our records.

My colleagues asked them work together within their neighborhoods on common projects and it worked. These are people's organizations.

As far as the government, we work with the cabinet of the Prime Minister. In the Park project, we act as a contracting authority for the government, including the following departments: Public Affairs, Social Affairs, Economy, and two others. As far as our community work in the neighborhood, we are not bound to anyone. Our role there is more to stimulate than build.

When we did our study about the urban remodeling, it was the department of public works who acted as the ordering institution and the department of public affairs was the executing authority. So there is an institutional umbrella in action. We have no formal agreement, though. We work with the Department of Health within their regular work. It is very difficult to work with the government because it is weak, has no internal resources, financially. The City Hall is usually clueless about its function, objectives and role.

The project does not only operate through the building of top-down state procedures, but also takes into account and involves the populations of Martissant. In 2009, Haitian sociologist Michele Oriol published a thorough study compiling ethnographic data and found that sanitation and trash-related problems were two of the most pressing problems for inhabitants. Fokal and the European Union, at the same time, want to preserve the springs, which the population didn't see

as an immediate problem. This is a first discordance. The population wanted and still wants improvement of roads, staircases and available light and electricity in the neighborhoods. One of the main request was the construction of schools and roads, which didn't featured prominently in the EU project. In brief, the population has claims that have not been fulfilled. Three years ago, there were 209 neighborhood-led organizations acting in education, trash collection and general improvement of infrastructure. However, as Monsieur Jean put it, "many of these organizations do not last and are created ad hoc when a funding opportunity arises." Here we can see that even if Fokal tries to fulfill popular desires, it still follows the plans of its main funding agencies, who have different plans than the population.



*Figure 38 Clean ravine in Beny, Fokal 2011*

Long-term state capacity is the objective of Fokal, but their project is very small if we look at the map of Port-au-Prince, and it builds state capacity (such as trash collection) in a very small territory. It leads to the fragmentation of the city: the neighborhood next door, Bolosse, has not received any municipal service since 2008 in terms of trash collection, for instance. This creates differential spaces within the city: neighborhoods that receive help and jobs and

neighborhoods absolutely devoid of everything. Moreover, the state has shown it is capable of compensating people living in an area it wants to use. The state was respectful of residents' desires and worked on the long term with them so they could recover from their moving.

However, the brutal destruction of Monatuf in 2014 proves that the state capacities built by Fokal are not sustainable. The institution that took care of demolitions, UCLBP (Unit for Lodging and Buildings Construction) is a new creation of President Martelly that can bypass ministries and act on its own, through made-up legal frameworks. Again, the fragmentation of state institutions and their lack of coordination and dialogue lead to tragic situations in the handling of urban planning. Furthermore, institutions like the European Union and NGOs ask for immediate results NGOs because they need visibility. This doesn't work with long term solution meant to be applied to the whole Haitian territory; it spatially fragments urban policies and creates vastly different neighborhoods in a condensed space (Lombart, Pierrat, Redon 2014). Thirdly, there are strong dissonances between impoverished populations with specific desires and short-term needs, and institutions working on the building of long-term collective structures. The people who take part in the urban renewal projects face many problems, as they are perceived as the recipients of state favors, which creates new hierarchies in the neighborhoods. Too many actors with dissonant projects, timely goals and visions of space use undermine the possibility of broad action that can only be undertaken by the state.

The present institutional assemblages created through the supervision and coordination of multiple organizations by Fokal include both vertical assemblages, as it creates relationships between popular organizations and state, local and foreign NGOs; and horizontal assemblages, in cases where popular organizations and local NGOs coordinate their own efforts. These assemblages contribute to the fragmentation of urban space because of Fokal's inability to suture

different spatio-temporal scales. Fokal is itself as an institution divided along multiple discordant temporal and spatial scales. To put it more simply, Fokal is a Haitian organization led by experts who also work or have worked for the state (the director is former prime minister). As one main figure of Fokal said to me in an interview, they try “to stimulate action, not to execute.” They try to build state durability and the capacity, through local projects, to intervene in the whole territory. However, their conception of space, time and state is disrupted by the fact that they are forced to work for the short-term visibility of major foreign funding agencies such as the European Union (the Open Society of Soros is similar in many ways). They must also work with populations who do not envision time, space and place in the same manner because they are steeped in economic hardship. This dissonance of spatio-temporal rhythms is the main feature of Port-au-Prince and Haiti, a capital and a country where divergent visions and practices of land use and durability compete and create new on-the-ground spheres of inequality. The director of Fokal, Michele Pierre-Louis, asked the right question at a 2012 conference: “How do we reconcile our different spatio-temporal scales?” She provides the right answer when she affirms that the state needs to build the capacity to legislate property and land use and to distribute national rights to all citizens. This cannot happen in a place where too many NGOs, religious organizations and international agencies bypass the state to implement their own projects.

### **Institutional Invisibilities**

While Martissant is replete with institutions catering to ecology, water resources and various kinds of infrastructure, the Bolosse 4ème Avenue neighborhood’s inhabitants complain about being forgotten by all. I mostly talked with people living next to the ravine Saint-Léger, a small street carved into a steep rocky hill. The Saint-Léger street and ravine are located three blocks away from Martissant. It takes about ten minutes by foot to walk between the two areas.

Unlike the section of Grand Rue located at the bottom of this neighborhood, the Saint-Léger street is clean and its paved streets make for a nice walk. Mr. Martial, who has been living here for more than ten years, explains:

It is a quiet neighborhood, there are a lot of retired people, workers, some storekeepers, artists, and lots of unemployed people, unfortunately. We organize ourselves and manage to get electricity, we ensure the safety and the salubrity of our streets. But it's hard because nobody cleans up the ravine. It's 12 feet deep and filled with detritus. We have mosquitoes all the time because the trash is always wet. The odor is unbearable. It used to be cleaned up regularly, but the trash services in this part of town have completely disappeared.

When the rain falls, the street becomes filled up with wastewater and trash. The trash makes its way into homes when the rain is heavy. People complain about working all the time to keep their homes clean.



*Figure 39 Ti Michel selling Cola and liquors from his kiosk, Bolosse 4c*





*Figure 40 An apartment building in Bolosse 4*

This neighborhood has great social and architectural diversity and boasts a very low crime rate. It is not rare to see large houses and courtyards full of plants and flowers. In the meantime, small houses built with cinder blocks and salvaged materials have been built in all the interstices of the neighborhood. People have built many houses along the ravine in the past twenty years. Their houses are difficult to access, as they stand adjacent to a narrow rocky path overlooking the deep ditch. Nevertheless, people here do the best they can to bring their trash to places where the trucks of the state trash collection service go by. Monsieur Raymond, who has lived on Rue Saint-Léger since 1956, goes once a week to the state trash collection department to



protest about the detritus flooding his neighborhood. He's the leading voice of this neighborhood and directs the informal efforts to keep the place clean. In February 2014, he took me for a tour of the ravine. As we were looking at the pigs feeding from the trash, he explained:

When you see a plastic bottle or some kind of plastic package [ambalaj] somewhere, it comes from the ravine, not from the people living here. You see, uphill, you have a somewhat affluent neighborhood, and there is a heavily trafficked road going by the upper side of the ditch. Trash comes from these places. People in cars will come by and throw plastic bags filled with trash into the ravines. Instead of carrying the wastewaters away, like it used to, the ravines are now an open air landfill. Back in the old days, even some 15 years ago, you didn't see all of this. First, we didn't have these kinds of products here in Haiti, things like drinks in plastic bottles, cookies wrapped in plastic.... When you drank a Seven-Up, you returned the glass bottle to the vendor, that was it.

On fait du mieux qu'on peut mais on se sent lâchés par l'état. Bolosse, c'est un vieux quartier, il y a beaucoup de gens qui vivent ici depuis très longtemps, autrefois c'était boisé. Ce n'est plus pareil, mais on se connaît tous quand même. Et on n'est pas du genre à aller manifester ou crier aux portes du Palais National pour faire bouger les choses. On aimerait dialoguer mais on ne voit jamais personne. On va aux Travaux Publics, dans les bureaux, mais rien ne se passe. La ravine c'est un cancer pour nous tous ici. On aimerait quand-même que l'état nous aide.

The ravine of which people talk is a canal with cement walls where informal houses have emerged. Even in dry season, the water flows into the canal through a dysfunctional sewage system carrying mounds of garbage. They reach a turning point of the ravine close to Saint-Léger Street where the stale water is supposed to flow underground. But it cannot. So a huge continuous mass of humid trash is polluting the area. When it rains, the ravine overflows and discharges a full load of trash and foul liquids into the surrounding streets. This situation sometimes gets dramatic, as happened in the Solido neighborhood in June 2014 when mountains of garbage invaded the streets. Madame Sabine, who lives close to the ravine, explained calmly:

Here the ravine is ten feet deep. But one cannot see the bottom because it is always full. When it rains heavily, my family works all night to keep the dirty water away from our house. We heightened our little fence, we did everything to keep the water away and we are still invaded by garbage. We always have an ill person at home. Mosquitoes, insalubrity... we are normal good people. What did we do to deserve this?



*Figure 41 Ravine Saint Léger (Joos, 2013)*

During the many conversations I had with residents of Bolosse 4, it appeared clear that they would like to establish a dialogue with the government to start with. Mr. Patrick, who lives in one passageway parallel to the ravine, said:

The problem is not new but the quantity of garbage has largely increased since 2010 to the point that we cannot control it any more. The government should take care of this problem just like it used to. If NGOs want to get involved, no problem. But I think most of us would like to deal with our national institutions before anything else.

Very often people get irritated to see nothing of the Port-au-Prince reconstruction plan they heard so much about during the 2011 presidential elections. Some see how capable the government is

in matters of sanitation in the Martissant area. Many are ready to invest in their neighborhood, to participate in projects such as waste processing and training in recycling methods. The residents already know the “green” language all too well.

The rainy season that starts in May always promises a sanitary catastrophe. Madame Sabine observed wisely: “Soon many will get sick because of the invading mosquitoes. Many will give work to the doctors of the Health Center of Portail Leogane, when the illnesses could be prevented by a big cleaning of the ravine. What costs more: healthcare for hundreds of sick people or prevention?” Many know that a simple cleaning of the ravine would be a temporary solution, but Madame Sabine’s opinion is often shared: a first effort has to be made in order to turn to more sustainable solutions. As Monsieur Raymond showed me, the ravine could be functional. A retention basin was dug in the middle of the ravine in the 1960s, as he recalls. This basin would normally prevent water overflows when there is no rain. However, it is filled with thick amounts of trash.

As Monsieur Raymond mentioned, the ravines are filled with products that didn’t exist in Haiti *en masse* before 1986. One quick look into a pile of trash in the ditch tells a tale of globalization: boxes of Egyptian cheese imported via the Dominican Republic, cans of fruit juice made in Mexico, Juicy Fruit gum packages or plastic wrappings from California-made Bella soap float among the remains of other imported products. In a National Public Radio story entitled “Port-au-Prince, a city of millions, with no sewage system” broadcast in 2012, Richard Knox states that “often when Haitians build a house, they don't even think about putting in a toilet” (Knox 2012). The whole story depicts the apocalyptic infrastructure situation in the post-earthquake moment, blaming the lack of a functioning sewage system on the Haitian governments and population. Of course, there is no historical overview of this situation, which

was inherited from colonial and imperial engineering practices in many occupied tropical regions.

The ravines worked as a sewage system in times where trash production was minimal. The open air drainage canals (or ravines) have been the primary mean to evacuate wastewater and rain water since the colonial period (McClellan III 2010: 89). It can be hypothesized that building an underground sewage system was too expensive for the French government and too difficult to execute for colonial urban planners who lacked construction materials. However, during the American occupation (1915-1934), parts of Port-au-Prince benefited from modern infrastructure designed by American engineers. As General Gerald C. Thomas, who worked in the Provisional Marine Brigade in Haiti from 1919 to 1921, writes that the city had “an electrical system, a trolley line, paved main boulevards, and a reasonable sewage system, at least in the affluent suburbs and government buildings” (Thomas 1991: 77). Neighborhoods like Pacot and Turgeau, where most American occupants lived, still have a functioning underground sewage system, even if the iron manhole covers have long been stolen, which makes for dangerous and deep holes in the roads and sidewalks. In the Monograph of the Republic of Haiti compiled 1932 by the United States Marine Corps—Division of Operations and Training, we learn that in Cap Haitian, “the American Scientific Mission has done splendid drainage work of a semi-permanent nature, which should reduce the infections from Malaria to a very low figure” (Marine Corps 1932: 601). Presumably, in Port-au-Prince, where it is mentioned that sewage systems are “open and closed” (Marines 1932: 601), the same semi-permanent types of work were undertaken. Driven by hygienist ideologies, American engineers reinforced the colonial system of open drainage canals in marginalized neighborhoods while building a modern sewage infrastructure in the neighborhoods they lived in. Indeed, the central districts of Port-au-Prince still benefit from



such a system, which make the city in these areas (such as Monatuf) much more breathable and livable. Of course, nobody could predict the invasion of detritus of the past thirty years, but it was well known that open air sewage would breed disease and air pollution.

The remnants of the sewage infrastructure are colonial and imperial debris that continues to be an active agent of the ruination of impoverished communities. As anthropologist Kathleen Stewart writes, “things do not simply fall into ruin or dissipate.... They fashion themselves into powerful effects that remember things in such a way that ‘history’ digs itself into the present and people can’t help but recall it” (Stewart 1996: 111). If people do not recall the imperial history behind the ravines, they do still feel the effects of a “semi-permanent” infrastructure on their life on a daily basis. Life projects, in these conditions, are very limited due to the health and social obstacles the Saint-Léger ravine places in people’s way.



*Figure 42*

## **The Quest for the Solution**

Together with a Haitian architect and a Swiss engineer I befriended in 2012, I walked along the ravine to understand how it works and what would be the potential solutions so the canal could serve its purpose. I had promised Monsieur Raymond that I would come back with experts who work for the government and for NGOs. Jackson –the Haitian architect- and Thomas –the Swiss engineer-, who both worked for several important organizations, were very interested to venture into a neighborhood with a “bad reputation”. They often only passed by this area and were curious to explore this infamous ravine that is off the NGO maps. I clearly explained my role to Monsieur Raymond—that of a documentarist who would provide him with a detailed report and photos of the neighborhood that he could use for negotiations—and that I wasn’t involved in the NGO and state worlds. We took a walk along the ravine with Monsieur Raymond. When Thomas, the Swiss engineer, started to talk with Monsieur Raymond, he used an expert vocabulary and tone:

There are two visible problems: one is that the leaks in the abduction system push the stuff to the bottom which leads to the constant humidification of the area. The other problem is that the leaks of the water pipes keep multiplying and the water debit reaches its maximum close to Saint-Leger Street where works of laying of culvert [busage] and drainage were done some ten years ago, I would say. They seem to have been well done but the huge quantity of clutter gets it stuck. We must think of a solution for the long term: doing a hydrological study in the area, focusing on waste processing, communal water outlets and discussing with the concerned populations. But before fixing a wound the first thing to do is to stop the bleeding.

The two experts agree that a short-term solution was necessary. Cleaning up the ravine and unblocking the pipes as fast as possible was necessary in order to prevent illnesses due to the rainy season. This was also the immediate goal of Monsieur Raymond. However, the “holistic

solution” the engineer put forth was subject to debate. Thomas argued: “The ravine is so full that it is difficult to see in what shape the construction is. Before envisioning long-term solutions, there is a need for the DINEPA [State Water Supply and Sanitation Agency] to fix up all the water leaks of all the pipes that traverse the neighborhood.” If the government stepped in, replied Monsieur Raymond, it should only be to clean up the ravine as it used to do. As he explained to us with a worried tone, if the Water and Sanitation Agency comes up to the neighborhood to fix the pipe leaks, they will discover that people do “priz dlo”—that they deviate potable water pipes to bring water inside their own homes without paying the state. While Jackson remained silent, Thomas went on as if he hadn’t heard Monsieur Raymond;

I agree. As a first step, the authorities should take urgent measures. The SMCRS [trash collection] and the Public Works Department should step up to help residents clean the ravine. We know that resources are limited and that the situation is difficult for all Haitians, but we should insist that this is an emergency and that the government should get involved right away. But step number two is to fix the water leaks, otherwise, humid stuff will clog the ravine again and again. We need a holistic solution with educational programs around trash and recycling. There is a need for fixing up the small problems that lead to the big problem.

Monsieur Raymond and his friends Jano and Alfred wouldn’t have it though. The whole neighborhood would turn against them if the holistic solution was applied. The risk would be for many people to be penalized. What they asked for was simple: they wanted the ravine cleaned up with machines, they wanted electricity, which hadn’t come through this neighborhood since 2004, and they wanted schools and jobs for the population. They felt the water leaks issue was important but impossible to fix right now. “You need to convince people first,” stated Alfred, a fifty year-old man who has spent all his life here. He went on:

And to do so, you must start with projects that please the community: picking trash up, opening schools and clinics, and then you can talk about the leaking situation. If you deprive people of the only thing they can truly enjoy in this neighborhood, having water running from a tap located in your house, you will only stir up trouble.

Nou pa genyen sevis komunal isi. Lè lapli vini ranblè bouche ravin nan e lel vin kon sa dlo a pase an lè. Nou pral gade ravin nan. Ravin sa genyen 10 pye pwofondè. Li fe dix pye kif e ke ou pa we pwofondè li. Ravin sa li bay pwoblem sa a depwi sou Duvalier pèrè, li kon sa. Yo eseye fe kanal pou dlo a pase enba a koz de ranble [pierre] fatra ki vini avek anpil ter/sable/gravier/sachet/twal, etc. ki impoze dlo sa pase enba tè. Se sa ki koz li bouche. Li pase an lè, li pran wout kay nou, nou inonde lè lapli tonbe. L'etat pan janm netoye la du tout, yo neglije nou. Mwen la depwi 1962, mwen se popyetè nan zon nan. Me m di w : le ou pral vini ak DINEPA nan zon nan, pral genyen pwoblem !

Most of the people I talked with only demanded the cleaning of the ravine and access to electricity. The fact that they informally connected to the water system was an advantage they didn't want to jeopardize. Jackson understood this point, and reassured the group of men we talked with by stating that nobody would call the DINEPA (water and sanitation). He agreed with the men living there that the problem was a social problem before being an infrastructural problem:

If people have an income, they will be happy to pay for water or electricity. But first you need something to happen: if children can go to school, if work positions are opening up for people from this neighborhood, things will start to change. I lived in Port-au-Prince for forty years and I know that if you say: "I am from Bolosse, or I am from Cité Soleil", you won't get a job. The neighborhood has a bad reputation. People say it's dirty, it's dangerous. Cleaning up the ravine is a priority, that's for sure and we all agree. But then, you need a project like the one in Martissant where you start by giving employment to a few people. It's an income problem, as usual.

While some people in Martissant are able to participate in the slow renewal of their neighborhood, talks about possibilities of a decent urban life in Bolosse are purely speculative. With Monsieur Raymond, we sent a report I wrote to several media outlets. Tele Ginen came soon afterward with a full camera crew. They interviewed Monsieur Raymond along with a few of his neighbors who live along the ravine. Monsieur Raymond kept going to the SMCRS (trash collection services) but to no avail, even with his momentum from being on TV. The situation of Bolosse is unfortunately far from uncommon, as he knows.



Lefebvre argues that the right to the city “should modify, concretize and make more practical the rights of the citizen as an urban dweller (citadin) and user of multiple services. It would affirm, on the one hand, the right of users to make known their ideas about the space and time of their activities in the urban area; it would also cover the right to the use of the center, a privileged place, instead of being dispersed and stuck into ghettos (for workers, immigrants, the ‘marginal’ and even for the ‘privileged’)” (Lefebvre 1996: 34). The right to the city does not yet exist in Bolosse, and is only partially implemented/recognized in Martissant, even though the people have an idea of how they want it implemented. The trash-filled ravines do not allow for any life projects and cast people at the margins of society by the reputation of squalor it creates.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: PATRIMONY AND DESTRUCTIVE URBAN PLANNING**

Port-au-Prince's old districts were severely damaged during the 2010 earthquake. Many people in Grand Rue, Monatuf, Bel-Air and all the neighborhoods surrounding the Champ de Mars perished within buildings or in the streets as large buildings collapsed. However, many old structures resisted the disaster and sheltered their dwellers. Mainly houses built with wood or with a combination of timber, tuff, plaster, cement or bricks and roofed with light materials such as corrugated iron or metal sheets didn't collapse. I was able to observe extensive damage such as cracked walls or collapsed gables but, to a large extent, the patrimonial structures known as gingerbread houses remarkably survived the seismic bursts that ravaged most of Port-au-Prince. These houses are today deemed to be among the last remnants of Port-au-Prince's patrimonial built environment, since old churches, cathedrals and state buildings collapsed in the quake.

While the gingerbread houses are the target of a small patrimonial rehabilitation program led by the Fondation Konesans ak Libète (FOKAL) and funded by the World Monument Fund, the shotgun houses of Port-au-Prince that housed and still house the Haitian working classes living are not mentioned as parts of the patrimony. They are actually demolished through state-led urban planning projects, even though some members of the state Haitian Institute for the Protection of National Heritage (ISPAN), founded in 1979 by architect Abert Mangonès, recognize these structures as buildings that should be documented and protected. In this chapter, I describe, compare and analyze two neighborhoods and their fate. Clomène's shotgun neighborhood in Monatuf was demolished without notice on May 28 and 29, 2014, while the

Bois Verna neighborhood and its many gingerbread houses that belong or formerly belonged to the bourgeoisie are now being renovated by private owners and local NGOs associated with foreign partners. I will describe the built habitat in both places, the people who live in these structures and the processes that lead to patrimonial recognition or mere destruction. I argue that shotgun houses architecturally embody counter-hegemonic practices of a population that has traditionally been marginalized in Haiti.

### **The Gingerbread Neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince**

East of the Champ de Mars stand the Bois Verna, Turgeau and Pacot neighborhoods. Beginning in the 1910s, these neighborhoods were coveted by the “import-export bourgeoisie”, as Rolph Trouillot puts it, and the petite bourgeoisie, whose members bought large swaths of land in the green hills of eastern Port-au-Prince on which to build small and large wooden houses (Trouillot 2014: 189). I mainly walked in Pacot, where I lived, and planned to do most of my fieldwork there, working with people inhabiting derelict gingerbread houses in this place. However, while I gathered data in these areas of town, it proved difficult to get information from actual residents, who feared the proprietors of their homes would be upset to know that an ethnographer spent time on their property. I was nonetheless able to meet a few proprietors and to establish good relations with them. I also interviewed and walked around with Farah Hyppolite, who is in charge of the Fokal gingerbread restoration project. However, I was mostly attracted by neighborhoods where working-class architecture from the colonial period still existed. Aland and I felt an urge to talk with people whose history was seldom narrated and who genuinely wanted to have their voices heard. In this section, I will describe the gingerbread neighborhoods and the processes of gentrification that affect these places where domestic workers and the middle class were able to find lodging before the 2010 earthquake.

Pacot is a place where broad, green avenues radically contrast with the tumult of the crowded streets of the rest of the capital. Between 1911 and 1944, this part of the city became the locus of a vast urban planning experiment. Private contractors were hired by powerful local businessmen—such as auto importer Wilson, whose name was given to the upper side streets of Pacot—to cut large asphalted streets into a square mile of wooded hills adjacent to the political center of the city to create a residential area for the Haitian elites and for American occupants (Corvington 1972; Marley 2006). This land, located a mile east of the National Palace, was divided into large parcels in the middle of which a wide variety of polychromatic and richly ornamented gingerbread houses were erected (Corvington 1972; Godard 1985). Most of these structures were abandoned long before 2010 and have been deteriorating for decades. As explained previously, the waves of arrests and executions of 1963, 1964 and 1967 that targeted the intellectual bourgeoisie and the mulatto elites that didn't support Duvalier had for consequence a serious brain drain as experts of all kinds fled to New York and Montréal.

Pacot is a disturbingly quiet residential neighborhood in Port-au-Prince. There are thick concrete walls, sometimes colorfully painted, sometimes topped with forbidding barbed wire or thick bougainvillea flowers whose thorns deter anyone from climbing the walls. These walls have been growing recently. Jean-Daniel Beauregard owns and lives alone in a ruined six bedroom red-and-yellow gothic-style manor that belonged to his grandfather, a doctor who lost his job during the Duvalier era but who never left Haiti. Jean-Daniel told me in a 2012 interview:

Life took place outside, on the side galleries where we ate, played and spent time with family and friends. We played soccer on the street, rode our bicycles. There were no fences or walls around the houses. We wandered everywhere we wanted. All the mothers on the street were my mothers. One time, I crossed the street with my bike without paying attention. A woman yelled at me and slapped me on the butt! She told me: “sit here and don't move!” and gave me a lecture. It was possible in those times [the 1960s]. This doesn't mean life was all peaches and cream. Duvalier's repression was terrible. I don't know anyone in the neighborhood who hasn't gotten a member of their family

“disappeared”. It could be through random macoute violence. Macoutes used their power for all sorts of reasons. If they were jealous of your woman, your car or whatever, if they just didn’t like your face, well... you would disappear. You didn’t need to be a big bourgeois [gwo chabrak] or todo politics to end up at the Fort Dimanche prison. Nonetheless, here in Pacot, it was like a jungle. Trees everywhere, we left all doors open at all times. There were trash pickup services, we had tap water. Our house was surrounded by tall mango and breadfruit trees from which we ate. When Aristide came back to power in 1994, I had all the trees cut down and I built high walls topped with barbed wire all around the house. I was attacked three times by gangsters between 1994 and 2005. Point blank each time! I’m not doing politics or anything. I lost my job long ago, so I don’t have any belongings but my small TV set so I can watch soccer with friends. Once they stole an old crate of music cassettes! Walls grew quickly in the early 2000s as the neighborhood was often the target of random violence. Aristide pointed to us with his finger. You know, he said something like: “if you are hungry, you know where to find responsible people!” He meant here and Pétion-Ville... I never lived a year without terror. Yes, we sat outside at night when I was a kid, listened to folktales elders told us, we had a rich family life, a house wide open on natural wonders. And yet we were terrified. All my family lives abroad. All my neighbors left the neighborhood in the 1970s and 1980s. I only have one neighbor I know from my childhood days. We all live behind closed walls, we don’t know each other. Many NGOs have settled in the neighborhoods and transformed places into military camps. It’s simple, the more foreign money that arrives in Haiti, the poorer Haiti becomes. It’s a tremendous business. Prices of rent in the neighborhood have soared since NGOs came in throngs after the 2010 earthquake. It’s the best neighborhood in Port-au-Prince, many people want to live here and work here. It’s easier to do your little things in Pacot than going to the downtown neighborhoods and helping the people who really need help. I could sell my house for a lot of money, but I don’t want to. It’s falling apart. I don’t really care. A house lives and dies. That’s her last years... I don’t care about it being restored.

Jean-Daniel quit his stable job in a telecommunications business in 2004 and lives off small remittances his brother sends him from Florida, where he works as a policeman. He is very sarcastic and doesn’t care anymore about the fate of a country he used to deeply love. His quiet house is haunted by intangible yet powerful streams of state violence materialized in the high walls surrounding the villas, which stand as markers of social standing for families who lived in bourgeois urban *lakou*.

This changed with the modernist aesthetics and carceral types of architecture that emerged in Port-au-Prince under Duvalier, especially in sections of Delmas in the north of the

city, where the regime intelligentsia started to build residences. The gingerbread houses demand lots of care and are made for a lifestyle that became dangerous in the 1960s. As a consequence, most of these houses started to fall apart at that time. As ruins of opulent urban castes, they regained their cachet for American preservationists mesmerized by these “endangered species” in the 1970s. Phillips’ superb 1974 book of drawings and the recent efforts of the World Monument Fund are clearly inspired by a romanticized history of a once-functional Haiti, where people had access to space and comfortable dwellings in the capital. These houses also attract foreign NGOs and their workers who, as I will show later, make the prices of rents go up and reinforce the paramilitary surveillance of these neighborhoods. Private patrimonial structures also exist in the working-class neighborhoods but never attracted the interest of preservation societies. Nonetheless, the gingerbread houses tell the story of Haitians educated abroad who invented a syncretic form of architecture that was adapted to the local climate and natural disasters.

These vast and elaborate residences reminiscent of the American Victorian Painted Ladies were named “gingerbread houses” by American tourists visiting Haiti in the 1950s. Far from being pale copies of their American cousins, they were designed by Haitian architects trained in France at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Baussan, Mathon and Maximilien, in fact, borrowed features from the French seaside architectural style and from American Queen Anne style architecture to build houses suitable to the tropical setting. The gingerbread houses are distinctively Haitian by the mere fact that a confluence of international cultural traits was channeled through a distinctive Haitian vision materialized, for instance, in the inventive ornamentation handcrafted by local master carpenters who will reproduced similar designs at a smaller scale in the working class and middle class neighborhoods of downtown Port-au-Prince.

Owned by the Port-au-Prince bourgeoisie at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these houses are now occupied by people from every segment of the Haitian social spectrum. In the same neighborhood, the passerby can catch sight of luxurious mansions inhabited by prominent members of the political elite, as well as lopsided houses squatted in by several families.

Farah Hyppolite, a Haitian architect in charge of the Fokal restoration project, presents a potentially fruitful approach to dealing with the reconstruction of her native city that is removed from the romanticism these houses inspire in foreigners. Farah and I took a long walk in the gingerbread neighborhoods and had conversations about the utility of preservation. By pointing out that the old houses of Port-au-Prince reflect a viable type of architectural design and house-building knowledge, she places the Haitian workers and their traditional skills at the heart of the reconstruction process:

The gingerbread houses are well-designed. Almost none of the 200 structures we catalogued collapsed during the earthquake. The walls have strong timber frames that are often visible. This allows for flexibility. It is a technique widely used in regions subjected to seismic activity since the 1755 Lisbon earthquake. They could offer blueprints for the reconstruction of the capital. They are built on elevated floors to avoid floods and humidity. Their high ceilings and many doors allow for good ventilation. Their steep roofs are perfect to sustain the heavy rains that batter the city in the summer. They sustained earthquakes, hurricanes and are a testimony of Haitian artisanal savoir-faire. [I then asked Farah about preserving shotgun houses:] I love smaller houses with the same architectural patterns and wish to extend our project to the whole city of Port-au-Prince. If we could build small structures with designs adapted to our country, it would be a big step forward. Our Fokal project is going slowly, we do not have too much funding. We are now training local carpenters by renovating a home in Bois Verna that will serve as an annex of Fokal. It's a long, long-term project!





*Figure 43 Gingerbread houses in Bois Verna*



As we walked down Rue “O”, a narrow alley perpendicular to the central and busy Bois Verna artery, Farah showed me parcels of land where no less than five small gingerbread houses had been bulldozed in a matter of two months: “The land is worth more than the houses themselves. There is tremendous financial pressure to get rid of the gingerbreads. In these times when we have lost so many of our landmarks, the state should offer a legal framework to protect our cultural artifacts and help proprietors keep their historic homes alive.” Since 2010, more than twenty historical houses have been destroyed by private owners to build apartment complexes or to sell the land. Private security guards make sure nobody is squatting on the land of empty houses. With the influx of foreigners renting houses and apartments in this prime location in the city, these neighborhoods, which are close to downtown but away from the heat, noise and pollution that characterize the lower neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince, have become hyper-securitized spaces where middle-class and working-class Haitians cannot afford to live.



*Figure 44 President Louis Borno's house (Joos 2013)*



*Figure 45 Inside Borno's house, Joos 2014*

### **The Post-2010 Moment in the Gingerbread Neighborhoods**

In April 2014, Aland was on the lookout for a two bedroom apartment or house that would reduce his commute to work. He then lived in the heights of Pétion-Ville in the semi-rural hills of Marlique. We conducted an ethnographic experiment in order to inquire about price augmentations in the gingerbread neighborhoods by contacting real estate agents who showed us houses and apartments in various locations in the city. When Aland was by himself, real estate agents (*koutyè*) were willing to show him places he could rent for less than \$2,500 (U.S. dollars) a year. However, Aland was unable to find anything in the gingerbread neighborhoods where he hoped to live with his family. The good schools, availability of tap water and electricity and the clean air made this place desirable. When I was present, *koutyè* only showed us expensive apartments and places in the gingerbread neighborhoods where a majority of foreigners lived. It is only with Monsieur Arold, a friend of a friend, that we could visit places affordable to Aland. Monsieur Arold agreed to work with Aland and understood why we needed to document the

renting market. He stated what so many people told us: “You won’t find anything in Bois Verna. After the earthquake, it became impossible to rent here, it’s very expensive.” All the places we visited were about 500 square feet, and included functioning bathrooms and two bedrooms.

We first went to Delmas 24, a popular neighborhood made of small cinder block structures and concrete buildings, where we visited a well-built apartment with new amenities and freshly painted walls. Aland liked the place but needed 25HTG a day to commute to teach at his high-school located 45 minutes away from there. Transportation prices were always in the equation. The neighborhood was in bad shape, with trash piled up at every street corners and electricity seldom available. It rented for \$1,750 a year (prices are all in U.S. dollars). We then visited a house in Lalue, an artery close to Bois Verna. The apartment was well-located and Aland could walk to work. However, the house, which also rented for \$1,750, was in a terrible shape. Walls were covered with black mold, the rusty tin roof had holes in it and the stench of the common restrooms made it unlivable. “That house is sick,” said Arold. “I’ve been trying to rent it for a year but I know it won’t work.” We then drove to Christ-Roi, a neighborhood recently rehabilitated by NGOs, to visit a nice house with large windows and a shaded courtyard. However, it was located way too far from Aland’s workplace and rented for \$2,000, which was expensive for the neighborhood. We then retreated back to Pacot and Bois Verna where we visited three centrally located apartments. All of these places were renovated and well-ventilated and had functioning amenities. However, landlords rented these places by the month, at \$300, \$450 and \$525 respectively. It wasn’t affordable at all for Aland, whose total monthly family income was \$350. The places we visited in Pacot were very similar to what we saw in Delmas 24 but the location made them prime apartments. As Arold mentioned, the \$450 apartment used to

rent for \$250 a month before the earthquake. Prices almost doubled after 2010 and the recent demolitions of residences in downtown Port-au-Prince also made rental prices increase suddenly.

Pacot, Bois Verna and Turgeau all have small housing units affordable for families like Aland's. His wife Rachel is a bank clerk and he himself crisscrosses the city to teach in different schools. Because too many of her family and friends lived in the Funeral Street area, Rachel didn't want to live there because too many people would come and go from their home at all times of the day and night. She worked six days a week for long hours and needed some private space to relax with her one-year-old son and husband when she came back from work, usually after 7 PM. Increasing the commute time would simply make their lives impossible. They finally decided to rent a small house in the outskirts of Pétion-Ville, which didn't reduce their commute price or length but allowed them to have access to a well-reputed and affordable kindergarten for their son. The gingerbread neighborhoods offer a type of habitat that is ubiquitous throughout the whole city but that is unaffordable to most working Haitians.

For long-time residents of these districts, life also changed after the 2010 earthquake. My friend Christelle Célestin lives in a small gingerbread house that formerly belonged to President Salomon and his family. She has distant ties with this family and lives with her 92-year-old grandfather in the right side of the house while they are renting the middle room to a cousin who opened a beauty salon in it. The left side of the house is rented to a family Christelle has known for many years.

In terms of spatial practices, the gingerbread houses promote both family communal life with their galleries and large dining rooms, and at the same time compartmentalize private life (Rosner 2013). Gingerbread houses are nested in wooded areas and set back from the street. Often, people working for the residents lived in small barracks behind the main house. The

gingerbread houses draw on Victorian architecture and promote the values of nuclear families with a hierarchy of rooms such as the patriarchal study, the master bedroom and the few spaces where domestic workers are allowed to transit. These houses vastly differ from the downtown residences which, for the most part, include the semi-private space of front porches that separate interior living spaces from the street.

The gingerbread houses, in most cases, lost their social function, as wealthy home owners prefer Hollywood style villas perched on the heights of Pétiion-Ville, where they escape the density of Port-au-Prince that forces them to rub elbows with its poorest residents. Nowadays, though some well-preserved houses are coveted by Americans and Europeans for whom the antique cachet remains important, the gingerbread houses are not generally desirable because they are not deemed suitable for mixed housing and commercial use. When talking about houses with Clomène, she often stated that feeling estranged from street settings would prevent her from doing good business. The shotgun houses of Monatuf seemed far more cherished by their inhabitants, who saw these structures as an integral part of their possibilities for a livelihood.

### **The Shotgun Houses of Port-au-Prince**

While all rent prices soared after the earthquake due to lack of housing, Monatuf remained an affordable neighborhood where basic public services such as trash collection, electricity and good schools were still available. I call Monatuf a shotgun neighborhood because most buildings, even if they are not technically shotguns, have the same rectangular shapes and the same length of street façade as shotgun houses (about 12 to 14 ft.). In 1974, folklorist John Michael Vlach did fieldwork in the central neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince and detailed the various forms of shotgun houses he found there. While Vlach didn't describe daily life in and around the shotgun houses, his findings were nonetheless groundbreaking. The shotgun house is

often touted as the quintessential working class house in the rural U.S. south and is often associated with African American material culture. Vlach, through archival work and detailed measurements, succeeded in proving that this cultural hallmark of the Old South actually originated in Haiti, specifically in Port-au-Prince, where the oldest species of this architectural gem could be found.











*Figure 46 Shotgun houses in Rue de l'Enterrement (Joos, May 2014)*

In order to maximize the use of expensive urban land, shotgun houses have little street façade and often have a “camel back”—rooms built atop the structure that aren’t counted as residential space in property taxes. Beyond these utilitarian functions, the shotgun house invokes “long migrations, the conduct of the Atlantic slave trade, the rise of free black communities, the development of vernacular (folk) and popular traditions in architecture, and the expansion of

American [and French, in the case of Saint-Domingue] industrial needs” (Vlach 1983: 281). The people who inhabit these houses in Port-au-Prince know their patrimonial value and take pride in the ornamental features of the house such as the gingerbread trims that make them look like bourgeois houses on a much smaller scale.

If the gingerbread house was built for nuclear families in very private settings, the shotgun tells a very different story. Exactly forty years later after Vlach, Aland Joseph and I were doing fieldwork in the neighborhoods he documented and found the houses he described in his articles and books. As shown previously with the examples of Clomène’s and Boss Joel’s houses, the shotgun houses that dot the Monatuf are still coveted spaces where commerce and private life fluidly unfold. This working-class form of patrimony tends to disappear in downtown Port-au-Prince as commercial buildings such as funeral parlors, beauty salons, restaurants, garages and warehouses are built atop demolished shogun houses. As Boss Joel stated:

Funeral Street used to be full of these little wooden houses. Mine may date back to the colonial period, the Haitian Institute for Preservation workers told me. It’s a trace of our presence as free people in Port-au-Prince from earlier times and it should be preserved so people don’t forget who we are. Enslaved people who fought and won their freedom. The rumors of demolition make me sick.

Boss Joel recognizes the patrimonial value of his house and takes pride in the stories it tells about national heritage. The ISPAN employees who came to visit his house and painted a sign on its front wall recognizing it as a historical building told him a lot about his house. This type of house is disappearing quickly from Monatuf; Brazilian anthropologist Rodrigo Bulamah, Aland and myself counted 47 wooden shotgun houses in the street grid made by Rue Pavée, Rue Saint-Honoré, Rue de la Réunion and Funeral Street (about a square kilometer of streets). The shotgun is a syncretic form of architecture widely used in rural areas, and in urban centers inhabited by rural migrants. It allows for a way of life similar to that in a *lakou*.

As Vlach demonstrates forcefully, the shotgun draws on Yoruba two-room houses that have been transformed by African captives adapting to new settings in Saint-Domingue. As he shows, the typical dwelling of the Yoruba in Africa was a two-room modular structure, with a single entrance. As art historian Meredith Kahn states, “the structure’s modular design allowed it to be combined with other units to form a variety of building types, including structures with courtyards and long, multifamily houses” (Kahn 2007: 53). While wattle and daub structures are still being built in rural parts of Haiti and were ubiquitous in the outskirts of Port-au-Prince until the large waves of rural migration of the 1980s, urban centers mostly comprise shotgun houses built with with European half-timbering structures that make them paraseismic. Vlach also mentions that the Arawak who peopled the island before their mass extermination by colonists in the 16<sup>th</sup> century also contributed to the elaboration of this important form of rural and urban Haitian architecture. The front porch located under the gable and the size of the rooms is strikingly similar to Taino and Arawak *bohios*. In brief, the house favored by free men of color in Port-au-Prince and by affranchised blacks during the colonial period stems from a syncretic vernacular architecture that crystalizes the cultural and spatial practices of West Africans and island natives.

The fact that the house is modular and can be extended allows for the housing of fluid families. Clomène herself had a small extension built on the back of her house in order to have a small dining room and TV room where her friends and relatives could enter without permission. She kept the third and fourth rooms closed during the day in order to preserve her own privacy. The structural improvisation this allows makes the shotgun a prime architectural form in a city where disasters of all kinds often reshuffle the demographic composition of the capital. For instance, when Boss Joel took in his two granddaughters after the 2010 earthquake, he moved his

workshop from the second room to the side gallery, which he closed with doors he recuperated from appliances. He cleaned up the room and installed a bed and a TV set for the girls to feel at home.

Countless examples of improvised extensions are visible in Monatuf. Perhaps the most remarkable that I observed was a vertical extension of a camel back shotgun. An extra room was added on top of the two-room camel back, and on top of this added room was a miniature replica of a shotgun house, built to house chickens. While preservationists working on gingerbread houses seek to find the original design of the house by looking at blueprints or by reassembling original blueprints using GIS technologies, the shotgun designs are perpetually extendable. It is a form of patrimony that is used, lived in and transformed according to the social and aesthetic needs of the people who inhabit them. This will have direct implications when discussing cultural rights in a later section.

The Haitian shotgun house has traveled, and it is a testimony to Haitian hypersyncretic cleverness. It is to be seen everywhere in New Orleans, where it appeared when in 1809, when the city size doubled with the arrival of “1,887 whites, 2,112 slaves, and 2,060 free people of color fleeing conditions in Haiti” (Vlach 1983: 283). The shotgun houses allowed for private life in their backrooms and social life in their front salons, often separated by sculpted wood lattices. As in Clomène’s house, the back courtyards are often used as workshops or kitchens while the semi-public space of the front porch allows for commercial activities. The shotgun house is a well-thought-out vernacular structure for a class of people who needed to work in order to make a living.

## The Demolition of the Shotgun Neighborhoods

Since 2010 and the declaration of Monatuf as a space of public utility, residents of this area have experienced deep anxieties because of frequent rumors of demolitions. I will reproduce here a conversation with Boss Joel six months before the demolition of his own home:

There's never security problems here, even if we're close to the prison. It's the old part of the city, and it used to be much cleaner than what it is today. It's a pity they only invest money uphill, in Pétion-Ville.... I love my old house, my neighborhood. It's the old Port-au-Prince. The powers in place work like former occupation forces: they drain the wealth of the people in family. They take care of their own neighborhoods. ISPAN comes here to catalogue houses but it's useless. They take photos, look at our houses and tell us that for the state, the house is worth nothing. It's the land that's expensive. They can give me 10,000, 50,000 dollars. I don't want it. It's my home. Where would I go? It's an old house, it may not be worth anything to them but I have my neighbors here, my memories. I have my workshop. It's a good little house. All made of wood. There are rotten parts, but during the earthquake, nothing moved! No damage at all! [his son interjected:] Even if it collapses, it doesn't kill you, it's wood! [Boss Joel laughed and added:] They knew how to make solid houses. We need to keep our patrimony and make it possible for people to live better lives in their own neighborhoods. And not build concrete buildings in lieu of old houses!

A few days after our conversation, on April 24, 2014, Clomène called me to let me know that her neighbor had showed her a letter stating that the neighborhood would be demolished soon. Nobody knew when this would happen. April 30 was the rumored date. The same day, I walked with Aland in Rue de la Réunion. We saw barricades of burning tires and beer bottles were thrown at us, probably because my skin color places me on the side of urban planners wanting to demolish that side of town. We ran under the porch of a printing shop and talked with people who told us demonstrating was no use. The shop owner stated: "In 2010, they demolished a whole square of houses right there to build a new ministry. They started to build, indeed, but the construction has been halted for more than a year! Now, they don't have money to finish their construction projects but they have enough to come and raze our residences.... Mechanstè! [it's evil!]" The next day, I went to see Clomène with Rodrigo and Aland. When we arrived at

Clomène's, she was sitting in her living room. It was 3 PM, a time when she usually works.

Today, however, she felt depressed and didn't feel like working. We sat down with Aland and

Rodrigo and started to talk about the possible demolitions. Aland recorded the conversation:

I don't know when they will start the demolition. I don't know when I will start to move.... They don't say when they start. In 2009, they demolished a part of the neighborhood adjacent to the prison. They gave a month for people to move out. A long time before they demolished, though, they gave compensations to some proprietors. Proprietors didn't say anything to anyone and rented their places knowing that they soon would be demolished.... The state bulldozers come and destroy everything, including people's belongings [krazè tout bagay moun yo]. I need to pack my belongings, I'll pull out parts of the house to build myself a little place in Onaville [in the desert-like spaces located 30 minutes north of Port-au-Prince]. I don't have money, there's nothing else I can do. All the people from this area will do that. The state will take this place [leta ap prann zon nan]. ISPAN declared my house a patrimonial structure after January 12, 2010. People are angry, but you cannot beat up the state. You cannot beat up the state [ou pa ka goumen leta... ou pa ka goumen leta]. [Clomène paused.] I need to save Madame Lucille's stuff, I need to go to her other house in Carrefour to save her belongings. That will cost money! Her furniture is so heavy, it's solid wood! Beautiful furniture.... They already told us in October they would demolish our place. It didn't happen.... I'll go to Onaville, to live on state owned-land, like everyone does.... Proprietors receive compensations, not us. Onaville is hot, dry. I'll build a big room to put my belongings in, my freezers.... We might have to live in a tent. I'll take the interior wooden lattice of the house. It's too beautiful to be destroyed....

After our conversation we decided to collaboratively write her story in order to raise funds so she wouldn't have to move to Onaville, a place devoid of resources that grew exponentially after the 2010 earthquake. We collected 850 U.S. dollars that I handed to Clomène on May 20 so she could organize her move and find a place to rent. The money was insufficient for renting in downtown Port-au-Prince, but Clomène found an agreement with Madame Lucille and moved to her second home located in Carrefour on May 29. After we talked on April 25, Clomène called me to tell me that demolitions were halted and that she thought there was a good chance nothing would happen, as was the case in October 2013. All the people in the neighborhood lived in deep anxiety, not knowing when and where to move. Rumors spread, mainly because the state unevenly distributed contradictory letters. Some proprietors have been

compensated but the lawyer in charge of the process, Henry Céant, declared on June 24, 2014, on radio Scoop that to his knowledge, only fourteen proprietors have been compensated. The state clearly violated article 36-1 of the 1987 Constitution that stipulates that “expropriation for a public purpose may be effected only by payment or deposit ordered by a court in favor of the person entitled thereto, of fair compensation established in advance by an expert evaluation.” As I will show later, executive powers rarely comply with the laws they are supposedly elected to implement. People knew that an all-powerful, lawless state would one day awaken and crush their houses and belongings. They felt powerless. As Clomène importantly stated: *ou pa ka goumen leta—you cannot beat up the state.*

On May 28, 2014 people woke up to the sound of bulldozers. As we can see in Aland’s photographs, surprise and panic took over the neighborhood. Aland documented thoroughly the brutal destruction of a large part of Monatuf as I was sick and bed-ridden in the U.S. We talked on the phone. The news was depressing. Our friend Gilberte, as I will detail later, had almost no time to save her belongings. Boss Joel, who refused to move out, knelt down speechless, in tears, as his workshop was looted in front of placid policemen who didn’t budge. He watched the demolition of his house, as if he was paralyzed. Aland told me that he didn’t respond when he and his son talked to him. Boss Joel now lives at his sister’s in Martissant. He has lost a lot of weight and doesn’t work anymore. Clomène told me that he barely talks when she calls him to talk. His surrogate granddaughters went to live with distant relatives in Cité Soleil and cannot afford to go to school anymore. The list of tragedies goes on. Hundreds of families were rendered homeless without notice. This part of Monatuf is today a vast pile of rubbles that functions as an informal dump in the middle of Old Port-au-Prince.

On May 28, 2014, Clomène heard the rumbling noises of trucks and bulldozers driving up Funeral Street around 5:30 AM. She immediately called Aland and a few other friends in order to get some help moving the rest of her belongings. In anticipation, she had already moved Madame Lucille's furniture to another property she owned in Kafou. Aland helped Clomène and her family get a pick-up truck loaded with her mattresses and suitcases and then started to document the demolitions with audio recordings, notes and photography. We had been collaboratively documenting this part of town for six months when homes started to be crushed to dust. Not knowing when the demolitions would happen, I went back to North Carolina to visit my family for a week in May 26 before I would do my last two months of fieldwork in Port-au-Prince. However, a day after I landed in Raleigh, my body started to stiffen, I couldn't walk anymore and I went to bed with a high fever that lasted six days. For the next three weeks, I couldn't function properly as my body was full of strange aches while I was experiencing extreme fatigue. Chikungunya, at last, had gotten ahold of me. This form of dengue, which killed my friend Mèt Rosarion, slowed Port-au-Prince down in April and May as a great number of people were bitten by tiger mosquitoes spreading this debilitating disease. I remember visiting Aland and his wife Rachel when they got it in April, bringing fresh squeezed grapefruit lemonade and paracetamol pills, and talking with them about the weird fact that I didn't get the disease, as I hung out in the same spots they did.

I myself was bed-ridden and depressed by Chikungunya—in Tanzanian Makonde, “that which bends up”—when Aland called me to tell me that they were destroying the homes of people who, over time, had become close friends of ours. Once I returned to Haiti on June 27, we both sat and talked about the excellent and heartbreaking material Aland had gathered. We recorded the conversations we had while editing photographs and started to write an article for



*Le Nouvelliste*, by far the most important newspaper in Haiti. On September 3, 2014, our article was printed. It gathered lots of online comments, which quickly disappeared from the *Nouvelliste* website. I will reproduce our article at length before discussing it through the analysis of an interview I conducted with Clomène and Monique in June 2015. My English translation doesn't render French puns and idioms that made our text rather ironic and provocative, but I do my best as an amateur translator (the French version is available online):

**Downtown Port-au-Prince: Between ransacked patrimony and broken lives**  
**Aland Joseph and Vincent Joos**

The partial demolition of Reunion and Funeral streets, at the end of May 2014, has caught by surprise many people living in Port-au-Prince. The operation had been scheduled long beforehand but no one knew exactly when the bulldozers were going to tackle that not-yet-evacuated neighborhood. The promised compensations of owners had been compromised as well.

It was a double surprise. First the inhabitants of these streets, who had been hearing rumors about the demolition for more than two years, were awakened by excavators demolishing their very own homes. Secondly, the public was not prepared for this massive demolition, which was completed without any clear prior communication by the government. No one will deny the necessity of demolishing certain unsafe buildings and replacing them with paraseismic ones for the sake of public welfare. Yet the razing occurred without care and in a rush: a large square was leveled and, with it, multi-century structures were gone, stirring up individual wounds left by the 2010 earthquake and the ensuing homelessness.

The debate following this operation was, with few exceptions, bland. The neighborhood was decreed a slum by a few categories of the public: the sycophants of the current regime, the people with a preconceived opinion about the city center and its architecture, and also part of the intellectuals shouting “modernity” every two sentences like communist dictators—which we will discuss later. It is easy to point out a neighborhood and cast scorn on it from behind a computer—browse the media yourself to find many examples of what we are referring to. This neighborhood has been described as a group of garbage houses and the demolition victims as brainless people, at best, who should have left long before, if not simply thieves or foul-mouthed storekeepers.

For those who know this neighborhood, the reality is different. As the historian Covington explains, these old streets of the ancient colonial square were inhabited, during the 18th century, by an urban population who worked hard in order to make ends meet. Things are different now: the population at Morne-a-Tuf is composed of workers, craftsmen, government employees, students, writers, retired people who often held important positions, schoolchildren, domestic workers, cooks, disillusioned unemployed people dreaming of going to work, bosses and traders of all kinds. These inhabitants like their neighborhood and many have been living there a few decades. The place also went through changes, especially after 2010. Many former

and current residents as well as a large number of Haitians are clearly attached to these streets of historical importance.

Thieves from elsewhere operate sometimes on these streets, which certainly aren't nests for robbers. These are vivid, electrified and clean streets, far away from the insalubrious urban chaos that we notice down south beginning with Grand Rue. It is the Port-au-Prince of Roumer, Saint-Aude and Brouard that is being sacked, these poets rooted in these popular neighborhoods. Contemporary poet Dieulermesson Petit-Frère refers to them when he daringly describes the loss of vivid nightlife and cultural diversity with the destruction of Rue de la Reunion. In the *Le Nouvelliste* online comments following this article, he got widely criticized. The idea of an old historical center altogether residential, administrative, commercial and cultural as many world capitals contain, does not seem feasible here for many. Instead of an urban restoration where important elements of the existing patrimony would be preserved and where residents would get help with finding options for living, authorities preferred, according to Covington's saying, "the narrow and tasteless modernism." They opted for an urban plan favoring the automobile and an administrative corridor worthy of Pyongyang.



*Figure 47 Image from the video presenting the "new" Port-au-Prince: the future shape of Monatuf*

### **The case of the shotgun houses of Port-au-Prince**

Parts of the urban patrimony were preserved from the May 2014 demolition. The city's first Baptist church is such an example. But it is not enough. A good number of wooden structures that resisted the earthquake very well have now been torn down. These were what are called shotgun houses: wooden houses or brick- and timber-framed structures frequently built in downtown Port-au-Prince since the 1770 earthquake. Raised three to four feet above ground level in order to avoid moisture and floods, these houses are furnished with "galleries that lean

back against the facades of the house” as Covington described them. The shotgun houses have a longitudinal shape and aligned rooms of about twelve feet each, one after another.

These houses are among the last vestiges of working class architecture from colonial times. They sheltered the “petits blancs” [white menial workers] and their families but also the “free people of color” and certain enslaved craftsmen and workers who were granted limited freedoms in the inner capital. The semi-private space of the gallery offered the possibility of a rich social life while the closed space permitted the families to enjoy a certain privacy. Often these structures were also hide-outs for Marron slaves and a meeting spot for future revolutionaries.

Originating in Haiti, the shotgun house is an architectural model that spread widely across the Americas, hence its importance in world history. In the United States, the shotgun is seen as the typical house of modest southerners, mainly in Louisiana, Mississippi, Georgia and Alabama. Today they are celebrated in movies, novels, documentaries. Of course they are perceived as purely American. They sell for a lot in cities such as New Orleans or Savannah where they are often renovated with great care. They became restaurants, bookstores, boutiques, and they function as major tourist sights. The current Haitian government, which supports the economy of tourism, should take this as a model. Once again, this symbol of the rural America and its working class in the large cities of the Old South came directly from Haiti and precisely from the old center of Port-au-Prince.

In 1974, American folklorist John Michael Vlach came here to study the shotgun houses. His conclusion, widely shared among scholars, is clear and precise. The shotgun house appeared in New Orleans with the wave of Haitian immigration in 1809, which doubled the size of the city. The Haitian exiles brought this house model to fit the need of space in a city facing a sudden increase.

The shotgun is a reflection of Haitian history, added Vlach in his wonderful book *By the Work of Their Hands: Studies in Afro-American Folklife*. These houses are indeed the result of a creolization of different architectures: the orientation comes from the Yoruba in Nigeria; the room size from the Arawaks; the carpentry from the French. As Vlach wrote, “the shotgun house has been modified by aboriginal populations, European colonists and African migrants forced to traverse the Atlantic Ocean.” In sum, these small modest houses, either dilapidated or well cared for by their current owners, are true repositories of the Haitian collective memory and an example of national genius that has been massively exported. With their recent demolition, not only a part of the Haitian patrimony has disappeared, but also terrific economic opportunities. Just as we support the preservation work of the bourgeois structures—that is to say the restoration of the superb Gingerbread houses of Port-au-Prince—we would like to point out the importance of working-class patrimony and its valorization.

#### **Building the city and respecting the patrimony**

Once again, it is not the necessity of the reconstruction that we are contesting here but the way of doing it. We have examples of successful urban projects in Port-au-Prince that could have served as models. The remarkable project of the Martissant Park is a teaching case: compensation of owners and inhabitants with transparency and organization, contribution of the residents to the definition of the project, respect for the historical aspects based on elaborated sociological studies, great improvement of sanitary conditions, and efficient coordination among various involved institutions (formal and informal). Martissant is definitely not close to perfection, but one can see a huge difference as compared to what it was in 2008. So why not

borrowing the model of a functional participatory urbanism for the center? It is known that safety at Martissant is worse than in the center. It is useless to invoke this alibi in order to justify the lack of dialogue with the respective neighborhoods.

This participatory pattern is still a possibility. The ISPAN had completed an inventory of patrimonial buildings in the center before the earthquake. Hopefully it will not be left in the drawer. Most of the shotgun houses are still standing despite their old age: they are paraseismic buildings conceived for weather hazards typical for the country. In New Orleans they served as a model for the city's reconstruction after hurricane Katrina in 2005. This type of house, found everywhere in Haiti, could be an important element of urban renovation. Therefore, the UCLBP could use the ISPAN sources and put to work students and university researchers in order to open a prolific dialogue with the concerned populations and to proceed with demolitions and renovations based on historical elements in order to preserve and increase the character of the center of the city.

The government project for the center causes shivers up and down the spine. First, we wonder why journalists unite their voice to compare the current reconstruction works to the building of the Bicentenaire by Dumarsais Estimé. The seafront was built thanks to a patriotic loan that involved the unanimity of Haitians of the time (not with fake dollars, as the legend says). Second, most of the land of the Bicentenaire had been donated by patriot citizens interested in the beautification their city. That is not the case with the current unpopular project, which left behind a huge chaos of owners' compensation and family tragedies.

Finally, this project make us think of the "modern reconstruction" of Bucharest, Romania, by its communist dictator, Ceausescu, in the 80's after the devastating 1977 earthquake. Ceausescu shaved down the old residential downtown, which withstood the earthquake, and ordered the building of a large corridor filled with official buildings too large for such a small country. Today this administrative boulevard is one of the worst urban landscapes in Europe, jammed with cars careless of pedestrians. Despite everything, Ceausescu, as clueless as he looked, had first rehomed the displaced population, which is not the case with the current demolition in Port-au-Prince.

The downtown project in Port-au-Prince as designed today is not adapted to the life of these historic neighborhoods. Most of the capital residents do not want a Caribbean Bucharest—as ethnographers, we have collected opinions from dozens of subjects of different social classes. It would be totally feasible to reconcile residences, business and administration while giving a touristic momentum to the country's capital. A participatory project with a true call for bids for renovation and reconstruction is the foundation to a modern edification of the center of the city. Despite our pessimistic point of view, we wish success to the government in this rehabilitation process. We hope the actors of the reconstruction will operate with the utmost care for the future's sake, as we know that public institutions are not only pen pushers but also ministers and public servants who professionally care for the welfare of the country.

Aland bought a few newspapers to distribute among our friends in Monatuf and for the few of our friends we could track down. We knew that our paper wouldn't change the state's brutal urban planning practices. As described above, scathing comments trickled down as soon as the article was published online but soon disappeared from the *Nouvelliste* webpage. People

with access to the newspaper online aren't the folks who live in downtown neighborhoods.

While we received some comments aligning with our viewpoint, the majority of readers again called for “modernism” and argued that necessary evils must happen for the city to change, etc.

At least, the shotgun houses were placed on the patrimonial map, as Vlach's writings didn't seem to be well-known in Haiti.

In June 2015, I witnessed two high school students taking photos and doing fieldwork in and around the shotgun houses of Rue Magloire Amboise, an artery I explored a little while in Port-au-Prince. They were Aland's students who became “obsessed” with shotgun houses. Aland's classes, fueled by our common fieldwork and by his advocacy for the preservation of working class patrimony that allows for non-Western ways of life had strong effects. Aland plans to extend our fieldwork activities with the help of the burgeoning ethnographers he trains. Our documentary projects are still ongoing and growing. The next step is for us to work with these motivated high school students so they can publish their own research in a Haitian publication or newspaper.

### **Voicing the Demolitions: Insiders' Experiences of Destructive Urban Planning**

A month after the demolitions, I was back in Haiti for a month. I spent time in Gros Morne and then went back to Port-au-Prince on July 15. I visited Clomène and Gilberte but couldn't find Boss Joel, nor my other friends. Madame Lodine, who sold cakes and fresh juices from her apartment, Pierre-Louis Jeanty, who sold books around the Mausoleum, and Salena, who did ti komès from her front porch, were gone, and their phone numbers didn't work anymore. Aland and I sat down to prepare our newspaper article and video recorded the conversations we had while he explained to me what was going on in his photos. I will reproduce here Aland's insights:

Very early in the morning, people started to try to block the streets so state bulldozers couldn't pass. They did that so they would gain time to move their belongings. Lots of residents' friends were here and helped as they could, with cars, trucks or wheelbarrows. You had so much activity. You could see thieves with saws cutting off iron doors and fences, even when residents of the houses they looted were still inside. You didn't have bandits with guns but lots of people who came to take bricks, windows, doors.... Some people burned the planks of their houses. You had people crying. It was exactly like January 12. You didn't have the dead people of course, but you had people running and crying like mad dogs. You had lots of young people with sledge hammers in their hands, saws, looking out for construction material. Ruins of Port-au-Prince are feeding the reconstruction of Port-au-Prince. It's not a new fact. They even told me "President Martelly gave us a job!" [laughing] That's the way the state creates jobs! They saved cinder blocks, doors, anything made of iron. In the meantime, bulldozers destroyed houses. It was dangerous, with all those young lads under the demolishing crane.

Demonstrations from business people and residents were immediately repressed. The whole of Port-au-Prince was filled with activity. Guys from Cité Soleil came to make a little money. Guys from Kafou Fey came with their trucks to make a bit of money too. Little money was to be made from recuperating the iron. 6HTG a pound. You see that guy with a weighing scale. He's the one who buys.

You see here, this is Clomène's house. People are taking the bricks of her house away. Everything. Like January 12, people covered with dust. I felt the anguish I had during January 12. People didn't die. But it was the same atmosphere. Policemen were there but people were free to pick up anything they wanted. It's an enormous loss for the people and the patrimony. You remember our photos of these neighborhoods before? Houses just disappeared in a heartbeat! People running with fridges, cabinets.... What will be the next step? Will they demolish Bel-Air?

Aland was tense when reliving the demolitions. His frequent mentioning of the 2010 earthquake would come back in other conversations about the demolitions as well. He was with his mother when the earthquake happened. Their house in the Bas-Peu-de-Chose neighborhood, half a mile away from Monatuf, collapsed as they escaped it. They slept in Rue Nicolas for two days before walking up to Pétiion-Ville to live with Aland's sister, whose house was intact. Aland lost many relatives and friends in the earthquake and usually cannot sleep more than five hours a night as he has become claustrophobic. I will here reproduce the testimonies of Gilberte, whom we interviewed on July 19, 2014, and Clomène, who finally was able to talk about her traumatic experience in June 2015. Her sister Monique, whom she now sees once every two months, was

there as well and talked about her own experience. My goal is to let their voices detail the brutal awakening of a state that previously only taxed them without giving them any benefits.

Gilberte has worked in a fancy restaurant in the gingerbread neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince since 2008. She's the 31-year-old mother of Wilenson, a cheerful little boy who was five year old when I met them at Madame Lodine's pastry shop in September 2013. Her husband passed away in the earthquake as he was walking back from his garage located at the bottom of Rue Charéron, when a five story buildings collapsed on pedestrians. As she stated in a conversation we had with Aland about the lack of building norms, "Some idiots build up as many stories as they can on the top of old houses. The upper stories were bigger than the basis of the building. Even without an earthquake, it would have collapsed.... His fate was to walk there at that exact moment..." Gilberte works long hours six days a week. She leaves her apartment at 7 AM, when her mother comes to pick up Wilenson to climb with him up to Kafou Fey where he goes to school. Gilberte comes back home around 5:30 PM, when the commute isn't too bad. On May 28, she was home when the demolitions suddenly started:

They started on Saturday. The night before, I came home at 7 after running errands. My neighbors told me: "What are you going to do when they start demolishing tomorrow?" "Demolishing!" I replied. "My landlady didn't tell me anything about demolitions. Nothing!" I went to bed but couldn't really sleep. My neighbor called me on the phone around 5:45: "Neighbor, what are you doing? They started to crush houses down the street, how are you going to save your belongings?" I couldn't believe it so I went down to see for myself. They started to demolish at the end of the street. I ran to fetch a taxi in order to save some of my belongings. When I came back, all the houses around my apartment building were demolished to the ground. My neighbor was already gone. I just had time to go up, to pack a suitcase quickly. While I was inside they started to tear down the building, I didn't want the building to fall on my head, I just had time to escape [y ap krazè padan m anndan. pandan m te anndan yo ap fourè kom si yon krok!] I was trying to save a box of things but a big chunk of the wall fell. I was forced to run away. Why do they do that? They don't have any projects.... It's a concrete building. I lost so many things. My dresser, my bed.... My son's school books, uniforms, his drawings, his report cards. Our family photo albums, all of our memories. All gone [tout bagay sa yo pidi net net net]. It hurts [sa fè m mal]. I paid a year of rent two months before they demolished. I pay my electricity, everything. And the landlady didn't tell me anything.

Anything! I called her and she told she didn't know what would happen.... Perhaps she's a victim like me. She's now in a hospital abroad, she travels, she doesn't answer my calls. I'm trying to get the months of rent I paid back. For now, I don't know if I will get my money back. She owes me 10 months of rent. [In June 2015, Gilberte hadn't received any compensation from her landlady.] It was a small apartment in a big blue house, next to a mapou tree. A beautiful house that really resisted the earthquake well. The biggest one in front of the prison. Only family members of the landlady lived there. Her sister, brother and so on. She's always abroad. I lost so much. Things, money. Like other people.... You make a first trip to save your belongings, and you come back, everything is under rubble.... [clapping her hands]

I had just been there a year and two months. I loved the neighborhood. I was independent. I love my independence a lot. I would go back home, I didn't know too many people. I had water and electricity 24/7. I had my room. I didn't go out at night, because I have my son with me. We would go to bed early. But it's really a good neighborhood, you could go out at any hour of the day or night without any problems. Perhaps because the prison stands there. But there are a lot of good people living there. My son now lives with my mom in Kafou Fey, in the Fouchard zone. It's a small house, my grandmother lives there too. My sister lives next door, I live with her for now. [laughing] He's the only boy in a family of women! I'm not at ease, I miss my independence.

It's hard to find a house. I looked a lot in this neighborhood to find something decent for me and my son. Everything is so expensive. If I rent far away from my work, I will have to pay much more for transportation. If I live in Delmas, it would make me pay about 90HTG of transportation a day. I make 200HTG a day at the restaurant [\$4.00].... At first I was making 2,000HTG a month. My boss saw I was a good worker. She gave me a better position. Today I make 4,000HTG a month (about \$90). I pay 1,500HTG a month for sol<sup>1</sup>. I pay for transportation every day. I pay for my son's school every month. I'm left with 500HTG a month (\$12 in 2014, \$10 in 2015) for food and expenses. I live and survive on God's account [sè si kont bondyiè map viv]! I need my job, but I cannot make savings. You need to show up to work in time, to have all your clothes impeccable. It sucks your money out. If I'm late I need to take a moto, which is far more expensive than a taxi. I know how to live on very little money! But now that I live in Kafou Fèy, things are much more difficult....

Gilberte still lives in Kafou Fèy to this day and walks great distances to enter the taxi zone that allows her to pay 30HTG to go to work. If she were taking a cab to work from the place where she lives now, it would cost her double. Holding a formal job doesn't ensure her a decent life. She works long hours and lives on very little money. She still prefers to keep her job

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<sup>1</sup> "Sols operate with individuals depositing money into a communal fund that is instantly disbursed to one or more members. The sol keeps running until all members have had a turn at the fund. They take in the regular deposits of members, called a 'hand' or main sol, once or several times a month, depending on its rules. The person starting the group is called the sol mother, manman sol, or sometimes, simply 'banker'" (Wilson 2010: 4).



instead of entering the *ti komès* economy like her sister. She fears the instability of this income and knows that the area where she lives wouldn't be a good place to do business. Gilberte is a rather shy woman who likes to keep to herself. As she told me in June 2015, she misses dearly the independent life she lived with her son on Funeral Street. Like many others, her stability was again taken away when this man-made disaster hit her. Port-au-Prince seems to be in a state of perpetual demolition as disasters, brutal urban planning and landlords' ruthless evictions do not allow the working classes to enjoy the stable lives they deserve.

My friends Clomène and Monique have not fared very well since the demolitions either. Monique now lives in Poste-Marchand and Clomène settled on the roof of a small house belonging to Madame Lucille in Kafou, on the southern side of Port-au-Prince. With her husband and three children, they live in two very small bedrooms but enjoy an open rooftop shaded by a mango tree and a breadfruit tree. They often sleep outside to catch a breeze during the night. However, Clomène has lost most of her business opportunities. As she receives three to four hours of electricity a day, her freezers stand empty under tar paper on the roof of the house. Monique now lives far away from her sister and survives by selling sandals on the streets.

The day I came to visit Clomène in Kafou in May, 31 2015, Monique was there, which is unusual. Her 17-year-old boy Andy had just been sent to jail in Kafou. On Thursday, May 28, 2015, exactly a year after Clomène's house was demolished, Andy was watching TV at Clomène's new house when police forces burst into her home. They were raiding the neighborhood in order to find people who were stealing electricity. Doing *ti priz*—getting power illegally—is a common practice, since it might take up to two to three years to get a power meter from the state electricity agency. Clomène had time to hide under a pile of mattresses she stored in a large cabinet built into her bedroom wall, but Andy was taken away to the Omega Prison of

Kafou. Clomène heard she would need to pay a \$500 penalty fee to have her nephew released. Both sisters were in distress, especially Monique, who didn't have the means to stay at her sister's and bring food to her younger son.

It had been ten months since I saw her, and Clomène took time to explain her situation:

I didn't rent my house. Mrs. Lucille let me live in her house. We received letters from time to time saying they would destroy the neighborhood. I told Mrs. Lucille, who sent me to a meeting where I presented copies of the property title. We had to go to see the lawyer Céant but I didn't want to give him the original. I think Mrs. Lucille didn't get anything at the time they demolished the neighborhood. If you're a proprietor, you needed the money to move somewhere else before they demolish your house, right? So, for a while we heard rumors of demolitions. And the night before they demolished, on TV and radio, they said that bulldozers would come the next morning at 5 AM. People don't have money in their hands! Mrs. Lucille didn't have the money to move her furniture away!

It's because you and Aland did a fundraiser abroad that I could move away some of our things, we did it in a rush. Before I received money, I only had a neighbor and Monique to help me move things away. But we couldn't move by ourselves the freezers, the oven.... What could I do if armed bandits came to steal my things during the demolitions? They were a lot of them, with crow bars and so on who stole things from people. Mrs. Lucille didn't realize what was going on. The morning of the demolitions, very early, I took away with me what I could take away. They took away many of my things.... We rented a truck and Mrs. Lucille called some of her tenants who lived in a little house she owns in Kafou, so they would wait for me and help to store our belongings. Without our friends' solidarity, we would have slept on the streets. You have people who got hurt during the demolitions, some of them died being crushed in their houses. Some of them died of utter surprise [sezisman]. You still have people living in tents in Rue du Champ de Mars.

Mrs. Lucille lost a house she loved dearly. Canada's freezing temperatures always took a toll on her. She would come here and you would think she was handicapped. But after a month in her house, she would be well and walking. She always said her house makes her feel better, that she always thinks of her house. Now it's demolished. She didn't receive any compensation when she was so righteous, paying her property taxes dutifully, every year!

Mrs. Lucille allowed us to stay in the tiny two rooms she owns on the top of her house here in Kafou. I saved all her belongings. So... we're not homeless, but it's very hard on me. My children go to downtown schools and I have to pay for transportation for all of them. I go with my littlest one every morning and pick her up every night. That makes me spend two hours crisscrossing the city every day. It's hard for me to pay for their schools. Schools here in Kafou are much more expensive than the ones in downtown. So they still go where they used to go.

We're in this house, but there's no life here [pa gen lavi]. There's no pedestrian traffic, our street is a cul-de-sac. I try to do business but it doesn't work. I tried to buy

water, but since electricity comes and goes, my water rots. What I sold in one day in Monatuf, here, I sell in fifteen days.... I used to sell soda pops, and it was a nice distraction. Friend would come and go and ask me: "Clomène, give me a little soda!" [Clomène, banm ti cola, ti cola!] I felt alive. I felt alive! I was well organized. Here, you don't have anything. Everyone here in Kafou live reclusive lives [yo viv pesonel]. Sometimes, a neighbor will come to buy 5HTG of water, a bottle of coke....

Mrs. Lucille came and visited us in April 2015. Her daughter in Canada is now deceased. She doesn't work and doesn't have money. She saw that our living conditions aren't good. She helped me to raise my children since they were little, you know. She considers us her family. She told us to build an extra big room on the roof. I started to build it. It's far from being finished but I know God will help me finish it.

[At this point, Clomène's sister Monique starts talking:] Clomène supported me after I lost my home in the 2010 earthquake. I'm her littlest sister. Clomène has her children but she took me with her because I didn't have a job, I couldn't sell anything where I lived for a while with one of my aunts. Houses are too expensive for me. I don't want to go to Cité Soleil. I have two young daughters and we cannot live anywhere. They lived with me at Clomène's. When I lived with Clomène, I lived well. I was doing business, helping sell beds, I was selling produce. Now, I don't have much. I sell sandals where I live in Poste-Marchand but it doesn't work too well. Just enough to buy food for my children. When Clomène's house was destroyed, it broke my heart, I always thought about Clomène and her children.... Where would they go.... Now, where I am I cannot pay for school for my children. It's a crime to perform demolitions like this, to throw away people like that on the streets. Old folks, mothers, fathers, young girls and boys, rendered homeless like that....

Now, my boy is in jail. I cannot sleep, I have headaches. It hurts me so bad. He's a child in the hands of the police.... I don't know if he will get out today, tomorrow.... Myself as a mother, I cannot intervene.... Our fate is only in God's hands in this country.

[Clomène talks again and ends our interview with powerful statements:] Life became so difficult. I wake up at 4 AM to prepare lunch for my girls and to prepare my little one, and we leave the house at 5 AM. There are so many traffic jams that we need to leave at 5 AM. It costs a lot of money, all those trips to the city. Only my son goes to school here in Kafou. I lost so much by losing my home in Rue du Champ de Mars.... Here in Kafou, I can spend a whole day without seeing anybody. I had so many friends downtown. I raised my children downtown. In a zone like Kafou, where you don't know anyone, if you're hungry, you will stay hungry [w ap fè grangou net]. When I was in Rue du Champ de Mars, I could go to see friends and eat something. I would never be able to go hungry there [m pa ka grangou]. If tomorrow morning, I don't have money to make lunch for my daughters, I'll go to Madanm Batiste and tell her I don't have food. Fifi [Madanm Batiste's daughter] would help me readily. Here, you can remain starving [isit w ap fè grangou net, grangou net]. I'm not someone who can sit on a chair and do nothing. I need to find a way to raise my children. I'll find a way. I did all possible businesses you can think of. I'll find ways to make a living but now my life is upside down [lavi m tet anba]. But Kafou is a luxurious district [se yon zon lux li ye]. People come home and stay in their house [lè ou rentwè ou rentwè net].

It wasn't just the destruction of physical space and structures and of history and patrimony but also of people's social lives, independence, mutual support, livelihood, invested savings and opportunities in this central neighborhood. In June 2015, in lieu of my friends Boss Joel, Gilberte, Lanmou, Pierre-Paul, René, Jackson, Darline, Mandam Cécile and Clomène's houses, I found a pile of rubbles where a few young men were still trying to extract whatever resellables they could find.

## **CHAPTER SIX: RECONSTRUCTING HAITI IN MOUNT OLIVE, NORTH CAROLINA**

Oswald Destin e is a tall and strong 71-year-old Haitian man. He works as a seasonal farm worker and is a talented carpenter who spends his time between North Carolina and Croix des Bouquets, a city adjacent to Port-au-Prince where he grew up and owns land. I met Oswald at our common friend Rosalie’s house in Mount Olive, eastern North Carolina, in May 2012 while doing a documentary photography project. Between 2010 and 2011, approximately 2,000 Haitians settled in Mount Olive, a town of 4,500 inhabitants, in order to work in the meat processing plants of the region. Since 2011, Rosalie has prepared and sold Haitian dishes from her house and served cold drinks to people who come to play cards or dominoes in her living room after a long day of work. Oswald had lost a few games when I came in to buy a meal on a hot day in July 2012, as the clothes pins clipped around his two ears indicated. While waiting for my plate of banann pez e, pikliz and taso b ef (fried plantains, hot pickled cabbage and fried spicy beef tips), he invited me to replace his game companion who was about to leave for his shift at the Butterball turkey plant, located in nearby Duplin County, where he worked long hours every day.

While we played dominoes, Oswald told me about his project of building an apartment building next to his old family house in Croix des Bouquets. He didn’t like Mount Olive but followed some of his friends here because he could easily find employment in the fields or at the giant meat processing plants that dot this area. Oswald was saving money to finish a construction project he started eight years ago in Croix des Bouquets, Haiti. He now needed money to

enhance his almost-finished building with indoor plaster walls, a solar panel roof, and tinted windows. However, working long hours in the fields at his age was difficult. As we shall see, Wayne County is known for the cruelty of working conditions in the agricultural sector, a legacy of the racist sharecropping system. Oswald planned to return to Haiti and finish his project but, as he often stated, he needed to generate an income in order to pay for his granddaughter's nursery school and for his sister, who was taking care of their 95-year-old mother. Oswald's case in Mount Olive wasn't peculiar. The working-class members of the Haitian diaspora—namely, the people who work in the fields and in meat processing factories—that I met talked and dreamed about returning to their home country. However, many had to work in order to sustain their family who didn't have the chance to get a work visa in the United States.

Many Haitians I met in Mount Olive go back and forth between the U.S. and Haiti at least once a year to visit their family and friends, or to work on the properties they own on the island. As Elizabeth McAlister writes, Haitians living in Mount Olive are transmigrants who “sustain social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement. They may support houses in Haiti with jobs in [the U.S.] They may keep their children in Haiti” (McAlister 2002:185). Haitians living in Mount Olive sustain family and social relations with Haiti, but also with older diasporic settlements such as in Miami or New York.

As transmigrants, they operate and navigate in very different environments, to which they need to adapt in order to survive. Adaptation doesn't necessarily mean to assimilate one's subjectivity and identity to fit the mold of a given “local” society. It is not measurable with “adaptation scales” but, rather, it is visible in the deployment of collective social and spatial practices forged on the long term that enable Haitians to organize themselves and to function without institutional safety nets. For instance, when Oswald first came to Mount Olive, he came

with a group of people he had known for more than ten years and rented a house with two couples he has gone to church with since 1994, when he first arrived in Miami after losing his job in Haiti.

This chapter is based on a total of eight months of fieldwork that is still ongoing in Mount Olive, and tracks how Haiti is imagined and reinvented among Haitians who live there and fully contribute to the economic life of their country through remittances and individual life projects that materialize on the island. Many of the spatial and commercial practices I have described throughout the dissertation find an echo here. Here, I only use a small fraction of the archival, photographic and ethnographic material I gathered and am still gathering in Mount Olive. However, my goal here is to paint a social map of the city before and after the massive influx of Haitian immigrants in 2010 in order to reflect on the parallel effects of U.S. post-plantation capitalism in Haiti and the southern United States, namely among African American and Haitian communities.



Figure 48 The Mount Olive Police Department friendly bunch (Joos, 2013)

The residential patterns imposed by Jim Crow administrations after Reconstruction still prevail to this day, and Haitians who recently arrived in Mount Olive have settled in the historically African American neighborhoods of the city. Haitians coming to Mount Olive have to face an economic and political elite that has treated and still treats black people as second class citizens. A simple stop in the town hall, police department or schools of the area shows that the vast majority of people with government jobs are white. While white residents make up 39% of the total city population, the police department, for instance, comprised 15 white officers and one African American officer. While Haitians have very different backgrounds, citizenship status, etc. than African Americans, their “Blackness produces what we identify as a global anti-Black racism, which stems from the logics of the transatlantic slave trade and continues into our contemporary moment in almost every nation of the world” (Sawyer and Paschel 2007: 304). Haitians have different histories and relations to race and blackness, but are nonetheless subjected to U.S. forms of structural and ideological racism. In addition to inheriting the implicit and explicit racist treatments African Americans endure in Mount Olive, such as employment discrimination or racial profiling, Haitians have faced peculiar forms of structural violence in the United States, such as specific anti-immigration laws targeted at them. These laws have resulted in the classification of Haitian immigrants as economic refugees and made it nearly impossibility for them to get political asylum (Loucky 2006: 272).

General perceptions of Haitians by Americans are tainted by a long history of American violent military handling of Haitian national affairs, by sets of detrimental policies geared specifically towards Haitians settling in the U.S. and by the crude misrepresentations of Haiti that have historically prevailed in media and literature. I will first trace a quick sketch of Mount Olive’s history to unveil the structural violence both African Americans and Haitians face as



black people living in a region where slavery, sharecropping and urban zoning policies detrimental to African Americans have shaped race relations. I am using archival snapshots and oral history that illuminate the fate of African Americans living in Wayne County and do not pretend to offer a full history of this place. I take a cursory look at violent episodes and quotidian, almost imperceptible, ways of policing black people in this part of North Carolina.

### **Exclusion and Segregation in Mount Olive: an Archival and Historical Overview**

Until 1870, Mount Olive was a village of Wayne County comprising a “few houses, a few frame stores, two turpentine distilleries, a bar room and a school house—all surrounded by woods and swamps” (Mount Olive Centennial Commission 1970: 17). It has been served by the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad since 1839, which allowed its economy to grow through the shipping of turpentine and cash crops mostly produced by enslaved blacks. The Centennial Official Program of 1970, which I was allowed to read in the archives of the Mount Olive Town Hall during five days of archival research in November 2013, doesn’t mention, in the short history of Mount Olive it presents, that many slaves worked the fields of the county. In fact, part of the railroad itself was built by local planters John Thomas Kennedy and “John E. Becton, using their slaves” (Powell 1988: 351). Slave owning families, such as the Kennedys, Kornegays and Bectons, dominate the business and real estate landscape of this small town to this day and have given their names to many streets of the central districts. In the *Mount Olive Tribune* of August 3, 1984, we can read that the Kornegays (who often married Bectons, another wealthy family of planters in the area) still owned the Red Hill Plantation, one of “the few colonial plantations still owned and cultivated by the descendants of the original owners. Their descendants have made a notable contribution to the development of Wayne and Duplin county” (Moore 1984). Their contribution was rendered possible by enslaved people they owned, who

provided the hands needed to work the fields of Wayne County and to build the city of Mount Olive and its railroad tracks.

In an interview given in 1937 to a Works Project Administration historian, John C. Bectom, who born into slavery to parents who toiled on Wayne County plantations in the 1840s, recalls stories his parents told him. For instance, his enslaved grandmother would:

begin burning logs in new grounds before day break. They also made her plow, the same as any other men on the plantation. They plowed until dust-dark before they left the fields to come to the house. They were not allowed to attend any dances or parties unless they slept off unknowing. They had candy pullings sometimes too. While they would be there, the patrollers would visit them. Sometimes the patrollers whipped all they caught at this place, all they set their hands on, unless they had a pass” (WPA 2010: 45).

Mount Olive’s agricultural system is typical of antebellum North Carolina, with its slave patrollers (and later its policemen) making sure everyone remained in places they supposedly belonged using physical coercion and incarceration. All the interviews recorded in North Carolina in the 1930s through the WPA describe the same working conditions and the omnipresence of patrollers brutalizing enslaved people at whim. As I found in my recent interviews with politicians and religious leaders of the Mount Olive African American community, memories of slavery, spatial segregation and white overt and subtle administrative violence are still vivid.



*Figure 49 Eastern Downtown Mount Olive (Joos 2011)*

Mount Olive was incorporated on March 1, 1870, after the formal end of slavery. Its city center, built around the railroad track, was inhabited by the white elites and middle classes who built Victorian mansions as well as simple structures, while the majority of African Americans lived in the southwest part of town in small wooden houses, next to open ditches carved along the cucumber, tobacco and cotton fields in which they labored. Many of them also lived next to the fields they sharecropped. Sharecropping—the renting of small plots of land where people give a portion of their crop to the landowner at the end of the year—and the credit system stemming from it kept many African Americans in poverty and ensured the continuation of a white system of supervision and black submission in the whole South.

A few African American families obtained land during the short-lived Reconstruction period, as Jerry Armstrong told me. Jerry Armstrong is an evangelist who lived a great part of his life in these neighborhoods of Mount Olive. He was elected in 2013 as a district commissioner and is the only elected African American citizen sitting in town hall meetings in a place where

approximately 50% of residents are African Americans. I met him through my Haitian friends, who respect him a great deal for his frankness and generosity. Evangelist Armstrong welcomed me many times in his home and walked with me around town, showing me where the “color line” stood, how present administrators kept suffocating economic life in predominantly black neighborhoods and telling me the hidden history of Mount Olive. His voice and narrative reconstitute the periods before and after the Civil Rights Act and provide a map for understanding life in the predominantly African American neighborhoods of Mount Olive:

I was born in 1954. I can describe Mount Olive from the time when Kennedy was killed. My father’s family were farmers. But my father was independent and didn’t like working for white folks. He started a shoe shine business. At nine years old I was shining shoes with my brothers. That kept us off the streets, that kept us off trouble. That’s the way we fended at that time. My father was a hustler, he made money. Not a lot, but he made money. My mother’s mother was related to the Waynes. She was a Wayne. They used to own a big part of Wayne County. My mother is removed five generations from her Catawba ancestors. They were friendly Indians. So we have Indian ancestors. She was a Smith-Wayne.

Up to 1965, as a kid, you had to grow up fast. It’s the country, I guess it’s different in the city. When my second wife moved here from Maryland, she told me: “Jerry, you told me a lie. You told me you were living in the country. It’s not the country. It’s the ghetto!” To me, it’s the country. Until recently, next to my house, you had the fields. She thought about something like a big farm.... It was more like the country when I grew up here. Until 1965, it was segregated. From here on Slocomb Street to Center Street, where you saw my Ministry Outreach, there was an invisible line there. What they called the white line. Where we saw that guy standing at the corner store, if you took a right, you were in the white area. I have remembrances of white families who were good people. But when you went up in town, you felt the arrogance. It was a time when things were changing and people’s mindsets were changing. Before 1965, I would say that 85% of Negro men worked in the fields. The rest of them went to the military, some to college. Before desegregation, when we had all-black schools, it was stressed to us that we needed to value education and how to conduct ourselves to get what we need.

There was an imaginary line. And on this side, you had bootlegger houses and small businesses. They sold homemade liquor to people partying on the weekends. We had slang names for these streets, like “Nigger Street.” These businesses were ran by women, mostly, because most men worked in the fields. It was illegal to make liquor, but everybody knew, it was in open sight. Of course, they had to crack down on that sometimes to show their force. It was alive. My brothers and I shined shoes, which kept us from the streets. My father feared the police, he didn’t want us to be abused by the system. But we ventured in these parts of town, sometimes, because of youth’s curiosity.... I knew how to conduct myself in order not to be incarcerated and lose my

freedom. I distanced myself from people who would put me in trouble. But I was not a goodie-two-shoe, I did things. We sort of stagnated, never living further than Goldsboro or Dudley, small communities. We stagnated, unless you read or was around people doing good things.

When school integration came in 1969, they closed the black high school named Carver School. I was angry in the inside. It was an accredited school with certified black teachers. Because of the law, they took us off the city in a school in the country. I couldn't understand that. Community leaders told that it needed to happen. I was looking at it as an economic thing. Why would you take a school that's already accredited, a well-built brick school? We had our teachers, we had stores in that part of town. We used to have a drive-in theater, mom and pop's stores, it was a prosperous part of town! Carver High School had a football team and a famous band. We had role models. We were proud of our teams, the Tigers. It fell apart. Now, you don't see anything nowadays. If we walk there, you'd see science buildings, art buildings, all closed. You'd see my regrets! The neighborhood dried up. If they brought white students here, at Carver, adapting those good buildings.... We had restaurants, country clubs. It would have thrived businesswise.

People now think nothing good comes from that part of town today. We have kids who go to college! But we were taken in a new building in the country, with cows and stuff in 1970. We had a race riot at Southern Wayne, that new high school. They weren't ready to go there, they weren't ready for us. It was like pouring gasoline on fire. My twin brother, Terry, sat next to a girl who said: "I'm not seating next to that nigger!" It was 1970 or 1971. We had put up with so much. They called us names and temperatures raised up. We had a race riot. We fought. Then we stayed out of school for a couple of days. We went to the juke joint, they had a little juke joint in the corner with a piccolo. You'd put a dime and you'd play James Brown, "I'm black and I'm proud".... The riot didn't last long. It was for the good because it brought up awareness for those at the school board who had to make adjustments. It was like a domino effect. There were riots in many school of the region. So the Wayne County school had to do something because many teachers were passive and were not doing anything.

My mother wanted me and my brother to go to college. But I was only thinking about one thing: getting out of high school. To get away from Mount Olive, I joined the military. I graduated in 1972. My brother was already in Vietnam. I followed suit. I wanted to go to Vietnam. But seeing I was young, 18... well, they sent me to Korea. I did two tours in Korea. I love that country, its people, its food. If you didn't come from a family who had the means, that was your option.

You could work for low pay at the pickle company. Blacks helped to build the company, but they are not recognized for their role. They should have plaques thanking the black community for their support of the Mount Olive Pickle Company, for the harassment and prejudice they had to go through. The Negro had to work extra hard, they had to work extra hard to get what they want. Lots of blacks were sharecroppers, we had a lot of poor whites sharing the same predicament and they could understand us.

[Excerpt from after the interview, from a conversation recorded the same day in my field notes:] Blacks always paid taxes and didn't get much in return. Today, it's about the same. It's been so many years we're asking the city to take care of the ditches in this part of town, because of mosquitoes and everything. Nothing is made for us. Keeping us

as a residential zone prevents us to do business. That's what I will try to change as a commissioner.



*Figure 50 Evangelist Jerry Armstrong (Joos, 2013)*

The African American neighborhoods located behind the imaginary line Armstrong talks about contrast with the city center inhabited by majority white people. The houses are smaller, many are empty and deteriorating since people have left this city where they do not find much employment opportunities, and many “mom and pop’s businesses” buildings are now abandoned. The neglect of tax-paying and law-abiding citizens Armstrong talked about forcefully reappeared when I found a 1968 letter in the Minute Books of the city addressed to Mayor Odom by the Civic Organization of Black Citizens. I will reproduce this beautifully

written and poignant letter here in order to complete the picture of the African American neighborhoods of Mount Olive:

In His Honor, Mayor Odom, the members of the Board of Aldermen, officials of the Town of Mount Olive and interested citizens.

I have been chosen as the speaker for the Religious, Professional, Business and Civic organizations of Mount Olive's Black Community that are represented here today.

Ours is not a grievance of Police brutality or any of the patented ones, but rather one of ignoring us completely.

Our first grievance is the one concerning the additional water and sewer tax. We feel that this is an unjust tax, one that will work extra hardships on our poor in both races. We would like to know how our local government derived that power. Our constitution states that these Powers that are vested in the Governing body are vested by the people to be governed. Now, where did and when did our officials get that power. We feel that for such a tax to be legal, this measure will have to be brought to the people in the form of a referendum to be voted and passed by the people.

The organizations that I represent feel if that be so then that tax would not stand a chance of passing because of the nature of the purpose of said tax. We feel that if there was a practice of Fair Employment here that this measure would stand some kind of chance. But when Burlington Company and Boling Chair Company are located here for the specific practice of hiring white women and white men, except for a few menial janitorial jobs, then we do not want and will not support any idea that contributes to this cruel injustice, we will not support in words, or deeds or our pocket books.

We have enjoyed a reasonably sane Mount Olive during all of the crisis in the last decade. This peace that we have enjoyed has been at the expense of the Black Community, we can say truthfully, that there is nothing that the White Community has done to maintain this observance of law and order. We have been approached by outsiders to get us into the 20th century, but we believe that the Black Citizens can sit with the White Citizens of Mount Olive and work out salvation. We need to do this and do this immediately. Take a hard look at our Business District, check and see if you can find a Negro in Sales or any other position other than janitor or other labors of servitude except Belk-Tyler store. Yet, Blacks were called to go overseas for democracy during World War II, a war brought on these United States by the bastardly sneak attack on Pearl Harbor where many of your people and our people died, yet, the Japanese race is represented on Mount Olive's sales force. That is right, this is America, a nation that embraces all races except the Black Nation that it is today. Yet, we still are America's stepchildren. When one tenth or more of our population is not represented in decent jobs that is another cause for concern.

We are not stupid, it is just that we are trusting, God fearing, law abiding citizens. Have you ever stopped to think what would happen to Mount Olive if Black Citizens boycotted these all-white Business Establishments, started non-violent demonstrations and all in all disrupt the so-called harmony that exists here. Let us warn you here and now that we are not stupid, we have knowledge, we are not afraid, we have nerve.

We are not concerned about an airport, that means nothing to us, we are not worried about a golf course, financed by the people Federal Funds, that we cannot play on because we are black. We are not interested in a Burlington Enterprise that will not train and hire our black

youths. We do not think much of a Boling Chair Company that will hire only a few Black men to do janitorial work.

We are deeply concerned about how our tax dollar is secured and spent. We are deeply interested in the paving and lighting of our streets, of white teenagers speeding in our Community. We are concerned about sidewalks to protect our children from traffic, about the open ditches in our Company that breed insect, pests, rats and other vermin. We feel that something could and should be done about the Sub-standard rental housing property, that it should be brought up to the standard for human conditions. We are concerned about the cleanliness of vacant lots, that the Town Sanitation Department keep these lots clean and that the cost of cleaning be added to the property taxes. That these lots that are heir properties and in cases where the heir or heirs are deceased or are away and have no care for said property, that the Town take action to sell said property at Public Auction and use proceeds for the good of the community.

We are vitally interested in a re-distribution or precinting or any other measure whereby a representative can be elected from his district in order that all districts be represented in our municipal Government. We know that taxation without representation breeds misery, injustice, unrest and finally, blood-shed. Our Founding Fathers knew that in the 1700's. There by touching off the American Revolution. Let us not let this happen again, but let us be fair about the whole of the conditions here. We should start in our Town Municipal Government. We would welcome a member of our race helping to collect our taxes, our water bills, our Court Costs and fines and etcetra. We should have one or more in our banks to handle our money and cash and checks. We should have some of our race in every Business Establishment and any other Enterprise that gets its life blood from the General Public.

We trust you, gentlemen, tried and true, our duly elected Public Servants, will take a good, unveiled look at conditions here and go on record as being the first Mount Olive Administration in the history of this Town to face the facts squarely and sincerely and begin to eliminate such cruel injustices.

The aforementioned conditions are the incentives that breed the Rap Browns and Stokely Carmichaels, both which you and we deplore. Let us prove them right, that America was born in violence, steeped in violence and that violence is the only language that America understands.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Let us hold fast to these truths, "That we are our brother's keeper" and the great commandment, "Love ye, one another as I have also loved you". With this great concern for each other we are sure that we can keep the faith for Honest Abe Lincoln, "That a government of the People, for the People and by the People shall not perish from the Earth."

Thank you.

After the school integration and the passing of laws redefining southern Mount Olive as a residential district where commerce is strictly limited, many black-owned businesses closed down. Jerry Armstrong laments the lack of opportunities for young people of Mount Olive and the fact that things, according to him, haven't changed much to this day. On a warm day in



October, as we took a walk on Center Street and met a Baptist pastor in front of Armstrong's Ministry, a police car came by, slowed down and then went on. The pastor explained that the police were permanently present in the neighborhood and "looked down on black folks." This part of Mount Olive is heavily policed. I vividly remember him saying that the Mount Olive Department comprised fifteen white policemen and one black officer.

The fact that members of the African American community are not finding employment in communal and state institutions is not a new concern. In the Minute Books of 1965 to 1968, I found repeated requests from the Civic Organization of Black Citizens asking for the hiring of a black policeman whom people could trust. There are obvious continuities in the way affairs are handled in Mount Olive today. The legacy of "harassment and prejudice," as Armstrong stated, is still vivid and non-white workers' living and working conditions haven't change much. Latino immigrants endure treatments similar to that of African American laborers.

Before the wave of Haitian migration in the early 2010s, Mount Olive received many temporary immigrant workers to supply the farms and meat processing plants of the region. In the 1990s, Latino immigrants from Central America started to settle in the region and some Latino seasonal workers came to the area to work in the fields and plants. Lax enforcement of undocumented labor laws in the region enabled many people to find employment here. The working conditions on the cucumber farms selling their produce to the Mount Olive Pickle Plant were so terrible that the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, a labor union located in Wayne County, organized a successful five-year boycott of Mount Olive Pickle products. Migrant workers lived in derelict trailer camps adjacent to the farms where they worked and picked cucumbers from sunup to sundown for low wages, when their bosses bothered to pay them at all (Rohrs 2004). After five years of struggle, the Pickle Company agreed to raise the price they

were paying for their produce and agreed to pay an extra three percent to farmers who offered workers' compensation to its laborers. The working conditions in the area slightly improved for Latino workers, but as we shall see, for Haitians who had just arrived in town, working conditions in meat plants and on farms remain gruesome.

### **A Haitian Island in North Carolina**

On January 27, 2014, I published an article in *Le Nouvelliste* where I detailed the arrival of Haitians in Mount Olive and how their presence changed the local landscape. I wanted to recognize the important role working-class Haitians play in the reconstruction of Haiti, as many workers of Mount Olive heavily participate in the present Haitian remittance economy. I will translate and reproduce the article here, as it succinctly presents the situation of Haitians living in Mount Olive:

Mount Olive is a small town in eastern NC, located in the middle of cotton, tobacco, soy, and various vegetables fields. At first sight, it is just like any other town of the Old South. The train track cuts the city in its middle, separating the African American community from the white community. The "American pickle capital" comprises about 5,000 inhabitants, many abandoned stores and sacked Victorian houses. It is surrounded by a suburban belt where the white residents began to settle in the 60's. The suburban area is situated between a highway and a strip of greasy and cheap fast food restaurants that contrast with the old center of the city. This center is like the center of any other southern town, reminiscent of the old plantation society where race prejudices are not in their last chapter.

In the beginning of 2000, a few hundred Haitians came to settle here. Over the course of nine months, 3,000 people arrived in the area, mainly from Florida. After January 12, 2010, a temporary work permit allowed Haitians to look for jobs outside the major urban centers. Mount Olive is surrounded by huge industrial animal slaughter centers that cannot find enough employees. The Haitian labor, harshly affected by the 2008 economic crisis in Florida, is a godsend/bargain for the local industries. The recruitment of Haitians was massive and quick. In a few months Mount Olive saw a Little Haiti taking shape in the heart of its downtown.

In a city where no one walks (errands like banking and dry-cleaning are being run from the car), one can now see pedestrians. The old houses downtown have been quickly repaired and rented at full price. The Haitian community has established a complex economic system for sharing housing, gardening, and renting for the benefit of people who often have known each other for a long time.

Suzette Lubin opened her boutique downtown and sells corossols, mangos francisques, douce marcos, konparets and all sorts of beauty lotions. She explains: “In the beginning, it was a group of friends who drove here in search of work. Since factories were hiring, they phoned others. I came quickly to open my store here because business was sluggish in Florida. Very fast my little store became a sort of recruiting and renting center. A friend of a friend of a friend kept calling and I kept giving information out and putting people in contact.” Suzette’s boutique is, as I call it, the city hall of Little Haiti. People discuss work, religion, community life and roads. One can witness neighbor disputes, rumor propagation but also conflict resolution after heated debates. One can also hear talk about the native country and its future.

Today many Haitians make their life in this quiet small town. Jerry Armstrong, an African American religious leader elected to the city council, brought things about: “They came to live in a neighborhood that is not doing good. But since 2010 I observed my new neighbors: they are hard-working, good mannered and great chefs. Our neighborhood becomes safer because the houses are inhabited again and the yards are cleaned. There is a lot to do to change things around here and Haitians bring new positive energies.”

Now on Mr. Armstrong’s street one can find delicious pates on Sundays, taste lalo, tomtom at the home of Haitians from Grand’Anse or dishes featuring cashews as they cook in Northern Haiti. On Saturdays, one can drink a Prestige beer while watching a soccer game or playing dominos in the neighborhood houses where small businesses have opened discreetly. People chat on porches, do each other favors and sometimes go to church together and support each other to overcome hardships. These, the hardships, are not rare in the neighboring refrigerated factories where hundreds are working hard under non-stop surveillance.

This is a very particular migration. Unlike many former migrants, instead of living in trailer parks around industrial sites, Haitians chose to share houses and gardens in an urban space where they would come across each other and where they would interact with the local community. They organized networks for transportation to work and systems for filling out immigration and tax paperwork. Instead of hiding away in their homes watching television, people have coffee together for their scarce leisure time or walk in the quiet streets of the town. Discussions often evoke the native country, family and friends disappeared in the many catastrophes that have struck Haiti. Thousands of dollars leave pockets each week toward their country. The diaspora working class participates actively in the Haitian economy and the reconstruction of the island to which many dream of going back.

Life is far from being perfect here at Mount Olive. People also argue and the mechanism of the underground economy gets jammed. Healthcare is expensive, the work difficult, dangerous and underpaid. The school system may be frustrating and the local administration often dismisses when one requests basic services. The racism of a caste society is still present. In spite of that, people proudly carry on their daily fight watching lot bò [the other side of the ocean]. This hard-working diaspora is the eleventh state/department/county in Haiti as it discreetly contributes to the welfare of many family members living in the country as well as the country’s cultural acknowledgement in the world. The Obin-Dumé art exhibit at the prestigious University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill will remind us that we must consider this working class as a force in its own right in the making of cultures in the U.S. and Haiti. Culture is not the expression of an elite but a universal human right. The Little Haiti that has emerged here in North Carolina is the spearhead of the revitalization of an American community devastated by successive crises.

## Haitian Households in Mount Olive

Rosalie settled with her husband Milo and their then 3-year-old son Oscar in Mount Olive in March 2011. Rosalie is from the island of La Gonave, located northwest of Port-au-Prince in the Gulf of La Gonave. It is the largest of Hispaniolan satellite islands. She grew up in the city of Pointe-à-Raquette in the southern part of La Gonave with her two brothers, who now both live in Miami. In 1995, her father, a fisherman, and her mother, a cook and domestic worker, sent her to Port-au-Prince. She was sixteen when she settled in the Bas-Peu-de-Chose neighborhood, a middle-class stronghold of the capital. There she stayed with her mother's childhood friend, whom she considers her aunt. Rosalie is a shy, hard-working full-figured woman who has a positive outlook on life. I often sat with her on the porch of her house once the lunch hours were done. During a Sunday afternoon in September 2014, we talked on the porch with her husband while Oscar played videogames on my phone. Punctuating her sentences with laughter, she recalled:

My aunt worked as a domestic for a pharmacist. The man was a retired widow when I joined my aunt in Port-au-Prince in 1995. She'd been working for him for many years and I think they had an affair. They were kind to each other. We would sit and have coffee with him in the morning. He would make the coffee and wash the cups. Back in the days when his wife was alive, my aunt suffered a great deal. She will tell you her back hurts because the woman made her climb the stairs up and down all day long for trivial reasons. They didn't have children. I remember that Monsieur was a very quiet man. And that his feet smelled terrible [laughing]! I would go down with her to work, have breakfast at Monsieur's and then I would go to school. I finished high school thanks to my aunt who paid for everything. She had a boy and a girl in La Gonave but they lived with their father and didn't talk to her. Jean-Marie, her boy, was a classmate of mine when we were little. He passed away around the time I settled in Port-au-Prince. Marie hurt but didn't say anything. I never had to work in Port-au-Prince. I studied for school, I occasionally cooked for us but I never worked at someone's place. We lived in Kafou Fey, some twenty-five minutes away from Monsieur's house, which was not far from Place Cadet-Jeremie. I didn't like Port-au-Prince. It was rough at that time. We had to hide in the room my aunt rented at night. Bandits everywhere! [Zenglando nan tout kote!] People weren't nice, the city was filthy. I missed Pwentaraket, my home. I missed running up the hills, eating fish, going out at night.

I finished high school around 2001 and met Milo around that time. He was ten year older than me and lived in Florida. He was an American citizen. He drove trucks until recently but he was laid off in 2008. We lost the house we bought in Miami the same year. Foreclosure. He's the brother of one of my classmates, Dieuline, who's now my sister in law. We got married in 2002 and I left Haiti in 2004. It was hard for my aunt. I was her baby. She's 74 now, like my mother. She's well. I send her money every month since I left. My brothers send money to my parents. I am not in touch with them. We helped them settle in Florida but we don't get along. Milo doesn't want them in our life. I don't either. I go back once a year to Port-au-Prince with my son. I visit my aunt Marie but I can't go to La Gonave, it's too difficult with the baby. I guess I'm used to Port-au-Prince, it's home now.

Milo has worked at the Butterball turkey plant since 2010. He's one of the first Haitian workers the factory hired. Starting in 2008, Rosalie and Milo struggled in Florida, moving from one big city to another, living with friends and relatives after they lost their home and their cars. Rosalie got pregnant just before a whole array of problems started to befall her and Milo right during the 2008 economic downturn that cost him his job. She recalled that the pregnancy was difficult and that she had a hard time breathing the whole time. Milo eventually found work as an itinerant farm laborer in April 2009 while they were living in Fort Lauderdale with one of his sisters. Milo is a slim, tall 50-year-old man who always wears a hat because, as he says, the cold from the factory never leaves his body. After working a month in the fields of Virginia and Georgia, he befriended Carlo, a Haitian middleman who hired Haitian workers and drove them to various work locations in his Ford minivan. Carlo needed a co-driver as he drove through the U.S. south nonstop. As Milo states:

Carlo is a good guy. He's from La Gonave too, you know. You heard, he's talking about fishing and boating all the time. That's the way we bonded, talking about places my step-parents took me to. I'm a truck driver and a mechanic. He needed a guy like me badly at the time. We drove all the time. I would see Oscar and Rosalie maybe twice a month, quickly between rides. The money in this trade is good but I'm tired of driving trucks. And during summers, you drive all day and all night. Winters are much slower. One day, in late 2010, Carlo got a call from one of his friends. She told him to bring people to Mount Olive, in North Carolina. You know, Haitians got work visas after the quake, so they moved where they found work. We drove with some guys to Mount Olive and met with Suzette who runs a store on Central Street. She sent us to Butterball. They were

hiring men and women by the dozen! Papers or no papers! The first time, one guy came out of the factory, looked at us and hired us all! I tried the job, liked it and stayed. Soon Rosalie and Oscar came with a truck I had bought. That old truck there, which doesn't run over 60 miles an hour! I got Rosalie a job and we settled in Altagrace's house for a while.

When I met Rosalie and Milo in the summer of 2012, they were living with three other families in a six-bedroom two-story Victorian home in the historic district of Mount Olive. Altagrace, who still lives there, rented the place in her name, as she is a U.S. citizen who saved enough money to run a small sub-rental business in Mount Olive. She also drove (and still drives) people to the surrounding meat processing plants in the area for a small fee. The four families sharing the house had known each other prior settling together in this large house. They each paid \$500 a month to Altagrace and shared the sole bathroom and the kitchen. Rosalie quickly became the main cook of the household as people each chipped in to buy groceries. As she states:

I make good fish soup and grilled red snapper. I am a fish expert! I cook Lalo [a collard green stew made with seafood and marinated beef], I cook legume, gratin, gryio, taso dinde, taso bèf, kabri. I only cook traditional Haitian food [manje peyi]. We would put money together and I would go twice a month with my truck to Miami. It's a slow truck! So slow! I come back with a full truck of rice, corn meal, frozen fish, djondjon [black Haitian mushrooms], pwa kongo [pigeon peas] that I buy at markets around Miami. I would do this during weekends because I worked at Butterball. I got fired after I had a fight with a woman there, an American woman who was nasty to me. She hit me with a frozen turkey and she started the fight but I was the one who got fired. I know how to handle my own business, I don't need Butterball! [m konne degaje m, m pa vle tounen Butterball!] After a few months living at Altagrace's, Milo rented a small house. I started a small business there and it's still going well today.

Rosalie and her family first moved to a very small and isolated house next to the railroad tracks. They paid \$600 a month, which was outrageous given the quality of the dwelling. Evangelist Armstrong, who's good friends with Rosalie and Milo, helped them to find another home for the same amount. As of August 2015, they live in a comfortable house where the cold

winds don't blow in the bedrooms during winters. Entering Rosalie's house is like entering a small shop. She kept a room to put her bed and Oscar's bed and desk and kept her living room's round table empty for her guests, but the rest of the house is filled with dry goods and chest freezers. Rosalie reminds me of Clomène: she never sits down and constantly sell things or talk with people to provide some kind of information. As she states:

I needed a house of my own. I like living with my friends okay [m renmen rete ak zanmi m couci couca, ou konprann?] but my house is the place from where I can conduct real business. The living room is a nice space to have guests. People come for a drink, for lunch, they watch soccer on TV. I sell lots of food I bring back from Miami. People know when I'm going. I come back with fresh Haitian avocados and mangoes. I sell Maggi of all kinds [stock Maggi cubs], cans of fish, smoked herring, spices, canned sardines, Bella soap, Florida perfume.... I cook paté [a savory pastry filled with onions and tomato and herring sauce] on Sundays so Milo can bring them to work and sell them. We sell dozens of paté every Sunday. People come here to eat two things: grilled fish and dous [a homemade treat made of grated coconut, raisins and cane sugar]. People love dous! Dous is a lot of work. You need the right coconuts, you need to grate them for hours....



*Figure 61 In Rosalie's front bedroom: Haitian mirlitons are used to prepare legim, a spicy vegetable stew (Joos 2014)*

At 6 PM, the house is closed for everyone, as Milo comes home from work. They both enjoy the privacy of their evenings. Milo often peruses truck-related websites on his laptop as he dreams of opening a truck business. This time, he doesn't want to be behind the wheel but would like to supervise a team of Haitian chauffeurs. He knows the business very well as he drove trucks throughout the whole U.S. for more than twenty years. Rosalie and he are saving money nowadays to realize this project that would allow them to go back to Florida. During a cold evening in December 2014, they invited me for dinner, as I was staying in the gorgeous \$39-a-night Carolina Motel in nearby Goldsboro. While we were eating spicy akra [taro root fritters] that Rosalie had just fried, Milo pensively said:

I put stickers on crates all day long. It's not a hard job, I can't complain. I'm just cold all the time, my feet hurt. But well, other folks work much harder cutting and packaging meat. Nonetheless, it's a temporary job. Well, I hope it is temporary! Mount Olive is okay but we miss Florida. Here, it feels far away from Haiti. A few Americans are nice but for the most part, you feel like an intruder. Old black folks from the Baptist church, or people like Jerry Armstrong are real good people. They know where Haiti is, what it stands for in history. The freedom for all blacks, that's what Haiti fought for long ago. They know that. But you see, I went to a meeting at school not long ago because they wanted to test Oscar's English. They say he doesn't speak English well enough, but he speaks two languages! Kreyol and English. He's five, he needs time. Anyway, the speech therapist was a nice lady but the teacher spoke to me as if I couldn't understand English. I didn't say anything, because she's the teacher of my son. But she repeated all sentences twice: "Oscar needs this and that. Oscar needs this and that." It's a feeling I have at work too. People think you're stupid, they don't say it and you feel it [yo pap janm di w ou se yon imbesil me se yon feeling ou genyen].





*Figure 62 The Butterball plant in Duplin County (Joos 2011)*

Our common friends, such as the poet Héraste Obas and his wife Elina, or Oswald who spends lots of time in Rosalie’s living room, share the same sentiments. Oswald often complains that the police stops him too often when he drives his car around, for instance: “I don’t drink, I’m a religious guy. I’m 72 years old, gray hair on my head, big glasses on my nose. Why do they need to see my paper every time I go and get a cup of coffee at McDonald’s? Does it make sense to you?” Rosalie only opens the door of her house to people she knows. The curtains of the front rooms are always closed as she fears the police will crack down on her business. A climate of suspicion against governmental authorities is diffuse among the Haitian community and many think of their employment in the region merely as a platform to a better future. With the lack of urban infrastructure and business opportunities in the black neighborhoods of Mount Olive, this sense of estrangement takes material forms when mosquitoes invade the neighborhood in the summer or when the stench of the ditches fills the air.

I will end this chapter by translating a poem my friend Héraste Obas wrote. His poem made me realize that Haiti is always on people's minds and that the colonial past of the country is remembered to make sense of present situations. Milo, Héraste and Michel Obin, an artist who lives in the area, often sit together and talk about the figures who brought independence to their country. Dispossession is a common theme of these conversations, as these men feel legitimately that they have been robbed of life possibilities that could have emerged if their home country hadn't been looted by Spanish, French and American invaders. As Héraste Obas recited one afternoon in the kitchen of a house he was moving out of (see the video I recorded here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1HNbfjOmeMM>):

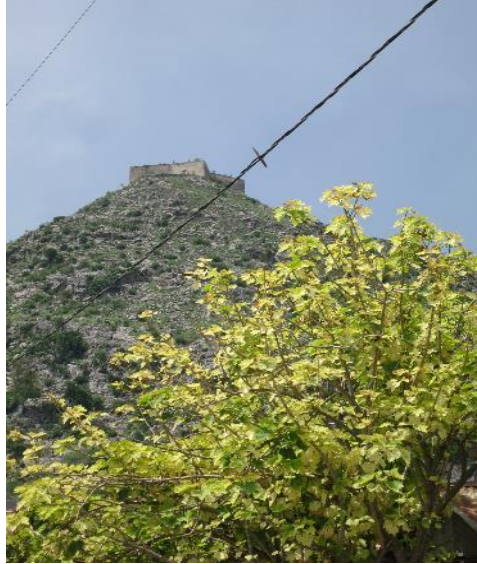
Give me a little...  
Give me a little of the bread you stole from me in broad daylight  
I'm hungry, and I want to feed my sons and grandchildren whose entrails are revolted  
Give me a little of my water that you have taken in the middle of the day  
I'm thirsty and I want to give water to my brothers and sisters whose lips are dried up  
Give me a little of my blood that you have drunk during full moon  
My veins are empty and I want to help my cousins, nephews and nieces  
Give me a little of the space you have stolen from me during the night  
I sleep under the stars and I want to offer shelter to all my companions who are homeless  
in the village  
Give me a little of the gold you have stolen from me  
I am poor and I want to help my father, my mother and my wife who live in bitter misery  
Give me back the waters of the rivers you drained in broad daylight,  
I want to water my valleys and my fields dried up under the sun  
Give me a little of yourself, that you have hidden for so long  
I want to heal the thousands of poor who are struggling  
Give me a little of myself that you have imprisoned in the cold  
I am enslaved and I want to free my family, my city and my homeland that live far from  
liberty  
Give me a little of what belongs to me  
And you will be forgiven.



*Figure 51 Héraste Obas (Joos, November 2013)*

## **CONCLUSION: VERNACULAR SPACES AND CONSTITUTIONS OF SELVES**

In June 2015, Aland Joseph and I took a two-day trip to Dessalines-Ville, a small town located in the northeast Artibonite region. Before 1804, this town was named Marchand, after the name of a Frenchman who owned a large plantation there. In 1804, Jean-Jacques Dessalines made Marchand the capital of the newly independent state of Haiti. It was shortly after renamed Dessalines in his honor in the Imperial constitution of May 20th 1805. It was hence the first Black capital of the New World. After Dessalines was assassinated on the Pont-Rouge at the north entrance of Port-au-Prince in October 1806, Port-au-Prince was stated the new capital of Haiti. Until 2008, this small town was named Marchand-Dessalines but its inhabitants and elected officials renamed it Dessalines-Ville. Bob Nerval, a middle-school teacher who lives there told me that people want to be called “Dessalinien” – or partisan of Dessalines – instead of “Marchandeurs” – peddlers. This calm city is surrounded by steep hills on which seven forts have been built in 1804 to protect it. Each fort serves today for Vaudou practices, from highly publicized ceremonies to the more mundane offerings to various deities [*lwa*].



*Figure 52 Fort Décidé, Dessalines-Ville, 2015*

Bob Nerval, whom I met when I first visited Dessalines-Ville in 2013, walked with us around town. We first visited the *kay spirituel* –the spiritual houses- where Dessalines and his wife Claire Heureuse practiced Vodou rituals [*sévi lwa*]. They are located in a central street in an empty and dusty courtyard where Dessalines’ house stood until a powerful storm destroyed it in 1994. People go there to make money and food offerings frequently. Half a mile down the road, the Source Dessalines, a sacred spring that run around a fort stands as the most coveted feature of town, with its pools of fresh water and the sacred Source Imperiale where Dessalines and his wife bathed with their family. The waters of this specific source located in a dark cave are reputed to have many powers and only oungans or mambos [male and female priests] who know the spiritual possibilities of these waters can use them.



*Figure 53 Left: Claire Hereuse's Kay Spirituel; right: Jean-Jacques Dessalines' Kay Spirituel*



*Figure 54 The Imperial Spring*

On a Saturday after noon of June 15, 2015, children were bathing in the springs located around the fort while their mothers cleaned clothes in a nearby stream. Young men played soccer



near the entrance of the Imperial Spring while many people were sitting around the fort, listening to music, playing cards or discussing. The ruins of Marchand Dessalines are inhabited, spiritually and physically. The house of Claire Heureuse Dessalines is today the home of three low-income families who use it as a shelter but also as a base from which they produce dry corn, food and items they sell. The forts are permanently used for Vodou ceremonies and the Imperial Spring, surrounded by loaded canons, is a recreational and religious space cherished by Dessaliniens.



*Figure 63 Woman washing clothes around the fort*



*Figure 55 Claire Heureuse's house*

In this dissertation, I attempted to show that houses are not simple shelters we can only stylistically describe to assert their patrimonial value but are mainly the locus of human practices that they channel and shape. The structures materializing certain layers of the past are not ruins of a bygone era but spaces where historical echoes inform domestic practices that enable people to live autonomous lives. The value of these patrimonial structures does not only lie in the history they encapsulate. The way people use, transform and give meaning to the shotgun houses, gingerbread houses or the forts scattered around the country render the Haitian material past alive in daily lives. In turn people fully engage with the Haitian past and fashion themselves as agents of the social and cultural geography of Haiti.



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