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HAITIAN (PRE)OCCUPATIONS: IDEOLOGICAL AND DISCURSIVE REPETITIONS: 1915-1934 AND 2004 TO PRESENT

Toni Pressley-Sanon

ABSTRACT

This essay explores ideological and discursive connections between international imperialism and Haitian victimization through the lens of the U.S. occupation of Haiti from 1915-1934 and the current occupation by MINUSTAH that began in 2004. It lingers on moments of resistance to these military forces from a grassroots front in both instances, drawing parallels between the two.

Keywords: Haiti, U.S. military occupation, MINUSTAH, resistance, discursive practices, imperialism

RESUMEN

Este ensayo explora las conexiones ideológicas y discursivas entre el imperialismo internacional y la victimización haitiana y se enfoca en la ocupación de Haití por parte de los Estados Unidos entre 1915 y 1934 y la ocupación actual de MINUSTAH, la cual empezó en 2004. El ensayo se detiene en los momentos de resistencia local hacia las fuerzas militares de ambos movimientos y establece puntos de contacto entre los dos.

Palabras clave: Haití, ocupación de los Estados Unidos, MINUSTAH, resistencia, prácticas discursivas, imperialismo

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article explore les relations idéologiques et discursives entre l'impérialisme international et les victimes haïtiens. Il se concentre sur l'occupation Américaine d'Haïti entre 1915 et 1934 et l'occupation actuelle de la MINUSTAH qui a commencé en 2004. L'article analyse les moments de résistance locale contre les forces militaires de ces occupations, en présentant les rapports existants entre les deux.

Mots-clés : Haïti, occupation militaire Américaine, MINUSTAH, résistance, pratiques discursives, impérialisme

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Introduction: The Occupations of Haiti

The United States has orchestrated two military invasions of the Caribbean country of Haiti. The first, which lasted from 1915 to 1934, began under orders by U.S. President Monroe Wilson and came to an end under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt through a disengagement agreement. There were two primary reasons for the first U.S. intervention: one was the political instability that plagued the country and that resulted in a rapid succession of presidential assassinations and forced exiles; the other was U.S. fear of German imperialism that rivaled its own aspirations.

Internal to the country, between 1911 to early 1915 Haiti had seven presidents and the state was in shambles. In July 1915 the president at the time, Vilbrun Guillaume Sam, with opposition to his presidency growing, had 167 political prisoners executed. Port-au-Prince erupted in chaos and, despite trying to take refuge in the French embassy, a crowd managed to drag him out and tear him to pieces. On the international front, the sizable community of German businessmen who resided in the country facilitated German economic and political encroachment on Haiti by marrying Haitian women. Their unions enabled them to circumvent Emperor Jean-Jacques Dessalines' 1804 decree that no white person could own Haitian land. With the early twentieth century occupation, the U.S. was able to install a Haitian puppet president, Philippe Sudre Dartiguenave, and U.S. President Wilson was able to rewrite the Haitian Constitution, adding a provision that allowed foreign ownership of Haitian land.

The occupation lasted 19 years. And while it was welcomed by a certain segment of the Haitian population—primarily the elite class—there was resistance to it from the moment that the marines disembarked from their ship. One of the first was by Charlemagne Péralte, a landowner, politician, member of a military family, and the ranking commander in the town of Léogâne at the time (Michel 1996).¹ Less than a month after their landing, the commander of the warship *Eagle* went to demand entry into the town and informed Péralte that one hundred American troops would occupy it while another commander requested that his troops be lodged in the Government Palace (Michel 1996). Péralte refused, stating that he only took orders from the Haitian president. President Dartiguenave responded by firing him and replacing him with Charles Maubert Cassey, a more tractable officer (Michel 1996).

The politician, Roger Dorsinville, remarked that upon seeing the marines disembark from their ships, the faces of the adults who watched registered a look of resignation. For him, the look meant "The white soldiers had come to defile our independence: where were the ancestors?"

Finally the ancestors were no more" (*Marche arrière* 1986:16). The marines also knew they were not welcome as Marine Faustin Wirkus observes in *The White King of La Gonâve*: "It hurt. It stunk...We were not welcome. We could feel it as distinctly as we could smell the rot in the gutters...There was not a smile in sight. The opaque eyes in the black faces were not friendly" (1931:17). Nonetheless, despite the open hostility to their presence, the marines came to stay. Once ensconced in the country they set about "civilizing" the country's inhabitants whom they thought of as their wards; recalcitrant children in need of paternalistic guidance. As historian Hans Schmidt asserts, the United States saw itself as the self-appointed trustee of civilization in the Caribbean. It was thus obliged to safeguard its definition of standards of decency and morality (1995:66). The enforcement of those standards that were steeped in paternalistic racism meant that gross human rights violations, sexual violence, and impropriety as well as armed resistance to their presence—most notably from the peasant population—marked the marines' tenure.²

The haunting of that first occupation is personalized in the 2003 film, *The Agronomist*, in which the journalist and political activist Jean Dominique relates his memory as a four year-old watching the marines finally leave. He says "And every time a marine battalion passed in front of the house, my father took my hand and said, 'Don't look at them, don't look at them'. So, I had this uncomfortable attitude to be attracted by those wonderful soldiers and to feel that my father disagreed. And every May 18th, which is the Flag Day, defiantly he put the Haitian flag in front of the house.³ And I said, 'Father, what is that? What does that mean for you?' And he said, 'That means that you are Haitian. That means that my great grandfather fought at Vertières'" (Battle of Vertières-November 18, 1803).⁴ Never forget that. You are Haitian. You are from this land". Punctuating each pronouncement with a thumb thrust forward, Dominique recalls the words of his father: "You are *not* French. You are *not* British. You are *not* American. You are *Haitian*". Dominique follows this memory/pronouncement with raised eyebrows—a look of astonishment or one that invites a challenge.

As several scholars have argued before me, that first invasion had a profound effect on Haitian history.⁵ The legacy of that first invasion also lives on in Haitian society today. As we approach the 100-year anniversary of the first American invasion, the memory of it is being summoned contemporarily as Haitian people negotiate the continued presence of a twenty-first century international military force.

1990 and Beyond

The second U.S. military invasion officially took place between September 1994 and March 1995. Titled “Operation Uphold Democracy” the intervention was designed to remove the military junta that had exiled then-President Jean-Bertrand Aristide eight months after he was democratically elected president. Following the success of the operation in its facilitation of the return of President Aristide to the palace the U.S. military forces withdrew from the country. It was replaced by the U.N. Mission in Haiti (UNMIH) under the command of U.S. President Bill Clinton. In fact, 2,400 U.S. personnel from the original “Operation Uphold Democracy” remained as a support group commanded by UNMIH under a new operation called “Operation New Horizons” until March 1996. A large contingent of U.S. troops (USFORHAITI) participated as peacekeepers in the UNMIH until 1996 with the U.S. forces commander also acting as the commander of the U.N. forces. Then, after the UNMIH’s tenure ended in Haiti, U.N. forces under various mission names remained in-country until 2000.

But there is something missing in this neat history of the second intervention: that is, that the multilateral intervention in Haiti really began in 1990. According to their website, the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti’s (*Mission des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en Haïti* or MINUSTAH) mission began when, at the request of the provisional government, the United Nations Observer Group for the Verification of the Elections in Haiti (ONUVEH) observed the preparation and holding of elections. In February 1993, over two years after the 1991 coup and overthrow of Aristide, a joint United Nations coalition called the OAS International Civilian Mission in Haiti (MICIVIH) was deployed. When in September 1993, the military junta that had seized power prevented UNMIH from being fully deployed to carry out its mandate, “the Security Council authorized the deployment of a 20,000-strong multinational force to facilitate the prompt return of the legitimate Haitian authorities, maintain a secure and stable environment in the country, and promote the rule of law.”⁶ In short, the initial intervention was followed by a number of successive United Nations peacekeeping missions from 1994 to 2000, including UNMIH, which assumed its functions in full in March 1995, the United Nations Support Mission in Haiti (UNSMIH), the United Nations Transition Mission in Haiti (UNTMIH), and the United Nations Civilian Police Mission in Haiti (MIPOMUH).

From 1804 to 2014

On January 1, 1804 Emperor Dessalines declared the fledgling nation of Hayti⁷ independent; that is, a sovereign nation, free to determine its destiny as part of a larger global economic and diplomatic system. In 2004, the year that Haiti was to celebrate its 200th year of independence, MINUSTAH descended on Haiti as part of a stabilizing mission. In the months leading up to the intervention, armed fighting had broken out in Gonaïves and quickly spread to other cities as insurgents took control of much of the northern part of the country. The Security Council acted equally quickly and on February 29, 2004, adopted a resolution that determined that the situation in Haiti constituted a threat to international peace and security. It subsequently authorized the Multinational Interim Force (MIF). It declared “the Council’s readiness to establish a follow-on United Nations stabilization force to support the continuation of a peaceful and constitutional political process and the maintenance of a secure and stable environment” (“MINUSTAH Background”). Finally, on April 30, 2004, acting on the recommendations of the Secretary-General at the time, Kofi Annan, the Security Council adopted Resolution 1542 establishing MINUSTAH, which took over from the MIF on June 1, 2004. The international military force that was authorized at that time remains ensconced in Haiti.

The Current Military Crisis

The 2004 intervention came after months of political upheaval and violence, which resulted in the second exile of then-President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. That official mission has lasted a decade. Like the U.S. marines who occupied the country almost one hundred years before, this new force’s tenure has been rife with accusations of human rights abuses and allegations of sexual impropriety. And while many Haitians realize that were it not for MINUSTAH’s presence, the country would not be enjoying the tense calm that it does today, the question is, as it was during the American Occupation, “At what cost?” Some would agree with Ricardo Seitenfus, an Organization of American States (OAS) official (“OAS Removes”) and Arnold Antonin, a political scientist and filmmaker, that the peace of Haiti is the “peace of the graveyard” (*Haiti: Le Chemin*). As Dominique expresses in his interview regarding the marines years before, many Haitians today are conflicted about MINUSTAH’s continued presence. Others, similar to Dorsinville, have a sense a resignation or violent indignation about what they perceive as a foreign occupying force.

This article argues that the ideological and discursive practices

found in both scholarly and journalistic venues preceding and during the current occupation by MINUSTAH echo those deployed immediately before and during the occupation of Haiti by U.S. marines in the early twentieth century. I posit that this ideology and the discursive practices that accompany it reinforce imperialist policies based on geo-political and material interests.⁸ Sociologist Laënnec Hurbon undertook a similar project in his article “American Fantasy and Haitian Vodou” (1995). As he states:

it is significant, or in any case, symptomatic, that this occupation was preceded, accompanied, and followed by a series of racist diagrams and images of Vodou which were deployed in the United States. Without being the major justification for the occupation, Vodou served as a pretext, and the sketches and images of which it was the subject bear witness to the particular virulence of the American occupation in Haiti (184).

While Hurbon focuses on how Vodou as a spiritual belief system of the majority Haitian population was deployed as part of a larger racist agenda in the early twentieth century, I take a comparative approach to reading expressions of imperialist ideology that justified the first American occupation and undergirds the current multinational occupation.

As I discuss in the introduction, while there was the well-publicized American military intervention from 1994 to 1995 (“Operation Restore Democracy”) my focus here is on the two long-term occupations, which have endured long enough to accumulate writings and commentary about them. Moreover, as should be clear from the introduction, the current military occupation grew out of the 1994 intervention, so they should not be seen as separate occurrences.

Though I agree with historian Laurent Dubois that the foreign presence today operates in different ways and on different terms than it did in the early twentieth century (2012:366), I nonetheless think that it is important to draw attention to the ideological framework that operates as foundational to the two military interventions and the discursive practices that undergird the systems of domination that make these repeated invasions plausible, especially now as events are still unfolding and will one day be discussed and written about retrospectively in ways similar to the American Occupation.

When I talk about ideological underpinnings, I mean the beliefs and orientations that began with the “unthinkability” of Haiti as a black nation in a world dominated by European powers in the early nineteenth century. The Haitian Revolution was, in the words of anthropologist, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, an “unthinkable history” (1992:73) and to paraphrase political critic and philosopher Noam Chomsky, a transgression for which the country has never been forgiven (2010). The colonizers’

ideological position—quite simply, that the enslaved population of Saint Domingue had no right to claim their independence from France—was communicated discursively through the pronouncements at the time by people like Thomas Jefferson, who called Haiti “the pest of rebellion” (Galeano 2011). It also found its way into the writings of travelers who visited Haiti shortly after its independence and wrote about cannibalism, superstitiousness, and the lasciviousness of its people whose childlike nature made them incapable of governing themselves.⁹ Political scientist Robert Fatton observes:

...after defeating the French and gaining their independence, Haitians confronted for more than a century the unmitigated hatred of White supremacist powers. At a time when its domination rested on the twin pillars of racism and colonial rule, Western imperialism was bound to fear that the vast areas it controlled would follow Haiti’s insurrectionary path. Indeed, the makers of 1804 disturbed the global system of exploitation (2011:160).

The unmitigated hatred of the first hundred years of Haiti’s independence later found expression in a paternalistic racism still based in the belief in White supremacy. This form of racism has been equally devastating to the country, borne out as it was during the first American Occupation and as I argue, can be witnessed in the current stabilization mission by UN forces.¹⁰ As I will show, throughout the literature of the early twentieth century, the picture of Haiti as a country that should never have taken its freedom and should be recolonized because it was incapable of governing itself was promulgated.¹¹ Furthermore, similar language was used in 2004 when the UN decided to go into Haiti to try to stabilize it. After the earthquake of 2010 such language resurfaced in discussions about whether Haiti should be made a protectorate or trusteeship of the United States.

It is also important to mark Haitian people’s responses to the reality of these multiple sites of violence on the ground. What was true during the first occupation is true today. To paraphrase historian Mary Renda in her discussion of James Weldon Johnson’s intervention on the discourse circulated about Haiti during the American invasion of 1915, Haitians are not grateful (or, for that matter, ungrateful) wards, but fully competent political subjects who have explicitly and repeatedly refused to grant control of Haitian affairs to the international community.¹² Or as Chavannes Jean-Baptiste, founder and director of the Haitian peasant organization *Mouvman Peyizan Papay* (MPP) asserts, Haitians are struggling to be “adults in their own pants.”¹³ Nonetheless, over and again, the international community has undermined Haitian sovereignty.¹⁴ As Trouillot avers:

France, England, the Netherlands and the United States traded with Haiti, but only on terms that they themselves imposed. The United States provided most of Haiti's imports but bought little in return. It only recognized Haitian independence almost 60 years after the fact, in 1862... While Haiti was ostracized diplomatically, it also represented "the world's first experiment in neocolonialism". If in retrospect the Haitian revolution appears to have been a failure, it is in part because Western powers—notably France, England, the United States and the Vatican—wanted it to fail (1994:47).

Even after France recognized Haiti in 1825, the U.S. refused to follow suit. Illustrative of the ideology that undergirded the diplomatic blockade, the U.S. senator from Missouri, Thomas Hart Benson, remarked that:

Our policy towards Hayti...has been fixed...for three and thirty years. We trade with her, but no diplomatic relations have been established between us...We receive no mulatto consuls, or black ambassadors from her. And why? Because the peace of eleven states will not permit the fruits of a successful negro insurrection to be exhibited among them. It will not permit black ambassadors and consuls to...give their fellow blacks in the United States proof in hand of the honors that await them for a like successful effort on their part. It will not permit the fact to be seen, and told, that for the murder of their masters and mistresses, they are to find friends among the white people of the United States (qtd. in Montague 53-54).

The international community's undermining of Haitian sovereignty, as it did following the Haitian Revolution, can be tracked in the occupying forces' actions and their supporters' discursive practices preceding and during the 1915 invasion. Many of the same practices have been deployed contemporarily with the MINUSTAH occupation that took shape in 2004, and which have then been manifest in events on the ground.

A Brief Overview of the Literature on the Occupations

A good number of histories have been written about the occupation in the early twentieth century; too numerous to list entirely. They include some of the texts that I utilize in this essay. For example, Hans Schmidt's *Maverick Marine: General D. Smedley Butler and the Contradictions of American Military History* (1998) and *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934* (1970) are both well-researched descriptions of the workings of the American marines' work in Haiti; François Blancpain's *Haiti et les États Unis, 1915-1934: Histoire d'une Occupation* (1999) provides a good overview of the occupation while Roger Gailliard's *Hinche Mise en Croix* (1982) and *Charlemagne Péralte le Caco* (1982) are very

important histories of the major actors in the *Caco* rebellion. Mary Renda's *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of Imperialism, 1915-1940* (2000) does an excellent job of tracing the paternalistic racism that made the wholehearted conscription of American men into the occupation possible. More recently, in *The Spirits and the Law: Vodou and Power in Haiti* (2011), historian Kate Ramsey explores the contentious relationship between the marines and the Haitian population through the lens of Vodou. Following the 2010 earthquake, Dubois published a sweeping history of Haiti's internal conflicts as well as its relationship with the international community, covering a good deal of the American occupation in *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History* (2012).

While there has been much written in the press and in digital media, especially from journalists and human rights activists such as Kim Ives and Marguerite Laurent, who point to the racist ideology that is behind the human rights abuses that MINUSTAH has been accused of in the past few years, and drawing connections between the American occupation of the early twentieth century and the contemporary multinational occupation, very little has been written about this topic as yet. Exceptions to this are some of the articles that are included in *Tectonic Shifts: Haiti Since the Earthquake*, edited by Mark Schuller and Pablo Morales (2012).

The American Expansionist Project

The U.S. takeover of Haiti in 1915 was not an isolated incident. It was integral to a prolonged period of American expansion and imperialism. From the start of the twentieth century, the U.S. moved to conquer the Caribbean and Central America. Just before the turn of the century, the U.S. annexed Puerto Rico (1898) and began occupying Cuba (1898-1902). Then it backed a revolt that facilitated Panama's separation from Colombia and opened the way for its control of the Panama Canal project (1903-1914); it occupied Honduras in 1911 and then sent troops to Mexico in 1914. It began its occupation of Haiti in 1915 followed by the Dominican Republic in 1916.¹⁵ As part of the larger plan to occupy Haiti, a campaign to convince American citizens and the world of the necessity of such a move was started.¹⁶ For example, in 1908, an article reprinted from an address to the National Geographic Society, "Haiti: A Degenerating Island: The Story of its Past Grandeur and Present Decay" by Rear Admiral Colby M. Chester, U.S. Navy, painted Haiti as an oasis that was being ruined by its black inhabitants. He calls it one of the "most favored nations" because of both its location and its natural resources. However, he laments that the island's inhabitants were not of an order befitting the country's natural riches (1908:200). In his section entitled "Haiti is Degenerating to a Condition of Barbarism," Chester points

out that of 21 rulers from Dessalines to “the one now holding power,” only four had completed their terms in office. He follows that with a truth that reads like an accusation: “Haiti is getting blacker and blacker” (Chester 214). He may be speaking about both the skin color of the nation’s inhabitants and his perception that the country is sinking deeper and deeper into a barbaric state as, according to him, this encroaching blackness is the result of the practical extermination or forcible removal of the white element from the island. For him in 1908, not only were the ancestors of the contemporary inhabitants of Haiti responsible for the “fierce strife known as ‘The Horrors of the Negro Insurrection in Santo Domingo’” (Chester 209) but the inhabitants of the twentieth century continued their insubordination against the natural order of things. In his view, Haiti was “the one country in the world where white blood is at a discount” (Chester 214).

National Geographic Magazine, in which the article was printed, was an important tool for winning popular American support for the invasion of Haiti, as the National Geographic Society, which publishes the magazine, had and continues to have a reputation for “safeguarding American values and traditions” (Lutz and Collins 5). This includes “an informed or knowledgeable citizenry, particularly in an epoch, which may have been devoted to the idea of America’s *global responsibilities*” (Lutz and Collins 5, emphasis added). The U.S. used the rhetoric of Christian duty as justification for its military mission to save Haiti from itself. In addition, the idea that Haitians were children in need of fatherly guidance was promulgated. As Renda notes, “Paternalist discourse was one of the primary cultural mechanisms by which the occupation conscripted men into the project of carrying out U.S. rule” (2001:13).

Hurbon surmises that the U.S. became interested in dominating Haiti politically and militarily with a long-held ideology toward Vodou that interpreted it as evidence of barbarism from which the people of Haiti “must be delivered” (183). It should therefore be noted that Chester’s discussion of Vodou is unoriginal and part of a tradition that dates back to the days of colonialism. As part of the machine of imperialism, his article damns the Haitian inhabitants and is presented as further evidence of the need for radical intervention by Christian souls who have the benefit of “hundreds of years of enlightenment and study of political science and economy and republican principles” (Chester 217). Chester writes for a white American audience. Thus, his preoccupation with the barbaric Haitians “who have no higher ambition than to possess sufficient means to supply the demands of their appetites” (Chester 214), who engage in “the most disgraceful orgies” and practice “blood sacrifice” and “cannibalism” (Chester 215) and who remain in touch with the “call of the wild” (Chester 216) is linked to the preoccupations of his

white American audience: “the American negro.”¹⁷

According to theorists of the Frankfurt School, *National Geographic* is located within “mass culture—materials created and disseminated by powerful interests for the consumption of the working classes” (Lutz and Collins 5). For these theorists, mass culture is degenerate and manipulative, invested in duping and misleading people into developing a false sense of an understanding of their situation in a capitalist society (Lutz and Collins 6). We see this manipulation at work in Chester’s indirect way of pointing to the danger of *not* invading Haiti. He advises his audience: “It is well for us to consider whether we too may not expect some such acts of savagery to break out in our country if our own colored people are not educated for better things” (Chester 216). The desire to intervene in Haiti’s downward moral, economic, political, and social spiral is depicted as being driven, not only by a sense of Christian duty, but also self-preservation. Chester finishes his exposition with a directive: “Let us... not make a similar mistake to the one here enacted, lest our own wards go through the horrors which have so darkened the history of the Black and Brown republics” (Chester 217). The wards to which he refers were black people in the United States, a good number of whom remembered the days of slavery from first-hand experience and with whom the U.S. was trying to figure out what to do. In other words, if white Americans planned to maintain their way of life, then it was in their best interest to support a move to quell the bad example to the South lest their “own negroes” revert to their natural state of savagery which, until then, their contact with white people had abated.

By July 1915 the United States marines invaded Haiti. Indeed, as J. Michael Dash proposes, Haiti can be said to have created the conditions for foreign occupation to the extent that in the chronic unrest of the years leading up to it, neither the mulatto elite nor the black majority seemed prepared for the reality of political autonomy (Dash 1981:43). But it would seem that, given the U.S. project of expansion, even without the political unrest, Haiti was still within its sights. According to Patrick Bellegarde-Smith the documents announcing the occupation were drafted ahead of the invasion with the date left blank, thus giving the United States the freedom to move when they felt the time was right (2004:99). The brutal murder of President Sam on July 27th gave the U.S. the excuse they needed and a day later on July 28th, Admiral William Caperton landed his troops (Gaillard 1981:11).¹⁸

With the invasion and subsequent occupation came a slew of eyewitness and fictionalized accounts of the depravity of Haitian culture, focusing on Vodou, and propaganda to justify the human rights abuses that were perpetrated against the Haitian population. A 1916 article in *The National Geographic Magazine* entitled “Wards of the United States:

Notes on What Our Country is Doing for Santo Domingo, Nicaragua, and Haiti” picks up where Chester’s article leaves off. The author depicts the three Black and Brown neighbors of Chester’s article as sorely in need of salvation that can only come from the United States, even at high financial and (white) human cost:

It has not been without effort or without expense, nor yet without the actual sacrifice of blood and life that our country has stepped in to play the role of Good Samaritan to the peoples of Santo Domingo, Haiti and Nicaragua, who had lost the blessings of peace and were unable to gain them. In Haiti alone we lost one officer and six marines and had a number wounded. How much money it has cost has not been ascertained officially, but the usual estimate is that it costs \$1,000 a year to support an American soldier in the tropics, and thousands of them have been sent down there (“Haiti and its Regeneration”: 147).

In fact, the loss of American life compared to Haitian life was minimal. According to Max Boot, during their occupation of the entire island of Hispaniola, American soldiers did not suffer “significant casualties (26 Americans in action; 79 wounded)” (2002:180). Conversely, the number of Haitians killed range from between 2,250 to 50,000.¹⁹

Continuing with his claims of the purely altruistic intention as the basis of American occupation, the author asserts, “Wherever America has gone, whether to Cuba, whether to Panama, whether to Santo Domingo, Port Rico (sic), Nicaragua, the Philippines, or Haiti, the welfare of the people has been her first concern...” (Chester 151). However, Weldon Johnson, writing from a position of solidarity with the Haitian people, saw it otherwise, contending that “the Occupation convention demands everything of Haiti and gives nothing” (“Self-Determining Haiti”). His article, also addressed to the American people, hoped to broadly spread “the truth about what [had] happened in Haiti under... American occupation” (“Self-Determining Haiti”). The “truth” about what happened included the reinstatement of the *corvée*²⁰ system of labor extraction that for the Haitian peasant reeked of slavery, the massacre of thousands of Haitian peasants, the desecration and destruction of sacred objects, a rewriting of the Haitian Constitution and the hijacking of the Haitian banking system and its treasury.²¹

Offense and Resistance

With the occupation of the land by racist American marine officers came a plethora of equally racist depictions of the people, their history, and their culture. Renda makes the point that the unabashed racism of many Marine Corps officers and enlisted men and the outright brutality of the forced labor system galvanized Haitian opposition to the 1915

occupation (11). This resistance came primarily from the Haitian peasant population. These loosely organized peasants, known as *Cacos*, were led by officers from the Haitian army with Charlemagne Péralte at the head in 1918. The *Cacos* waged their struggle against the marines until their defeat in 1919 shortly after Péralte was murdered.

Rather than understand them as revolutionaries fighting for their freedom from imperial forces, the marines labeled them “bandits” inspired by Vodou to disorder, pillage, and blind violence (Hurbon 184). As part of the concomitant propaganda machine that accompanied the invasion, the marines issued official orders instructing officers to replace the term “*Cacos*” with “bandits” in all official correspondence. Officers were also directed to try to get Haitians to use the term, “bandit” (Gaillard 1982:200). Not only did many of the leaders of the *Cacos* come from the ranks of Vodou practitioners (Bellegarde-Smith and Michel 2006:xviii), but they were also militarily trained. In addition, as Dubois suggests, officers from the Haitian army often led the resistance, prompting occupation authorities to disband the army and replace it with an organization that the marines could control (2012:232).

The marines, in fact, did not know how to deal with the *Cacos*, as the latter deployed a form of guerilla warfare that left the marines disoriented. Furthermore, the line between peasant and revolutionary was constantly blurred because, though the *Cacos* did not have the benefit of the forest coverage that the insurgents had during the revolution when they engaged in guerilla warfare against the French military, they nonetheless visually cloaked themselves until they were ready to strike. Consequently, U.S. analysis of the progress of the marine mission was fraught with contradictions. On the one hand, the authorities maintained that peasants were coerced into joining the movement; on the other hand, they cited the spread of the movement as a reason for them to continue their counterinsurgency missions.

These contradictions point to the unknowability of *Cacos* as Ramsey argues (2011:140-142). Accounts of the size and number of the insurgent troops ranged from between 5,000 to 15,000. Not only was there a core group of rebels but there was also a contingent of temporary fighters, as well as peasant communities, that provided provisions and shelter for the insurgents. The fluidity with which one went from being a *Caco* to a harmless peasant plagued the marines. As Frederic May Wise remarked in his memoir, “instantly they could disband, hide their weapons, and become peaceful inhabitants” (Wise and Frost 1929:315).

The *Cacos*’ unknowability is poignantly illustrated in two photos that H.P. Davis included in his text, *Black Democracy: The Story of Haiti* (1967). On the left is a photo of an old bearded peasant farmer barefoot with a sack hanging on his cut off and torn pants. His straw hat sits back

on his head. His hands are by his sides and he looks off into the distance. The caption reads, "Peasant" (Davis n.p.). In the photo on the right the same bearded man, still barefoot with his hat on his head looks directly at the camera as he raises his machete above his head in his right hand. The caption reads, "Caco". In the second photo, though his clothes are old they seem to be cleaner, whiter than the clothes that he wears in the photo on the left. Rather than the torn pants of the first photo, his pants are rolled up to the calves. He carries a macoute bag, the staple attire of farmers, but also the costume of the Haitian *loa* (spirit), Azaka, defender of peasant autonomy. Azaka, the *loa* of agriculture, like the peasants themselves, is a hard worker and *serviteurs*²² show their appreciation for him by frequently ritually feasting him (Deren 1970). This invocation of Azaka is important because it draws attention to Haitian people's persistent deployment of the spirits in their conceptualization and confrontation of political and economic challenges to their sovereignty across time and space.

While Hurbon buttresses his argument regarding the marines' racism with the claim that the American government deliberately chose Southerners for the mission in Haiti, I would contend that such a claim, while true, obfuscates the racist ideology on which the entire United States was based and which continued to proliferate during the invasion. This racist ideology that prompted the marines to compare Haitians to seven year olds "with no ancestry of intelligence as a foundation" (Russell qtd. in Bellegarde-Smith 103) was not confined to the Southern states; it permeated the entire country.²³ In any case, racist marines following the orders of racist and classist American legislators were unprepared for the resistance that they faced. They used many of the same qualifiers that were used to talk about the revolutionaries of 1791, which were in turn used in the international media and in the law to criminalize the *Cacos*. Moreover, just as the French were unable to conceive of the Haitian Revolution, the Americans were unable to admit that these designated targets of their imperial prowess²⁴ were not interested in their brand of "civilization".

The ideological positioning of the U.S. interpreted Haitians as unable to self-govern for two reasons: one, because of their child-like nature and two, because of their "seemingly natural propensity for savagery" (*Senate Hearings* 1:516). Testimony from one of the key figures of the occupation captures the sense of paternalism that permeated the 1915 mission. "We were all imbued [sic] with the fact that we were the trustees of a huge estate that belonged to minors...that the Haitians were our wards and that we were endeavoring to make for them a rich and productive property, to be turned over to them at such a time as our government saw fit" (*Senate Hearings* 1:516). While by and large they

were seen as “the most kindly, generous, hospitable, pleasure-loving people,” they were also seen as prone to devious machinations of those who wear “vici [sic] kid shoes with long pointed toes and celluloid collars” who incite them “with liquor and voodoo stuff”, making them “capable of the most horrible atrocities” including cannibalism (*Senate Hearings* 1:517). Haiti’s post-revolutionary history of, in the words of Admiral William B. Caperton, “savage warfare, that is uncivilized warfare” was also invoked as a reason for the need for foreign intervention (*Senate Hearings* 1:291).

The Unknowability of the Insurgents

Based on population statistics, Bellegarde-Smith estimates that as many as 50,000 Haitians may have died during the *Caco* Rebellion, though the number reported by General George Barnett in 1920 was 2,250 Haitians compared to 14 to 16 American Marines.²⁵ Renda arrives at the figure of 11,500 Haitians killed based on the 6,000 that Trouillot states were killed in battle and another 5,500 who died in “forced labor camps” (2000:311 n. 2). But if we return to Ramsey’s discussion of the fluidity and thus, the unknowability of the “*Caco* bandit” at least in the American marine’s imagination, then we come to the realization that there is no telling how many insurgents were killed or even how many killed would have considered themselves insurgents. This quandary, of course, then raises the issue of the dearth of sources of accounts by Haitian men and women who participated in the war. Most statistics are culled from official U.S. hearings with American military and their supporters in attendance and very few, if any, from those who fought in the war from the side of the insurgents.

The marines’ response to the unknowability of the *Caco* was to remove the known—in this case, in the form of the insurgent leaders, Charlemagne Péralte (1885-1919) and Benoît Batraville (1877-1920).²⁶ The revolt declined after two marines in blackface sneaked into Péralte’s camp and killed him. The occupiers then displayed the body of the leader rendered impotent in death in order to quell resistance. However, Hans Schmidt notes that the marines’ mistake was in distributing photos of Péralte that showed him tied to a door in a pose that resembled that of Christ nailed to the cross (1995:102). Thus, rather than destroying the insurgents’ morale it turned their leader into a martyr. As we shall see, he continues to serve this role during the current threat to Haitian sovereignty.

Shortly after the two leaders were murdered—the head cut off of the snake as it were—some of the former insurgents were made into “good laborers” and absorbed into the Haytian American Sugar Company

(HASCO) and the United West Indies Corporation. Invoking the image of droves of zombies marching in unison toward their destiny Wirkus, “The White King of La Gonâve”, wrote of 450 insurgents in the early 1920s who “came down to Port-au-Prince and became good Haitians at twenty cents...a day” (1931:113). With the *Caco* Rebellion defeated the Marine Corps enjoyed a period of ease and autonomy for seven years following the reorganization of the occupation in 1922 (Renda 212). Officers’ days subsequently consisted of morning military exercises, local administration, and public works supervision followed by afternoons of readings, sports and leisure. Sports like polo, basketball, boxing, golf and baseball helped them stay in shape (Renda 212).

According to Bellegarde-Smith, at the height of the *Caco* rebellion, between 20,000 and 40,000 people might have been involved with fewer than 5,000 having access to weapons. Echoing Frenchman, Pamphile de Lacroix (1820), who noted during the Haitian Revolution that both the whites and the blacks were massacring each other, Robert Rotberg wrote in *Haiti: The Politics of Squander* (1971) about the *Caco* Rebellion that, “both sides were guilty of atrocities” (1971:122). However, as Bellegarde-Smith rightly remarks, “no one who defends his/her freedom by force of arms is as guilty as those who would initiate violence to deprive a people of its freedom” (2004:107). His remark, of course, is as relevant to the distant past of the Haitian Revolution as it is to the not-so-distant past of the American Occupation. It is equally relevant to the current occupation.

Enter MINUSTAH

By February 2004, amidst violent political upheaval, the twice democratically elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was forced into exile. As I discuss in the introduction, the interim government and the U.N. requested the support of a U.S.-led multilateral Interim Force comprised of troops from Canada, France, and Chile to stabilize and secure the country (Mendelson Forman 2011:146). In March 2004 former U.N. Secretary, General Kofi Annan, made the case for long-term engagement in Haiti. In beginning the article published in *The Wall Street Journal* with, “Not again!” he invokes the question that W.E.B. Du Bois proposed many whites wanted to ask Negroes: “How does it feel to be a problem?” (*The Souls of Black Folk*). Indeed, after his first alarmist words, Annan proceeds with the almost instinctive labeling of Haiti as “the poorest country in the western hemisphere” before announcing that the country “was sinking rapidly into chaos” (“Haiti: This Time We Must Get it Right”). Although the speaker of these words is Ghanaian, he makes his pronouncements as part of a political structure that for

centuries has seen Haiti as a problem. Thus, he may be seen as voicing the ideological positioning that has undergirded the international community's long-held relationship with the country.

His next two paragraphs reinforce the immutable nature of Haiti's dysfunction with their opening lines: "We had been there, done that, ten years before" and then "Yet here we are again" ("Haiti: This Time"). Echoing Chester from the 1908 *The National Geographic*, Annan's third paragraph spells out the level of barbarity that Haiti has sunk to with the police force disintegrated and leaving the country in the hands of armed thugs, later stating that the situation in the country is more daunting than it was 10 years before with weapons proliferating and drug trafficking being entrenched. Finally, he, like Chester, makes his pitch saying "Haiti is clearly unable to sort itself out, and the effect of leaving it alone would be continued or worsening chaos. Our world cannot afford such a political vacuum, whether in the mountains of Afghanistan or on the very doorstep of the sole remaining superpower" ("Haiti: This Time"). Chester, in turn echoes Alvey A. Adey, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State from 1886 to 1924 who in 1888 wrote about Haiti, "The situation is becoming intolerable...Haiti is a public nuisance at our doors" ("The Long History"). Like Chester and Adey before him, who claimed that Americans had to straighten Haiti out before their barbarianism spread to their own American Negroes, Annan argues for the unacceptability of Haiti's instability because of its close proximity to the United States. His words had similar consequences; by April of that year the United Nations Security Council approved Resolution 1542, which established MINUSTAH.

MINUSTAH's Ambiguity

The months preceding MINUSTAH's arrival, like the years preceding the American Occupation, were marked by societal upheaval and insecurity. Gangs controlled many poor neighborhoods, and it was common for members of the urban poor to wake up to find someone murdered near their houses, their houses burned, or someone kidnapped. Also, as Fatton says, President René Préval's ability to remain in office to finish out his term from 2006 and re-establish "a modicum of stability is largely due to the much maligned presence" (2011a:41) of MINUSTAH. Furthermore, Fatton speculates that had it not been for the U.N.'s presence the situation after the earthquake "would have easily degenerated into a chaotic Hobbesian world; in addition, had the Haitian military not been disbanded it is likely that a coup would have materialized" (2011a:41). While this may be true, I think that Dubois' intervention is important. In *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History* he remarks

that, Haitians' "social cohesion" was made dramatically visible by the 2010 earthquake as many outside observers expected that, given the massive difficulties and lack of security in Haiti even before the disaster, there would be a complete social breakdown—as there might well be in many places where the state has essentially evaporated. But as aid workers and journalists arrived in the country, they were surprised at the level of organization they encountered. In fact, it "was not the government but the networks that crisscross the country—neighborhood organizations, religious groups, extended families—that tended the injured, set up camps, fed one another, sang and prayed and mourned together" (2012:12). Nonetheless, after the initial shock and disorientation of the disaster and the reality of life without shelter, food or water set in, we can speculate that support networks would have quickly broken down and there would likely have been widespread violence.

It should also be noted that while everyone was in the same predicament immediately following the earthquake, the socio-economic gap that exists between the poor majority and the tiny elite class meant that those who were able to escape the misery did, leaving the rest to suffer. Finally, the neighborhoods where these gangs reign supreme are extremely impoverished. As former Special Representative to the United Nations Secretary-General and Head of MINUSTAH, Hédi Annabi, says, "Close to 80% of the population lives with less than \$2.00 a day.²⁷ Over 55% live on less than \$1.00 a day. So, if that cannot be changed, I think everything we're trying to accomplish will remain fragile and could be reversed quite easily" (*MINUSTAH Steals Goats*). In other words, if the living conditions of people are not improved, then MINUSTAH is simply keeping a lid on a powder keg ready to blow. Until the Haitian elite in collaboration with the international community is ready to rethink economic and political policies that disfranchise the vast majority of the population there will always be a "need" for MINUSTAH or some other invading force.

Similarities between the proposals of today and those that fueled the U.S. imperialist project in the early twentieth century are evident. For example, several months after the 2004 removal of Aristide, the idea of annexing Haiti was proposed.²⁸ Following the earthquake of 2010, the question was again raised in several editorials which compared the country's GDP pre-earthquake of \$6.2 billion and 80% of the population living below abject poverty to Puerto Rico's GDP of just over \$86.2 billion with one of the highest standards of living in the Caribbean.²⁹ One blogger asks, "whether the [earthquake] opens new opportunities for restructuring of Haiti's government and economy, literally from the ground up" ("Should the United States"). This proposal is not far from the reality. As Fatton says, in the aftermath of the earthquake the high level of "foreign intrusion" has "turned Haiti into a virtual

trusteeship"...“under a wave of humanitarian interventionism and plans of reconstruction” (2011b:165).³⁰ As the U.S. and its partners “build Haiti back better” in the words of special envoy to Haiti and head of the Interim Recovery Commission (IHRC), Bill Clinton, we must ask what the U.S.’s restructuring of Haiti from the ground up and building it back better mean to the poor majority of Haiti. In fact, Haitians are being treated as irresponsible children in the rebuilding process. According to human rights activist, Beverly Bell “the Haitian people, together with their government, have been bypassed in the planning and oversight of how money is spent and in reconstruction policies” (2012:22). Not only were the international donor forums led by foreign ministers and international financial institutions, but they were all held outside the country in Montreal, Santo Domingo, and New York (Bell 22). Moreover, according to former Prime Minister, Jean-Max Bellerive, the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in Haiti do not communicate with the government about where money is spent. In fact, many do not even bother to register with the government. They simply bypass any semblance of protocol. Finally, according to Yesica Fisch and Martha Mendoza in their article, “Haiti Government Gets 1 Penny of US Quake Aid Dollar, AP Says” (2010), the Haitian government received one cent of every dollar that came in after the earthquake and was not consulted on the rest.³¹ These testimonies may be seen as clear examples of Haitians being treated as they were described during the first invasion: as “minors” and “wards” in need of paternalistic guidance.

MINUSTAH Steals Goats

When one is traveling around Port-au-Prince, walking, riding tap taps, buses, mopeds, etc. and a tank of MINUSTAH troops is seen passing he/she will often hear at least one person call out, “MINUSTAH steals goats” or simply make the bleating sound of a goat, “baaah!”³² Journalist, Reid Lindsay, who lived in Haiti from 2004 to 2008, notes that he started hearing it in Cité Soleil and it spread quickly, even in the farthest-flung places in the countryside (*MINUSTAH Steals Goats*). “It was both a joke, but also said with some contempt for the UN which began to be seen as an occupying force in Haiti and a force that wasn’t necessarily welcome.” Lindsay’s assessment is an example of what Richard D.E. Burton has observed about the role of play in Caribbean culture: that, “all play is oppositional and all oppositionality...contains a ‘play’ element—which most definitely does not mean that it is *not* intensely serious at the same time” (1997:9, italics in original). While the chant or sound is voiced jokingly, there is also a strong sense that behind the smile is the unfriendly opaqueness which Wirkus was so

aware of years before. The emergence of this chant is an example of a tactic that has been utilized by the subaltern for centuries; that of the use of songs or chants under violently repressive conditions to indirectly make their voices heard by those in power. In Haiti this vocalization of grievance or “speaking back” often takes the form of a practice known as *voye pwen* or “sending a point” (Smith 2001:47). Commonly packaged and delivered through the medium of song, called a *chante pwen*, this chant, “MINUSTAH steals goats”, may be seen as another example of a point sent through chant. A more direct form of protest can also be witnessed in the streets of Port-au-Prince where anonymous graffiti artists demand the troops’ departure. For example, it is common to see on walls or buses bearing the blue of the MINUSTAH forces, the words, “ABA UN” (Down with the UN) or “ABA UN = KK” (Down with the UN = Shit)” (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1: Bus with Anti-UN graffiti. Photo: Toni Pressley-Sanon, Summer 2011.



Whether a MINUSTAH soldier actually did steal a goat is not known. The phrase nonetheless signifies the sense of disfranchisement and resentment that the people feel for the men and women whom they see as vacationing at their expense. The goats, which can be seen wandering the streets of Haiti today, are metaphors for Haitian sovereignty that is being undermined by foreign forces with the support of the

Haitian elite.

The Twenty-first Century Work of the Word

In 2011 The United Nations University Press published a book called *Fixing Haiti: MINUSTAH and Beyond*. The volume, edited by Jorge Heinle and Andrew S. Thompson, seeks to “put the country’s current challenges in context” (2011:15). The majority of the essays contained within were originally presented at a conference sponsored by the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) in September 2008 (2011:15). CIGI is “an independent, non-partisan think tank that addresses international governance challenges” (2011: n.p.). The form as well as the content of the text however, should be noted. While the essays contained within are lucid and well argued by some very reputable scholars in the field, the way that the book is constructed makes it possible to read it as a public relations vehicle. The book is introduced with two endorsements by noted experts in the field of international policy and governance, Anthony P. Maingot and Michael Shifter. The first questions that come to mind when reading these endorsements are: Why the need to include the voices of these two men before the work is even underway? Do the endorsements undermine the weight of the text or do they indeed support it? Furthermore, the second of the endorsers makes a statement that threads its way throughout the text whether directly or in tone: “For policy officials and decision makers concerned about Haiti’s future, this is an indispensable guide” (2011: n.p.). The endorsement is reminiscent of the paternalistic framework that guided the actions of American lawmakers and the marines during the first U.S. occupation and begs the question, “Who are these decision-makers and what is their stake in “Haiti’s future”?”

In the “Foreword” Paul Collier, a professor of economics and a specialist in the political, economic and developmental predicaments of poor countries (“How to Help the Poorest”),³³ makes a statement that obscures the reality of Haiti’s current predicament. Using language in such a way as to make “social inequality invisible” (Macedo 2009:20) he says, “Haiti has suffered a series of recent misfortunes: hurricanes, an earthquake, cholera and a discredited election” (*Fixing Haiti* n.p.). On at least two of his points, I offer that this use of the passive voice is a part of a smoke-and-mirrors game, which obscures the agents in Haiti’s “misfortune”. First, if we look at the devastation caused by the earthquake as well as by the recent hurricanes and tropical storms that ravaged the country while leaving their Caribbean and Latin American neighbors minimally damaged, we understand that the devastation Haiti suffered was a direct result of its underdevelopment over the past almost two and

a half centuries. In other words, as the Dominican writer, Junot Díaz, writes in “Apocalypse: What Disasters Reveal” (2011), these were not “natural” disasters. The loss of human life and property was caused by human decisions and actions, not the least of which is ignored building codes that were responsible for much of the loss of life when concrete walls collapsed and multistoried buildings pancaked. Secondly, the cholera outbreak, “a misfortune”, was caused by a waste management company dumping the fecal matter of MINUSTAH troops from Nepal into the Artibonite River, a major source of water for the Artibonite region where the country’s rice is grown. These are not “misfortunes.” They are preventable disasters that were perpetrated by human beings. Finally, there are several reasons why the elections that current president Michel Martelly won were discredited, and which can be compared to the installation of President Dartiguenave under the marines (Dubois 2012:217). One, as political anthropologist Jean-Yves Blot argues, the November 28th election was a “disaster” because the outcome was determined by the presence of MINUSTAH. It was not a sovereign act; one “in which the population exercises its autonomous rights as people in charge of their own life” (2012:196). Furthermore, Mark Weisbrot and Jake Johnston delineate in “Haiti’s Totally Flawed Election” the discrepancies in the electoral process, which included the extremely low voter turn-out, with only 22% of voters having their vote counted. Tally sheets for 11.9%, representing more than 24% of all votes, were never received or were quarantined for irregularities by the Provisional Electoral Council (CEP). Finally, the election took place without the participation of Lavalas, the political party that is still a popular favorite and represents a threat to the status quo (“Haiti’s Fatally Flawed Elections” 2012) (Fig. 2).

The Resurrection of the Zombie

Before moving on to the connections between the resistance to these occupations in the past and the present I want to briefly discuss the redeployment of a figure that was used during the first occupation to justify the international community’s intervention among the general population in Haiti; that is, Vodou. Where during the first occupation it was in travelogues, *The National Geographic*, and books written by marines and their family members as well as anthropologists that set the stage and justified the occupation; during the current occupation, missionaries, NGO workers, and U.N. workers with their family members can be added to the established list of contributors. With them, we see a reemergence of the zombie as a trope for Haiti’s Otherness and dysfunction that, though not stated explicitly in most cases, testifies to

Fig. 2. The graffiti on a wall in Port-au-Prince reads, “Pa Gen Eleksyon san Famni Lavalas” (No elections without Famni Lavalas).



Photo: Toni Pressley-Sanon, Winter 2009.

the continued need for “modernization” and an end to the primitivism that makes repeated occupations necessary.

During the first occupation the journalist, William Seabrook, published his travelogue, *The Magic Island* (1929), based on reports by Wirkus. While “voodoo,” as outsiders called it, was well-known in the international community Seabrook’s text is credited with introducing the zombie to the American public. Since that time, the zombie has been indissolubly associated with Vodou (Hurbon 1995). Interestingly, but not surprisingly, this latest intervention seems to have spurred a new wave of reports from Haiti about zombie sightings: one from the partner of a U.N. worker and the other from a journalist. These tales served to “other” Haiti in the past and are being deployed in a similar vein today, justifying and undergirding this latest “modernization” project.

In the 1960s, the zombie was taken out of the Caribbean and placed in a metropolitan setting by filmmaker George Romero. Nonetheless, it has reemerged periodically in relation to Haiti most famously in anthropologist Wade Davis’ travelogue *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1985) which was turned into a horror movie in 1988. In 2009 and 2011 two articles were published in *Men’s Journal* and *Harper’s Magazine*

respectively. The first entitled, “Into the Zombie Underworld”, is written by the partner of someone who works for MINUSTAH. The author, Mischa Berlinski (a novelist), begins the article by describing where his wife is stationed: the town of Jérémie “just 125 miles or so from Port-au-Prince.” But with only a dirt road that links it to the capital city, “the trip can take 14 or 15 hours” and is impassable when it rains. The only other means of transportation are a weekly boat that “is slow and dangerous” and a “propeller plane” (“Into the Zombie World”). In other words, he is in the remotest of the remotest towns that implicitly needs to be modernized so that the 125 miles that could be traversed in an hour and a half in the U.S., if one drives under the highway speed limit, is not so treacherous. He then promptly launches into the reason for the article: within a month of arriving in the town he hears a rumor that “a deadly zombie was on the loose. This zombie, it was said, could kill by touch alone”, prompting the cancelling of school by local authorities and an investigation by the head of the local secret society, who later informed everyone that, “all of his zombies were accounted for.” As Berlinski tells the reader, “One of my first complete sentences in Creole was, ‘*Gen vréman vre zonbi an Ayiti?*’” (Are there really truly zombies in Haiti?), to which his motorcycle-taxi driver/teacher responds, “*Bien sûr...Ayiti se repiblik zonbi*” (Haiti is the republic of zombies) (“Into the Zombie World”). Berlinski is then eager to meet a zombie for himself. He is not kept waiting long as, several weeks later his wife comes home with a story from a local judicial official about a young woman who was killed and zombified. The rest of the article relates the case that is, in the words of the official, “*un peu spectaculaire*” (“Into the Zombie World”). Berlinski makes sure to include Davis’ first book and his later, *Passage of Darkness* (1988) in his text for scholarly evidence.

Two years later in November 2011 pharmacopeia correspondent Hamilton Morris published “I Walked with a Zombie: Travels Among the Undead” in *Harper’s Magazine*. The title is a play on the title of the 1932 B-horror film, *I Walked with a Zombie* directed by Jacques Tourneau. In Tourneau’s version the zombie was a white woman. Unlike Berlinski, Morris went to Haiti specifically in search of zombies three months before the 2010 earthquake. He describes what he saw when he arrived:

Even now, three months before the January 2010 earthquake that will destroy much of Port-au-Prince the chaos of waste in the streets seems without compare. The roads, alleys, and canals are littered with a skin of organic matter, peels, husks, and shells of every imaginable food. Banks of plastic miscellany line the sides of the roads waist-high with a coverage so complete it would seem the soda bottles must have crystallized in the atmosphere and fallen upon the earth like snowflakes (52).

His words can be compared to those of journalist Amy Wilentz who in

2010 compared Haiti metaphorically to a latrine in need of someone to clean it up (“In Haiti”). In both narratives Haiti is compared to a wasteland that has no hope if left to itself, but that needs the intervention of outsiders to clean it up physically, socially, and politically. Like Berlinski, Morris also cites Davis as the authority on zombies, seeking him out before his trip. The majority of his article is dedicated to his search for the zombie.

As the authors from the early twentieth century contributed to the imperialist machine that is, as Chris Vials argues, predicated on the “politics of disavowal” (2011:43), which entails othering the imperialist target, these contemporary writers are reinvigorating a figure that in the American popular imagination embodies Haiti. For the average reader, who has very little knowledge of the long and complicated history between the U.S. and Haiti, the connections between the creature and the people of the country to the South—with which they already associate profound poverty (“the poorest country in the western hemisphere”), disaster (hurricanes, earthquakes, flooding), political violence (coups d’état), and general violence (food riots, kidnappings)—the link is ready and facile.

Resistance to MINUSTAH: Echoes of the Past

Not only is Bellegarde-Smith’s statement regarding the right for one to defend his or her freedom³⁴ relevant to the Haitian masses’ struggle against foreign occupation in the early twentieth century, but it is also relevant to the recent past of armed struggle against MINUSTAH’s occupation in Cité Soleil, a slum neighborhood in Port-au-Prince, the nation’s capital, that was led by a young man named Emmanuel Dread Wilmer, who was killed by more than 350 MINUSTAH troops on July 6, 2005. Several activists, including members of the Haitian Lawyers Leadership Network, have drawn connections between the labeling and treatment of this figure of resistance to MINUSTAH and that of Peralte during the American Occupation.

Again, in 1919 Charlemagne Peralte was ambushed and murdered by two marines who disguised themselves with black shoe polish. With the help of several Haitian gendarmes they entered the house where Peralte was staying and shot him twice in the heart (Galliard 1982:298-306). They then desecrated his body, displaying it in the middle of the town of Grand-Rivière. Afterwards they took the body to Le Cap, stripped it, placed a cloth around the midsection, tied it to a door and propped it against a wall in a police station. The marines then took photos of the posed body, made several hundred copies of one and then dropped them by airplane in areas where *Cacos* were active (Galliard 1982:317-318).

Like Peralte, who was called a bandit years before when he waged war against the U.S. invaders, Wilmer was labeled a “gang leader” and “gangster”. He was, in fact, a supporter of Aristide’s Lavalas party and protested the exploitation of the Haitian poor by men like Andy Apaid³⁵ and Reginald Boulos,³⁶ members of the Group of 184 who were very vocal detractors of Aristide.³⁷ He was also called a “community leader” and a “father figure” by people in Cité Soleil (“Eyewitnesses Describe”). When MINUSTAH went after him they reportedly fired 22,000 rounds of ammunition and killed 70 people including Wilmer.³⁸ Marguerite Laurent, a lawyer and avid blogger on Haitian politics and culture, compares the murder of Wilmer to the murder and crucifixion of Peralte in her essay, “The Crucifixion of Emmanuel ‘Dred’ Wilmè by U.N. Troops: A Historical Perspective” (2005). She begins her essay with the pronouncement that in 1919 when he was killed, “Peralte was a ‘chimères,’ a ‘bandit’ to almost everyone in Haiti except the poor peasantry who were being slaughtered by the U.S. marines and their then newly formed Haitian “gendarmérie.” Drawing parallels between the fate of Peralte and the possible fate of Wilmer, Laurent speculates: “Like Charlemagne Peralte, Emmanuel ‘Dread’ Wilmè, may be executed by foreign troops and dragged, as a trophy, through the streets of Haiti to cow the peaceful demonstrators who are demanding the return of the Constitutional government; to demoralize, to ‘shock and awe’ the Haitian poor with the overwhelming, unjust and illegal power of foreign troops in Haiti” (“The Crucifixion”). Her comparative reading of Peralte and Wilmer seeks to recuperate Wilmer’s legacy amongst the contemporary poor of Haiti as their ancestors recuperated Peralte’s legacy despite the occupying force’s attempts to vilify him.

Like Peralte on whom marines carried out a pre-dawn execution (4 a.m.), as Laurent proposed, Wilmer was indeed killed in a pre-dawn raid on Cité Soleil (5 a.m.). According to residents, the U.N. troops entered the area at about three in the morning and opened fire. Eyewitnesses reported that the U.N. troops used helicopters, tanks, machine guns, and tear gas in the operation. A U.N. military spokesman defended MINUSTAH’s actions saying, it was “a necessary move to wipe out violent gang activity” (“Eyewitnesses Describe”). While the U.N. claims five people were killed, “local residents put the figure at no less than 20. Some estimates are even higher. Witnesses said innocent civilians were among the victims” (“Eyewitnesses Describe”). Unlike Peralte, Wilmer received a proper funeral. Community members were able to retrieve his body, place him in a white casket with pictures of Aristide taped to it, and drape it with the Haitian flag. Hundreds of people marched through the streets carrying the casket.

Wilmer, like Peralte, was labeled a bandit by the occupying forces.

However, a very different story from that told by MINUSTAH comes from within Cité Soleil. In her visit to the neighborhood where Wilmer had a stronghold, local residents showed filmmaker Rachel Smith (*MINUSTAH Steals Goats*) houses riddled with bullet holes. One person who shows her around tells her that there was a woman who lived nearby with her six children and that MINUSTAH troops killed them all. "They didn't have a chance to escape." Another man from Cité Soleil, Enock, shows Smith the skeleton of a school that was supposed to have been built to help parents who had no income to send their children to school. But with the shooting between MINUSTAH and the armed groups, the construction was never finished. In their explication of Dread Wilmer, the men that Smith interviews say quite pointedly that for them Wilmer was a hero. In fact, someone painted a mural of him—"a beautiful piece." However, MINUSTAH "removed the whole thing. They destroyed it with their cannons." According to one man, "The MINUSTAH aren't concerned with what their bullets hit. It's whatever happens happens." Thus, while indeed the evidence about Wilmer is much more nuanced and contradictory than what I present here (he is reputed to have behaved at times as a Robin Hood figure and at other times, as a self-serving criminal), it is worth noting similarities between Wilmer's struggle for liberation from contemporary invading forces and Péralte's twentieth century *Caco* movement that Laurent points out.³⁹ We may also note concomitant parallels between MINUSTAH's repressive tactics and those implemented by their predecessors almost 100 years before.

In 2012 Ricardo Seitenfus, the Organization of American States' (OAS) representative for Haiti, delivered his assessment of the role of foreigners in an interview with the Swiss daily *Le Temps*, asserting "The world has never known how to treat Haiti, so it has ignored it. ...Enough of playing with Haiti!" ("OAS Diplomat's Words"). Interestingly, echoing what seems to have been the mandate during the first American Occupation, Seitenfus continues: "We must build roads, hydroelectric dams, assist in building a judiciary system" ("OAS Diplomat's Words"). While we know that this mandate resulted in the U.S. marines reinstatement of the *corvée* system to build roads that would not serve the peasant population, Seitenfus ironically laments that these improvements to Haiti's infrastructure will not take place as the "UN's mandate in Haiti is to maintain the peace of the graveyard" ("OAS Diplomat's Words"). We can deduce from the tone of the interview that Seitenfus would not be averse to paying Haitian people a living wage for their labor, which the U.S. marines did not do during their occupation. However, there is no desire on the part of the international community to support such a model, as evidenced by the fact that Seitenfus was immediately recalled from his post for his candidness and there has been no official direct

response to his allegations. He has since published a scathing account of his tour in Haiti entitled *Haiti dilemmas e fracassos internacionais* (Haiti: Dilemmas and International Failures) (2014).

Local and International Solidarity

Mobilization against what has come by many, especially amongst the poor, to be conceived of as an occupation by foreign forces is gaining momentum, both in Haiti and abroad, amongst the Haitian diaspora and their supporters. For example, even though the Brazilian contingent is leading the mission, on November 5, 2011, over 600 people in Sao Paulo protested for four hours in solidarity with the Haitian people, demanding that MINUSTAH leave Haiti. In an article about the demonstration, Julio Turra, president of Brazil's largest and most important union, the Unified Workers' Central (CUT), is quoted as saying "Haiti is a country which supported the freedom struggle in Latin America" (*Haiti Liberté*). Drawing on its distant revolutionary history, he avers:

A country which used to terrify slave owners in all the Americas today is being subjugated by a foreign military occupation that doesn't have anything to do with humanitarian purposes as it pretends. It is embarrassing. Therefore, Latin American people, and Brazilians in particular, owe a debt to Haiti. It is an historic duty. We must express our solidarity. And we can't accept a gradual withdrawal of troops because we don't know when that will end...⁴⁰ We must ask for the immediate withdrawal of the troops and defend Haiti's sovereignty in the face of the occupation (*Haiti Liberté*).

By September 14, 2011, in Port-au-Prince, people took to the streets to protest MINUSTAH's presence as a result of allegations that U.N. troops from Uruguay had raped a Haitian man. Chanting "rapists" and "MINUSTAH (the UN force) must go," about 300 protesters marched on the presidential palace. Some threw rocks at riot police, who responded with tear gas ("Haiti Police").

Finally, the history of the *Caco* rebellion and Charlemagne Peralte is being reinvigorated in the countryside where peasants are actively resisting MINUSTAH's presence. At the entrance to the town of Hinche, Peralte's birthplace, there is a banner stretched across the road. It reads, "Down with the occupation. Long live democracy" (Fig. 3). At Place Charlemagne Peralte in the center of town, a mural of the leader's fight against the marines provides the backdrop to an outdoor stage where local theatre productions are held (Fig. 4). At the center of the square on a pedestal sits a bust of Peralte, where for two years local organizers have staged protests against the occupation, performing ceremonies and calling on the memory of historical resistance to fortify them against the

Fig. 3. The banner at the entrance to Hinche. It reads, “Down with the occupation. Long live democracy.”



Photo: Toni Pressley-Sanon, June 2012.

Fig. 4. Mural in Place Charlemagne Péralte.



Photo: Toni Pressley-Sanon, June 2012.

current struggle for sovereignty (Fig. 5).⁴¹

Fig. 5. Bust of Charlemagne Péralte.



Photo: Toni Pressley-Sanon, June 2012.

Conclusion

It is critical to learn the lessons of history, many of which we see being repeated. The U.N. mandate has been extended until October

2015—again, the 100-year anniversary of the first American occupation and inching toward its 19-year duration as protests against its presence grows.

As I have argued in this article, the practices of the current occupying forces can be traced back to the ideological positions of those in power as well as the discursive work that justifies and promotes their presence in Haiti. The current situation can in turn be traced back to the ideological positions and discursive practices of the U.S. leading up to and during the early twentieth century U.S. marine invasion and occupation. These positions and practices have given rise to the form that the stabilizing mission has taken in the country and to the events that are reported in the news, such as human rights violations and rapes, perpetrated by the troops as well as to reconstruction plans that are being made without the consultation of the Haitian government nor the majority population, many of whom are being displaced. They can also be seen in the media as tools in the unequal relationship that persists between Haiti and the international community.

Bellegarde-Smith has proposed that a “paradigm shift” is necessary, both internally in the relationship of the elite to the rest of the population and externally in the country’s relationship with the international community. This shift would entail, in part, that the international community respect Haiti’s right to national sovereignty as well as its unique revolutionary and cultural history, without the trapping of exceptionalism that currently determines political policy (Trouillot 1990b) toward the country and ending the racist paternalism and exoticism that has operated historically and is currently at work in both official and unofficial dealings. Such a paradigm shift, I believe, has at least the possibility of changing Haiti’s relationship with the international community from one of dependency to that of collaborative partner.

Notes

- ¹ An important hub south of Port-au-Prince.
- ² See Schmidt 1995; Bellegarde-Smith 1990; Renda 2001; Ramsey 2011; Dubois 2012.
- ³ His action was a serious act of defiance because during the American Occupation the U.S. demanded that the American flag be displayed for the entire 19 years of the occupation. According to Fleurimond W. Kerns, “For 19 years, the Haitian flag disappeared from view, except when it was raised by resisters like Charlemagne Péralte in the Central

Plateau, whose struggle was taken up by Benoît Batraville after he fell” (2004:101).

- ⁴ The Battle of Vertières was the deciding victory of the revolutionary soldiers. By October of that year the insurgents had wrested control of the colony from the French.
- ⁵ See Michel-Rolph Trouillot *Haiti State Against Nation* (1990), Laënnec Hurbon “American Fantasy and Haitian Vodou” (1995), Laurent Dubois *Haiti The Aftershocks of History* (2012), Mary Renda *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940* (2001), Roger Gaillard *Premier écrasement du cacoïsme* (1981) and Roger Gaillard *Charlemagne Péralte le Caco* (1982).
- ⁶ This intervention took place in July 1994.
- ⁷ The original spelling of the country.
- ⁸ I’d like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for helping me clarify this argument.
- ⁹ See for example, Spenser St. John’s *Hayti, or The Black Republic* [1884] (London: F. Cass, 1971), John Houston Craig’s *Cannibal Cousins* (New York: Minton, Balch and Co., 1934) or Faustin Wirkus’ *The White King of La Gonâve* (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, and Co., 1931).
- ¹⁰ As Fatton observes, “The world powers have traditionally shown either outright enmity or a less than benign paternalism toward the island” (2011:160).
- ¹¹ As Fatton notes, shortly after independence, “on several occasions France planned to violently reestablish its sovereignty over the island” (2011:160).
- ¹² Renda, of course, was writing about the American Occupation of 1915. James Weldon Johnson wrote a series of articles exposing the atrocities committed by marines at the time so they were both talking about the U.S. intervention specifically. As MINUSTAH is made up of several international nations, I argue that the same reasoning applies to this current assault on Haitian sovereignty.
- ¹³ Personal interview with Chavannes Jean-Baptiste, June 2012.
- ¹⁴ This assault on Haitian sovereignty began shortly after Haiti declared its independence from France (See Laurent Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History*, 2012).
- ¹⁵ That same year the U.S. sent troops to Mexico again. In 1917 the U.S. purchased the Virgin Islands from the Danish; in 1926 the U.S. began

occupying Nicaragua. Laënnec Hurbon, "American Fantasy and Haitian Vodou" in Donald Cosentino, ed., *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou* (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum, 1995), 181-197 at 183.

- ¹⁶ For an overview of some of the debates, see "The Press and American Intervention in Haiti and the Dominican Republic, 1904-1920" in *Caribbean Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (July 1969), 27-43. Blassingame provides a comprehensive catalogue of the some of the major debates that took place from 1904-1920 in newspapers and journals.
- ¹⁷ I use this term as it was commonly used to refer to blacks at the time.
- ¹⁸ In a battle over the presidency that his opponent, Rosalvo Bobo, seemed to be winning, Sam's military commander decided that killing the prisoners would cow the opposition. However, many of those murdered were members of the elite class and Port-au Prince erupted.
- ¹⁹ I discuss this discrepancy later in this article.
- ²⁰ The *corvée* system, though not mentioned by name, was first introduced in the Code Rural of 1864. It "provided for the upkeep and repair of stretches of communal roads by a rotation of residents for the rural section(s) that the roads crossed" (Ramsey 125). The marines reinvigorated the system in order to force peasants to build roads during the occupation.
- ²¹ See Schmidt 1995; Renda 2001; Ramsey 2011; Dubois 2012.
- ²² *Serviteurs* are people who serve the *loas*.
- ²³ U.S. High commissioner, John H. Russell.
- ²⁴ According to Michel Rolph-Trouillot (1995), in order for the French to have been able to think that the blacks could successfully revolt they would have to think of them as subjects; human beings capable of thinking for themselves and conceiving of a future that they are capable of determining.
- ²⁵ Hans Schmidt points out a discrepancy even in that number. Earlier Barnett had reported that 3,250 Haitians had been killed. He modified that number at the Senate hearings claiming that there had been an error in addition (note the absence of accountability). However, Marine Corps records indicate that the original 3,250 tally had been correct (103n.)
- ²⁶ Batrville was captured by U.S. soldiers and executed in May 1920. He is buried in Mirebalais, his place of birth.
- ²⁷ Mr. Hannabi died in the 2010 earthquake.
- ²⁸ See Don Bohning's "An International Protectorate Could Bring Stability

- to Haiti”, *Miami Herald*, 11/23/04. <http://www.lecontact.com/archives_of_editorials_7.htm>
- ²⁹ See for example, Paul Toscano’s “Commentary: Should the United States Annex Haiti?” on CNBC.com. 3/5/10. <http://www.cnbc.com/id/35729134/Commentary_Should_the_United_States_Annex_Haiti>
- ³⁰ Fatton, “Haiti in the Aftermath of the Earthquake”, 165.
- ³¹ Ibid.; Yesica Fisch and Martha Mendoza, “Haiti Government Gets 1 Penny of US Quake Aid Dollar, AP Says.” *Huffington Post*. January 27, 2010. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/01/27/haiti-government-gets-1-p_n_438938.html>. Accessed 11/6/12; Fatton (2011, 172). As Fatton notes, yes, state corruption is a problem, but to attribute the impoverished condition of the country to state corruption is a mistake because for decades, only a very limited amount of foreign assistance has in fact, ended up in government hands (2011, 172). We see the effects of the international community’s dyadic relationship with Haiti in the lack of progress with the reconstruction efforts almost four years after the earthquake in filmmaker Raoul Peck’s latest project, *Assistance Mortelle* (2013).
- ³² No one has ever been able to tell me exactly when the expression started or where it originated.
- ³³ “How to Help the Poorest: Springing the Traps.” *The Economist*. April 2, 2007, accessed at <<http://www.economist.com/node/9581576>>, May 29, 2012.
- ³⁴ Again he says, “no one who defends his/her freedom by force of arms is as guilty as those who would initiate violence to deprive a people of its freedom” (*The Breached Citadel*), 107.
- ³⁵ Andy Apaid, an American, founder and leader of G184, owns Alpha Industries, one of the oldest and largest assembly factories (sweatshops) in Haiti. G184 was created specifically to oppose Aristide’s government. Apaid opposed Aristide’s government when the president wanted to raise the minimum wage from \$.38 a day to \$1.00 a day (Ira Kurzban in *Aristide and the Endless Revolution*, Dir. Nicolas Rossier, New York: First Run Features, 2005). In July 2005, under pressure from G184 for the U.N. to increase police activity, the raid on Cité Soleil was carried out and Wilmer was killed.
- ³⁶ A member of the family that constitutes a conglomerate that owns several media outlets his position is explained in the film, *Aristide and the Endless Revolution*.
- ³⁷ Aristide, a Catholic Priest, was popularly elected president of Haiti and

served from 1990-1991 and again from 1994-1996. He was re-elected and served from 2001-2004.

- ³⁸ These numbers are probably higher but will probably never be disclosed because MINUSTAH deemed the mission a success and “did not seek to enumerate the civilian deaths” (Edmonds et al. 2012:49).
- ³⁹ I would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for making this point. Indeed, accommodation and resistance to the current occupation is complex. My hope is that the argument that I posit here will spark a conversation about the persistence in ideology, discursive practices, and legacy of the 1915 marine invasion contemporarily with the hope that such treatments of Haiti will cease.
- ⁴⁰ Former Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva said Brazilian troops would only be deployed for six months when the occupation began in June 2004.
- ⁴¹ During my visit to Hinche in summer 2012 there had been such a ceremony performed a few weeks before. According to several students whom I asked about the ceremony, songs were sung and flowers laid around the bust, which MINUSTAH troops later came and removed.

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