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A Copowerment¹ Model for the Producers and Consumers of Coffee in Haiti

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¹ Copowerment is defined as “a dynamic of mutual exchange by which both sides of a social equation are made stronger and more effective by the other” (Inslee).

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Introduction

Development practitioners and philanthropists in more developed societies have historically been tempted to view development as achievable only through participation in the global economy. While this development orientation has undoubtedly aided certain countries in their growth, it increasingly has become the default orientation for development practitioners regardless of if it is beneficial in their specific context or not. The Caribbean country of Haiti is a prime example that demonstrates the dominance of this orientation and the subsequent harm that it has caused the Haitian poor. Haiti has always been known for its capacity to grow excellent coffee, and thus coffee production in Haiti is consistently in the spotlight as a potential avenue for Haitian development. No doubt, coffee can and should be viewed as an asset for Haitian development and resilience. However, the international focus on exporting Haiti's coffee has largely left out the experiences and realities of the Haitian peasant¹ farmer. Time and again, in interviews with Haitian coffee producers and archival research with existing literature, I find that this current model of development is not comprehensively helping small-scale coffee farmers in Haiti. The system under which Haitians grow coffee should not be seen as disembodied existence of a particular economic model. Instead, it should be viewed as the life-altering, daily-influencing reality that it is for Haitian peasant farmers. Coffee certainly has the potential to help Haitian farmers lift themselves out of poverty. However, this will only happen if Haitian coffee is produced within a system that recognizes the agency of the Haitian farmer, the existing local demand for coffee in Haiti, and the need for environmental rehabilitation.

¹The term peasant in Haitian culture, translated as *peyizan* in Haitian Creole, does not carry the negative connotation it typically does when used in English, but refers to anyone from the countryside, especially those living in poverty.

Coffee has always been an integral part of Haitian business and culture. Small-scale Haitian farmers even jokingly say that they were born and raised under the coffee tree (Savannzombi Focus Group). In the eighteenth century, approximately half of the world's coffee was coming from the French Caribbean slave colony of Saint-Domingue, which today is Haiti (Pendergrast 17). While no doubt coffee production and export has had periods of economic benefit for poor Haitian coffee farmers, it is also true that certain frameworks of development through coffee production have led to the demise of topographical, political, and social wellbeing. After Haiti won its independence in 1804, coffee remained a cash crop for the island well into the 20th century, with a sharp decline in coffee exports beginning in 1984. In recent decades, Haiti has been exposed to terrible storms and coffee-destroying pests. Haiti has also been subjugated to the influence and demands of a neoliberal global economy and humanitarian power structure that has weakened Haitian food sovereignty across the board, including local coffee production and consumption. Drawing on dozens of interviews and interactions from coffee stakeholders in Haiti obtained through fieldwork in August of 2020 and five years of developing Haitian relationships before that, this thesis will show that the perspectives and experiences of the Haitian peasant producers and consumers of coffee are largely ignored in humanitarian and commercial contexts. If the public and private sectors at work in Haiti begin to heed these peasant perspectives, perhaps more consistent and solidified avenues can be provided for Haitians to escape material impoverishment through coffee production.

A core foundation of the theoretical framework of this thesis is the concept of copowerment. A term championed by professors at Northwest University, copowerment is “a dynamic of mutual exchange by which both sides of a social equation are made stronger and more effective by the other” (Inslee). This term is used in a way similar to which most people

use the term empowerment. The main difference to be noted is etymological. When parsed into its roots, empowerment suggests a dynamic of hierarchy when one actor hands over power to another. Copowerment, on the other hand, recognizes the individual power ontologically rooted within each human being and seeks to build and enable that power collaboratively. Even if the general connotations of empowerment and copowerment are similar, this thesis will utilize the term copowerment in an effort to emphasize the autonomy and power of the Haitian peasant farmer and consumer. For both Haitian coffee farmers' and consumers' needs to be met in a copowering manner, a system must be put in place that prioritizes local consumption of Haitian coffee instead of foreign consumption while also protecting some of the farmers' vulnerabilities that stem from a lack of social safety nets. One comprehensive solution to these problems could be creating an Alliance of peasant coffee farmers in Haiti that could assist in encouraging wealth creation and autonomy in the Haitian coffee field. This Alliance would advocate for a threefold approach that seeks to copower both the small-scale Haitian coffee farmer and the current consumers of coffee in Haiti. This Alliance would

1. Encourage different domestic sectors in Haiti to commit to consuming locally grown coffee.
2. Help farmers receive agricultural resources with no foreign agenda or attached contingency of exporting coffee.
3. Facilitate coffee production practices that supplement Haiti's already existing reforestation efforts.

In facilitating this threefold framework, perhaps Haitian peasant coffee farmers can further lift themselves out of poverty.

A General History of Coffee in Haiti

The coffee tree and its cherries have a long and exciting history in general, but even more so in Haiti. Originally from Ethiopia and used for religious practices, coffee would eventually spread out from Eastern Africa and into the rest of the world. In 1734, French traders brought over the first coffee seeds to the western side of the island of Hispaniola, the island that would eventually become the independent nations of both Haiti and the Dominican Republic (Pendergrast 17). Because of the high-labor intensity of harvesting coffee and sugar, the two commodities the French exported from Saint-Domingue, slave treatment and accommodations in Saint-Domingue were amongst the worst in recorded history. Ironically for the French, their cash crop of coffee that required such massive amounts of slave labor would eventually contribute to their ultimate downfall. In 1791 the slaves started a revolt that lasted 13 years and led to their independence in 1804, becoming the first and “only major successful slave revolt in history” (18). After defeating Napoleon’s military, the newly freed African slaves largely abandoned coffee production in the beginning phase of their new nation, but it would not take long for the former slaves to revive some of the old coffee-producing plantations from the French days. It seems that much of the revitalization of coffee production in Haiti was out of necessity though, as the French continued to exploit the newly liberated Haitians even after winning their independence.

Twenty-one years after the Haitian Revolution, Haiti felt their former colonizers breathing down their necks once again. In 1825, France’s King Charles X sent a military delegation back to Haiti, demanding that Haiti compensate France for their ‘lost revenues’ from the successful slave revolt (Daut). The ‘independence debt,’ as it would become known as, was in the amount of 150 million Francs. This represents approximately \$21 Billion U.S. in the modern world. Fearing another war and greater loss of Haitian life, Haitian President Jean-Pierre

Boyer accepted the terms of the agreement. Haiti would not finish paying off its debt to France until the 1890s. However, the loans Haiti took out from several American banks to repay the French were not repaid until 1947. This 122-year period of paying off their freedom created many ripple effects throughout Haiti's history. Because of this debt, the newly founded country had to divert financial resources that could have otherwise been invested in infrastructure, education, and social welfare initiatives. The independence debt also has a connection to coffee. As the story goes, Haiti used coffee to finance a good portion of their independence debt payments to France (Desruisseaux).

Coffee production and export picked up once again by the 1850s. Even though coffee exports were mainly used to pay off their independence debt, Haiti held a relatively steady position amidst the international players in the highly speculative coffee trade up until the 1960s ("History of Haitian Coffee"). From the 1970s onwards, and specifically after 1984, Haiti experienced exponential decreases in coffee production and export for a multitude of reasons ("Haiti Coffee History"). The falling price of coffee on the international market, deforestation, trade embargoes, agricultural pests and disease, and overall poverty were all factors contributing to Haiti's lack of coffee production. Haiti has never made a legitimate recovery back to the coffee production or export numbers they saw in the early 60s. Throughout the 2000s, Haiti's coffee production came out to about one-half of what it was before 1984. Since Hurricane Matthew in 2017, coffee production has fallen to less than a third of what it was in its prime ("Haiti Green Coffee Production by Year").

Culturally, drinking coffee has always been a pastime for Haitians. Brewed in wealthy homes on the hills of Petionville and the side of the road in shantytowns alike, coffee in one way or another has always been a part of Haitian life. Coffee vendors in the streets and markets

typically prepare coffee the traditional way, using a dry preparation method dating back hundreds of years. Roasting the coffee beans over a fire, vendors brew their coffee with sugar and spices, and serve it with bread. One can see several Haitian men and women gathered around these vendors sitting on chairs or on the ground on a typical Haitian morning. The upper-class Haitian coffee consumer will usually purchase Grade A coffee from a supermarket, roasted and packaged by Haitian roaster groups like Rebo Cafè or Selecto. However, these consumers only make up about 20% of the consumers of coffee in Haiti, as most coffee consumption in Haiti is done so in the traditional way described previously (Ewald).

Ecological Devastation

Throughout Haiti's history, the natural environment never had much of a chance of sustaining itself. Much of this is due to the exploitative and extractive commercial interests of both France and the United States over the years. Some of Haiti's environmental damage has also come at the hands of modern-day peasant farmers. Some peasant farmers utilize harmful felling practices, or tree cutting, to provide income during desperate times. It will be acknowledged how Haitians have partially participated in the environmental damage of their homeland. But first, it is important to have an accurate historical context for the geographical area that Haiti inherited.

Haitians did not inherit their land in a historical vacuum; the land they won in their revolution was less than perfect. Dr. Marylynn Steckley describes the original colonial conquest of the Caribbean as "the impetus for Caribbean food insecurity and environmental degradation" (Steckley and Shamsie 182). This includes Haiti, which resides on the western third of the island of Hispaniola in the Greater Antilles region of the Caribbean. It is well documented how brutal colonial slave plantations were in regard to the decimation of both the human spirit and the

wellbeing of the landscape. Haiti's already vulnerable topsoil "succumbed to erosion under land-use systems based not on the practices of unknown African ancestors but on the extractive technologies of a market-oriented colonial plantation system" (Murray 384). The French colonizers also practiced monocropping, a generally damaging method of agriculture where only one type of crop is grown in a plot. French monocropping of both coffee and sugar, as well as their use of the island's timber for furniture, catalyzed centuries of nutrient-depleted soil in Haiti.

Even in their first century of existence, Haiti likely was forced to participate in its own destruction because of the ongoing fear of going back to war with the French. As a means to pay their independence debt, Haiti likely turned to quick and unsustainable sources of income to survive. In these situations, where such a vast portion of the government budget is focused on debt repayment, Haitians were forced to cut down forests and destroy their ecosystem in the hopes of keeping their head above water (Clawson 178). If it were not for the independence debt, perhaps Haitians could have picked up momentum in their own development long ago.

A century after the French were ousted from Saint Domingue, the United States stepped in as the next global superpower to detrimentally influence Haiti. One would hope that this transfer of influence would have led to more ecologically sustainable practices in Haiti, but unfortunately that is not the case. Most notably, the US military occupied Haiti from 1915 to 1934 with the intent of helping stabilize democracy in the country. The United States' occupation of Haiti involved many atrocities, including seizing 40% of the gold stored in the national treasury (Steckley and Weis, "Agriculture in and Beyond 406). In regard to ecological devastation, the occupation also "involved the rewriting of Haiti's constitution, most notably to enable foreign interests to own land," which led to "massive peasant dispossession" as well as further commodification and extraction of Haiti's natural resources (406). Enacted under a guise

of modernization and benevolence for Haitians, the United States military exponentially increased the pace of Haiti's ecological devastation throughout the twentieth century.

Citizens of the Global North, a term many academics use to describe the 'more developed' societies worldwide, who are less inclined to worry about environmental issues may ask why the desecration of the Haitian environment matters. Typically, this skepticism of environmental protection is well-intentioned; after all, should we not focus more on helping people instead of just the earth beneath their feet? The simple distinction to be made here is that there is not a distinction to be made here. Humanity and the environment are not separate, dichotomized entities but perpetually interdependent structures. While it may sound oversimplified, a quick peek under the surface shows a vast interconnectedness between humanity and the environment. Lack of dense tree cover in Haiti is not simply an aesthetic downside of the Haitian mountains; it affects Haitian children's health and wellbeing because "higher upstream tree cover is associated with lower levels of childhood disease" (Jacob 577). Topsoil washing away into the ocean is not just an unfortunate side-effect for the marine life that dwells in the ocean shore, but it also negatively impacts the catch of the Haitian fisherman who feeds his family using that same marine life and the Haitian farmer who provides income for her family through that nutrient-depleted soil. Even though I personally would vouch for such approaches, this thesis is not pursuing abstract arguments for environmental care rooted in ontological, theological, or even psychological rhetoric. At its core, the argument here is that environmental care is a straightforward, pragmatic way to help care for the impoverished people of our world, especially the Haitian peasant farmer.

Present Day Farming

After winning their independence, Haitians inherited land from the French that was already on the precipice of becoming uninhabitable. Then, the American occupation of the early 20th century further exploited Haiti's natural resources by exponentially increasing natural resource extraction. However small compared to the systemic issues mentioned previously, Haitian citizens of course have still contributed to their own environmental destruction over time. Because of generational economic impoverishment, Haitian farmers today are frequently forced to use a tactic they view as a 'last resort' economically, cutting down trees to make charcoal to sell on the local market. It is important not to blame the Haitian environmental situation on one foreign culprit. Doing so would be disingenuously oversimplified and would also dismiss Haitian agency over the years contributing to the desecration of the land. Interestingly enough, this history of environmental injustice, and the subsequent deforestation cycle many Haitian farmers find themselves in, does not necessarily mean that the average Haitian farmer's agricultural practices are ecologically malevolent.

Most participants I conversed with in August of 2020 exemplified that farming in Haiti is a profoundly spiritual and embodied practice connected with the land. Farmers respect and listen to the needs of their land, and resort to environmentally unfriendly practices only when there seems to be no better alternative. Like farmers in many other countries worldwide, Haitian farmers have traditionally engaged in what agronomists call intercropping. Intercropping is where two or more crops are planted and grown in the same field together. This natural tendency of intercropping is a much more environmentally friendly alternative than monocropping, where one crop is grown in concentrated plots. Intercropping increases soil health in many ways; it adds nitrogen to the ground desperately needed by most crops, builds organic matter within the soil, and even reduces input costs for the farmer (Wise 67; Jacob 576). The vast majority of coffee

growing in Haiti uses this system of intercropping. Farming coffee often looks more like random undomesticated jungles of coffee trees than the neat rows of plant replicas many envision when they think of coffee farms. Intercropping coffee trees around mangoes, plantains, and other trees also generously provide the shorter coffee tree with the shade it needs to grow well in the Haitian climate.

It is also essential to consult existing cultural comparison literature to determine how culture may affect the farming practices of the Haitian peasant farmer. Comparing different countries similar to Haiti culturally and geographically using the Hofstede Country Comparison tool leads one to believe that Haiti is most likely a collectivist society, instead of an individualistic one (“Country Comparison”). My own experience interacting with Haitian culture over the past six years also provides support for this assumption. A stark contrast to the very individualistic culture of the United States and much of the Global North, a collectivist society tends to view their identity more so as solidarity within a group instead of identity contained only within the individual (Elmer 136). This does not mean that Haitians or people in other collectivist societies do not view themselves as individuals. Academia makes this demarcation between cultures to show the diversity of cultures worldwide; certain cultures are less likely to have hyper-independent tendencies and tend to rely more on group solidarity and collective decision-making. This is not to say that one orientation is right or wrong, or that they are mutually exclusively. The point here is to note the differences in cultural orientation, which shows the different values and worldviews of the individuals within each culture.

Collective cultural orientation has an enormous impact on the way that Haitian’s practice agriculture. While most every tree, crop, or animal is likely to be ‘owned’ by an individual, Haitians frequently are involved in helping one another herd livestock, till the soil, and pick

coffee cherries in commercially informal and community-oriented ways. Haitians have developed this cooperative system over the years and have traditionally called it *konbit* in Haitian Creole. A common phrase in Haitian Creole that conveys this communal understanding of agriculture is '*Plantè se kolèg,*' translated as 'planters are colleagues' (Murray 394). This cooperative of communal labor in the face of economic and ecological adversity should be viewed as an already existing asset of the Haitian peasant farmer lifestyle instead of an obstacle needing correction or alteration.

Qualitative Research

While many theses and research documents in academia are created under a very strict and objective disposition, my education has taught me that sometimes it might be counterproductive to try to remove oneself entirely from the process of gathering data. Quantum entanglement theories show that the observer of an experiment necessarily alters the matter that is being observed. Furthermore, if that is true on a quantum level, how much truer is that when considered in light of researching with social, conditioned, cognizant human beings? I, of course, attempt not to perpetuate any preexisting bias of mine in this work, but I will not deny that I as an individual am a part of this work, and thus I have unconsciously shaped it and it me. I am reminded of the words of ethnographer Seth Holmes who writes, "my embodied experiences led me to recognize the impossibility of separating research from human relationships" (37). Qualitative research expert Ernest Stringer adds that "it is impossible to write objective accounts not ultimately inscribed with the perspectives and experiences of the author because of the interpretive processes inherent in data collection" (58). It is nonsensical for me to write this research as if it is entirely objective. This research is interpretive, meaning there exists an underlying assumption that "reality is socially constructed" and there is no one single, objective

reality to be discovered but different realities to be constructed and discovered (Merriam and Tisdell 9). The reality I attempt to uncover in this work is the reality of the Haitian peasant coffee farmer. On a deeper level, a framework of action research was used in the fieldwork portion of this thesis, described by Sherran B. Merriam as research that “seeks to engage participants at some level in the process in order to solve a practical problem” (49). Action research is meant to create a difference in the lives of the participants involved. The very purpose of the inquiry itself is to “find an appropriate solution for the particular dynamics at work in a local situation” (Stringer 6). Thus, my research with my participants attempted to uncover the specific dynamics of the Haitian coffee scene.

Growing up in the very affluent, homogenous city of Scottsdale, Arizona, I never had the opportunity to experience different cultures in a genuine sense. This undiversified upbringing contributed to me holding an unconscious ethnocentric bias in my youth, or parsing “the world into virtuous in-groups and nefarious out-groups” (Andrews, et al. 697). Ethnocentrism leads one to believe that their cultural group is the idealized moral norm that other groups should strive to assimilate to. I did not have many cross-cultural experiences growing up to help me gain perspective on my own culture’s flaws. That is, until my first trip to Haiti in 2015.

My initial exposure to the country of Haiti is very personal. My older sister Quincy went on a trip with her university to rural southeast Haiti in January of 2013. She returned home from that trip and expressed to my family and me how life-changing it was to make friendships in Haiti. She claimed to have fallen in love with some of the kids she met there and proceeded to change her major from English to Nursing, hoping one day to return to Haiti and help the people there that she came to know. Unfortunately, that dream was cut short for Quincy when she passed away on New Year’s Day in 2015. It was the most challenging time in my family’s life,

and amidst the grieving process we decided it would be worthwhile to visit the community that Quincy had fallen in love with in Haiti. So, in the summer of 2015, we packed our bags and headed for southeast Haiti.

That trip set in motion events that have changed the course of my life. Since that initial trip in 2015, I have been visiting Haiti in professional, recreational, and volunteer capacities several times a year. Whether organizing groups from my university to visit our Haitian friends or facilitating different development projects, there is nowhere in the world that means quite as much to me as Haiti. I have come to befriend many Haitians throughout my experiences, and I have learned that they have quite the story to tell. These friends have shown me that Haiti is a country rooted in pride, social justice, and independence. The cultural differences were shocking at first, but I have come to love them and love the process of being exposed to other cultures as well.

The motivation behind this research is academic. However, I also have a strong desire to help impoverished Haitians help themselves. I adamantly want to understand the plight and context of the Haitian peasant farmer because I believe that I can be of greatest use to Haiti when my contextual understanding is at its highest. The Haitian stories and perspectives uncovered in this thesis should be viewed as more valuable than anything else presented in this text. These rural Haitian friends of mine “need opportunities to share their own stories” so that they can be “seen and understood” by an outside world that historically has not given them a platform (Vogl 78). I would love to view this thesis solely as a conduit through which Haitian peasant voices are amplified. But, of course, I nevertheless admit that my unconscious and subjective interpretation undergirding much of this research influenced the final focal points of this thesis, even though it was not my intent.

In choosing my participants for this research, I attempted to engage in purposeful sampling. This method of sampling is “based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight” from participants who “the most can be learned” (Merriam and Tisdell 96). The participants chosen were chosen because of their specific experiences, connections, and perspectives to coffee in Haiti and to a specific co-op of coffee farmers called COOPCAB. Thoughts and anecdotes were obtained from coffee growers and sellers, individuals currently and formerly in management at COOPCAB, and government and private sector participants directly connected with coffee production in Haiti. The majority of the interviews were not planned out in advance, as my translator and I discussed with participants more or less at random. Many of the farmers we conversed with we found by asking other farmers about whom we should talk to next, or by simply running into farmers in and around communities in southeast Haiti. We conducted semi-structured interviews with a high degree of flexibility so that the participants could talk about what they wanted to talk about instead of what I wanted to know. Before each interview, verbal consent was given by the participant to record the conversation and quote them in this thesis.

When visiting Haiti, one of my favorite pastimes is enjoying a cup of locally produced coffee in the morning. As an avid coffee lover, I appreciate the unique and robust flavors of the *Arabika Typika* coffee that Haitians grow high up in their tropical mountains. And as a lover of Haitians, I am more than happy to support their local coffee industry. I have wondered why a country with such a great capacity to grow coffee has not been able to procure recent economic growth through coffee like other coffee-growing nations. Entering into my fieldwork in May of 2020, I wanted to figure out what potential connection coffee production had to economic development in Haiti. I expected my thesis to be centered around a business idea of exporting

Haitian coffee directly to shops in the U.S. that exclusively sold Haitian coffee, but after conducting my research, the orientation of my thesis changed dramatically.

History of Neoliberal Economics in Haiti

Subsidized Imports

Trade liberalization, or the opening up of a country to international trade, began in Haiti after Haitian citizens and political opposition ousted dictator Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier in the late 1980s. This liberalization eventually brought massive food imports through the Agricultural Policy Analysis Project, a project championed by USAID and the Inter-American Development Bank (Steckley and Weis, “Peasant Balances” 6-7). Having international development agencies and actors connected to the UN restructure society in the hopes of achieving economic development is not unique to Haiti. Many developing countries have been subjugated to these same programs over the years, often referred to as Structural Adjustment Programs, or SAPs. Founded upon beliefs that laissez-faire economics are usually altruistic, SAPs are supposed to be “implemented at a national level and focus on macro-economic indicators” of economic growth, such as government expenditure and tariff rates (Willis 146). The practical implications of an SAP usually involve minimizing the control of local governments on commercial activity, cutting tariffs and import/export taxes, devaluing the local currency, and encouraging participation in the current economic globalization movement by using economic strategies like comparative advantage (57). The academic debates rage on as to whether or not neoliberal economic approaches like SAPs are objectively beneficial for Global South countries. However, even if SAPs are appropriate answers to poverty and development in certain parts of the world, it is critical to recognize the harm that foreign development programs like SAPs have had on Haiti over the years.

Once Haiti began its restructuring, the Haitian government was subjugated to many foreign ideas of what it means to properly govern a society. The government was required to “cut rice tariffs from the 35 to 3%, which led to a surge of imported rice that accelerated the displacement of traditional peasant grains,” as well as displacing a vast majority of the country’s rice farmers (Steckley, “Eating Up the Social Ladder” 556). Moreover, the imported rice displacing locally grown rice was almost all subsidized and coming from the American Midwest, meaning that the middle-class American farmer was directly profiting off of a series of transactions that were putting Haitian farmers out of work. While former U.S. President Bill Clinton has openly apologized and taken responsibility for this development mistake, American rice can still be found all over Haiti. Over the first several decades of structural adjustments, Haiti’s GDP per capita was cut in half in large part because local crops were being undercut by subsidized imports (Schwartz, “Travesty in Haiti” 117). I have yet to take a trip to Haiti where I do not come across imported American foodstuffs, like rice, sold in the local markets, including even the rural mountain communities of southeast Haiti.

Unfortunately, there are many similar occurrences across the developing world to Haiti’s imported rice scandal. Author Katie Willis claims that SAPs frequently have been proven “to have very serious consequences” such as poverty increase, rise in living costs, and rise in unemployment levels, often to the benefit of foreign corporations (Willis 58; Pellow 131). Let us take the plight of the southern Mexican farmer as an example. Since the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, “the United States has raised farm subsidies 300 percent,” which has negatively affected thousands of Mexican farmers (Holmes 41). Because NAFTA’s purpose was to facilitate free trade in North America, Mexico was prevented from placing tariffs on imported American products, including produce and other

foodstuffs. The already subsidized American products, coupled with the “free-trade” restrictions that prevented the Mexican government from protecting their small-scale farmers, drove many farmers into poverty or forced migration simply because their products could not compete with the low price-tag attached to the subsidized American imports (Holmes 167; Clawson 36). In his ethnography titled *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies*, physician and ethnologist Seth Holmes conveys his findings of how “the contemporary system of neoliberal corporate capitalism has built global inequalities, leading southern Mexico into a deepening economic depression” (Holmes 107). The Jamaican dairy industry experienced similar adverse economic effects as well, as US dairy imports undercut and destroyed much of the Jamaican milk industry through structural adjustment programs in the 70s, 80s, and 90s (Moe-Lobeda 218; Willis 59). Structural Adjustments in Malawi paved the way for massive agribusiness group Monsanto to receive government subsidies, which allowed them to privatize and control the majority of seed distribution in the country (Wise 32-34). Monsanto’s control over seed distribution in Malawi led to the removal of the indigenous, more nutritious, and drought-resistant MH18 maize seed so that Monsanto-patented seeds could better control the Malawian maize market (32-34). Authors Baer-Nawrocka and Sadowski broadly assert through their macro-analysis research on food security around the world that wealthier countries in the Global North “have considerably hampered the agricultural development of poor southern countries over the last decade” through export subsidies (10). It would be beneficial for much of the developing world if Haiti were the exception in this instance, but unfortunately, it seems like Haiti may be very closely related to the common experience of structural adjustment.

The great irony for Haiti and the well-intentioned development actors at large is that Haiti’s structural adjustments had the exact opposite effect than what was intended for the

Haitian poor. Over the first 14 years of Haiti's structural adjustments, agricultural imports tripled while exports of the same category were cut in half, meaning that SAPs have largely made Haiti more import-dependent, food insecure, and impoverished than previously (Steckley and Weis, "Peasant Balances" 8). The liberalization of Haiti's economy likely happened with very good intentions. However, Haiti has not fared very well under its restructuring due to imposed worldviews that undermine food sovereignty and overemphasize Eurocentric models of agricultural development. It is essential to note that Structural Adjustment Programs and neoliberal development methods may be relevant and helpful for development agendas still. However, for the Haitian context, meeting the immediate needs of the locals should be the priority. Global business and trade can still have a place to aid the Haitian people so long as it is only when local businesses and citizens cannot provide for themselves.

Export Chain Failures – The Export Problem

It is also important to have a robust understanding of the history of export-oriented agendas of development for Haiti. While this proposal does not suggest that neoliberalism is inherently malevolent to impoverished farmers worldwide, there is sufficient evidence available to question whether or not this method of development should continue to be pursued in the Haitian context. In 2015, Dr. Timothy Schwartz, an anthropologist and statistician who has lived in Haiti for more than 30 years, conducted an evaluation survey on the results of a project for the Haiti Hope Project. The project aimed to improve farmers' income through mango production and export. In his evaluation, Schwartz found that after \$60 Million U.S. in funding, no new processing facilities had opened, nor had exports of mangos increased with any significance (Schwartz, "Haiti Hope Project" ix). Most pertinent to Haitian farmers at large is that Schwartz found that the local market price for mangos were consistently 20%-40% higher than the price

farmers would receive by exporting their mangos (Schwartz, “Haiti Hope Project” iv).

Economically, one can understand from Schwartz’s findings why the Haitian mango farmer would naturally be disinterested in the international market.

This same finding that there is higher profit potential for selling locally as opposed to internationally is reaffirmed in other value chains in Schwartz’s research. In each of the multiple agricultural chains he researched in Haiti, including coffee, Schwartz found that “the local market offers 2.5 to 5 times the value of the export market” (Schwartz, “Socio-Dig” C). There are many reasons for this price differential and its lack of recognition from the international and humanitarian community. Most simply and understandably, it is likely that the NGO and international community is so focused on export-driven development in Haiti that it causes them “to overlook the vigorous local market where” produce like “mangos sell for as much or more than the export market chain” (Schwartz, “Haiti Hope Project” 19). Keeping in mind that the local market is more profitable for Haitian farmers than the export market, development practitioners should be experimenting more with community development projects focused on food sovereignty and the local Haitian market.

Another reason why export chains may not benefit the producer in the best way possible is the presence of the oligopsony in Haiti. Oligopsony occurs when only a small number of buyers are on a market with the ability to export. This leaves the producer with few, undiversified options for exporting their product. Stemming from an extremely weak and sometimes nonexistent central governing body and the vast concentration of wealth into the hands of a very few, the oligopsony controls most every Haitian export market. In a piece published by *The Journal of Development Areas*, the authors state that “as of 1998, there were 18 exporters” of coffee in Haiti (Lopez and Dorsainvil 96). In this same article, the authors mention

the adverse effects of this oligopsony on the Haitian coffee producer. With the benefit of retrospect, I can recognize that their complaint about oligopsony is even more relevant today than it was when it was written, as there are now no more than four exporters of coffee in Haiti, as opposed to the 18 active exporters in the 90s (Arias et al. 18). This continued decline in the diversification of exporters is a further indicator that export-led development models may not be relevant or beneficial for the small-scale Haitian coffee producer today.

In regards to the oligopsony, one obvious solution to this economic problem would be to revise the economic and political system currently supporting its existence. This is no simple feat however. The history of how abusive and exploitative Haiti's elite treat their poor neighbors is well documented and slow to change ("Solidarity with Haiti"). In his book *Travesty in Haiti*, Schwartz recalls a conversation he had with the child of a wealthy Haitian aristocrat. The generational and institutionalized despise and disregard for Haiti's poor can clearly be seen in his interaction with this child named Dee:

I follow her to the garden. She stops in front of a small tree and points to a crook in the branches where, sure enough, there grows a tiny parasitic fern. "There, you see," bright little Dee exclaims triumphantly. "The one plant is living off of the other plant." Then looking at me curiously and carefully enunciating her words, she asks: "Do you know what par-a-sit-ic means?" "No," I say, wanting to encourage her young mind, "Tell me." "Well, it is like the poor here in Haiti," she says. "They live off the rich. They suck on you until you have nothing left, until you are finished." Appalled, I ask her where she heard such an explanation and she tells me, "From my teacher at school" (Schwartz, "Travesty in Haiti" 200).

It is evident that the contempt the upper class holds against the lower class in Haiti is one of the reasons why Haitian peasants have been stuck in cyclical poverty for so many years. It seems there are genuinely only two options for Haiti's future in regards to this dilemma. Either the oligopsony will continue to control much of the commercial and political activity of the country as it has for decades, or a social uprising or massive intervention will occur to rid Haiti of this corrupt section of its elite. Getting rid of the oligopsony in Haiti could greatly benefit Haitian coffee farmers. Lopez and Dorsainvil estimated in the early 90s that increasing the number of coffee exporters would result in a drastically higher price paid to coffee farmers (102).

Unfortunately, this thesis assumes that this oligopsony is not going to dissolve anytime soon. There are understandable arguments and discussions for why these elite aristocrats should be ousted from Haiti, and I sympathize with those arguments. However, this thesis aims to attempt to work within the current Haitian system, all of its faults and restraints included, rather than advocating for an uprising that would undoubtedly end in violence. In the case of an entirely new Haitian society and atmosphere void of the upper class blocking specific development strategies for the lower class, parts of this thesis would become obsolete. However, advocacy for violence is nowhere near the scope of this thesis, and so with academic integrity, I will proceed onwards with the presumption that the oligopsony will continue to operate within the Haitian context as it historically has.

All of the negative results from Haitian export-agendas aside, this is not to say that exporting coffee is a bad idea for every developing country. *The Institute for Sustainable Development* reports that many countries in recent years, such as Ethiopia, Uganda, Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar, and Papua New Guinea, have shown positive potential for increasing the overall wellbeing of their citizens through sustainable coffee production and export (Voora et al.

4). In a macro-analysis of coffee production and exports globally, Theodore Murindahabi et al. found that the “long-term effect of coffee exports on economic growth was positive and significant,” asserting that “countries producing coffee can boost their economy by increasing the quantity and quality of coffee exports” (392). It should be noted that this data is aggregated and generic, as it does not show exactly who benefits from increased coffee production and export. Generalized data such as this makes the broad assumption that if economies are growing, societies are improving; however numerous historical contexts prove that this connection is not universally true (Sider 235). Notions claiming that increases in GDP and other macro indicators of wealth universally correlate with the well-being of a population should be met with skepticism.

Nevertheless, there is evidence of economic development through coffee exports in some instances. One need look no further than Brazil to make the case that coffee exports can, in fact, ‘develop’ a country. The key here is not to demonize any economic theory of development holistically but rather to analyze what approach would be best for Haitian peasant farmers in the current moment. Considering the multitude of failures with export-oriented agendas throughout Haiti’s history, I will move forward with the assumption that this agenda is still inappropriate for the Haitian context.

Cultural Conflicts with the Global Market

Haiti was founded on the successful revolt of black slaves against white French oppressors at the turn of the 19th century. Understanding the Haitian origin story and subsequent cultural distrust of much of the outside world is crucial to understand when interacting with Haitians, and specifically the Haitian peasant farmer. The unique distribution of land in Haiti after winning their independence, as well as having cultural roots that seek to maximize

autonomy, are widely recognized components of Haitian culture in academia that do not coincide well with the global market (Steckley and Weis, “Peasant Balances” 18; Arias et al. 21). These cultural characteristics, and their subsequent incompatibility with much of the Global North, could be one of the many reasons modern economic development methods have consistently failed in Haiti.

In Haiti, peasant farmers do not prioritize profits. Rather, “peasants are fundamentally guided by goals of sufficiency and stability, prioritizing a spectrum of household needs and seeking to optimize production accordingly, rather than simply trying to maximize production and profit” (Steckley and Weis, “Peasant Balances” 4). This prioritization of household needs instead of profit margins ends up butting up against the goals and assumptions of many agricultural development projects. For the Haitian producer, the primary purpose of agricultural cultivation above all else is to meet the consumption needs of the household as opposed to creating risky income opportunities (11). Schwartz explains that small-scale Haitian “producers are first and foremost adapted not to profits, but [to] ecological, political and economic hardship and crisis that puts a premium on risk management” (Schwartz, “Haiti Hope Project” vii). To survive, these farmers have learned to avoid unnecessary risk-taking. This risk management is carried out through livestock and crop diversification, and compels the Haitian peasant farmer to avoid the historically volatile international market that may be difficult to access in the first place (Schwartz, “Haiti Hope Project” 49, vii). Steckley even claims that Haitian “peasants are actively resisting various attempts to expand mango production and struggling to maintain a degree of autonomy over their cropping systems” (Steckley and Weis, “Peasant Balances 4). Active resistance towards expanding production contradicts the foundation of how business operates in much of the developed world.

The degradation of specific market chains traditionally used for income generation in Haiti was not the only negative side effect of Haiti's structural adjustment. Attempting to liberalize Haiti's economy into a more conventional Eurocentric model has created notable cultural tension within the traditional Haitian economy, especially concerning foodstuffs. Since the early days of their independence, Haitians have been operating under what anthropologists define as the internal rotating market system, sometimes referred to as the informal Haitian economy ("The Haitian Market System"). The internal rotating market system operates starting in the rural areas and ending in the cities, such as Port au Prince. Traditionally, produce, meat, and dairy in Haiti have been produced in the countryside by small-scale farmers on small-scale farmland and then delivered to the inner city or other urban markets. The individuals delivering and distributing these goods are what Haitians call *Madan Sara*. *Madan Sara* are women who act as a sort of middleman and transporter in the Haitian economy. *Madan Sara* operate on a spectrum, as the more prominent and wealthier *Madan Sara* employ truckloads of produce at once, whereas the average *Madan Sara* may transport her small amount of produce on the back of a motorcycle or donkey. Approximately half of Haitian farmers sell their produce to *Madan Sara*, while eighty percent of resellers buy their produce from *Madan Sara*, indicating that the role of the *Madan Sara* is essential in the Haitian informal economy (Stam 31). Considering that farming supports 66% of livelihoods in Haiti, it seems important to take the wellbeing of the *Madan Sara* into consideration (12). Unfortunately, it seems that the liberalization of Haiti's economy has done just the opposite of that.

Imported foodstuffs also bring with it imported employment opportunities. The antithesis of the *Madan Sara*, and often her commercial rival, is the *Komèsan*, which in Haitian Kreyol translates to "distributor" ("The Haitian Market System"). The *Komèsan* operates in the exact

opposite way the *Madan Sara* does. The *Komèsan* is usually hired by transnational corporations and receives imported and often highly processed foodstuffs from importers or wholesalers in the city and proceeds to distribute his product through the same urban and rural markets used by the *Madan Sara*, albeit in the opposite direction. This break from the traditional flow of goods from rural to urban works against the grain of the traditional system that Haitians have operated under for years and provides additional competition and inconveniences to the business model of the *Madan Sara*. Not only does the *Komèsan* drive a wedge in the flow of the informal Haitian economy, which some would argue is more beneficial for Haiti in the long haul, but *Komèsan* have also been known to employ less than ethical strategies in their commercial struggle against *Madan Sara*. Offering *Madan Sara* credit through imported goods such as rice, flour, and sugar at 0% interest with the understanding that the *Madan Sara* will sell the product at less than cost, the *Komèsan* can artificially reduce the prices of imported goods for their own interests “because the purchaser can now resell the imported food at a price below the real cost,” even though this is at the expense of the *Madan Sara* in the long run (“The Haitian Market System”). The competitive relationship between the *Madan Sara* of the traditional Haitian economy and the *Komèsan* of the global economy is in no way simple. The *Komèsan* likely provides Haitians with much-needed imported products that otherwise would not be available. However, one must still be honest in addressing whether or not Haiti as a whole is better off with this foreign, internationally recognized form of enterprise encroaching on the informal Haitian economy. The mission of the *Komèsan* is aligned with the foreign agenda of a neoliberal development model. This undermines and diminishes the asset of the pre-existing economy in which the *Madan Sara* operates.

As noted earlier, one also has to consider the impact of collectivism on Haitian business and farming practices. The communal and agriculture practice of *konbit* and collectivist business practices does not fit conventional agriculture or business molds very well. When I was in Haiti in August of 2020, my translator and I stopped on the side of the road in the town square of Thiotte to buy some coffee from several coffee vendors. *Madanm* Augustine and *Madanm* Valerie are both women in their 40s or 50s with soft smiles and friendly dispositions. Hard-working, driven women laboring for hours at a time in the sunlight providing customers with coffee and small food items, it would be natural to assume that these vendors would employ all of the marketing and business tactics as so typically practiced in the Global North. However, that is not exactly how a business operates within a Haitian collectivist culture. I would come to find out that the vendors on the side of the street in Thiotte have an unspoken rule about coffee pricing. *Madanm* Valerie and Augustine do not use competitive pricing as a means to procure more customers, as all of the vendors are expected to set their price on an agreed-upon amount for a cup of coffee. In this way, the vendors are working together to equitably share customers and profits, instead of undercutting one another's prices and harming their neighbor's business. This phenomenon is also apparent in the operations of *Madan Sara* around Haiti. Talitha Stam notes that a reduction of the price of an agricultural product in the market by a *Madan Sara* would be met with firm, collective unacceptance from other *Madan Sara* (26). This price agreement between *Madan Sara* is undoubtedly a result of collective cultural orientation.

The bend towards collectivism in Haitian culture does not mean that general rules of market economics are entirely irrelevant. Local Haitian economies still very much operate under supply and demand restrictions, as does most of the world. However, the added component of social solidarity and immediate care for the collective wellbeing of agricultural vendors

exemplifies a certain cultural predisposition that does not easily fit within the neoliberal framework of business as it is understood in the Global North.

Another cultural conflict between Haitian culture and much of the developed world is related to land distribution. Haitian land has been dispersed relatively equitably amongst Haitians since the Haitian Revolution. Complete landlessness in Haiti is very uncommon, and most people own small portions of land, with the average plot being anywhere from 1-2 hectares, or 2-5 acres (Murray 387-389). The lack of large individual holdings of land, coupled with the lack of a formalized national land registration system, makes it difficult for corporations to gain rights to and aggregate land for production purposes.

There are many reasons why development through neoliberal, export-focused agendas are not contextually relevant for Haiti at the moment. The historical and cultural roots of distrust and autonomy that Haitian peasants possess yield a labor force that is weary of profit maximization. These farmers prefer to stick to traditional, low-risk farming practices and commercial activity concentrated on the local economy. The unfavorable system of land-possession present in Haiti, in regards to a neoliberal perspective, makes the installation of massive monoculture cropping areas more difficult than in other countries with a similar climate, like the Dominican Republic (Schwartz, "Haiti Hope Project" 47). Even when it comes down to simple economic options, ample research conducted by Schwartz suggests that it is more profitable for farmers to sell their products locally instead of attempting to export through the oligopsony, as many agricultural products sell for double the price on the local market. The reality of the Haitian context right now does not mean that opportunities for human development through export and orthodox neoliberal market techniques will not be appropriate responses in the future for the Haitian farmer. However, given the Haitian peasant farmer's current cultural, geographical, and

economic specificities, one should be very hesitant to assume that export-oriented agendas will be inherently beneficial for small-scale Haitian farmers. The development world must not assume that the Haitian farmer is adamantly yearning to export his or her produce, because if small-scale Haitian “producers have learned anything in the past 200 years it is that they cannot count on the international community and foreign markets to save them” (Schwartz, “Haiti Hope Project” 50). Development agendas can no longer ignore the context and perspective of Haitian peasant farmers if they wish to be genuinely helpful.

Framework for an Alliance of Coffee Producers

The proposal here is to establish an advocacy group, or Alliance, for Haitian peasant coffee farmers. The framework for this coffee Alliance is multi-faceted because of the complex nature of the problems faced by Haitian coffee farmers. The proposal will encourage the prioritization of local distribution and consumption of coffee, provide agricultural resources to farmers, and encourage reforestation through coffee farming, all within a framework that seeks to copower each actor involved.

Prioritizing Local Consumption

It seems that commonplace ideologies of development unconsciously place consumers in the Global North as a necessary means for development in the Global South. While there are some contexts in which consumers in the Global North have undoubtedly aided Global South countries in economic development through the purchasing of their goods, one must not assume that this approach is relevant or helpful in every development context. Such an assumption is ignorant of contextualization and may even be Eurocentric. A necessary step towards realizing copowerment and agency in communities of the Global South is remembering and prioritizing the local needs and demands of the consumers in-country. Local consumers are often not even

considered in development agendas. Studies have shown an increase in the rate of domestic coffee consumption in Haiti over the last several decades, so why is this market rarely considered in project proposals (Arias et al. 8)? In an interview with a representative from Rebo Café, the largest roaster and supplier of coffee in Haiti, a company representative explained that Rebo has not been exporting coffee since at least 2017 because of the rising Haitian demand for coffee and the inability of the current supply to meet that demand (Ewald). The Rebo representative also mentioned that Rebo was forced to import coffee several years back to meet local demand. Luckily, Rebo has not had to import coffee into Haiti in recent years, but one has to wonder why there is currently such an international emphasis on exporting Haiti's coffee if the Haitian demand for coffee has not yet been satisfied.

This lack of supply for Haitian coffee demand was even predicted in a study published by the *Inter-American Development Bank* in 2006. The authors of the study reported that Haiti's annual coffee production was on track to be so minimal in the coming years, and the domestic demand was growing so much that Haiti would likely require coffee imports to meet the demands of their local market (Arias et al. 8). This thesis contends that if Haitian coffee producers had more control and autonomy over their own coffee's destiny, they would likely not be exporting it outside of the country when the domestic demand has not yet been satisfied. Farmers would likely choose the domestic market for economic, cultural, and sovereignty related reasons. Fieldwork from Steckley shows that Haitian peasant farmers generally believe that "production for local consumption should be prioritized" in the grand scheme of Haiti's development (Steckley and Weis, "Agriculture in and Beyond" 407). If there is a general Haitian consensus of how food production should be prioritized like Steckley's research shows, the international development community must respect this consensus.

Important to note in the fight for food sovereignty in Haiti is the complex cultural components of food consumption in Haitian culture. In general, but more explicitly concerning food, Haitians sometimes view products made in Haiti as inferior to imported products associated with “whiteness” (Steckley, "Eating Up the Social Ladder" 559). This cultural preference for foreign foods associated with whiteness undermines Haitian pride and localized agriculture and can strip the Haitian diet of more nutritious and organic foods. While it must not be assumed “that dietary preferences will tend to align with local production and support small farmers,” coffee is such a widely consumed product in Haiti by multiple classes that there likely is not a negative or peasant stigma attached to its consumption (Steckley, "Eating Up the Social Ladder" 557). Considering that Haitian coffee has been regarded as prestigious and an international delicacy also leads one to believe that there will not be many cultural diet preference barriers in implementing this Alliance.

Coffee is served in practically every home, business, government building, and NGO in Haiti that can access it. The middle and upper classes make up the portion of the population that consumes coffee conventionally. Much like the Global North consumes coffee, the upper and middle classes buy roasted coffee in packaged bags from grocery stores. Alternatively, the lower class typically consumes coffee in more a traditional fashion (Ewald). Vendors brew large batches of coffee on the side of the street or in an outdoor market in large containers and add sugar and other spices directly to the brew. The coffee is then purchased by the cup from the vendor and consumed near the vendor (Valerie; Augustine). I purchased several cups of coffee in this way throughout my fieldwork in Haiti in an attempt to build rapport and relationships with coffee stakeholders.

A large purpose of this Alliance would involve encouraging consumption of Haitian coffee instead of foreign coffee in the different domestic sectors mentioned previously. Interestingly, foreign NGOs and other groups have been known to import more convenient and industrialized Western coffee products instead of consuming locally grown and roasted coffee (Steckley). As already discussed, many NGOs, foreign government projects, and UN projects have been dedicated to creating export-driven development in Haiti and have not intentionally supported domestic market opportunities for farmers and agricultural stakeholders. This proposed Alliance would work against this orientation and encourage actors in Haiti to support farmers in a very straightforward manner by consuming Haitian coffee when in Haiti.

There are many problems associated with exporting coffee and other agricultural products in Haiti. Unequal power dynamics between producer, exporter, and consumer and environmental degradation have caused exporting coffee to largely become a non-sustainable and highly speculative option. Yet, coffee export projects continue to be encouraged by a well-intentioned, subconsciously Eurocentric, development community.

Providing Agricultural Resources

When asked about what problems faced the coffee farmer's ability to make a good living from their coffee, there were several consistent answers that many different stakeholders communicated to me. Common responses involved several things, including the changing of the climate and weather patterns, the lack of access to fertilizer, the coffee tree killing "coffee rust", and lack of general structure and rule enforcement from the Haitian government.

Noting the importance of fertilizer in coffee, the stakeholders mentioned that access to fertilizer has decreased in recent decades and has increased in price ten-fold (Desruisseaux; Savannzombi Focus Group; Nwèl). The Haitian coffee farmer currently makes anywhere from

\$1.17-\$1.75 U.S. per pound of coffee. However, a single bag of fertilizer usually costs the Haitian farmer \$30 U.S. (Desruisseaux). This expensive financial cost of fertilizer causes its use in Haiti to be a less pragmatic option than farming in other contexts across the globe. Research by Steckley and Shamsie supplements the farmers' claims that in Haiti, "fertilizer use is among the lowest in the world" in large part because of the high price point (Steckley and Shamsie 180). This Alliance would seek to provide farmers with fertilizer at little to no cost. However, care should be taken in supplying farmers with fertilizer, as the Haitian government used to provide many resources to farmers but has been unable to do so in recent decades. The assistance from an Alliance such as this should not overwhelm a community or undermine their history. Rather, assistance given should "be considered in the light of people's own capacities," including recognizing the authority of former and present governing bodies in the Haitian context (Darcy 3). The last thing a new initiative in Haiti needs to do is invalidate the agency of the Haitian public sector. Because this Alliance will engage local leaders and innovators, hopefully copowerment can be achieved and local knowledge and assets can help fill in any institutional gaps that may be present.

It is important to note that while the term fertilizer is used here, it does not necessarily mean that Haitians should receive, or are even want to receive, synthetic fertilizers developed for conventional agriculture in the Global North. The overuse of these types of fertilizers has been known to destroy soil microbial diversity, increase acidification, and reduce organic matter in soil (Wise 7). Using synthetic fertilizer, often pushed and lobbied for by big agribusiness groups, shows promising yields in the first several harvests of use. However, a recent macro-analysis study found that "yield gains were often temporary, and they rarely generate the prosperity [for farmers] to sustain commercial fertilizer purchases" without at least some form of subsidy (48).

Synthetic fertilizers typically entice farmers in the early years of use because of this yield increase in the initial harvest. However, many farmers then find themselves trapped as their soil becomes more acidic and requires progressively more synthetic fertilizer each year, ultimately diminishing their profit margin (34). A more contextually relevant and at least quasi-traditional form of fertilizer could be created using a concept known as Integrated Soil Fertility Management. ISFM involves mixing a small amount of industrial fertilizer with local organic matter, making for a more cost-efficient and more environmentally friendly product for fertilization. Fertilizers utilizing ISFM or other more locally and readily available inputs should be what these farmers are given access to, not foreign synthetics that are not suited for Haitian soil and are economically inviable and unsustainable for the average peasant farmer. Because ISFM fertilizers consist of readily available natural inputs, they do not require imports and are much cheaper than the industrial alternatives. Thus, farmers are much more likely to be able to afford this type of fertilizer.

Encouraging Reforestation through Coffee Production

From some of the smallest-scale farmers to even the more prominent coffee roasters in Haiti, participants noted that climate change has been affecting the coffee harvest in Haiti (Ewald; Nwèl). As a Small Island Developing State (SIDS), coupled with a history of deforestation, erosion, and lack of government preventative action, Haiti is in a uniquely vulnerable position in relation to climate change (Sprenkle-Hyppolite et al. 306). Because of their geographical positioning close to the rising sea level, SIDS "are especially vulnerable to climate change and disaster" compared to rest of the world (Mercer 248). Luckily, traditional coffee farming practices in Haiti can greatly mitigate Haiti's vulnerability to disasters.

This thesis identifies a disaster not as an unstoppable and utterly spontaneous event. Rather, a disaster is a natural hazard enabled and amplified by preexisting vulnerabilities (Collins 14). In other words, disasters are preventable and they occur in places where a natural hazard can exploit weak social structures; disasters are not unavoidable, universal carnage. Weather hazards in more protected societies that would not result in a disaster immediately turn into disasters in Haiti due to the country's chronic vulnerability and lack of sustainability-focused development. While Haitians contribute to their own disaster risk in various ways, one must recognize that many of the natural hazards that afflict a country like Haiti are not a result of local ecological maleficence. Much of the greenhouse gas emissions causing climate change, which has caused 90% of natural disasters in the last two decades, is out of the control of Global South countries such as Haiti (UNISDR). The Global North disproportionately causes climate change for much of the world, and the countries that feel its effects the most are those who can do the least to change it. (Willis 183). For example, the United States generates nineteen percent of global waste but only holds five percent of the global population (Pellow 100). Figures like these exemplify how cooperation and action in the Global North are critical for peasant farmers' livelihoods and wellbeing.

Not all of Haiti's environmental problems stem from foreign countries. For the portion of environmental degradation that Haitians are culpable for, it is good practice to remember that if environmentalists wish to decrease disaster vulnerability, they must prioritize meeting the livelihood requirements of Haitians (Collins 58). With this perspective, one can determine that poor Haitian farmers should not be held entirely culpable for using environmentally harmful practices to generate income. Assisting Haitians in developing their own communities and increasing their overall wealth directly correlates with overall tree cover in Haiti and thus

protects Haitians against certain disasters. While it is true that Haitians cannot fix macro climate change issues, there are always things individual communities can do to mitigate climate change and increase climate resilience in their homeland while also adapting to the climate crisis as it unfolds. It is possible that increasing coffee production in Haiti is something that can protect Haiti from climate change.

Another resource provided by the Alliance would be coffee saplings for farmers to plant wherever they choose. Because coffee requires shade, it makes practical sense for the Haitian farmer to plant trees and other taller crops around the coffee tree. Coffee's inherent need for these taller trees helps rehabilitate and retain topsoil, helping guard against the destruction of crops during extreme weather events. The protection from extreme weather events then allows the Haitian farmer not to have to chop down trees for income after extreme weather events. Retention of topsoil is one of the most important environmental practices for sustaining any community. Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist Thomas Friedman goes as far as to say that "almost all failed civilizations collapsed because they didn't steward their topsoil" (334). By providing farmers with more coffee saplings, the Alliance implicitly encourages farmers to keep other trees rooted, which would increase soil health and prevent topsoil erosion. Less erosion of the topsoil means more coffee can be grown on the same amount of soil, and thus more trees will stay rooted to provide shade for the increased coffee grown. By providing farmers with more coffee saplings, they can begin participating in this ecologically benevolent and self-sustaining cycle of rehabilitating Haiti's soil.

Any initiative to increase community resilience should be locally owned and facilitated. These initiatives should "highlight a community's ability to reduce their own disaster risk" and avoid importing foreign ideas of resilience (Wisner). This focus on preexisting community

potential and ability is widely accepted as good development practice in general. Authors Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert label the identification of this existing potential as “asset-based community development,” while author Sue Ann Hammond would most likely label this approach as “Appreciative Inquiry” (Corbett and Fikkert 126; Hammond 25). No matter the definition used, the point to remember here is that it is very likely that at least partial solutions to Haiti’s deforestation problem already exist within Haiti. Identifying and building upon these existing, contextually relevant strengths should be international donors’ and the development community’s priority. While coffee was never naturally growing on the island of Hispaniola, coffee trees have been growing in Haiti over the last 300 years. They have since become a familiar part of Haitian agriculture, making it a native and locally recognized source of income and social resilience. The strengthening of a preexisting asset like coffee is vital because when “existing capacities can be strengthened, the impact of hazards is reduced” (Venton and Hansford 23). Moreover, in a somewhat cyclical fashion, when the impact of a hazard is reduced, it then becomes easier to continue strengthening those existing capacities.

Coffee can be grown in direct sunlight with intensive irrigation, as it is typically done in conventional industrial settings. However, this method of coffee production depletes nutrients out of the soil and further quickens the erosion of topsoil (Pendergrast 24, 34). Luckily, the traditional way Haitian peasant farmers have grown coffee in their intercropped farmlands over the centuries is not as conventional. Every Haitian farmer I spoke with in August of 2020 mentioned how vital shade is for coffee tree growth. Because of the importance of shade in the growing process, these coffee farmers inherently value tree cover, even if the tree does not produce any useful crop or substance. Because shade provided by trees is an essential component of any coffee farm, growing coffee encourages Haitian communities to keep trees rooted, which

helps them avoid rockslides, increases the nutrient density of the topsoil, and provides more cover from harsh winds and rainfall. The potential profit from the coffee production itself could also be a helpful tool to invest in other disaster risk reduction measures, effectively creating a positive cycle of disaster risk reduction. This "integration of indigenous and scientific knowledge" could "strengthen the ability of indigenous communities to cope with climate change, while retaining their traditional practices," which in this case, is growing coffee (Mercer 250-252). This integration is an excellent example of why current scientific literature is still relevant to the Haitian farmer, only it must be considered in light of, and complementary to, traditional farming practices.

A critical, potentially overly optimistic, element to recognize is that traditional Haitian farming practices have a high potential for restoring their degraded environment. This was evident in my fieldwork in the number of agronomists and environmentally-conscious coffee producers that I came in contact with and is supported by much of Steckley's research. Because of the current state of land ownership, monoculture farming is not practiced by many because it can be relatively difficult even to procure a large enough area to practice conventional commercial monoculture farming. Not only does the land distribution favor the healing of Haiti's soil, but there is a growing body of peasants advocating for more farmers to practice "poly-culture practices geared towards producing a range of healthy and nourishing foods in ways that regenerate the health of the soil" (Steckley and Weis, "Agriculture in and Beyond" 408). Farmers consistently stress that defending land rights from outsiders is one of the "most powerful unifying forces in rural communities," meaning that overall food and land sovereignty from transnational corporations could also lead to a healthier and more unified lower class (409). Of course, the obvious argument against allowing farmers to rehabilitate their own land is that this

has not worked in the past since Haiti's land has yet to be rehabilitated. Nevertheless, as noted previously in this thesis, the current state of environmental devastation in Haiti is largely due to historical and economic forces outside of the control of the Haitian peasant farmer. Thus, this Alliance would seek to empower the current environmentally friendly farming practices the Haitian peasant farmer is using.

In copowering the domestic Haitian market and producers, the natural division of land among small-scale farmers already present in Haiti can be utilized. The presence of small farm plots necessarily deviates from conventionally harmful farming practices. The foundation for a regenerative agricultural model for the Haitian farmer through coffee production has existed for centuries; this model can be built upon if the Haitian farmer has access to the local markets and is not sidetracked by export agendas and lack of resources. In the Haitian context, it has been evident that "the subordination of domestic food security to agro-export production has had enormous environmental and social consequences including deforestation, soil infertility, and food-import dependence" (Steckley and Shamsie 179). This Alliance seeks to flip this script so that the international market is of secondary importance to the domestic market, thus avoiding the consequences of prioritizing foreign consumers over Haitian ones.

Practical Implementation

For this Alliance to be successful, it must be facilitated and led by local Haitian leaders while also receiving consistent funding to help provide farmers with agricultural resources and pay for miscellaneous costs associated with increased coffee production.

This Alliance would implement the approach anthropologist G.F. Murray used in Haiti throughout his 20-year agroforestry project. Murray's approach supplied farmers with seedlings and agroforestry advice but ultimately "encouraged farmer-induced deviations" from the

project's assumptions (Murray 383). The goal would be for this Alliance to follow suit with this framework. While educational opportunities about environmentalism could potentially be provided through the Alliance, the Alliance would also encourage farmers to use resources in whatever way they feel is best for them, further emphasizing that there are no strings attached to receiving these resources. While many Haitian farmers do explicitly care about the environment, they understandably view short-term economic benefits as a priority over long-term ecological rehabilitation (383). This does not mean that these agendas are pitted against one another. The recognition here is that in order for both increase in income and environmental rehabilitation to take place, the Alliance needs to allow the economic wellbeing of the Haitian farmer to come first in order for the model to be sustainable.

The most important step in implementing this Alliance would be to identify the Haitian leaders who could facilitate the Alliance. Frequency-listing and the Notab Leadership and Key Informant Strategy (NOLKINS) is a method of surveying Haitian communities to identify local leaders of wisdom and integrity; this method could be used to identify potential leaders for the Alliance (Schwartz, "Freelisting"). NOLKINS is fairly different from conventional surveying. Instead of conducting surveys across numerous households in a community to aggregate data about levels of poverty, population, and local solutions, NOLKINS instead surveys random households and asks the household members to identify whom they perceive their community leaders to be. The identified community leaders are then the ones consulted regarding development projects or conflict in the community. In conducting NOLKINS surveys, questions are asked such as "who would you turn to if you needed a trustworthy local leader?" or perhaps, "who in the community is most reliable in cases of resolving local disputes" (Schwartz, "Freelisting")? After compiling the responses of surveyed households, the frequently mentioned

local leaders are contacted and are asked if they would like to participate in the project. For the context of the Peasant Alliance for Haitian Coffee, additional criteria would be added to the survey to find trustworthy community leaders who are also deeply invested in Haitian coffee. This method of identifying leaders would hopefully provide a foundation of multi-stakeholder Haitian leadership for the Alliance not based on hierarchical relationships but on recognized leadership roles in Haiti's coffee sector (Kuenkel 57). These leaders would be the engine behind the distribution of agricultural resources, encouraging reforestation, and advocating for the consumption of Haitian coffee in bigger Haitian cities.

Due to many unknown factors likely involving pallet preference, brand familiarity, and cost, many NGOs, businesses, and even restaurants import foreign coffee products into Haiti (Steckley). It is also possible that the importing of coffee became habitual after companies like Rebo Cafè did not have enough inventory to meet local demand in recent years. However, it would be a shame for these purchases of foreign coffee over Haitian coffee to continue when farmers eventually can supply the local demand. The encouragement is not necessarily for every entity in Haiti to completely abandon the consumption of foreign-grown coffee, but rather for the coffee consumers in Haiti to become more aware of the importance of supporting their local farmers. This includes both Haitian citizens and ex-pats alike. Sustainability-focused solutions to food security require “gradual development of innovation that covers the entire food chain,” including everyone from the farmer planting the initial coffee sapling in the ground to the consumer enjoying the bold flavor of a cup of Haitian *Arabika Typika* coffee (Dániel 43). If this Alliance worked perfectly, consumers of coffee in Haiti would prefer to purchase Haitian coffee, and the small-scale producers would fully meet the local demand for coffee. Ideally, this would lead to the strengthening of Haiti's food sovereignty, where people not only have the right to

foodstuffs, but also where farmers have secured their right to produce foodstuffs (Baer-Nawrocka and Sadowski 2). This encouraging of local consumption could take many forms, such as public service announcements, awareness seminars, or even conventional marketing. One idea is for a NOLKINS identified leader to host miniature awareness seminars with businesses, restaurants, and local and foreign NGOs. These seminars will increase awareness of the availability of Haitian coffee and where to buy it, and serve as a relational bridge from the likely upper-class consumers of coffee to the lower-class producers.

In terms of assuring environmental rehabilitation in Haiti, care must be taken as not to make this task the explicit priority. As mentioned previously with Murray's work, Haitian farmers will prioritize their short-term economic wellbeing over long-term environmental health, but that does not mean the two are mutually exclusive (383). The framework for the Alliance would advocate for a Participatory Rural Appraisal approach, which recognizes "that the local people are more knowledgeable about their environment than the external experts" (Van Niekerk et al. 16). In terms of environmental rehabilitation, PRA would influence the Alliance leaders to follow the lead of the people living in and experiencing their environment every day. In other words, the Haitian peasant farmers would collectively direct the reforestation efforts in their communities. Held accountable by the local leaders overseeing the Alliance's operation, the hope would be that the agricultural resources such as fertilizer and saplings would be equitably distributed throughout the community. While the initial intent is to increase the capacity of the Haitian farmer in their production of coffee, reforestation efforts would hopefully follow suit naturally because of the traditional agricultural practices of the Haitian peasant farmer when economic needs are being met.

The Term "Alliance" (Alyans)

There is specific intent behind using the word Alliance for this project rather than other terminology. The terms ‘association’ and ‘cooperative’ already have connotations and history in Haitian coffee production. Through my interviews, it did appear that there was a hierarchical distinction between the two. Associations are groups that coffee farmers can become members of that aggregate coffee cherries. The associations then proceed to dry and sell them. Each association has a board that buys the coffee from the association members (Nwèl; Savannzombi Focus Group). The term cooperative is associated with a group of associations, usually for the intent to export. However, it should be noted that many stakeholders disagreed on the exact definition and difference in purpose between coffee cooperatives and associations (Savannzombi Focus Group; Nwèl). While these associations and cooperatives act as conduits for farmers to aggregate their beans and connect them with buyers, one could argue that the cooperatives and associations are quasi-speculative and, therefore, undermine the producers' economic wellbeing. In an interview with a focus group, some of the farmers used terms like association, federation, and cooperation interchangeably. At the same time, some differentiated the different levels of these groups, and others claimed that terms used by other farmers do not currently exist. The only thing that could be deduced for sure about the terms used is that no one could agree entirely on what each term meant.

In order to provide farmers with a new option to where they can utilize all of the support described above, it would be best to use vernacular that has not yet been used. Hopefully, using a new word would change attitudes and thoughts in regards to possibilities with coffee in Haiti (Kelley and Kelley 198). I have not discovered a formal implementation of the word *Alyans* (Alliance) relating to Haitian coffee in my research. The hope is that the novelty of this term in Haiti's coffee industry allows the concept to stand apart from the association and cooperative

model as a tool to benefit small-scale Haitian coffee producers, roasters, and consumers. Ideally, the name would become associated with no-strings-attached support and advocacy for Haitian coffee farmers. The term would hopefully be able to separate this initiative from previous ones, such as the COOPCAB initiative in southeast Haiti.

COOPCAB Case Study

Before arriving in Haiti in August of 2020 for my fieldwork, I had come across a group known as COOPCAB several times in my research. I had connected with a company called Xaragua Café in Canada that had been exporting coffee beans out of Haiti using a cooperative, located in Thiotte in southeast Haiti. I had been visiting southeast Haiti for several years and was fairly familiar with the town of Thiotte and even had several close friends who lived there. Because of my familiarity and history with the area, I had come across the name COOPCAB several times before but knew little about it. I would come to find out that COOPCAB “is a secondary-level cooperative that aggerates and markets” Haitian “coffee from nine primary-level cooperatives in and around Thiotte,” with the intent of exporting their beans (Root Capital 4). Founded in 1999, COOPCAB has attempted to bring farmers together in order to export the highest quality *Arabika Typika* coffee bean, a bean which Haiti has a favorable climate to grow. Groups like Xaragua Café have been exporting and selling these beans with a premium price tag, both for their quality and potential fair-trade benefits, as COOPCAB attaches a fair-trade premium to their sales. Unfortunately, much of what I uncovered during my investigating of COOPCAB painted a much different picture than what was portrayed on the outside. This case study is in no way meant to smear or attack the attempts of COOPCAB and their international coffee purchasers. The point here is not that COOBCAP is entirely malevolent to its beneficiaries. However, I did uncover some significant findings that should be considered in

light of export-oriented agendas for development in Haiti through coffee. Between the misappropriation of fair-trade premiums to the COOPCAB model's failure to deliver the business opportunities it was funded to create, COOPCAB may not be benefiting the small-scale producer in the way hoped for at its inception more than twenty years ago.

Confusion on Status of Operation Between Farmers

An interesting fact is the reality that many Haitian coffee producers cannot seem to agree on the current operating status of the COOPCAB cooperation. Two older Haitian participants I talked with claimed that COOPCAB had not been operating or purchasing beans from farmers in the last two years, while *Madanm* Augustine, a street vendor selling coffee and food, told me that COOPCAB was operating but was only buying coffee from other organizations and not farmers anymore (Nwèl; Augustine). Different still, a representative from Rebo Café, one of Haiti's biggest roasters and distributors of coffee, said that he knew for certain that COOPCAB had been buying beans from farmers continuously over the last several years (Ewald). In my conversation with a focus group of coffee producers from Savannzombi, a community close to Thiotte, there was confusion and discussions throughout the interview amongst the farmers attempting to clarify with one another if COOPCAB had been operating in recent years or not.

Ristoun

Time and again in my interviews with coffee-growers in Southeast Haiti, the concept of something called a *ristoun* was brought up. *Ristoun* etymologically can be traced back to the French language as meaning "rebate," but in the context of the Haitian farmer, *ristoun* is a designation for the added premium the farmers are supposed to receive when their coffee beans are sold internationally. In the Western context, this is called a "fair-trade" premium. The intent is that the marked-up price of goods paid by the consumer ends up supplementing the income

generated by the producers of the product to avoid labor abuse and unlivable wages that so many producers in the Global South typically endure. In theory, this concept is easy to comprehend and participate in; much of the time, more affluent consumers are willing to pay at least a marginally higher price for something if they are told it is helping people in another part of the world. However, there is some academic debate over the inherent benefit that fair trade coffee has on the wellbeing of the coffee producer as a whole. Caroline Wright's research suggests that fair-trade coffee transactions are "embedded in unequal power relations" because the consumer ultimately holds all of the power in the transaction, making it little different than the purchase of non-fair-trade coffee (665). Wright also posits that few people are totally committed to buying only fair-trade products and thus pursuing fair-trade is not a sustainable panacea for exploited coffee farmers around the world (678). With all of the potential downsides associated with the concept of fair-trade, Wright still acknowledges that consumption of fair-trade coffee still probably makes for a better world. I agree with Wright's sentiment. Undoubtedly, the fair-trade system is not perfect as it cannot "claim to solve all the injustices in our economic system today" (Clawson 44). In a theoretical vacuum, fair-trade still seems to be a more ethical choice for coffee consumers. However, digging deeper into the Haitian context of the fair-trade coffee-export industry, explicitly concerning COOPCAB, the benefits of fair-trade premiums (the *ristoun*) may not always end up back in the hands of the impoverished producers whom consumers assume it would go to.

To further investigate the Haitian understanding and operation of the *ristoun* system, I met up with a friend named Pitit Nwèl. Nwèl is a Haitian agronomist who has been cultivating coffee in Haiti for nearly fifty years. Now retired from agronomy, he currently pastors an evangelical church in Thiotte. I have known Nwel for several years and he has become a very

close and trusted friend of mine. Frantz and I both knew that we needed Nwèl's perspective to better understand the *ristoun* system as it relates to Haitian coffee. After stopping by Nwèl's house for greetings and pleasantries in August of 2020, we all decided to meet up the following day when Nwèl would have more time to talk about coffee in Haiti. The next morning, we met up with Nwèl just outside of his little patch of jungle where he cultivates coffee.

During our tour of Nwèl's coffee-growing operation, I made sure to stay close to my Haitian friends, as it would be easy for a foreigner like myself to get lost in the beautiful Haitian jungle. Nwèl pointed out practically every tree we passed by and told us what kind of plants grew on each one. Many of the trees were coffee trees, but they were all intercropped amidst dozens of varieties of plants. It was a perfect visual for how the majority of peasant farmers in Haiti practice agriculture.

After our tour, Nwèl led us back to the road. Walking behind him, I unsuccessfully attempted to dodge all of the branches and vines that his shoulders were swinging back my way. We finally got back to the road and hopped into Frantz's car to take Nwèl back to his house. On the ride back, I asked Nwèl a couple of questions about how the associations operate and how farmers join them; it was not long before we arrived at the house. Sitting idle in Frantz's car, engine still running, I began to ask Nwèl about what Haitian coffee sells for internationally. Frantz translated for me, and Nwèl responded by saying that "COOPCAB will never let [the farmers] know how much money" they sell coffee for internationally. Frantz and I started laughing incredulously, as this is the same sentiment other coffee farmers have told us. I began to understand more comprehensively that the reason some of these farmers do not know if the international or local market for coffee is better is because COOPCAB does not share international market prices with them. I was still curious how the *ristoun* fit into all of this.

Through Frantz's translation, I asked Nwèl if he thought COOPCAB attempted to keep more than their fair share of the *ristoun*. Nwèl responded to Frantz in Creole, and Frantz chuckled at his response. After composing himself, Frantz turned to me and said, "He said he knows there is something called an administration secret." Brow furrowed, I ask, "And who gets access to that secret? The board?" At this point, Frantz and I were both laughing in between sentences with one another as it seemed more and more like COOPCAB is certainly keeping more of the *ristoun* than what they share publicly. Nwèl continued to explain to us that there is indeed a committee board within COOPCAB, and when the *ristoun* comes in, the board decides internally how much money they should give out to the coffee producers. Nwèl explained that the small-scale producers rarely know if and when they will receive their *ristoun*. Nwèl ended by telling us that the entire system operates with a "take it or leave it" disposition. We thanked Nwèl and dropped him off in front of his house. Frantz and I then drove back to our hotel as the sun was setting, nihilistically chuckling the majority of the way back because of what we had learned.

After corroborating Piti Nwèl's statements with other Haitian coffee producers, it became more and more apparent that COOPCAB was not exactly doing what one would assume they would do with the fair-trade premiums they were receiving for their coffee. I asked a focus group of coffee producers in Savannzombi if they received more money for selling their coffee internationally because of the *ristoun*. They collectively laughed and resounded, "*nou pa konnen!*" (we do not know!). The group proceeded to tell me that COOPCAB did not share the price at which they sold their coffee internationally and that only when COOPCAB made a decent enough profit would they have a chance at receiving their *ristoun*. A glaring problem with this process is that the average coffee producer participating in COOPCAB's co-op system is

uncertain about how much money they should be receiving for their crop. Only the board of directors at COOPCAB knows the administration secrets of how much beans are selling for and how much they are receiving in fair trade premiums. This translates to a select few people most likely profiting well off of this export system while the average producer is left in limbo. Two participants I interviewed in this case study, whose names I will omit at their request, admitted to me that they are aware that COOPCAB and their associated leaders have misappropriated funds and resources away from small-scale producers in the past. At the end of my conversation with the focus group from Savannzombi, they told me that “the *ristoun* system is like playing the lottery. You do not know if you are going to win” (Savannzombi Focus Group).

I still firmly believe that the socially and environmentally conscious coffee consumer should seek to purchase fair trade coffee instead of non-fair trade coffee. It is very likely that fair trade products, coffee included, have a higher chance of benefiting impoverished laborers compared to their *laissez-faire* counterparts. However, affluent foreign consumers, myself included, may be ignorantly overemphasizing the positive impact that our fair-trade purchases have on the impoverished producer, especially in the Haitian context.

INCAH

The day after I met with Piti Nwèl, I traveled to Haiti’s capital of Port-au-Prince to visit the National Institute of Haitian Coffee, abbreviated in Haiti as INCAH. INCAH is a part of the Haitian Agricultural Administration, but INCAH is exclusively in charge of all things coffee in Haiti. From keeping track of national production to exporting and financing rural coffee development projects, everything is supposed to run through INCAH. After driving around the general area looking for the INCAH building, we stopped the car and asked some bystanders on the sidewalk where the building was located. Without hesitation, the two men point behind them

to a fenced-in lot with several buildings and an abnormally beautiful lawn. One of the best parts about Haitian culture is that you can strike up a conversation casually with anyone on the side of the road. We thank the two men and drive through the gate past several large and rather ornate buildings. Later, we would find out that the buildings were determined to be uninhabitable after the earthquake that struck Haiti on January 12th, 2010. The buildings had been emptied and left dormant ever since.

Pulling up to the one building that still seemed operational, I stepped out of the car with Frantz. We walked in through the front door were greeted by a receptionist seated at a desk in front of us. The building's interior had power, several oscillating fans, furniture for seating, even a couple of air conditioning units hooked up to the walls, a much more modern and Western atmosphere than what you see in the average Port-au Prince establishment. After explaining that I was a student studying coffee in Haiti, the receptionist led us to an office around the corner. Sitting at the desk in this office was *Misyè* Cleonie Atelle, the National Director for Coffee in Haiti.

After pleasantries were made, Frantz and I started asking Cleonie Atelle about some of the things we had recently discovered about coffee production in southeast Haiti. Atelle claimed that if the government were aware of any *ristoun* (the fair-trade premium) that was not given back to the farmers, disciplinary action would be taken because that would be considered corrupt behavior. While it was nice to hear this sentiment come from a government official, it was not all that comforting considering that we were almost positive *ristoun* was being misappropriated without any legal repercussion. In regards to whether or not coffee farmers were aware of the local or international price for coffee, Atelle told us that he believes coffee farmers will often portray lower levels of educational and economic intelligence than they actually possess because

they know that they will receive more assistance if they come across as worse off than they are. While I did sympathize with Atelle's general argument, as I have seen Haitians intentionally portray themselves as more destitute than they indeed are over the years, it did not seem to be a holistic answer to the questions we were asking. Many of the stakeholders I interviewed gave similar responses without conversing with one another, and while it is true that Haitians have had immense issues of dependency arise from foreign aid, assuming that these peasant farmers were constantly lying was not a good enough answer for me.

I wanted to know about COOPCAB specifically. Through my translator Frantz, I asked Atelle if he thought that the massive donations given to create COOPCAB had been worth it for what COOPCAB is doing now. Had COOPCAB achieved its goal? He attempted to divert our attention away from only focusing on COOPCAB, as there are many other cooperative programs in Haiti, but I explained to him that we had been researching COOPCAB's activities and would like to know his opinion on COOPCAB's specific operations. With a slight hesitation, Atelle continued to speak in Creole to Frantz. Frantz turned to me and said, "he said that we know that COOPCAB failed, but there are many other organizations that are stepping in," "Wait, he said he knows that COOPCAB failed?" I interjected with my eyebrows raised. Did I hear that correctly? The government official responsible for all of Haiti's coffee just told me that he knows COOPCAB has failed its intended purpose? While the translated word for 'failure' in Creole is not as harsh and definitive as to how it is used in English, he admitted that COOPCAB was not what they had hoped it would be. Atelle went on to tell us that he thinks the COOPCAB situation right now "is a result of bad management." Pinpointing the exact downfall of COOPCAB would take much more extensive research and analysis. Having the National Director for Coffee in

Haiti convey that the export-oriented, foreign-funded coffee development model failed, however, was all too relevant for me to ignore.

As a cooperative-model coffee project started in the late 90s, COOPCAB has received hundreds of thousands of dollars in donations throughout its life from Root Capital¹, an NGO doing vital, life-saving work with farmers in rural communities worldwide (Root Capital 4). While this thesis's scope is not broad or extensive enough to provide support for this claim, it is my theory that some small-scale Haitian farmers support the COOPCAB model, not for the project's intended benefits like access to industrial-grade equipment or international buyers. Instead, this model is encouraged by Haitian peasant farmers on the surface because of the opportunity for farmers to potentially receive employment, benefits, stipends, or direct misappropriation of donated project funds. Farmers may support these initiatives not because they think the initiative will help with their coffee production but rather will allow them to procure financial stability due to the project being implemented by NGOs and foreign donors. Assuming this theory to be accurate, this is not to say that the farmers who claim to support COOPCAB are being unethical. They are simply opportunistic in making the best from a situation, a hand that in large part the international community has dealt to them. There is a word in Haitian Creole called *degaje*, which means "to make do with what you have." The Haitian farmer's mindset is heavily influenced by this *degaje* attitude and could be one reason some farmers continue to support this cooperative model that does not seem to be working like it is supposed to.

¹ While Root Capital's report of the ongoing operations of COOPCAB is glowingly positive, I have analyzed the report with suspicion of subconscious bias on the part of Root Capital because they have financially contributed to COOPCAB's operations over the years.

COOPCAB has most definitely benefited Haitian coffee farmers at certain times over the years. If not for the occasional free-trade premium bonus in income, at the very least COOPCAB has provided coffee farmers with an additional industrial buyer for their coffee. The conclusion of this case study is by no means meant to obliterate the infrastructure and defame the work that COOPCAB is doing in Haiti; doing so would be counterproductive. However, it is evident from both farmers' and the Haitian government's perspective that COOPCAB has not consistently helped coffee farmers in and around Thiote. The lack of information-sharing from the top-down about the international going rate for coffee disadvantages the peasant farmer. The misappropriation of the *ristoun* fair-trade premiums deny farmers income that is rightfully theirs. Lastly, the absence of a consistent shared narrative amongst the farmers about the operational status of the cooperative proves that COOPCAB is not very transparent with all of its partners. All of these things considered, it seems these coffee farmers are not benefiting from COOPCAB's model as much as one would believe from the outside looking in.

Lessons for other Contexts

I wish to reiterate that export-oriented agendas for coffee are not inherently malevolent to farmers in every context. A critique of unhinged, libertarian neoliberalism does not equate to advocating for full-blown socialism or state-controlled development. Considering that societies around the world have developed themselves through market-oriented economies should lead one to at least partially endorse those economic models on behalf of the poor (Sider 229). Coffee production and export led Brazil to become one of the biggest economies in the world. In Rwanda, ideas have been circulating about providing "coffee tourism" for travelers to visit the coffee growing operations of Rwandan farmers, giving farmers more overall control of their product, an idea that Haiti could also someday implement for the coffee-loving tourist

(Anbalagan and Lovelock 93). The interworking's of the world and how people care for the poor could change tomorrow, but as of today, "the most effective institution impacting the world" is business (Lynch and Walls 38). So, in some fashion the impact of business should be harnessed for the poor. But that does not mean it must be international business.

My hope is that this thesis poses a second option for development practitioners for how community development must be done. I hope that the history and context given throughout this thesis influences practitioners to at the very least consider more locally-focused avenues for economic development that do not rely on foreign consumers. The cultural, historical, and economic context of a situation must first be analyzed before any single economic or development model can be deemed appropriate.

Possible Limitations

Of course, as with any business endeavor or non-profit proposal, certain shortcomings should be addressed with this research. First off, the data compiled and the research conducted for this thesis were performed by a *blan*, a Creole term that Haitians use to mean "non-Haitian." This means that while I try my earnest to uncover the hidden Haitian peasant farmer perspective, I still hold a position as an outsider to Haiti and thus my work reflects that. While it was of utmost importance to me not to let my perspectives be too influential in this research, it should be noted that information, ideas, and opinions could have been misinterpreted by both my translator and me. This could have happened either because of the language barrier on my end or the subconscious assumptions we made during the research process itself. If this proposal ever makes its way into the hands of the Haitian stakeholders I conducted this research with, and the intent is that it will, and they collectively disagree with some of the conclusions of this research,

then it should go under continuous revision from those stakeholders and be subjected to whatever course of action they believe should be pursued.

An interesting note to remember is that there was not a clear single consensus among the producers as how best to increase income through coffee production. Several main points previously listed were central to most of my interviews, but there were a plethora of different perspectives across a broad spectrum. When discussing some of my findings with Dr. Timothy Schwartz, I mentioned that the participants I interviewed might have withheld the entire truth from me, especially when considering that some of the stakeholders claimed that the international market was better than the local Haitian market. Again, the theory here is that the prospect of development projects and their financing and implementation is very enticing to the average Haitian peasant. Haitians have been exposed to more NGOs and development projects than arguably anyone. There are estimated to be between 3,000 and 10,000 NGOs operating at any time in Haiti, and the NGOs' programs bring with them the opportunity for employment and financial incentives (Polman and Klarreich). This could be the reason why some participants shared with me that they want to export all of their coffee, because they could potentially reap the rewards from the funding of a project in their community, not because they think they would actually benefit directly from the changes the project itself is making in their community.

I also want to reiterate that although this project does not intend to create more Haitian consumers of coffee and simply strives to meet the domestic need as it currently stands, it is possible a project like this could be a catalyst for increasing overall coffee consumption in Haiti. While there has been extensive research examining the long-term health benefits of coffee on habitual consumers, some metanalyses even find a decrease in total mortality, this is still a vastly debated topic (Grosso et al. 80; Je and Giovannucci 1168). For every peer-reviewed article

arguing for coffee's health benefits, there is one that challenges it. For example, it is recorded in some instances that coffee consumption can be abused, and "over-intake of caffeine may cause adverse effects" on the consumer ("Addiction Volume 113 Contents"). Anecdotally, I have also heard that occasionally younger Haitians associate coffee consumption with hypertension, a condition with high prevalence across Haiti, and thus avoid the drink (Weber). While an unintended by-product of this project could be increasing overall coffee consumption due to the increased presence of Haitian coffee in the local market, the intent is only to supply the existing consumer in Haiti with coffee grown from his or her homeland.

Conclusion

This thesis proposes the implementation of an Alliance for Peasant Coffee Farmers in Haiti. The proposed Alliance would strengthen peasant farmer's autonomy and agency in a sector that the Global North has heavily influenced. While there is strong evidence to suggest that export-oriented agendas for development are not relevant in Haiti at the moment, this Alliance would not bar Haitian participants from exporting their coffee. However, it is my assumption that if Haitian coffee producers receive assistance to grow their product, they will likely first utilize the local market for the majority of their crop. This Alliance would not attempt to create more coffee consumers in Haiti than currently exists, but it does attempt to satisfy the demand for coffee in Haiti that already exists and encourages different sectors of Haitian society to drink locally grown coffee. This Alliance also would attempt to provide resources to Haitian coffee producers that are not easily acquired in present-day Haiti, such as fertilizer and coffee saplings. Lastly, this Alliance hopes to directly supplement the reforestation efforts already ongoing in Haiti by encouraging coffee production because of the coffee tree's natural need for shade and the environmentally-friendly nature of traditional Haitian farming. The hope is that

establishing an Alliance containing these three components can help Haiti's small-scale coffee producers and consumers become copowered to improve their lives and their homeland.

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