

Original Paper

The Haitian Neoliberal State

Paul C. Mocombe¹

¹ West Virginia State University, The Mocombeian Foundation, Inc., USA

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Abstract

This work attempts to understand the contemporary Haitian state, which is a paragon of the neoliberal state model. Haiti's neoliberal state is a colonial state impoverished to serve American global capitalist hegemony under the auspices of a Haitian comprador bourgeoisie and oligarchy composed of professionals, managers, intellectuals, and business elites in Haiti and the diaspora. However, unlike Chile, which the West points to as the success of the neoliberal model and process, Haiti's model is a complete failure, similar to the attempt to neoliberalize Russia post the fall of the Soviet Union. Whereas Russia, under Vladimir Putin, was able to combat the deleterious effects of the neoliberal process, Haiti is unable to do so. The work posits that Haiti's failures rest on its colonial experiences under mercantilist and liberal capitalism and the embourgeoisement of its population on the island and the diaspora.

Keywords

vodou ethic and the spirit of communism, structurationism, vodou, dialectical, anti-dialectical, affranchis, bois caiman, boukman dutty, phenomenological structuralism, haitian epistemology, haitian/vilokan idealism

1. Introduction

Like the Africans of North America who were enslaved by the British, the Africans of Haiti were enslaved by the French on plantations to reproduce the colonial mercantilist system of global capitalism, which became juxtaposed against an emerging liberalization of the latter (Du Bois, 2004, 2012; Mocombe, 2016). Whereas the former, mercantilist capitalism, promoted colonies and protective measures in trade to protect those colonies for the development of the colonial nation, i.e., metropole; the latter, promoted specialization and free trade (McMichael, 2008; Hudson, 2022). The dialectical struggles between (European and American) capitalists promoting either model have shaped geopolitics since the eighteenth century (Chase-Dunn, 1977; Wallerstein, 1982; McMichael, 2008; Hudson, 2022). Contemporarily, the distinction is drawn between protective measures and Keynesian economics, with

an emphasis on social welfare programs, state interventions into the economy, import substitutions, and nationalization, on the one hand; and neoliberal identity politics, on the other, with an emphasis on trade liberalization, austerity, financialization of economies, privatization, specialization, and identity politics (Sklair, 1995; McMichael, 2008; Hudson, 2022). The latter has been promoted by America, the hegemon of the contemporary global capitalist world-system, to countries seeking to develop and increase the well-being of their citizenry over the former, which America itself used to develop its economy and society against European (British) colonialism (McMichael, 2008; Hudson, 2022). To date, the consequences for countries using the neoliberal model for development have been disastrous: seeing, the rise of identity politics, with an emphasis on the queerification and feminization of the work force; the privatization of state resources and the rise of a small oligarchy, working for, and with, foreign capital to ascertain and (privately) control these resources; increased poverty for the masses; and a weak state unable to provide social welfare for its citizenry who are dependent on outside foreign and domestic private non-profit companies, i.e., nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and other non-state organizations for these services (Hudson, 2022). In essence, contemporarily, neoliberalism has become mercantilism in an effort to colonize the states of the world for American, the new metropole replacing the Western European states of previous centuries, agricultural, industrial, and post-industrial interests, against state nationalism and the Keynesian model, which are viewed as reactionary fascism in the Polanyian (2001 [1944]) sense by the rentier oligarchs of the capitalist world-system.

This work posits that the contemporary Haitian state is a paragon of the neoliberal state model. Haiti's neoliberal state is a colonial/vassal state impoverished to serve American global capitalist hegemony under the auspices of a Haitian comprador bourgeoisie composed of professionals, managers, intellectuals, and business elites in Haiti and the diaspora. However, unlike Chile, which the West points to as the success of the neoliberal process, Haiti's model is a complete failure, similar to the attempt to neoliberalize Russia post the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. Whereas Russia, under Vladimir Putin, was able to combat the deleterious effects (poverty, unemployment, death, etc.) of the neoliberal process by gaining control of the state, curtailing the powers of the oligarchy created by the West, nationalizing its natural resources, and implementing Keynesian economic policies, Haiti is unable to do so (Hudson, 2022). The work posits that Haiti's failures rest on its colonial experiences under mercantilist and liberal capitalism and the embourgeoisement of its population on the island and the diaspora against the African Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism in the mountains and provinces of the country.

2. Background of the Problem

The Haitian Revolution has been highlighted in the academic literature as a distinct revolution that sought to universalize the humanist ideas, ideals, and values of the Enlightenment in the face of European hypocrisy revealed by colonialism and racism (James, 1986; Du Bois, 2004, 2012;

Buck-Morss, 2009). Nothing could be further from the truth. The latter position only holds for some of the African leadership of the Revolution who were not interpellated by the social class language game of the Europeans and rejected their humanist ideas, ideals, and values (Du Bois, 2004; Mocombe, 2016, 2023). Unlike the black American, which became a structurally differentiated black other in America (Frazier, 1957, 1968; Mocombe, 2016, 2017). In Haiti, given that sixty-seven percent of the population were directly from Africa when the Revolution commenced, following the Haitian Revolution, many of the Africans were able to maintain and institutionalize their practical consciousness in the mountains and provinces of the island via the Kreyol language, the lakou system, and the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism (Mocombe, 2016, 2017; Du Bois, 2004, 2012). Hence two opposing forms of system and social integration (i.e., social class language games), each with their own mode of production, language, ideology, ideological apparatuses, and communicative discourse, would constitute the Haitian social structure (Du Bois, 2004, 2012; Mocombe, 2016): the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism of the Africans; and the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism of the *Affranchis*, mulatto elites and petit-bourgeois blacks in control of the state apparatuses (Mocombe, 2016). The latter, given their interpellation and embourgeoisement in European languages, mode of production, ideology, ideological apparatuses, and communicative discourse, sought to continue their participation in the global capitalist processes of the Europeans via mercantilism and liberalism and control of the state and its apparatuses of control. The former, the majority of the Africans, sought to constitute an alternative form of system and social integration, i.e., a libertarian communal social class language game, by which they sought to interpellate and socialize the masses, outside the state and its apparatuses of control under the *Affranchis*, for subsistence living and sustainable development of the material resource framework over capitalist exploitation. Dessalines, the founding father of the nation-state, attempted, in a Kojèveian sense, to synthesize the two positions (Mocombe, 2023).

This Kojèveian constitution of Haiti by Dessalines did not sit well with the *Affranchis* who desired their pre-war status and wealth, which tied them to the (mercantilist and liberal) global capitalist world-system. Instead of focusing on fortification of the island, national production, food security, and agricultural production for local consumption as Dessalines attempted to do with his equitable redistribution of land among the population, the *Affranchis* assassinated him over his land and economic reforms, and the masses of Africans fled to the mountainsides and provinces of the island (Du Bois, 2012).

With the assassination of Dessalines, the majority of the productive land was divided among the mulatto elites, who took over their fathers' land and estates, and the black commanding officers of the revolution (Du Bois, 2004). They kept intact the export based economic arrangements which existed under colonialism and Toussaint's regime with the mulatto elites—because of their status as mulattoes—serving as the middle persons between the nation-state and outside merchants. What emerged in Haiti, following the Revolution, was the same colonial (mercantilist/liberal free-trade) class structure under the leadership of the *Affranchis* (as opposed to the Europeans) and their adversarial

partnership with an emerging foreign white merchant class, which assisted in the acquisition of manufactured goods, petit-bourgeois blacks who converted their plantations into agribusinesses, and the Africans in the provinces and mountains whose products were heavily taxed by the emerging nation-state under the leadership of the Affranchis (Du Bois, 2012).

3. Theory and Methods

Haiti, since 1804, has been marked by this struggle between agents of these two forms of system and social integration, the Protestant/Catholic Ethic and the spirit of capitalism and the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism, with the merchant and landowning classes (agents of the former) constantly seeking to supplant the Vodou Ethic and spirit of communism of the African majority via what Karl Polanyi calls the fictitious commodities (land, labor, and money) of (liberal-bourgeois) capitalism: the commodification of the land of the island, the labor of the African masses, and money (dollarization of the economy), which ties Haiti to the global Protestant capitalist world-system of the Europeans and Americans (Mocombe, 2016). In other words, Haiti is caught between the libertarian communism of the Africans in the mountains and provinces; the mercantilism, guised under the umbrella of black nationalism, of the landowning Affranchis, both blacks and mulattoes; and the liberalism of a merchant class (Arabs, mulattoes, and a few blacks) seeking to (neo) liberalize trade and promote identity politics as they control the export and import trade on the island. The latter two seek control of the state and its apparatuses backed by their American and European handlers (a rentier oligarchical transnational class) seeking to neoliberalize the country and its institutions or state apparatuses of control.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Contemporarily, the continuous struggle between the mulatto (and Arab) merchant/professional class and the black landowning managerial classes for control of the state and its apparatuses, at the expense of the African masses in the provinces and mountains whose children they arm and use against each other as they migrate to Port-au-Prince amidst American neoliberal policies seeking to displace the masses off their land for diversified consumerism, i.e., tourism, agro and textile industries, and athletics (basketball and soccer), and trickle-down economics, continues to be a hindrance for the constitution of a sovereign Haitian nation-state amidst global climate change. The former two, interpellated and embourgeoised in Western ideological apparatuses, seek to constitute Haiti and the Haitian state, with the aid of whites (France, Canada, and America), as an export-oriented periphery state within the capitalist world-system under American hegemony through the queerification and feminization of the labor force, privatization of state assets and services, austerity measures, militarization, and liberalization of trade with France, Canada, and the United States (Du Bois, 2012; Mocombe, 2016). This neoliberal/mercantilist/colonial process stands against the desires of the masses of Africans who have been ghettoized in the urban slums, provinces, and mountains while seeking to maintain their *komes*, subsistence agriculture, and husbandry, which are deemed informal, against the gentrification of

the country. The new *grandon* class, composed of educated professionals, former drug dealers, entertainers, and police officers attack the former Affranchis class, which is now a comprador (oligarchical) bourgeoisie (composed of Arab merchants) seeking to build, own, and manage hotels (to promote “so-called” Haitian culture) and assembly factories producing electronics and clothing for the US market, under the moniker the children of Dessalines against the children of Pétion in the name of the African masses of the island, the majority of whom are peasant farmers interpellated and ounganified by the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism. Instead of focusing on infrastructure (artificial lakes, potable water, food security, mache—modern market spaces for *komes*, universities, and state-owned companies for the peasant class to sell, etc.) to augment national agriculture and the productive forces of the latter group, who constitute eighty-five percent of the population, the mulatto/Arab elites and petit-bourgeois blacks emphasize austerity, job creation through foreign direct investment in tourism, agro and textile industries, privatization of public services, infrastructure for an export-oriented economy similar to the one they had under slavery, identity politics, and the constitution of a political bourgeoisie in control of the state apparatuses. However, their inabilities—given the voting power of the majority—to constitute two dominant rotating political parties, between the grandon and the black professional/managerial classes representing neoliberalism on the one hand and identity politics on the other, to implement the desires of their former colonial slavemasters, leaves Haiti in perpetual turmoil and poverty. As in slavery, the African masses continue to protest and fight, against their interpellation, embourgeoisement, and differentiation as wage-earners (commodities) in the tourism trade and textile factories of the Catholic/Protestant Ethic and spirit of capitalism of these two power elites seeking equality of opportunity, recognition, and distribution with whites at their expense, for the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism of *oungan yo*, *manbo yo*, and *granmoun yo* of Bois Caiman. As the current historical conjuncture parallels the conjuncture of 1791 either a unifying national conference that parallels Bois Caiman or a second war of independence will determine the outcome of this perpetual economic and cultural civil war in Haiti. As for now, the masses of Port-au-Prince, galvanized by the grandon class, protest against the neoliberal capitalist world-system under American hegemony under the moniker, the children of Pétion v. the children of Dessalines. Although viewed within racial and nationalistic terms by the majority of the governing elites, Pétion representing the mulatto elites and Dessalines the African masses, this work suggests that the metaphor, contemporarily, have come to represent Marxist ideological categories for racial-class (nationalistic) struggles on the island of Haiti against dictatorship, the Haitian oligarchs, and American neoliberal policies on the island: the ideological position of Pétion representing the neoliberal views of the mulatto elites and petit-bourgeois blacks; and Haitian nationalism, economic reform, and social justice representing the ideological position of Dessalines as articulated by educated segments of the petit-bourgeois class, such as Moise Jean-Charles, Assad Volcy, etc., claiming to speak for the African masses, the majority of whom are more so the descendants of Macaya and Sans Souci (the African leadership during the Revolutionary period) than Pétion or Dessalines (Kreyol blacks of the island).

However, in the final analysis, both positions stand against the interests of the African masses as they seek to maintain their subsistence agriculture, komes, and well-being amidst the desires of the two bourgeoisies fighting for equality of opportunity, recognition, and distribution with whites within the global capitalist world-system under American neoliberal hegemony and identity politics (Fraser, 1997; Mocombe, 2016, 2017). Haiti is unable to produce a Vladimir Putin—whose actions represented a Polanyian countermovement to exploitation and oppression wrought on Russian society, following the fall of communism and the implementation of neoliberalism, by American wall street oligarchs—to represent and protect the interest and social class language game of the masses due to the entrenchment of the Affranchis class structure, which dates back to the colonial era, seeking to integrate the population, through the fascism of neoliberalism and identity politics, of the rentier oligarchs of the capitalist world-system under American and European hegemony.

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