"Imagining the Haitian Nation-Family From Domestic Patriarchalism to State Authoritarianism"

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Imagining the Haitian Nation-Family
From Domestic Patriarchalism to State Authoritarianism

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INTRODUCTION

In his analysis of the Algerian Revolution, Frantz Fanon concluded: “The family emerges strengthened from this ordeal.”1 The naturalization of the family in post-revolutionary national life has a history that far predates 20th century national liberation movements. From its birth, Haitian nationalism constituted itself as a politically gendered discourse built upon the trope of the family. On January 1st, 1804, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, lamenting that “the French name still haunts our land,” signed a Declaration of Independence that protested continuing external threats to the Haitian family: “look there for your spouses, your husbands, your brothers, your sisters. Indeed! Look there for your children, your suckling infants, what have they become?... I shudder to say it… the prey of these vultures.”2 The call to defend women and children summoned black men to action in order to rise from the depths of slavery and white supremacy to their rightful place as fathers, leaders, and protectors of the Haitian people.

The angry Declaration of Independence embraced vengeance as a duty of all Haitians who had lost family in the violent war: “Will you go down to your tomb without avenging them?... No, their bones would push yours away.”3 To Dessalines, independence from France was not enough; the new “nation-family” was not safe as long as Frenchmen maintained a presence on the island. Declaring that “the hour of vengeance” had sounded and that Haiti’s “holy armies” were led by a “just God,” Dessalines issued a proclamation on April 28th, 1804

3 Ibid.

justifying the massacre of the remaining French population: “Blacks and yellows [mulattoes]... of the same family, do not doubt, your perfect reconciliation had to be sealed with the blood of your tormentors.”4 In a divinely organized military spectacle, Dessalines baptized the Haitian nation-family in white blood. This male birthing ritual crushed the white patriarchy that had infantilized black men, and it set the stage for the nation to move forward. Appropriating all leftover French land in Article 12 of the 1805 constitution, the new state eradicated white patriarchy.

The Declaration of Independence thus began the process of imagining Haiti. The colony of children that was once divided between enslaved and free, black and mulatto, and rich and poor now became one nation-family. As Dessalines explained: “You suffered the same calamities… so the same interests now make you inseparable.”5 It marked the end of the Haitian Revolution of 1791-1804, which transformed Saint-Domingue, the most productive European colony of its day, into an independent nation-state. The Revolution had produced the world's first example of universal emancipation in a major slave-owning society, of colonial representation in a metropolitan assembly, and of full racial equality in a European colony. With the defeat of the British, Spanish, and French armies at the hand of ex-slaves and the affranchis, black men became agents of history. In proclaiming independence in 1804, the newly formed black sovereign nation of Haiti embodied the most radical movement in the Age of Revolution. This was underlined by the Declaration’s central claim that the French “are not our brethren.”6 The newly liberated Haitian family could now live free and independent of kinship with such

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5Ibid.
“monsters.” In their quest for liberty and autonomy the Haitian revolutionaries established a new model of politics based on the ideals of racial equality and universal emancipation. Haiti became a symbol of liberation that inspired slaves and revolutionaries and struck terror into slaveholding colonial powers.

The postcolonial state, however, faced myriad external and internal challenges to consolidating national sovereignty. “Aftershocks” of the revolution reverberated throughout Haiti’s history: continual threat of foreign subversion, economic blockade, and refusal of diplomatic recognition by slave-holding colonial powers. Political isolation and constant threat to national security weighed heavily on the early national leaders’ actions. Moreover, the postcolonial nation-state inherited a social order ridden with internal conflict; colonial color divisions among black, mulatto, and white and the deep class divide between big planters and small landholders lived on after independence. Big landholders strove to maintain the export-oriented plantation system in face of staunch opposition by ex-slaves, who had no desire to return to plantations. The state thus remained on a military footing to defend national sovereignty and repress internal dissent.

Alongside military measures, internal dissention necessitated the ideological reconstruction of the nation in relation to the state. Dessalines decreed in Article 14 of his 1805 constitution that all Haitians would be “children of one and the same family, of whom the chief magistrate is the father” and that all members of this family would henceforth be known as “Black.” By legally obliterating racial distinctions and conceptualizing race as a political

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category, Dessalines embraced a radical egalitarianism. In the very same stroke of the pen, however, he affirmed the necessity and “naturalness” of hierarchical family organization. Thus,

![Image](image_url)

Here, the October 1802 union of Dessalines and Alexandre Petion represents the alliance between black and mulatto families. At the feet of the two men, the chains of slavery are broken and the stone tablet references “L’Union fait la force,” nation, liberty, and the constitution. Dessalines’ representation of independence as a divine mandate of unity
between colors assumes visual form in this painting in which a white God blesses the revolutionary leaders as equals. Article 3 of Dessalines’ 1805 constitution declared: “Haitian citizens are brothers at home.”

paradoxically, the construction of “Black” as both nationality and race was organized through the ideological (father) and legal (chief magistrate) structure of the hierarchical family. The Haitian nation was never constituted as a horizontal community of equal and autonomous individuals. Rather, male citizens with means arose as privileged agents. Their violent and irrevocable obliteration of white patriarchy formed the basis of an anticolonial nationalism that denied active citizenship to women and subjugated the peasantry. Legitimate nuclear families under black patriarchs arose as the principal economic, social, and political units of the nation. Those who were not born into wealth or who lacked the bayonet were systematically marginalized. The early nineteenth century Haitian state was not an abstract bureaucratic apparatus but a structure built on the model of the patriarchal family; social power and the public sphere were defined as entirely male.

This paper analyzes uses of the family trope and the legal institutionalization of the male-headed nuclear family in order to better understand the genealogy of early Haitian nationalism. It draws on Anne McClintock’s gendered analysis of nation formation, which demonstrates the importance of the trope of the family “for sanctioning social hierarchy within a putative organic unity of interests.”

In Haiti, like in South Africa, metaphors of family naturalized hierarchies of power, labor relations, and national time from the level of the household to the nation at large. The state and the ruling elite used the trope of the family to tie together three central aspects of

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11 McClintock, Imperial Leather, 45.
12 My use of the word “naturalize” relies on McClintock’s analysis of the filiative order in the late Victorian upper middle class. For McClintock the trope of the hetero-normative, patriarchal family within the nation makes hierarchical social relations, state authority and military violence “natural;” the figure of the father and filiative imagery are projected on affiliative institutions allowing socio-economic inequalities to exist within an ideology of popular unity. Ibid., 89-94.
early Haitian nationalism: the patrilineal reproduction of citizenship; the punitive regimentation of the peasant population; and the production of the nation-state as a patriarchal family. Blurring of distinctions between erotic and political desires justified and naturalized the subordination of women to men, children to adult, and the nation’s citizens (as children) to the state (as parent). Social hierarchy was then mapped onto national history, with men embodying the forward thrusting agency of national progress, while women were not acknowledged to be active citizens or rightful occupants of the public sphere.

My analysis focuses heavily on the early Haitian constitutions, which are central to the establishment of Haitian nationalism. They function not simply as legal documents but as ideological archetypes—insofar that they project an elite imagining of the nation-state—that go beyond the political and social realities of post-independence Haiti. As Sibylle Fischer has noted, “just as we do not dismiss a dream as a misconception of reality but rather read it for insights about how someone experienced reality,” we cannot discard the constitutions as “irrelevant chimeras of elite ideology.” As foundational documents, they serve as “fantasies of statehood;” careful attention to tone and implication reveals the framers’ intent and their expressive visions of nationhood and citizenship. Contradictions, such as the strong tensions between universal liberty and the paternalistic constraints placed on laborers in Toussaint’s 1801 constitution, are attenuated by the framers’ use of the trope of the family at a legal and domestic level. It fell to the small, privileged, educated elite in colonial Saint-Domingue to take a hold on the early political reigns and engender a national culture. Visions expressed in the early national leaders’

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13 These include Toussaint Louverture's 1801 colonial constitution (1801-1802), Jean-Jacques Dessalines’ 1805 (1805-1806) imperial constitution, Alexandre Pétion’s republican 1806 (1806-1816) and 1816 (1816-1843) constitutions, and Henri Christophe's dictatorial 1807 (1807-1811) and monarchical 1811 (1811-1820) constitutions.

constitutions were echoed and reproduced in legal codes, decrees, proclamations, and laws designed to limit and control access to state resources. Likewise, public ritual consolidated powerful national symbolism and promoted broad public participation in unifying events at a time when the direction of government, economy, and society still seemed open and uncertain. The use of public ritual offers critical insight into the process of imagining a Haitian nation, creating itself anew, while borrowing from colonial traditions. Even as political regimes changed, successive Haitian elites reiterated contradictory visions of liberty and authoritarianism for the Haitian nation-family.

While recent historical scholarship emphasizes the centrality of authoritarianism and militarism to early Haitian nation-state formation, it neglects the centrality of gender to the construction of power. Robert Fatton Jr. has argued that from its birth, Haiti has sustained an authoritarian habitus—a repertoire of practices, attitudes, and behavior grounded in the material legacies of slavery, the plantation economy, and the long violent war for independence—which generated militaristic patterns of command and the archetype of messianic rule. “Presidential monarchism” thus became the main choice of Haitian national leaders who sought to sustain coercive economic systems and whose power rested on corruption and military control. The pioneering work of Mimi Sheller establishes that in this model of politics, “sword-bearing [male] citizens” became “the consummate image of the state,” justifying militarization of the state, marginalization of women, and new forms of serfdom. She notes the tragic paradox of the early national period: “The egalitarian and democratic values of republicanism were constantly

undercut by the hierarchical and elitist values of militarism.” Building on these arguments, my paper argues that use of the family trope was essential for justifying Haiti’s authoritarian habitus and militaristic culture. It enshrined men’s right to land and citizenship while naturalizing and legitimizing Haiti’s predatory authoritarian state as the embodiment of paternalistic order. In short, the family trope was the Haitian state’s most powerful ideological tool.

**DUTIES OF MARRIAGE, BOUNDARIES OF CITIZENSHIP**

Toussaint’s 1801 constitution for the post-slavery colony embraced gender hierarchy as adamantly as it rejected racism. Proclaiming family life to be the basis of an orderly society, Toussaint naturalized patriarchal nationalism in Saint-Domingue’s emerging imagined community. Good fathers made good families; good families made good subjects. Marriage, since it “tends to the purity of morals” was awarded special protection from the state. To reinforce marriage, divorce was outlawed and Roman Catholicism was declared the official state religion. Toussaint expressed concern that the social order of the colony was deteriorating in his Proclamation of November 25, 1801, which publicly charged mothers and fathers with responsibility for their children and with the duty to maintain familial order. Vehemently attacking “vagabondage” and what he saw as widespread prostitution, he entrusted the fathers of the colony to guard their wives with care and to raise their children as proper citizens. Celebrating male authority, he proclaimed: “The holiest of all the institutions among men living in society... is marriage. A good father of family, a good husband fully occupies the happiness of

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18 Ibid.
his wife and child, [and] must be in their midst the living image of the deity.”

Moreover, proper families modeled obedience to law and good citizenship: “A child who does not respect his father and mother, does he listen to the good advice of those who are strangers to him? Will he obey the laws of society…. and softer law of nature?”

Rhetoric and legal codification made the patriarchal nuclear family, governed by Catholic morality, the basis for male authority in public and private realms, eroding women’s rights and personal autonomy.

Toussaint had good reason to be anxious, for patriarchal authority had long been denied to black men. In colonial Saint-Domingue, the Code Noir allowed white masters to wield brutal power over slaves. In addition, women and children, like in most slave societies in the hemisphere, comprised two-thirds of all slaves freed by masters. Female slaves were distinctly more likely to be emancipated than their male counterparts, partly because of the prevalence of interracial sexual unions between white men and female slaves, but also because the Code Noir itself created various incentives and opportunities that favored slave women while emasculating slave men. Article IX penalized masters’ “concubinage” with forfeit of the enslaved mother and baby to the state. The same article ruled that, alternatively, the master could marry the mother, automatically giving the mother and her children freedom. This endorsement of interracial marriage meant that only mothers could wipe away slavery for their children by marrying white and joining the class of free persons of color. The Code Noir’s important article XII established that children born to slave mothers would not be free; however, children born to free mothers

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20 “Proclamation du Novembre 25, 1801,” in Ibid., 150.
21 Ibid., 146.
would be free “regardless of their father’s condition of slavery.”¹²³ This matrilineal system of inheritance infantilized enslaved black men. The *Code Noir*, which was meant to uphold racial hierarchy, reversed the traditional pattern of male inheritance among the populations of slaves and free coloreds. Children, through their mothers, enjoyed access to freedom and property. In most cases this was neither the choice of the father nor the mother, but the choice of the master, who controlled freedmen’s family life.²⁴

White patriarchal authority also challenged black men’s authority as economic providers. In pre-revolutionary Saint-Domingue, suitable marriage entailed forming bonds with partners of equal or more privileged status—typically richer and whiter. Since free women of color owned more property than their male counterparts, they were more successful in steering their children into legally recognized marriages. As many historians have noted, free women of color were especially important in Saint-Domingue’s urban economy and their prominence was quite marked in comparison to both white women and their colored male counterparts. In the city of Les Cayes, by 1753 68 percent of the free colored landowners were female while white women composed only 3 percent. By the 1780s, free women of color participated in 60 percent of urban sales and 43 percent of rural land sales, while white women constituted 18 and 11 percent, respectively.²⁵ Women of color generally brought more property to marriage than their *affranchis* partners, especially in the most prosperous couples. Following independence, much of

the land owned by women came into state control, only to be divided amongst male elites and soldiers later in the decade.

Haitian emancipatory nationalism borrowed the familial metaphors of Western society to naturalize the agency of the nation’s “founding fathers” and the subordination of the nation’s “others” within male-headed households. Citizenship in the new Haitian nation flowed from the
Presented as blessed by God and morally upright, Toussaint’s 1801 constitution created the foundations for a new imagined community in Saint-Domingue and in the independent nation of Haiti. Toussaint made clear that if the colonists of Saint-Domingue wished to enjoy freedom, they would have to uphold the moral duties of marriage, work, and obedience. While Toussaint’s new government did not last an entire year, the “Louverterien” social
project was the accepted model for the 1805, 1806, 1807, and 1816 Constitutions, sometimes without a single modification to its rhetoric.26

performance of proper familial roles, defined differently for men and women. Article 9 in the Preliminary Dispositions of the 1805 constitution proclaimed: “No person is worthy of being a Haitian who is not a good father, a good son, a good spouse, and above all a good soldier.”27 Making “worthy” citizenship synonymous with “above all being a good soldier” rationalized male superiority in a nation created through violent revolutionary war and protected from external subversion by the continued military preparedness of its male citizens. But Haitian citizenship also demanded the assumption of patriarchal responsibilities as family head. Free manhood implied the duty to protect wives and children, who were defined as dependents.

Women, who were barely mentioned in the 1805 Constitution, were excluded from active citizenship except in the roles they played in “being a mother to a ‘good son’ and being a wife to a ‘good spouse.’”28 While Dessalines’ 1805 constitution secularized marriage as a civil institution and allowed for divorce, his intention was decidedly not to favor women. His laws on divorce, released twenty days after promulgation of the constitution, specified that each case of divorce was meant to allow for a new marriage in which the husband and wife would be more compatible. Furthermore, women lost custody in divorce of boy children age seven and above.29 Although assigned to biological reproduction, women were not trusted with the social reproduction of male children.

26 Engraving. Anonymous, Toussaint Louverture proclamant sa constitution, Le Musée National Afro-Americain et le centre culture Wilberforce, Ohio, 1991. Claude Moïse defines the “Louverterien” project as: the establishment of a simple and uniform regime to control all finances and administration; the obligation of the cultivators and proprietors to work the land; ending “social degradation” by asserting Christian morality and attacking vodou and idleness; abolition and racial equality; and centralized power in the hands of a colonial governor-general.
28 Fischer, Modernity Disavowed, 268.
29 Loi sur le divorce, Lois et Actes, 95.
Endogamous marriage that consolidated social and political alliances and protected the wealth of the elite persisted in the post-independent period. However, efforts by Dessalines to bring mulatto families into the ruling group through marriage met with resistance. In 1805, Dessalines informed Pétion that a union of black and colored people was essential to the happiness of the Empire; he wanted the Haitian people to become “bronzed” by this union, in order to mute strife based on color distinctions. This prefaced his proposal that Pétion, as the best and most celebrated of the mullatoes, should marry his eldest daughter, Célimène, a proposal that Pétion declined.\textsuperscript{30} Dessalines’ offer and Pétion’s public refusal displayed the importance of women and marriage for constructing masculine political legitimacy.

During his brief two year rule, Dessalines’ the ideal for propriety in marriage, while embraced by the elite and those able to climb the social ladder, made little impact on the nouveau libres.\textsuperscript{31} Continued warfare had broken up many families and formal marriage had never been common among slaves. Haiti had also suffered a tremendous loss of life, especially among its male population.\textsuperscript{32} The resulting sexual imbalance resulted in the vast majority of children being born out of wedlock to unmarried mothers. Dessalines acknowledged the necessity of establishing a status for these children on the grounds that “it [was] important to reconcile what nature and society owe them with the political interests of the state.”\textsuperscript{33} He argued that the revolution had legitimized all Haitians; it was unjust to prevent a child’s inheritance from the

\textsuperscript{30} James G. Leyburn, \textit{The Haitian People} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), 40.
\textsuperscript{31} In practice, as everyone knew, the general was a notorious womanizer. Thomas Madiou, \textit{Histoire D’Haïti}, vol. III, 239.
\textsuperscript{32} Over 100,000 Haitians perished according to current estimates. The census taken following the Declaration of Independence in 1804 claimed the population was 380,000, indicating a loss of at least one-third of the population. Whereas men had always outnumbered women among the slave population before the revolution, women outnumbered men in the immediate post-independent period. Jeremy Popkin, \textit{A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution} (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 141.
\textsuperscript{33} Leyburn, \textit{The Haitian People}, 181; Lois ur les enfants nés hors mariage, \textit{Lois et Actes}, 77-81.
person who had given them life.\textsuperscript{34} Nothing in the law specifically promoted marriage, but every provision strengthened the family based on patrilineal inheritance and morality. It was up to fathers to recognize their children as an obligation to society. This may have undermined the importance of weddings and the legitimacy of marriage, but it reinforced the cultural attitudes favoring paternal inheritance and \textit{plâcage} (common law marriages). While the broad issues of marriage, inheritance, and legitimacy could not be solved by any leader, the efforts made by Dessalines shaped the development of the marital institution in Haiti.

Dessalines’ Constitution allowed for white women to be naturalized as Haitian citizens (and thus by definition to become “Black”). While Article 12 outlawed white property ownership,\textsuperscript{35} Article 13 neutralized Article 12’s effect on “white women who have been naturalized by the government [and] on their present or future children.”\textsuperscript{36} Following the massacre of all remaining Frenchmen and the appropriation of all French land by the government, any white women on the island would have had to be married to Haitian men, and thus, through their marriages, naturalized as Haitian and as black. In Jérémie, white women were targeted and often raped or pushed into forced marriages under threat of death. As the massacres ended in Le Cap, enraged members of Dessalines’ troops protested that the white population would never be fully extirpated unless white women, who “cursed the Haitian victory” and “regretted the reign of their [new] husbands,” died as well, or else they would raise children who espouse “French ideals.” Dessalines resisted, declaring that as long as these women married colored men and had mixed children, “they [would be] Haitian in the end.”\textsuperscript{37} On the orders of

\textsuperscript{34}Leyburn, \textit{The Haitian People}, 181-183; Madiou, \textit{Histoire D’Haïti}, III, 216.
\textsuperscript{35}Constitution impériale d’Haïti, Ibid., 56.
\textsuperscript{36}An exception to the ban on white property ownership was also made for German and Polish men who had turned against the French in the final battles for independence. Their contributions rendered them Black and Haitian.
\textsuperscript{37}Madiou, \textit{Histoire}, vol. III, 136-140.
Dessalines, white women could be saved if they agreed to marry officers of color, who were eager to marry widowed white wives of wealthy planters. The many white women who remained on the island, naturalized as Haitians by their marriage to men of color, symbolized retribution for slavery and French atrocities. If colonization inflicted itself as a “domestication of the colony … so as to divert female power into colonial hands and disrupt the patriarchal power of colonized men,” the literal appropriation of white female bodies by black men inverted the colonial dynamic, repairing black male honor.

However much the institutions of colonialism exploited Saint-Domingue’s colored population as a whole, the structures of the Haitian nation imposed a special burden on women. Haitian law increasingly subordinated wives to their husbands. In 1816, upon issuing his new constitution, Pétion declared that practical and judicial laws, including those regarding marriage and divorce, would adhere to Code Napoleon. Under the Code, women were subject to the control of their fathers or husbands, and forbidden to engage in any exchange of immovable property without their husbands’ or fathers’ consent. The Code stated that even if her husband was in jail, a wife was required to wait until his release to gain permission to engage in commerce. President Jean-Pierre Boyer opined that wives owed dutiful service to their husbands. His Civil Code of 1826 likewise modeled itself on Code Napoleon, declaring that a husband’s permission was needed for a wife to acquire and dispose of property, sue, and make binding arrangements and contracts. The denial of equal rights to married women was furthered by the 1826 Code’s specification that a Haitian woman who married a foreigner forfeited her

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citizenship.\textsuperscript{41} Never had Haitian women been able to naturalize white men as Haitian and black. But only after 1826 were Haitian women who married foreigners expelled from the Haitian national community.\textsuperscript{42} Once a Haitian woman gave her body to a foreign man (especially a white man, symbolically betraying her black nation), she was no longer qualified socially to reproduce her offspring as Haitian citizens.

Marriage for male ex-slaves held weighty significance, marking a break from the colonial past in the birth of the black patriarch. Marriage additionally signified proper communities, social order, and the possibility of a racially homogeneous nation-family. When Dessalines summoned the image of a growing Haitian nation, he encouraged Haitians to emulate a growing (male) child, whose “own weight breaks the boundary that has become an obstacle to him.”\textsuperscript{43} Throwing off the shackles of the \textit{Code Noir} and French rule was thus a form of male maturation; infantilized under slavery, colored men saw in fatherhood of proper families a tool to become “Men.” Through family, the nation indeed could be “conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship,”\textsuperscript{44} but one that excluded women from participation in defense and in “progress.” Defined as “naturally” domestic beings lacking autonomous agency, they existed outside of historical time.

\textbf{REGULATING DOMESTIC ECONOMIES}

In the aftermath of abolition, for the benefit of the “nation-family,” successive Haitian administrations sought to protect the plantation system and ensure its continued productivity.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 153.
\textsuperscript{43} “Declaration of Independence” in Dubois and Garrigus, \textit{Slave Revolution}, 189.
Despite the revolution's radical rejection of slavery and proclamation of universal equality, Haitian governments prioritized the colony’s economic wellbeing by upholding the plantation system over the right of individual self-determination of the formerly enslaved. Facing immense structural challenges in the form of economic isolation, demographic imbalance, and lack of access to foreign exchange except through large-scale production and exportation, the early leaders struggled to uphold the plantation system by imposing a harsh labor regime. As Moïse notes: “Toussaint Louverture who, after having recognized Laveaux, governor general of Saint Domingue (1793-1797) as a father figure, became himself the father of his citizens and recommended the transposition of the family model on work relations.”  

Title IV of the 1801 constitution reorganized the colony’s former slaves as wage workers whose new liberty and freedom, however, did not include a constitutional right to leave the plantations to which they had been assigned by the state. Article 14 proclaimed that: “Since the colony is essentially agricultural, it cannot be allowed to suffer even the slightest interruption in the work of cultivation;” this same article placed the plantation system under special protection of the state. To avoid that agriculture “suffer even the slightest amount,” Toussaint curtailed the freedom of ex-slaves, treating the freed masses as children who needed tutelage to become proper citizens. Toussaint personally exhorted the military to obey, artisans and agricultural workers to work, and judges to uphold the law.

In the immediate post-independence period, constitutions, legal codes, and ordinances institutionalized the principles of Toussaint’s authoritarian agrarian policy and filiative labor arrangements. Article 69 of the colonial constitution declared, “The law particularly watches

over those professions that deal with public morality, the safety, the health and the fortunes of citizens,” labeling an institution as vital as agriculture as under state control. Not only was productive agriculture an important symbol of “progress,” but the continuous threat of invasion and the need to maintain a standing army rendered the state dependent on revenue generated from taxing exports.47 “Our plantations,” Toussaint allegedly said, “are our gold mines.”48

According to Article 16, landless workers enjoyed no right to autonomous access to resources; instead, “each cultivator and worker is part of a family and receives a portion of its revenues.” Each plantation was to be a “factory that requires the union of cultivators and workers,” or, in other words, “a peaceful refuge of an active and faithful family, where the owner of the property or its representative is of necessity the father.”49 National law superimposed the culture and the rhythms of the colonial plantation cycle on the post-independent economy.

Dessalines, like his predecessor Toussaint and like Christophe who followed him, privileged agriculture as the first and foremost protected institution of the nation. There were to be no slackers in this new union; every citizen, Dessalines announced, was to consider himself either a laborer or soldier—an extension of the revolutionary discourse that citizenship brought duties as well as rights. If a man was not in the army, he would have to do manual labor. Women, since they could not join the army, had to work shoulder to shoulder with men. Such ideals of obligation were connected to republican citizenship; when civil commissioners Léger Félicité Sonthonax and Étienne Polverel’s declared general emancipation in 1793, they warned

48 Girard, Slaves Who Defeated Napoleon, 16.
that citizenship precluded “laziness or inactivity.” Economic inclusion in the nation as a “Good Haitian” required work; national independence, first and foremost, and national progress depended on agricultural production. Thus, Article 21 of the 1805 constitution and article 49 of the 1807 constitution both define agriculture as “the first, the most noble, and most useful of arts,” granting it special honor and protection. Likewise, Article 16 of Pétion’s 1816 constitution gave special privileges to agriculture: “Agriculture, first source of prosperity of States, will be protected and encouraged.” The agriculture that concerned the ruling elite was large-scale plantation export agriculture, or caporalisme agraire (agrarian authoritarianism), which required the compulsion of rural laborers to become cultivateurs portionnaires (sharecroppers). In the 1830s, Jamaican visitor Richard Hill described the sharecropping system he observed on his visit to Haiti’s Chateaublond plantation: “Their method is to divide themselves by families, and to cultivate together a part of the plantation, and they receive for a salary a portion of the product of that which they cultivate and manufacture in their division, conforming to the dispositions of the rural code.”

The vast majority of ex-slaves, who obtained little or no land, became subject to an array of restrictive laws designed to keep them tied to the plantation system. The 1807 Loi concernant la police des habitations, les obligations réciproques des propriétaires et fermiers, et des

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53 Fatton Jr., Roots of Haitian Despotism, 65.
54 Sheller, Democracy After Slavery, 94.
cultivateurs, promulgated by Christophe, mandated that once a contract was made, a cultivator could not leave the owner’s property.\(^{55}\) Disputes were to be settled in front of a Justice of Peace (invariably a landowner). Any cultivator who provoked a “movement” of any kind, by word or deed, could be tried for “disturbing public order.”\(^{56}\) Written permission was needed from a plantation manager to travel within a parish, and identification was needed to travel between communes. Cultivateur thus became a socioeconomic status that implied not just lack of economic agency and physical immobility; cut off from urban “civilization,” the cultivators came to be known as moun bwa (wood people), moun mon (mountain people), moun andeyo (outside people). In short, they formed a peasantry which Haitian elites regarded as the “other:” backwards, lacking political agency and intelligence, and associated with vodou. Stigmatized as listless, lazy masses, the cultivators were infantilized as children who needed to be disciplined by a paternal hand and remained unprepared for participatory democracy.\(^{57}\)

Following his ascension as king in 1811, Christophe maintained the big estates intact and under the control of a few successful generals who formed a new black aristocracy. His constitution of 1811 provided little formal structure for agriculture and business but gave him the absolute power to impose a harsh labor regime to guarantee the profitability of the export oriented plantation system, by then largely under direct state control. Christophe’s punitive approach was guided by his belief that Haiti’s future and independence required transforming Haitians into educated and diligent subjects. “Too long has the African race been unjustly

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\(^{56}\) Sheller, *Democracy After Slavery*, 96.

\(^{57}\) Ibid., 102; Fatton Jr., *Roots of Haitian Despotism*, 105; Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier*, 87-107.
calumniated,” Christophe wrote to emperor Alexander of Russia in 1819.\textsuperscript{58} For independence to be preserved and for the black race to progress, the subjects of Haiti had to be regimented by law and force. Curtailment of cultivators’ freedom was completed by the introduction of strictly regimented and mandatory state labor. Christophe’s 1812 *Code Henry* (adopted from *Code Napoleon*) echoed and reinforced patriarchal principles established by Toussaint’s constitution. The *Code* laid out the “reciprocal obligations” of three groups: property owners (*propriétaires*), tenant farmers (*fermiers*), and field workers (*agriculteurs/ cultivateurs*). Haitian labor arrangements attempted to glue citizens together like on a feudal family manor.

Code Henry’s ideal of micromanagement of the lives of both cultivators and proprietors reflects the political salience of the family trope. Proprietors were obligated to take care of their cultivators, “treat[ing] their respective laborers with true paternal solicitude.”\textsuperscript{59} Moreover, “they could no longer enjoy their profits in the comfort of the cities but had to organize the rural labor force and spend their time on the plantations.”\textsuperscript{60} The cultivators, in turn, were forced to acknowledge their respective managers, *fermiers*, and proprietors as paternal bosses. Christophe’s *Loi Concernant la Culture*\textsuperscript{61} spelled out every single detail of a cultivator’s workday. Reveille, rung as early as three in the morning, woke the women to prepare breakfast for the men. After breakfast, an overseer conducted morning prayers. From 4:30 a.m. till sundown—with a two-hour midday break—cultivators were to work the fields. Proprietors owed to cultivators one-quarter of all earnings along with health care, specifically all expenses of doctors visits and medicine. Moreover, proprietors were mandated to provide at least two

\textsuperscript{58} Dubois, *Haiti*, 52.
\textsuperscript{59} Sheller, “Sword-Bearing Citizens,” 164.
\textsuperscript{60} Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed*, 256.
hospitals on their property: one for general care and another for infectious diseases. Paternalistic bosses and regimented cultivators were thus charged to work together for the greater good. The greater good included encouragement of childbirth by exempting pregnant women and nursing mothers from field labor and mandating that one or two women should be reassigned from field labor to caretaking of children. No man, whether a member of the military or not, who did not derive his living from a plantation, could marry an agricultural worker, a prohibition designed to prevent female workers—potential mothers of cultivators—from leaving estates through marriage. The meticulous effort to balance responsibilities of workers and landowners reflected Christophe’s desire to legitimate the plantation structure through filiative rituals of paternalism and deference.

The elite considered those who did not work to be criminals who subverted the progress of the plantation economy and thus the nation. Of particular concern were “female licentiousness” and vagabondage, claimed to be the principal causes of social and economic degeneration since the revolution. The Loi Concernant la Culture rested on Toussaint’s repressive Règlement de Culture, which punished any individual who was “idle and vagabond;” this included “rural workers of both sexes who … left … the dwellings where they had usually chosen to reside in order to go and take refuge in another dwelling, without valid reason, in the villages, towns, or in any other place where residence is forbidden to them by the law.”62 Cultivators who tried to flee from the harsh labor of the plantation were deemed vagabonds and subject to imprisonment. The Règlement de Culture also attacked the poor, stipulating: “Begging is strictly prohibited; all idle people, beggars, women of loose morals, all vagabonds in

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towns, villages, and on roads” would be arrested by the police. Those who were without “any particular dwelling” would be assigned a place to work by the authorities.  

Boyer ascended to the presidency in 1818 determined to reverse his predecessors’ failure to revive Haiti’s plantation economy. Convinced that Pétion’s laissez-faire policy was an economic failure, Boyer wrote a new set of agricultural laws designed to remedy the gradual collapse of the plantation system. *Code Rural*, issued on May 1, 1826, outlined the most comprehensive and detailed plan for economic revitalization and for the firm implantation of serfdom. The dominating principle was the Haitian’s “obligation” to work the soil. While the first leaders had claimed regimentation was necessary for securing independence, Boyer justified such regimentation purely for national “progress” and to curtail stagnation, laziness, and idleness—all old enemies of the agricultural state. The overwhelming majority of the population would be legally attached to a plantation, watched and disciplined by a rural police, and forced to adopt familial labor arrangements where the landowners were defined as fathers of the plantation. Those who refused their “obligation” to work the soil would be severely punished and incarcerated. Discipline was performed by the rural police, controlled by a military *chef de section*, specifically appointed by the president.  

The *Code* sought to silence any dissenting voices, demanding from the cultivators obedience and respect for proprietors, renters, and managers, a reversion to colonial legal practice under *Code Noir* which legally bound ex-slaves to respect their former masters. If cultivators failed to show respect or “insulted” their managers, they could be jailed. Any sort cooperative enterprise among the laborers was strictly forbidden.

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63 Ibid.


Like Dessalines before him, Christophe poured money into national defense, most famously constructing La Citadelle Ferrière, which still stands in the Northern mountains. The fort served a practical purpose: if the French returned, the Northern Kingdom would be able to retreat and safely withstand a siege. It also served as symbol of Haiti’s determination to remain independent. To Christophe, Haiti’s fate would determine the future of the entire black race. This meant that Haiti needed to debunk the world of “false assertions” and create a nation not “deprived of…intellectual faculties,… civilization or government by regular or established law.” Unfortunately, the fort also

But the ideal of paternal discipline and panoptical state control fit poorly with Haitian reality. The system invited resistance in both rural and urban areas that foiled attempts to enforce certain aspects of the Codes, particularly those relating to mobility. The Haitian peasantry, being far from the disorganized, lazy, unwilling children they were made out to be, fled plantations, took up marronage in the mountains, or simply ignored the law. Many peasants managed to acquire their own land and thus avoid work on the big estates. Small-scale coffee production became the chief counter-plantation crop. By 1859, Haiti was the fourth largest producer of coffee after Brazil, Java, and Ceylon.\footnote{Sheller, \textit{Democracy After Slavery}, 48.} Because coffee required little land, labor and equipment to produce, could be planted in the shade of trees in mountainous areas, and could be sold in small quantities to coffee export merchants, it allowed smaller farmers an attractive alternative to the exploitative sugar economy. Other peasants chose to eek out a living on small subsistence plots. Accommodation was a necessary aspect of survival within a system in which the elite planter class comprehensively monopolized power, but some peasants resisted more tenaciously and consistently than others. Moments of struggle and moments of compromise appeared within the same historical conjuncture, but ultimately, resistance rather than accommodation prevailed. Ideals of national progress were of concern to the elite and urban classes. The majority of Haitians cared little about how foreign governments perceived Haiti or whether their forced labor contributed to the nation; what mattered to them was defending their access to land, since only land provided them with real autonomy, dignity, and freedom.
Haitian women’s economic independence embarrassed and stymied the Haitian elite. Female labor, regarded as “primitive” by Europeans, helped confirm stereotypes of Haiti as “barbaric.” But, because women controlled local marketing, which necessitated travel over sometimes great distances, and because they had independent access to credit, the state could do little to force them to conform to domestic ideals. It was widely accepted among the non-elite that going to the market was women’s work. More problematically, the large number of economically independent women who occupied urban public spaces helped foment political upheaval in spite of their disenfranchisement. They “were central protagonists in several important political events” in the 1840s. In the 1843 revolution, women in Aux Cayes composed “powerful propaganda” in favor of the liberal revolution against Boyer. Women in Léogane fired cannons against the presidential army, and finally, an “insurmountable multitude of women” stopped Boyer’s battalion of national guardsmen on its way to the capital, thus forcing him to abdicate his presidency.

Peasant resistance and female economic agency confounded the Haitian state while legitimating the state’s efforts to tighten its punitive grip over its wayward children. Only Toussaint’s and Christophe’s oppressive micromanaging of the peasantry proved successful in producing revenue. In the longer term, paternalistic rural codes and coercive agrarian policies accentuated the socioeconomic distance between the landowning elite and rural masses. While few former slaves gained real economic autonomy, Haitian military governments lacked the capital and labor necessary to make state-owned lands productive.

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69 Sheller, Democracy After Slavery, 125, 159-160.
THE PATRIACHAL NATION—STATE—EMPIRE

Destruction of colonial despotism through revolutionary violence gave birth to a new nation that would forever be deeply marked by the paternalistic guidance of its revolutionary military leaders. The “Haitian Hymn,” composed in January 1804, rang to the tune of the French “Marseillaise” evoking revolutionary battle rhythms and celebrating the head of state’s messianic role in independence:

“What? You remain silent, indigenous people,
When a Hero, through his exploits,
Avenging your name, Breaks your chains,
Protects your rights forever? (Repeat),
Honor to his martial skills!
Glory to his triumphant efforts!
Let us offer him our hearts, our incense;
Let us sing with a male and proud voice,
United under the benevolent Father,
Forever United,
Let us live and die as his true Children (Repeat),
Free and Independent.” 70

Unlike the French Revolution, which violently disrupted the traditional patriarchal model of authority, the new Haitian nation celebrated and reinforced the patriarchal authority of benevolent fathers and triumphant military heroes. This adulatory hymn of praise and thanksgiving evoked metaphors established by Saint-Domingue’s colonial administration and Toussaint’s revolutionary government. When Toussaint became Saint-Domingue’s top-ranking military officer in 1797 and boldly outmaneuvered French officials, he ruled autocratically as had been the practice under the extremely centralized French colonial system. Nevertheless, Toussaint wished to be perceived as a selfless provider for his nation-family: an indispensable father without whom chaos and civil strife would be inevitable, and thus to whom filial respect was always due. The constitution of 1801 confirmed “citizen Toussaint Louverture” as governor for “the rest of his glorious life” by virtue of both the “important services he has rendered” and

70 Composed by a certain “Ch.” Girard, Slaves Who Defeated Napoléon, 315-316.
“the desire of a grateful population.” The legacy of his 1801 constitution—absolutism coupled with paternalism—decisively shaped the development of Haitian presidential despotism; it wove autocratic rule into the very fabric of the nation’s imagining.

At 3:00 AM on July 7, 1801 (Octidi, 18 Messidor on the French Republican calendar), child drummers awoke the capital city of Cap-Français to drum rolls announcing the reading of the new colonial constitution. By 5:00 AM, the largely black colonial army and racially diverse national guard stood in La Place d’Armes, the main square. As civilian and military authorities paraded in according to precise instructions (specified by Toussaint himself), Toussaint took his place in the center between the mostly white colonial administration and predominantly black army, symbolizing the change in the new economic and racial order. According to Moïse, this ceremony sent a message to both the people and the metropole: it was an “act of confirmation” of the new power of Toussaint and an “act of foundation” of a new people. After a speech by Bernard Borgella (a white member of the constituent assembly that wrote the 1801 constitution) admonishing inhabitants of Saint-Domingue live up to the obligations of freedom (in classic French revolutionary motif), the constitution was read in full during six hours. Then, following a benedictory mass, Toussaint and his entourage retired to the government house, where a banquet had been set up for six hundred guests. This lavish feast, hosted by the notoriously frugal, Spartan Toussaint, was not about indulgence; rather, it was a spectacular display of his newly consolidated power. By imitating the colonial repertoire of parades, adulatory harangues, grand masses, and receptions, Toussaint fashioned himself as the proper and worthy governor-general for life. Tactically placed in the middle of the colonial rifts of color and class, Toussaint signified

72 Moïse, Le Projet National, 35.
73 Girard, Slaves Who Defeated Napoléon, 11-23
a savior; only through his iron rule and guidance could Saint-Domingue prosper. Indeed, to many he already represented Abbé Raynal’s Black Spartacus, arisen from the depths of slavery.  

Envisioning the colonial government as a father and the colony as a home, Toussaint opined: “A wise government must dedicate itself to support a household of good honor, respect and veneration; it must not rest until after it eradicates the last root of immorality.” Thus paternal wisdom justified a forcible control over and moral direction of activities of the children. But this was not all. Article 30 of the 1801 constitution entrusted Toussaint with the right to choose his own successor. He was above the law and enjoyed the right to interrogate and incarcerate anyone he thought might be involved in a presumed “conspiracy” against his regime. In addition, he was also placed in charge of policing and surveillance of the population, and he made all civil and military appointments. He alone could promulgate the law. Following Toussaint, successive national leaders saw the nation as their children and themselves as a father. As Moïse asserts, the first constitutions of the Haitian state were more or less toned down modifications of the “absolute personal power directly inspired by the Louverture regime.”

Also named governor-general for life by an assembly of generals in 1804, the even more ambitious Dessalines was coronated “Emperor” in 1805, head of the “Haitian Empire” who was to be “addressed as Majesty” and his “distinguished spouse” as “Empress.” The act naming Dessalines as Emperor justified “government ruled by one” as necessary in light of the past

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74 The promulgation was not limited to Le Cap. According to Thomas Madiou, the publication was sent across the island immediately following the ceremony. Madiou, Histoire, vol. II. (Port-au-Prince: Editions H. Deschamps, 1987), 121.
75 “Proclamation du Novembre 25, 1801” in Le Projet National, 150.
76 Moïse, Le Projet National, 79.
77 Moïse, Le Projet National, 33. Following in the footsteps of Toussaint’s 1801 constitution, Dessalines became governor general in 1804, but following Napoleon’s coronation in 1805 made himself into emperor. Christophe, inheriting his power from Dessalines in 1806, became the head of state for life in the North and then king in 1811. Pétion originally became president in 1807 through his 1806 constitution but his 1816 revision turned him and his successor, Boyer, into president-for-life.
grievances and Dessalines’ “virtuous” actions in securing independence. On October 8, 1805 he presided over a ceremony that replicated step for step the public promulgation of Toussaint’s constitution in Le Cap. Once again, everyone gathered to witness the reading of the act that nominated Dessalines emperor. Philippe R. Girard wonders whether the participants must have felt a strong sense of déjà vu, since many had witnessed Toussaint’s procession three years earlier. Many participants must have noticed how closely the new government of the independent nation of Haiti resembled the old colonial administration.

“Legalizing his omnipotence,” Dessalines’ constitution gave him immense political authority, from unrestricted legislative powers in article 30, to fiscal authority in article 31, to control over all internal and external issues of safety in articles 32 and 33. Fashioning himself as an all-powerful father, his Declaration of Independence reminded his countrymen: “Remember I have sacrificed everything to rally to your defense, family, children, fortune, and now I am rich only in your liberty.” However, in the same breath he warned the people that those who refused to obey the laws which were made for their “own good” would deserve and receive the punishment appropriate for an “ungrateful people.” Thus the nation’s first document was akin to a threat, an admonishment that the state, in particular the paternal leader, knew best what the people needed: that submission to the familial order of the nation-family was necessary lest they suffer dire consequences. He reiterated this demand and expectation of paternal respect in his 1805 constitution, which deemed him as “sacred and inviolable.” Furthermore, Article 17 in the general dispositions decreed that the same filiative respect was due to the state and all bosses:

79 Moïse, Constitution et Luttes de Pouvoir en Haïti, 41.
81 “Declaration of Independence” in Dubois and Garrigus, Slave Revolution, 190.
“Respect of superiors, subordination, and discipline are strictly necessary.” Punishment was due to any “sons” and “daughters” who dared to go astray.

Dessalines also established new precedents, including declaring the “birthday of the emperor and of his august wife” to be national holidays. Christophe’s 1807 Constitution likewise turned the birthday of his “cherished” wife and soon-to-be queen, Marie Louise Christophe, into a national holiday. However, by institutionalizing grandiose rituals of national spectacle in the northern state/kingdom, he far outdid Dessalines in promoting a culture of monarchical entitlement. Gathered in Le Cap on August 24th, 1807, citizens celebrated with “great pomp,” the birthday of Queen Marie Louise, the “honorable wife” and “national mother:” “mother of the unhappy, consoler of the afflicted, protector of the widows and orphans.”

Christophe’s “virtuous wife,” as the Cap newspaper Le Gazette termed her, served as a symbol of familial excellence and feminine virtue and a model for social responsibility and public life. Not stopping at birthdays, Christophe also proclaimed July 15th, their wedding anniversary (he and Queen Marie Louise had been married since 1793), a national holiday. Such festive spectacles helped to naturalize Christophe’s fierce grip on power in the North. Dramatic, imaginative, and vain, Christophe ruled for thirteen years more through personality than tyranny. Although often associated with the figure of “boogeyman” whose stringent disciplinary hand

85The only other national holidays named were Christophe’s coronation and Independence Day.
86 The “Bogeyman” has a long history in Haitian folklore and vodou. Often called the Mètminwi (master of midnight), Tonton Macoute (uncle gunnysack—after whom President François Duvalier would name his paramilitary forces), or Père Fouettard (father whipper), the bogeyman has always portrayed a man with a sack on his back who carries naughty children away.
The legacy of paternalism on Haitian national culture lived on in law and ritual as well as song. This excerpt from “Du vaudeville du Devin de village” demonstrates how Dessalines’ image of liberator, savior, and father persisted long after his death in 1806:

“Son nom, sa valeur, son courage,  
Font troubler tous les intrigans;  
Ennemi du vil esclavage,  
Il voit en nous que ses enfans,  
Chérissons sans cesse,  
Avec allégresse,  
Ce lui qui fait notre Bonheur,  
Vive l’Empereur. (bis)”

"His name, his value, his courage,  
Troubles all intriguers;  
Enemy of vile slavery,  
He sees us as his children,  
Cherish ceaselessly,  
With gladness,
was never far away, Christophe played an unconditionally loving paternal role towards his subjects as well. Presenting himself as a messianic savior of the Haitian nation-family who had “rescued it from the abyss in which its most inveterate enemies would extinguish it,” Christophe sought to naturalize the absolute authority that derived from his constitution. The mask of paternalism served not only the leader’s own ambitions but those of the elite, officeholders, and military leaders as well. With the creation of a nobility of loyal generals, the elites explicitly rejected republican institutions and portrayed the nation-state as a harmonious, integrated community in which neither class interests nor racial tensions existed; whatever conflicts of interest might arise could be best handled by the enlightened rule of the leader, the patriarchal benefactor of all.

Christophe’s incorporation of the queen into ritualized public ceremonies honored and cemented women’s domestic caretaking roles. National celebrations of familial ideals emphasized women’s secondary status in marriage and affairs of the state; a woman's proper place was under the authority of her husband, and a husband's proper place was under authority of the state. Paternalistic monarchy was simply domestic patriarchal control writ large. Christophe’s 1811 constitution institutionalized denial of the right of women to participate in the public sphere; it excluded female heirs from the throne, specifying that only “male legitimate children at the exclusion of women” were entitled to inherit power. Articles 4 and 5 laid out

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89Moïse, Constitution et Luttes, 80.
90Loi Constitutionnelle du Conseil d’Etat
provisions in case of the absence of male offspring: Article 4 allowed the king to adopt a son; but Article 5 made that adopted son’s claim to the throne illegitimate upon birth of a biological son. Merging the patriarchal family with the monarchical state legitimated the subordination of women to men along with the unchecked exercise of power by the Haitian ruling elite.

While absolutist executive and legislative power was not a universal feature of all Haitian constitutions, paternalism was certainly at the heart of political customs and expectations that grew out of the violent revolutionary war. Nation formation predicated on the nation-family created consensus that lent a fraternal character to Haitian society and legitimated dictatorial rule by military heroes. Stemming from the militarism demanded by external and internal opposition, the Haitian political system acquired a distinct deleterious character; a parade of chiefs of state, who by virtue of their leadership in the revolution ruled the country with iron hands, enacted their own constitutions and were themselves the law. Paternalism, however, gave absolute power a less brutal and cruel face. In the south, Pétion was nicknamed Papa bon kè (Good-Hearted Daddy), a reflection of his “benevolence” and “paternal grace” in distributing land to members of the military forces.\(^\text{91}\) Pétion understood that if the small mainly mulatto elite was to continue to rule, it had to co-opt the black majority by offering it a stake in landownership. Therefore, while keeping in place many of Toussaint and Dessalines’ economic practices—thereby leaving basic patterns of inequity and power unchallenged—his distribution of land to those who fought “to liberate the fatherland,” displayed his great “paternal love.”\(^\text{92}\) Despite the lack of authoritarian characteristics in Pétion’s first constitution, he exercised virtual absolute power

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\(^{92}\) Sheller, *Democracy After Slavery*, 93.
over the senate, thanks to the strength of paternalistic forms of power and control. Patriarchal absolutism from early in Haiti’s history was firmly rooted and naturalized.

CONCLUSION

Imagining a people, a nation is no simple state project, nor is it ever complete. Whatever the paradoxes and limitations, Haitian nationalism continues to offer a compelling narrative of nation identity that originates in popular as well as state imaginings. In *Haiti: State Against Nation*, Michel-Rolph Trouillot claims that: "the Haitian state and the Haitian nation were launched in opposite directions."\(^9^3\) Documenting the long history of attempts by the Haitian state to consolidate alliances among army generals, merchants, landowners, and politicians in order to achieve economic and political control over civil society, Trouillot characterizes the Haitian state as inherently predatory; it has always operated against the nation and the ideals it claims to represent. Moreover, its relative autonomy—the product of the rift between urban and rural sectors, between the small elite and overwhelming peasant majority—has fostered a political logic and conventions of governance that preclude rule for the people, let alone rule by the people.

Nevertheless, the idea that the Haitian nation embodies a liberatory and egalitarian ethic in contrast to the authoritarian and hierarchical state ignores the gendering of the nation and the ways in which private patriarchy has buttressed public authoritarianism. The authoritarian *habitus* could coexist with an emancipatory *habitus* where nation and state were imagined as one unified family; liberty—defined first and foremost as freedom from slavery, racial equality, and national sovereignty—demanded, at least in the view of the nation’s founding fathers, the

elevation of the black patriarch. Hierarchical citizenship, centralized political authority, and economic progress were mandatory for the survival and well being of the Haitian nation-family. If the state attempted to coercively control the rural labor force, it was in the name of national prosperity and thus security. If punitive means were used to quell political dissent, it was because Haiti’s wayward children required strict paternal discipline. In short, use of the trope of the family was a key tool that allowed Haiti’s founding fathers to justify authoritarian rule as protecting a putative commonality of national interests. Nothing could have seemed more “natural” than to borrow from paternalistic forms of colonial control as well as to build on the militaristic discipline that earned independence in envisioning filiative models of Haitian citizenship. Gender hierarchy, class hierarchy, and political authoritarianism are all cut from the same cloth: cloth that inextricably wove—and still weave— together both state and nation in the face of continuing domestic material scarcity and international threats to national sovereignty.

The permanence of Haitian nationalism, however, has proved powerful enough to remain cohesiveness in the face of contradiction. Parallel to elite imaginings, the popular masses have created a plethora of cultural manifestations that enrich Haitian nationalism. A recent retelling of a popular story that has become iconic is contemporary Haitian painter Madsen Mompremier’s “Dessalines Ripping the White from the Flag.” The painting depicts the widely held belief that on May 18, 1803 at Arcahaie Dessalines used his saber to cut out the white stripe—symbolizing white power—from the French tricolor flag. Importantly, it celebrates Dessalines' action, not his person; this is not a portrait of him as emperor, but the visual retelling of a popular story. He is not ruling but liberating Haiti. The armed Haitian soldiers who look on as the event unfolds are

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Prior to the 20th century the event is completely undocumented, showing up only as folklore. Since Dumarsais Estimé’s (future 33rd President of Haiti, 1946-1950) establishment of le jour du drapeau as President Sténio Vincent’s (1930-1941) minister of education, every May 18th, Haitians celebrate flagday.
represented as honorable, worthy males wearing French style bicorn hats and epaulettes. Concurrently, on the right, Dessalines’ goddaughter Catherine Flon sews together the two remaining pieces, thereby creating Haiti’s blue and red state flag.

Unlike the images propagated by elites, there is an absence of man-made monuments or a white male God, traditional signifiers of legitimacy. Instead, legitimacy stems from the embrace of the Haitian nation by all of nature. A tree bearing breasts as its fruit (symbolizing the fruitfulness and fertility of the land) ascends straight through the painting into the ocean-sky in the background. An angel provides divine assistance to Dessalines by holding the upper half of the flag. Iwa (vodun gods embodying nature) freely roam the skies in the form of feminine spirits looking upon the event. Fish swim in the ocean-sky with bi-color bits of the Haitian flag in their mouths. The female principle is both central and celebrated, contrary to elite imaginings which depict the Revolution as the product of bold action by heroic men. Mompremier’s highly symbolic painting juxtaposes the nation with nature, not with the state. The soil, the ocean, the sky, and plants and animals witness the act of forming a new Black nation: the creation of a Haitian people. Mompremier’s interpretation illustrates that as much as the elites have attempted to control the narrative, popular appropriations of "foundational fictions" give alternate spins on the meaning of Haitian nationhood.

Contemporary Haitian popular culture invokes the post-independent leaders as the cornerstone of the Haitian nation. In the hands of the underclass, the black male chauvinism that made the black state capable of challenging colonialism and slavery has been reimagined to embody a universal narrative of independence. Colorful street side portraits of revolutionaries fill the streets, iconic murals of the forefathers cover the walls, and busy taptaps (taxis) in traffic painted with the words “L’Union fait la Force” are on every corner of Port-au-Prince. The
history of struggle is made particularly present in Vodun, which personifies the complex and gendered incongruity of popular culture. Revolutionary figures, both male and female, are reborn as Iwa (by the act of returning to their ancestral land) presenting foundational fictions as living and literal. Vodun songs readily share revolutionary history; telling the story of the Iwa parallels the story of Haitian society. The modern celebration of the revolutionary past represents the ultimate reference to the collective memory that all Haitians share about their past and to the energetic force which has allowed their pride to transcend nearly two centuries of debacle.

If we continue to analyze the post-independence period solely through the lens of our idealized version of Haitian Revolution, we risk missing the agency of the masses in creating national coherence in the face of broken promises. The elites did not produce a “love” for the nation; to a large extent, they were able to rule because of the shared imagining of Haitian independence as a moment when the disenfranchised won, when equality triumphed, and when racial barriers were broken. This suggests a richness and viability of popular Haitian nationalism that is still rooted in the nation’s radical history and that continues to resist an authoritarian habitus. As Haitian women begin to contribute on an equal basis to the reimagining of Haitian nationalism, they will reshape and further strengthen it.

The Vodun Iwa Ogou, presented as a military figure, is based on Dessalines. The Iwa Marinet bwa-cheche is believed to be the Haitian Marianne who fought with Dessalines’ army and lit its cannons. In addition, the Vodun Iwa of maternal love, Erzulie, believed to be based on a black slave who allegedly fought in the Haitian revolution. Philippe Girard, “Rebelles with a Cause: Women in the Haitian War of Independence, 1802-04,” Gender and History vol. 21, no. 1 (April 2009), 1-52.
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