

5

Pigs, Peasants, and Politics in Haiti: Migdal's Theory of Peasant Participation in National Politics and the Fall of Jean-Claude Duvalier

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Abstract

This essay examines the popular movement—known as the *dechoukaj* (“up-rooting”)—that led to the fall of Duvalier and created the impetus for Haiti’s first democratic elections in over thirty years.

The essay employs Migdal’s theory of peasant participation in national politics to analyze the *dechoukaj* movement. The U.S.-directed eradication of the Haitian creole pig in the early 1980s precipitated a deep economic crisis in rural Haiti that threatened the subsistence of peasant communities. As a result, thousands of Haitian peasants turned to Catholic Church-based community groups for economic and social security. These organizations addressed the peasants’ material needs and provided channels for developing group and class consciousness.

At the same time, the Catholic Church in Haiti began to expand and articulate its political agenda. The union of a stable, national institution (the Catholic Church) with a large, motivated constituency (a newly mobilized peasantry) made the Church-based *dechoukaj* movement the most important political challenge to “Duvalierism” during the final years of the Duvalier dictatorship. It also created the foundations for continued Church involvement in Haiti’s transition to liberal democracy.

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Introduction

In the early hours of February 7, 1986, an unmarked C-141 transport plane arrived at the Francois Duvalier Airport in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Although the airport had been closed to international traffic for nearly a week, this flight received special permission to land. Dispatched from the U.S. airbase in Guantanamo, Cuba, it was to transport “President for Life” Jean-Claude Duvalier and his family to their exile in France.

As Jean-Claude Duvalier climbed aboard the American plane and closed the flight door behind him, he also closed the final chapter in the history of the brutal Duvalier family dictatorship. For nearly thirty years, Francois Duvalier and his son Jean-Claude enjoyed total control over Haiti’s political and economic life. They enriched themselves with state funds and brooked absolutely no political opposition. Their corps of secret police—known in Haitian Creole as the “Tonton Macoute”—terrorized the country through their violent enforcement of the Duvaliers’ capricious rule. This systematic and widespread violence muffled dissent, enveloping Haiti in a shroud of silence. Some observers cheered this silence and called it “stability”; most Haitians called it the “silence of a graveyard.”

In its final years, however, the Duvalier dictatorship grew increasingly unstable. Waves of protest rocked the island, shattering the silence before finally toppling the Duvalier regime. Most available analyses of the fall of the Duvalier dynasty emphasize Jean-Claude Duvalier’s gradual alienation of his father’s traditional urban support base - the black middle class. These same analyses generally locate the ultimate cause of Duvalier’s fall in the eleventh-hour withdrawal of U.S. support for his regime.¹

But to attribute Duvalier’s eventual fall to urban and international actors is to reduce a complex chain of actions and reactions to its final pair of links. For while political elites in Port-au-Prince and policy makers in Washington may have in fact swung the axe that beheaded “Duvalierism,” it was a growing network of rural-based, peasant-led revolts that bound, gagged, and led Duvalier to the block.

In the early 1980s a broad-based, popular movement, known in Haiti as the *dechoukaj* (“uprooting”), sprung up in the countryside under the protective wing of the Roman Catholic Church. It was this movement that organized Haiti’s peasants and mobilized political dissent, shaking the dictatorship to such an extent that by early 1986 the Reagan Administration felt obliged to orchestrate the departure of Jean-Claude Duvalier in order to preserve socio-economic stability in Haiti and in the Caribbean region.

Yet despite the compelling drama of this uprising—a political event that more closely resembled the peasant revolts of the middle ages than the sophisticated middle class marches and marxist guerrilla movements of modern day Latin America—the *dechoukaj* has received little attention from

scholars. The few studies that do exist tend to describe the riots and demonstrations that led to Duvalier's ouster as "spontaneous" or "unexpected." Words like these, however, have little explanatory value. Rather, to understand the fall of Duvalier, certain questions must be asked of the *dechoukaj*. Why, for example, did poor peasants in the poorest country in the hemisphere "suddenly" decide to incur the substantial risks of opposition to the Duvalier regime and its brutal corps of Tonton Macoutes when, for three decades, the benefits of silence had outweighed the costs of politics? Why did the peasants who participated in the movement feel that they would succeed when other more powerful groups had tried before and failed? What triggered this remarkable participation, and what forms did it take?

At the root of this increased participation was the economic crisis that gripped Haiti in the early 1980s; a crisis so profound that it threatened the very subsistence of peasant communities throughout the Haitian countryside. During this same period, the Catholic Church took a new role in Haitian politics through a participatory approach to community organization. Through its new program, the Church offered resources, direction, and a community of support—three things desperately needed by rural Haitians reeling from the economic crisis. The union that developed between the Haitian peasantry and the Catholic Church during the final years of the Duvalier regime served as the basis for a process of popular participation in political affairs that led from the *dechoukaj* of the early 1980s to the democratic transition of the early 1990s.

Like the Hydra, Duvalierism initially sprouted a new head upon Duvalier's departure, in the form of a military-dominated "Provisional Council of Government." The series of military dictatorships that followed were in many ways even more brutal than the Duvaliers; thousands of Haitians lost their lives in political violence after 1986. But today, a democratically-elected president sits in the National Palace in Port-au-Prince, thanks in large part to political forces formed during the *dechoukaj*. Father Jean Bertrand Aristide was carried to victory in the December 1990 elections on the shoulders of the same movement that pushed Jean-Claude Duvalier from power nearly five years before. Indeed, the electoral victory of Aristide, himself an important actor in the once-clandestine movement, represents nothing less than the institutionalization of the *dechoukaj*.

Migdal's Theory of Peasant Participation in National Politics

In *Peasants, Politics, and Revolution*, Joel Migdal presents a generalized theory of peasant participation in political movements and revolutionary organizations. His theory provides an appropriate analytical framework for examining the case of Haiti's *dechoukaj*. Migdal focuses his analysis at the

level of the village, and begins his formulation with an alternative theoretical explanation of why peasants abandon what he calls an "inward-orientation" and turn to the world "beyond the confines of the village."

Peasants are initially motivated to look outside the village when a sustained economic crisis resulting from unequal inter-state relations creates a subsistence-threatening situation. At this point, peasants are not politically or ideologically motivated to participate. They look outward in the search for an alternative system of economic relations to guarantee their subsistence.

As peasants begin looking beyond the scope of the village, they encounter economic and political institutions that are skewed against their interests. Their existence is no less precarious outside the village than inside. Peasants soon turn to political movements and organizations that can offer security in an uncertain outside world. Migdal identifies two seldom examined, but crucial, components of peasant participation in national politics. First, he describes the initial motivation for participating in a political world that had for so long been at best neutral and, at worst hostile, to peasant interests. Second, given this impetus to participate (which Migdal limits initially to the material interests of the individual peasant), how is it that peasants develop the group and, eventually, class consciousness necessary for effective participation in the national political arena?

Migdal claims that in the beginning peasant political participation is a measured response to the material needs of the individual peasant. But here, he breaks with conventional social theory which describes peasants as inherently conservative and rooted in a "private property consciousness." Migdal, by contrast, believes that peasants can acquire both group and, eventually, class consciousness. He traces the trajectory of revolutionary consciousness in peasants in a four step progression:

1. Peasants accommodate to revolutionary institutions.
2. Peasants seek individual material and social gains from the revolutionaries.
3. Peasants seek collective gains for their particular group, segment, or village.
4. Peasants seek an overthrow of the present political order to be replaced by the personnel, institutions, and programs of the revolutionary movement.²

The ultimate quality of peasant consciousness depends on the nature of the social and political goals of the specific movement. Over the course of an extended and mutually beneficial relationship, a revolutionary movement will instill a revolutionary consciousness in the participant. Although peasants must first receive individual benefits for their active support,

eventually they are willing to pursue collective goals with no immediate personal gain.³

The process of participation suggested by Migdal helps explain the eruption of peasant-based protest beginning in 1984 and ultimately leading to the fall of Duvalier in early 1986. With this theoretical tool, peasant protests that were spontaneous and unexpected are perceived to be gradual and, in retrospect, the outcome of a political process initiated long before the ultimate demise of the dictatorship.

Economic Crisis and the Origins of the *Dechoukaj*

Mats Lundhal, a distinguished analyst of economic and social issues in Haiti, writes that in Haiti, "most of the symptoms that are usually associated with underdevelopment are found in a relatively pure form."⁴ Haiti is the only Latin American country to be included in the World Bank's "low-income economies" category, joining such countries as Ethiopia and Bangladesh in the lowest sphere of underdevelopment known as the "Fourth World." Haiti's social and economic indicators are some of the worst in the hemisphere: the 1988 per capita income of US\$330 (US\$30 for lowest 17 percent of population), a life expectancy at birth of 54, a daily calorie supply per capita of 1,784 (*down* from 2,007 in 1965), and a illiteracy rate hovering around 80 percent.⁵

Economic underdevelopment alone is unlikely to trigger broad-based, peasant-led political upheaval. Peasants and peasant societies have developed mechanisms to cope with the long-term problems posed by underdevelopment. Migdal's "economic crisis" refers to a relatively sudden, well-defined departure from the long-term norms of poverty in peasant societies. These crises challenge traditional survival mechanisms, threaten peasants' subsistence, and prompt village society to look to outside institutions for survival. Moreover, Migdal's crises have a unique source—the "shrinking world" of nineteenth and twentieth century economic imperialism.⁶

The eradication of the creole pig in Haiti sparked just such an economic crisis. Until 1979, the indigenous, or creole, pig played a unique and vital role in the Haitian peasant economy. A piglet could be purchased for \$US10, raised at minimal expense by leaving it to forage on its own, and sold as a mature hog a year and a half later for as much as \$US180.⁷ The creole pig was a financial asset, an important aspect of the rural ecology, and an integral facet of the peasant agricultural system.

According to a 1983 report from USAID, 80–86 percent of rural households in Haiti were raising creole pigs before 1979.⁸ The creole pig was not only central to the peasant economy as a whole, but to the poorer peasants in particular. Poor peasants raised and owned pigs in Haiti, large landowners

and speculators generally did not. Thus, for peasants at the edge of subsistence before 1980, the creole pig provided insurance against financial catastrophes such as the occasional bad harvest or unexpected illness that regularly plague peasant existence.

In 1979 African Swine Fever spread to Haiti from the neighboring Dominican Republic. Within two years, the viral disease had killed an estimated 250–300 thousand pigs, or nearly one third of the pig population in Haiti. An almost equal number were slaughtered in panic sales as the disease spread. By 1982 the peasant economy had already suffered the loss of nearly two-thirds of the pig population—a substantial blow to the subsistence of hundreds of thousands of poor Haitian farmers.

At this time, the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture for the Reagan Administration, Bob Bergland called the spread of African Swine Fever in Haiti an “emergency situation” that threatened to destroy the swine industry in the United States and neighboring countries.⁹ The governments of the United States, Canada, and Mexico, in a display of international cooperation worthy of a better cause, assembled the funds necessary to persuade the Duvalier regime of the need to eradicate the creole pig. The Haitian Government quickly established an independent agency, the Project for Swine Fever Eradication and Swine Industry Development (PEPPADEP), to administer the slaughter and planned repopulation of the pigs. By June 1983, one U.S. official estimated that only 40 pigs remained in Haiti.¹⁰

Corruption and mismanagement of the government’s eradication program exacerbated the effects of the loss of the pigs on the poorest peasants. One observer noted that when the slaughter finally began, pigs were no longer dying of African Swine Fever in Haiti.¹¹ Although PEPPADEP received funds to compensate the owners of slaughtered pigs, reports suggest that a portion of those funds may have ended up in the pockets of officials administering the program. An AID analysis estimated that only \$0.50 out of every \$1.00 earmarked for reimbursement actually reached the pig owners.¹²

The eradication of the Haitian creole pig left no uninfected pigs to serve as breeding stock for a repopulation project. The total slaughter occurred despite reports that there were tens of thousands of uninfected pigs, including the entire population of pigs on the Island of La Tortue.¹³ The elimination of the creole pig meant that efforts to repopulate were entirely dependent on foreign stock. After a two-year delay, the repopulation program used a breed of white pig from Iowa that quickly proved unadaptable to the conditions of rural Haiti. Those peasants who eventually bought a new pig faced a higher price for a piglet (the price increased to approximately \$100) and had to incur additional expenses for the food, shelter, and veterinary care for the Iowa pigs. Such extraordinary expenses “not only put pig raising out of reach for the rural majority, but... also

transformed the role of pigs from serving as a virtually cost-free 'bank account' to becoming a debt-producing, risky investment."¹⁴

The lowest levels of Haitian peasant society suffered most from the economic shock of the eradication program. Like a one-time lump sum tax on the peasantry, the slaughter of the remaining population of indigenous pigs, combined with the depressed market price for pigs sold before slaughter resulted in an estimated \$12–15 million short-term loss for Haiti's poorest peasants.¹⁵ The permanent loss of income and security caused by the long-term shift of the pig industry from the lower to the upper strata of peasant society is incalculable. Due to the pig eradication, poor peasants were forced to turn to loan sharks, high interest credit purchases, and, when necessary, land sales to cover extraordinary expenses that would normally have been covered by the sale or slaughter of a pig. Thousands of Haiti's peasant households, already living on the edge of subsistence, found themselves unable to balance their accounts in the wake of the pig eradication.

To make matters worse, the pig eradication program began during an unprecedented recession in Haiti. The world economic recession took its toll as high oil prices and sinking coffee prices caused a foreign exchange crisis that paralyzed the economy. Tourism also declined after 1981 when the U.S. Center for Disease Control classified Haitians as a "high risk group" for the AIDS virus. In 1980 the number of tourists visiting Haiti peaked at nearly 200,000 visitors, most of them from the United States carrying much-needed hard currency for the tourism industry. By 1983, the number dropped to 40,000 and continued to drop as the political crisis grew.¹⁶ Over the last decade of Jean-Claude Duvalier's rule, the percentage of Haitians living in extreme poverty almost doubled, climbing from 48 percent in 1976 to an incredible 81 percent in 1985.¹⁷ By 1982, a World Bank report concluded that Haiti was "suffering its worst economic crisis in several decades." The same report described the condition of Haiti's poor during the early 1980s as "so characterized by malnutrition, illiteracy, disease, squalid surroundings, high infant mortality and low life expectancy as to be beneath any reasonable definition of human decency."¹⁸

During the early 1980s there were "forces at hand that *consistently* and *systematically* made it impossible for large numbers of ... village households to balance their accounts"—the necessary condition for a peasant to shift from an inward to an outward-orientation.¹⁹ Given the structure of Haiti's rural economy, Migdal's theory would predict that outward-oriented peasants would soon find the social and economic institutions outside to be "hostile" and "incomplete." Peasants would then turn to political organizations and movements that offered the material security that their village society or the larger economy were unable to provide.²⁰

This is, with some qualification, what happened in the early 1980s in rural Haiti.

Peasants, Politics, and Duvalier's Haiti

During his fourteen years in power, Francois Duvalier carried out what his son would later call Duvalierism's "political revolution": liquidating or co-opting every non-Duvalierist organization from the Haitian Army to the Boy Scouts. Upon his death in 1971, Francois Duvalier bequeathed to his son the office of the Presidency for Life, the corps of Tonton Macoute to jealously guard the office for him, and a political field without a single political party, opposition trade union, or social club not under direct Duvalierist control.

The Roman Catholic church in Haiti did not escape Francois Duvalier's sweeping grasp. Church-state relations were particularly tense during Duvalier's early years in power. His cultural nationalism clashed with the foreign-dominated clergy of the Haitian church. Duvalier purged the church of uncooperative clergy and exiled a number of mostly French priests, nuns, and even bishops. After nearly seven years of conflict, the Duvalier government and the Vatican reached an agreement to promote the "indigenization" of the Haitian church. Duvalier quickly named a Haitian Archbishop and appointed Haitians to all but one of the country's bishoprics. When Jean-Claude took over the Presidency for Life in 1971, he also inherited a church hierarchy stacked with pro-Duvalier Haitian clergy.

The Haitian church in the early 1970s, however, was just beginning to experience the social and political activism that had characterized liberation theology and the Catholic church in Latin America since the late 1950s. Francois Duvalier's control over the Haitian church precluded significant Haitian participation in this movement, but with his death, "clergy who were inspired by [liberation theology] heightened their awareness of Haiti's problems and, willing to test the new president, began to speak out for change."²¹

Throughout the decade, the Catholic church of Haiti quietly sowed the seeds of change. Although the hierarchy of the church remained largely conservative, the "body" of the church—priests, nuns, and layworkers—continued to test the boundaries of official tolerance for criticism of the Duvalier regime. More importantly, these church activists spearheaded efforts to establish and coordinate several new forms of non-Duvalierist, grassroots peasant organizations in Haiti. In 1973 Father Yvon Joseph, a Haitian priest with the Holy Ghost Fathers, founded the Diocesan Institute for Adult Education (IDEA) in northern Haiti.

IDEA began with the goal of creating a pool of trained peasant leaders, known as "animateurs," who would be "generalists skilled in raising peasant awareness, helping peasants identify and plan [development] activities, and forming [peasant] groups."²² These groups would have two principle activities: economic development (usually raising livestock or working a piece of land together) and "conscientization." IDEA was soon joined by church-based peasant training centers and peasant organizations

in several other parishes and dioceses. The groups all shared largely the same goals and employed similar methodologies.

In 1976 the bishops of Haiti, perhaps drawn into the social arena by the activism of these parish-based organizations, "launched an ambitious research effort to explore the material and spiritual needs of Haitians and their wishes concerning the church."²³ Their research found that church members had a "widespread and deep desire for more group life, including groups devoted to prayer, study, and work and not dominated by the ordained hierarchy."²⁴

These findings accelerated the formation of both the "ti legliz," or little church, and the school-centered youth groups. Under the rubric of liberation theology, "Basic Christian Communities" developed in villages throughout Latin America in the 1970s. The *ti legliz* network was formed in the image of these "Basic Christian Communities" and spread quickly with official church sanction. The *ti legliz* flourished particularly in the north of Haiti, where the Bishop of Cap-Haitien, Bishop Gayot, gave the program unparalleled support. The youth groups that formed were a combination of the *ti legliz* and the peasant groups. The student groups were organized through the rural Catholic school system and were under the direction of parish priests. These student groups were unique in their emphasis on the study of social questions without any accompanying economic activity. Despite their important role in the eventual fall of Duvalier, there are no published studies of these youth groups.

The growing networks of peasant groups, *ti legliz*, and Catholic school-based student groups created a new force in Haitian politics that fits Migdal's description of a peasant-based political movement. They provided a channel for peasant political participation by offering an alternative path to economic security through an institutionalized system of marketing approaches and by providing training for more effective integration into the national political arena. But members of Haiti's peasant movement were not solely driven by the material incentives to participate. Participants showed a general willingness to defer material gratification. Organizational participation led to a greater degree of group consciousness and solidarity even among poor and illiterate peasants. As a result, the organizations were able to mobilize a broad-based movement with social and political goals that opposed those of the regime in power. This movement soon developed a constituency relationship with the church leaders who were strong critics of the Duvalier regime.

The *Dechoukaj*—The Church-Led Mobilization and the Fall of Duvalier

As African Swine Fever and the pig eradication program exacerbated Haiti's severe economic crisis, the Catholic church emerged as the only

political challenger to the rule of Jean-Claude Duvalier. The absence of other opposition groups may have proven an advantage to the church. At the local level, priests were often the only political leaders and were relied on to gather resources, introduce innovations, and articulate local needs.²⁵ At the national level, the church's traditional role as collaborator with the state, together with the still nominally conservative church hierarchy, left a certain degree of political space for the Catholic church in the early 1980s.²⁶ Moreover, unlike many of its counterparts in the rest of Latin America whose relationships with Communist parties and guerilla movements have traditionally been problematic, the church in Haiti was "free to pursue a social change orientation unrestrained by the political complications a Communist presence would introduce."²⁷

The visit of Pope John Paul II to Haiti in March 1983 strengthened the church's political commitment to social change. Duvalier received the Pope, perhaps in the hope that the official recognition of his government implied by the visit would serve to politically legitimize his regime. The result of the visit, however, was quite the contrary. During an outdoor mass for more than 200,000 Haitians in Port-au-Prince, the Pope declared:

"The Christians [in Haiti] have noted that there is division, injustice, excessive inequality, degradation of the quality of life, misery, hunger, fear... They have thought of the peasants who are unable to earn a living from the land, of the people who live on top of each other in the cities without work, ... of the victims of various frustrations... Things must change."²⁸

The Pope's call for change did not go unheeded. By conferring the full institutional support of the transnational church for the Haitian church's emerging social program, the Pope's visit fueled an accelerated assault on the Duvalier regime.

In response to the Pope's appeal, the Haitian Episcopal Conference quickly published its "Declaration of the Bishops of Haiti on the Foundations of Church Intervention in Social and Political Affairs." The declaration described the fundamental principles that justified church intervention in national politics: the dignity and primacy of the human being, the guarantee of the common good, and the preservation of political society for the common good.²⁹ The bishops' declaration was released to the public with a document entitled the "Global Plan of the Conference of Haitian Religious," which promised an increased contribution "in concrete terms" to the promotion of the activities of peasant groups, "ti legliz," and youth groups." These activities would increase religious faith and help unify the urban and rural populations.³⁰

The church attacked Duvalier through the various types of peasant

groups, an increasingly vocal radio station ("Radio Soleil"), an official monthly publication in Creole ("Bon Nouvel"), and a pulpit in every diocese, parish, and village from which to denounce Duvalierist political excesses and social injustices. These forms of mass communication were extremely important as the Church social program moved from a local to a national level in the following years.

By 1984 the effects of the bishops' message became visible.³¹ Amid increased tension in church-state relations, riots broke out in the town of Gonaïves in May 1984. Crowds took to the streets chanting "down with hunger, down with misery." Police and soldiers fired into the crowds and killed at least two local residents.³² The international press focused on the crowds' demands and labeled the disturbances as "food riots." However, the demonstrations in Gonaïves were clearly a political signal. The riots were triggered by the apparently arbitrary beating of a pregnant woman by uniformed army personnel—not an uncommon occurrence in Haiti in 1984.³³ But the Pope's speech in 1983 had emphasized the violation of human rights under Duvalier, and by reacting as they did in May, 1984, the people of Gonaïves appeared to respond to church calls for a stand against the regime's abuses. The riots in Gonaïves spread to several other cities but were just as quickly put down.

The Duvalier regime did not hesitate to send a signal back to church social activists. In November of 1984, the government arrested "over 30 church development workers, agronomists, and agricultural economists, most of whom were affiliated with IDEA."³⁴ The Haitian government's analysis of events in 1984 led it to conclude that the Catholic church—and more specifically the rural development branch of the Catholic church—was ultimately responsible for the growing political tension in Haiti. Once again in April of 1985, the Duvalier government arrested and expelled a number of Catholic priests working with local "ti legliz," reinforcing the message that the government had associated increasing unrest with the Catholic church program for peasant organization.³⁵ Clearly, by early 1985, the lines were drawn between the church and the growing peasant movement on the one hand, and the Duvalier regime on the other. It would not be long before some of Duvalier's supporters in Washington and Port-au-Prince would begin to reassess their interests in the continuation of Jean-Claude Duvalier's rule.

The Haitian church, including the hierarchy, heated up its anti-Duvalierist rhetoric during the spring of 1985. The church organized several solidarity marches with the poor in Port-au-Prince and in the urban centers of the countryside. Nearly 80,000 people listened in Port-au-Prince as Archbishop Ligonde assailed "those who live in opulence while the masses live in poverty."³⁶ Church marches and sermons openly condemned unemploy-

ment, poverty, repression, and torture. At the same time, the transnational church had declared 1985 "Year of the Youth." In Haiti, the politically active church-based youth groups took the slogan to heart and organized a tight network of groups through national congresses and constant communication. The church at all levels prepared for a confrontation with Duvalier.

The confrontation came in the form of a referendum on a number of proposed constitutional reforms, the most significant of which would theoretically allow for the existence and functioning of political parties. The referendum scheduled for July 22, 1985 was little more than a democratic farce to "legitimize the continued hegemony of the president."³⁷ Church leaders and radio station personalities were calling for a national boycott. On July 20, a Belgian priest who opposed the referendum, the 78-year-old Albert de Smet, was beaten to death in his rural parish. His murderers were never found, although they were reputed to be members of the local Tonton Macoute. Three other Belgian priests were deported including Hugo Triest, the head of Radio Soleil. Finally, the regime silenced Radio Soleil by cutting the telephones and electricity to the station shortly before July 22.

The referendum passed with typical Duvalierist results—99.8 percent of the votes supported the proposed reforms.³⁸ In response to the murder and expulsion of the Belgian priests, the church sponsored a march in Port-au-Prince and a day of fasting and prayer. The referendum was a landmark for both sides. For the Duvalierists, it signalled the beginning of Duvalier's slide from power, as the government found itself allowing, and then cracking down on, a degree of opposition unheard of under Francois Duvalier. For the church, the support for the boycott of the referendum was the first demonstration of the size and strength of the anti-Duvalierist movement in Haiti. The church, together with the poor it had decided to champion, grew increasingly courageous.

At the end of November 1985 an unprecedented wave of protest struck Haiti. It began, again, in Gonaives, triggered by the arrest of a popular opposition figure and by a growing foreign exchange crisis that led to a national shortage of gasoline. The gas shortage disrupted transportation in the country, cutting off crucial deliveries of relief food throughout Haiti.³⁹ On November 27, crowds took to the streets in Gonaives shouting "down with misery," "down with dictatorship," "long live the army." They blocked the road going through the city and stopped a gasoline tanker demanding that it fill the pumps of Gonaives. The army eventually dispersed the crowd without incident.

But the next day—November 28—was the anniversary of a brutal crackdown in Haiti, and the students of Gonaives organized demonstrations of their own to commemorate the original crackdown, adopting the slogans of the previous day's protests. The student-led demonstrations were met with violent repression from state security forces. Three school

children were killed on November 28; one of them was shot while standing in a schoolyard, away from the actual demonstration.⁴⁰

The news of the deaths was widely broadcast on Radio Soleil and the Protestant radio station, Radio Lumiere. Demonstrations spread to towns throughout the countryside. The youth movement had three martyrs, more than enough to spark a nation-wide mobilization of the student network. A letter circulated shortly after the death of the three students in Gonaives captures the mood of the youth groups:

[The three students shot in Gonaives] died so that all Haitians could live and their deaths should serve as an example for all of us...

Young people, can we count on each other?

Young people, can the Church count on us?

Young people, can the country of Haiti count on us?

Young people, shouldn't this horrible situation change?⁴¹

The Gonaives demonstrations shook the Duvalier regime. By the beginning of 1986, "demonstrations against the government including students, merchants, and others were spreading to many other [towns]. Schools were boycotted and businesses were closed. Demonstrators cut road access between Port-au-Prince and other major cities."⁴² Almost two years after they began, the demonstrations finally reached the middle and upper classes in Haitian society. Professional associations and even the Haitian Chamber of Commerce released guarded messages in support of the anti-Duvalier movement. But the Catholic church remained "at the forefront of what was popularly known now as the revolution. Throughout the crisis its more radical spokesmen such as Bishop Romulus [of Jeremie] had persistently criticized the regime in interviews and broadcasts, while locally the hundreds of *ti legliz* groups had provided a structure for local political discussion."⁴³ At a huge demonstration in Cap-Haitien—the first demonstration to cut across all layers of Haitian society—the Catholic radio station broadcast a recording of the Pope's homily from 1983. As the dictatorship crumbled, one observer compared the role of the Church in Haiti to the Iranian revolution of 1979.⁴⁴

Finally, the costs of maintaining Duvalier in power for both his domestic and international supporters began to outweigh the risks of removing him. Despite difficulties in arranging his exile, international and domestic forces eventually prevailed as Duvalier fled Haiti for France on February 7, 1986.

Conclusion

Migdal's theory of peasant participation in national politics is a useful paradigm for understanding the birth and development of the peasant movement in Haiti. As a deep economic crisis hit rural Haiti in the late 1970s

into the early 1980s, peasant communities throughout the countryside found their very subsistence threatened. Upon discovering the economic institutions outside of their communities to be hostile to their interests, thousands of Haitian peasants turned to church-based peasant groups for economic and social security.

As peasants continued with the church-based groups, not only were their material needs addressed but, through Bible study and directed discussion, they came to examine the exploitation and injustice that stood as obstacles to Haiti's national development. The heightened awareness, when combined with the leadership and group skills gained through participation in the groups, gave the peasants an increasing sense of efficacy. This made it possible for many of the peasants to go beyond their immediate material needs and develop a sense of group and class consciousness.

At the same time, the only national institution in Haiti outside of the state—the Catholic church—began to articulate its political agenda. During the 1970s, the social program of the church expanded to include the new peasant associations. By the early 1980s the church had developed an explicitly political agenda. The visit of Pope John Paul II to Haiti in 1983 spurred its growing intervention in social and political issues. Thus, while peasants moved to find the church, the church was moving to find the peasants.

The union of a stable institution with a large, motivated constituency served to make the Catholic church the most important political challenger to Duvalierism during the final years of the Duvalier dictatorship. As successive peasant-based demonstrations shook the regime, it was only a matter of time before Duvalier would fall.

Migdal's theory does not capture all the forces active in the fall of Duvalier. Clearly the black middle class and national bourgeoisie played an important role in Duvalier's departure. By 1986 their growing disaffection with the regime, for different reasons than the peasants, helped form a national consensus on the removal of Duvalier. Haiti's most important international patron, the United States, turned this national consensus into an international cause. As early as 1982, United States pressure on human rights abuses may have helped anti-Duvalier forces. But the peasants' courageous defiance of the Duvalier regime in the streets forced these supporting actors to turn their backs on their former ally. Any analysis which excludes the role of the peasants sees only the surface ripples on the greater sea of change. It is the deeper current of change—not traditional urban elites or international forces—that propels political events in Haiti today. For with the election of Father Aristide, we are witnessing the formalization of popular participation in state affairs, the institutionalization of the *dechoukaj*.

Notes

1. See James Ferguson, *Papa Doc, Baby Doc—Haiti and the Duvalier's*, (Oxford, T.J. Press Ltd., 1987); *Comment—Haiti*, Catholic Institute for International Relations (England, Russell Press Ltd., 1988).
2. Joel Migdal, *Peasants, Politics, and Revolution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974): pp. 249–250.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Mats Lundhal, *The Haitian Economy—Man, Land, and Markets*, (New York, St. Mary's Press, 1983) p.23
5. World Bank, *World Development Report 1988*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1988) Statistical Appendix.
6. J. Migdal, *Peasants, Politics, and Revolution*, p. 91.
7. Yves Joseph, "Peste Porcine: \$10 + 15 Mois (Dechets + Soins) = \$180 ou L'Equation de Subsistance du Paysan," *Petit Samdi Soir*, No. 430, May 1-7, 1982.
8. *Swine Production (Interim PID)*, a draft by J. Copeland, D. Ferguson, Raul Jinojosa, Sharon K. Matter. Port-au-Prince, 1983.
9. J.DeWind, D.Kinley, *Aiding Migration: The Impact of International Development Assistance in Haiti*, Immigration Research Program (New York, N.Y.: Center for the Social Sciences, Columbia University, 1986), p.119.
10. *Ibid.*, p.120.
11. Bernard Diederich, "Swine Flu Ironies: The Slaughter of the Haitian Black Pig," in *Caribbean Review* No. 14 (1): p.16.
12. J. Copeland, et al., *Swine Production (Interim PID)*, p. 29-31.
13. Interview, Fritz Longchamps, director, Washington Office on Haiti, 4/20/89.
14. J. DeWind, D. Kinley, *Aiding Migration*, p.122.
15. J. Copeland, et al., *Swine Production (Interim PID)*, p. 30.
16. J. Ferguson, *Papa Doc, Baby Doc*, p.81.
17. from: Catholic Institute for International Relations, *Haiti—Comment*, p. 13.
18. *Ibid.*, p.12.
19. J. Migdal, *Peasants, Politics, and Revolution*, p. 91 (emphasis in original).
20. It should be emphasized that as a result of the crisis, many thousands of peasants migrated from their villages, leaving the countryside for Port-au-Prince or joining the growing tide of Haitian emigrants who, in small, rickety boats, risked the open waters of the Caribbean to reach the U.S. or the Bahamas in search of employment. Many more thousands remained, however; instead of risking hunger and drowning on the high seas, they risked the wrath of their local patron or the Tonton Macoute by choosing to participate in the Church-based peasant movement. When the United States and Haiti signed an agreement in 1981 that permitted the former to prevent, by force if necessary, the further arrival of Haitian immigrants, the out-migration route was blocked, and the peasant groups grew into an even more important venue for peasant survival.

21. M. McClure, *The Catholic Church and Rural Social Change: Priests, Peasant Organizations, and Politics in Haiti* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1985), p. 140.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 161.

23. *Ibid.*, p.162.

24. *Ibid.*, p.162.

25. *Ibid.*, p.186-187.

26. The Duvalier Government, under pressure from the Carter Administration, had launched a limited liberalization program in the late 1970s. This period saw the establishment of the Haitian League for the Defense of Human Rights, the appearance of a small number of opposition political parties, and a certain degree of press freedom, encouraging the appearance of independent radio stations in Port-au-Prince. But the Duvalier Government celebrated Ronald Reagan's election to the presidency in November with one of the harshest crackdowns in Duvalierist history. On November 28, 1980, the Tonton Macoute arrested, tortured, and killed opposition figures from politicians to radio personalities. Though the Catholic Church did not escape the crackdown, it remained standing after November 1980, and continued its work in the countryside.

27. M. McClure, *The Catholic Church and Rural Social Change*, p.188.

28. Dan Sewell, "Pope Says 'Things Must Change' in Haiti", *Miami News* (3/10/83).

29. Haitian Episcopal Conference, "Declaration of the Bishops of Haiti on the Foundations of Church Intervention in Social and Political Affairs," 4/11/83, p.1-3.

30. Conference of Haitian Religious, "Global Plan of the Conference of Haitian Religious," 4/83, p. 2-3. The Conference of Haitian Religious is an assembly of priests, nuns, and layworkers below the level of the Episcopal Conference.

31. It is important here to note that because of the very nature of the *dechoukaj* movement and the Duvalier Government, it is impossible to document (in most cases) direct involvement of members of church-based peasant associations in the various demonstrations that led to the fall of Duvalier. This research has yet to be done, and would require extensive interviews with church leaders and lay people who may yet be reluctant to fully explain the role of church networks in the *dechoukaj*. But because the *dechoukaj* was almost exclusively rural, the church was the sole actor on the national political scene, and the events followed increasing official church involvement in political issues, it is reasonable to conclude that church social and political programs were critical in the emergence and growth of the anti-Duvalier movement. Whether directly through peasant associations, or indirectly through church and radio "conscientization," church intervention in social and political affairs inspired broad peasant participation in the national *dechoukaj* movement.

32. "Haitians Say Police Cruelty Touched Off 4 Days of Riots," *New York Times*, (5/28/84).

33. Interview with Fritz Longchamps, 4/20/89.

34. J. DeWind, D. Kinley, *Aiding Migration*, p. 227.
35. *Ibid.*, p.227.
36. *Ibid.*, p.211.
37. J. Ferguson, *Papa Doc, Baby Doc*, p. 84.
38. *Ibid.*
39. "Two Incidents Sparked Protest in City Noted for Revolt", *Miami Herald*, (12/15/85).
40. *Ibid.*
41. Personal communication.
42. J. DeWind, D. Kinley, *Aiding Migration*, p.211.
43. J. Ferguson, *Papa Doc, Baby Doc*, p.111.
44. *Ibid.*, p.111.