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Master's Thesis of International Studies

# Haiti trapped in poverty

-A socio-historical analysis of the  
consequences of the 1825 independence debt-

빈곤의 덫에 빠진 아이티: 1825년 '근대화  
배상금'의 결과에 관한 사회-역사학적 분석

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Graduate School of International Studies

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International Cooperation Major

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# Haiti trapped in poverty

A socio–historical analysis of the  
consequences of the 1825 independence debt

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# Abstract

The relation between the 1825 debt that Haiti paid to France for its independence and underdevelopment on the Caribbean Island has been a controversial issue investigated by economic studies. As development should be understood as a more complex process than income growth, this thesis aims to analyze the negative consequences of the independence debt on Haiti's development from an original perspective based on social and historical considerations. In this approach, underdevelopment is defined as unfreedom, and the Haitian debt is considered as a social relationship between Haiti as a debtor and France as a creditor. This research drew on a sociological and philosophical literature to build an analytical framework, and empirical evidence was found in Haiti's 19<sup>th</sup>-century history. The analysis shows that the Haitian so-called double debt resulted in a renewed form of domination and exploitation of the newly established state in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as well as in internalization by the Haitians of their country's state of subjection. Hence, from a socio-historical perspective, underdevelopment of sovereign Haiti stems from the independence debt that France imposed on its former colony in 1825.

**Keywords:** Haiti, Underdevelopment, Independence debt, Unfreedom, 19<sup>th</sup>-century history

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# Chapter 1. Introduction

Underdevelopment has become a rising idea within international organizations after the Second World War. The word has been commonly used to depict the reality of those states that were being left behind by the ‘advanced countries’ with raising average living standards. From then, causes of non-development, in particular, have been at the center of the academic debate. However, development thinking also evolved significantly since the 1990s to produce a much more sophisticated definition of underdevelopment. What have been called ‘underdeveloped countries’ indeed encompass a wide empirical variety of different specific historical trajectories, including both economic and sociological factors. Therefore, poverty was understood as a multidimensional concept which goes beyond the lack of economic growth or of capital accumulation. In this thesis, development will be defined as the process of emancipation that contributes to attaining a capacity of self-determination. This understanding relates to the capability approach originally developed by Sen (1999). In his words, development is “a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy” (p. 3). Consequently, underdevelopment will be regarded as unfreedom, or as the deprivation of individual capabilities.

More specifically, this thesis has chosen Haiti as its study case. Alongside 45 other countries, the Caribbean Island has been listed as one of the Least Developed Countries by the United Nations (n.d.). Based on the multidimensional Human Development Index, Haiti ranks 170<sup>th</sup> out of 189 countries, and was given by far the lowest rating in the Americas (United Nations Development Programme, 2020). The country was also cited as a paradigmatic example of a “failed” or “collapsed” state (Krishna-Hensel, 2000) since the emergence of these concepts in the 1990s. That said, the Caribbean Island is no underdeveloped country as any other. The

reason why it is of particular interest to study the Haitian case lies in its singularity.

First, unlike many other underdeveloped states, the Republic of Haiti is neither a product of the decolonization process initiated after 1945, nor a newly established nation–state. As early as more than two centuries ago, Haiti gained independence from the French colonial empire and achieved sovereignty. The 19<sup>th</sup>–century history of the Haitian Republic is of particular interest, for the country was the first independent republic in Latin America, and the second one on the entire American continent after the United States. Also, the Haitian Revolution from 1791 to 1804 was a unique event in world history, as it was the first and only time that a slave revolt resulted in a state’s autonomy and a country’s self–reliance (Farmer, 1994/2006). Hence, Haiti’s historical exceptionalism makes it an intriguing case study.

Second, Haiti has become the true embodiment of the concept of underdevelopment. “Hopeless Haiti” (Farmer, 1994/2006, p. 110) has become a common expression to refer to the country’s lack of development prospects. This idea was particularly supported in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake. Despite its dramatic consequences on the Haitian population, the earthquake could have represented “a once in a lifetime chance” to start a new – more sustainable and more inclusive – development dynamic in the country (Oxfam International, n.d.). But instead, the state island once again emerged as the prime example of “humanitarian failure” (Wörlein, 2018, p. 160) not to be followed in the development area. This view had indeed been spread for decades already in the political and academic fields. In 1965, the French geographer Paul Moral had used the word ‘Haitization’ to describe the economic collapse of several African countries after their political independence from the French colonial empire (Joachim, 1979). Former Dominican Republic President Juan Bosch (1973) had also identified the process by which Latin American countries were regressing in terms of socioeconomic development as ‘Haitianization’. In sum, as Haiti has stood for the very definition of

underdevelopment, the reasons behind its ‘failure’ are particularly worthy of investigation.

Third, a last distinctive feature of the Haitian case lies in its paradoxes. How has the island state become an example of chronic structural poverty, when it was once the richest colony of the French colonial empire (Moreau de Saint-Méry, 1797)? How could a country born out of the most unique emancipation process in history be so radically turned into an underdeveloped state? What could have deprived the Haitians, once victorious slave revolts, of their capabilities? These peculiar ironies are the strongest argument for why particular attention shall be paid to the causes of Haiti’s underdevelopment.

Of all the credible factors raised to explain Haiti’s poverty situation, the question of the financial indemnity imposed by France in return to recognition of independence of its former colony in 1825 has become particularly controversial. Indeed, the idea that the French colonial power bore prime responsibility in Haiti’s non-development two centuries ago has fostered claims of compensation by some Haitian leaders and activists today. Political polemic started when Haiti President Jean-Bertrand Aristide announced in 2003 that he would demand \$21 billion reparations to the French government for the 1825 ‘heist’. Although the lawsuit never went through and Aristide’s government was overthrown the next year, the Haitian President became the first-ever Caribbean leader to officially claim reparations to a former colonial power (Werner, 2016). Since, other activists have been strong advocates of this demand. The Haitian economist Camille Chalmers considered Haiti as a ‘creditor’ to the West rather than a ‘debtor’ because of the indemnity paid by the country to France in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Klein, 2010). In 2010, a group of 130 scholars worldwide signed an open letter addressed to France President Nicolas Sarkozy to support a €17 billion reparation to Haiti aimed at compensating an “illegitimate and illegal” independence debt (Pilgrim, 2010). In order to rise above controversy, the consequences of the 1825 independence debt on the development capacity of 19<sup>th</sup>-century Haiti shall be



investigated.

So far, the question of a causal relation between the 1825 independence debt that Haiti paid to France and underdevelopment on the Caribbean Island had only been partially addressed by scholars. Haiti's independence debt was conceptualized as 'double debt', that included both the initial indemnity owed to France for recognition of independence and the subsequent commercial loan taken from French private banks to pay the first annuity in 1825. But researchers only focused on the economic consequences of this double debt for Haiti's development capacity. In particular, Bulmer–Thomas (2012), Henochsberg (2016) and Piketty (2019/2020) acknowledged the significant responsibility of the 1825 debt for the Caribbean state being trapped into poverty. Indeed, all of them found evidence that external debt service in the 19<sup>th</sup> century burdened the public budget of the Haitian state, and thus hindered its ability to invest to foster economic growth. However, the sole economic angle appears limited to fully address this issue.

First, previous economic research on the consequences of Haiti's 1825 debt could only consider underdevelopment simply as the lack of income growth. This definition is not in line with the latest development paradigm, which also accounts for social and historical considerations. Therefore, a gap in knowledge was identified here. This thesis will aim to fill this gap by providing an original interpretation of the outcomes of the independence debt from the socio–historical perspective. This angle will allow to consider how the 1825 debt could have deprived the Haitians of their capabilities and freedoms, rather than simply focus on how the high amount of the debt burdened Haiti's public finance.

Second, previous research could not solve the academic debate on which of internal or external factors are to blame for Haiti's underdevelopment. For example, Piketty (2019/2020) and Henochsberg (2016) supported that the French creditor was responsible for the debt burden, while Bulmer–Thomas (2012) argued that the Haitian domestic elite should be held accountable. It is important to reach a conclusion on this question, because, as

mentioned earlier, the dispute over the root causes of Haiti's underdevelopment in the 19<sup>th</sup> century has fueled political tensions today between France and Haiti. In other words, the present research will take position on who should bear responsibility for the negative effects of the Haitian independence debt – France or Haiti itself.

Hence, the aim of this research is to demonstrate how the 'double debt' was a root cause of underdevelopment in sovereign Haiti in the 19<sup>th</sup> century from a socio–historical perspective. To fulfill this aim, this thesis will address the following key research question: how did the independence debt imposed by France impact the development capacity of sovereign Haiti in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, from a socio–historical perspective? Underdevelopment was defined as 'unfreedom', or the deprivation of individual capabilities. Hence, the consequences of the double debt on the capabilities of the Haitians and on Haiti's emancipation process will be explored. Moreover, a consistent consideration of debt as more than just a financial transaction or a tangible amount of money due was needed. Therefore, it will be analyzed whether sociological and philosophical theories that consider debt as a social relationship of power between creditor and debtor can be applied to the Haitian case. In that regard, it will be investigated whether 19<sup>th</sup>–century history provides empirical evidence that the debt was a means for the French colonial power – become creditor – to subjugate its former colony – made debtor – again.

This thesis will state that, from a socio–historical perspective, the 1825 independence debt hindered Haiti's development capacity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, because it resulted in the domination of the newly sovereign state by France and in the deprivation of the Haitians' capabilities. The double debt resulted in a renewed form of domination and exploitation of sovereign Haiti by France, which deprived the Haitians of their freedom and of their capabilities. It also led to the Haitians internalizing their state of subjection, thus hindering any new potential emancipation process on the Caribbean Island. In other words, it will be argued that the 1825 independence

debt, as an external factor, was a root cause of underdevelopment in 19<sup>th</sup>–century Haiti.

This thesis will be structured as follows. Chapter 2 will review the existing literature on the causes of underdevelopment in Haiti, with an emphasis on the role the 1825 independence debt may have played. Chapter 3 will elaborate this thesis’ research design by clarifying the research method and the analytical framework selected, as well as providing brief background information about Haiti’s ‘double debt’ after 1825. It will be made explicit why considering the Haitian debt as a social relationship of power is relevant to the socio–historical approach. Chapter 4 will test applicability of this analytical framework to the Haitian case in order to provide an original interpretation of the outcomes of the independence debt for Haiti’s development. Chapter 5 will discuss implications and limitations of these findings for the relation between the 1825 French indemnity and Haiti’s underdevelopment. Finally, Chapter 6 will outline the main conclusions to this research.

## Chapter 2. Literature review – The causes of Haiti’ s underdevelopment

Why did Haiti get trapped into poverty? As mentioned earlier, the responsibility of the French colonial power for the Haitian case has been a burning issue, in particular with regard to the financial indemnity France imposed to its former colony in 1825. Before going more in-depth into this thesis’ core analysis – that is a new interpretation of the negative consequences of the 1825 independence debt on Haiti’s development –, it is of interest to review the existing literature on all the credible causes of Haiti’s underdevelopment.

Overall, what has made Haiti one of the least developed countries in the world? The several explanatory factors raised by scholars will be classified into two categories, namely “internal conditions” and “external relations” (Reitsma & Kleinpenning, 1985, p. 45). As the outcomes of the 1825 debt remain this thesis’ main concern, enhanced emphasis will be placed on the economic studies which investigated the relation between the French indemnity and Haiti lagging behind. This literature review will reveal that previous research could not convincingly enough explain how sovereign Haiti, paradoxically born out of a singular emancipation process, quickly became an embodiment of underdevelopment. In particular, a gap in knowledge about the socio-historical consequences of the 1825 independence debt on the Haitians’ freedoms and capabilities will be highlighted.

### 2.1. Internal conditions

Blaming internal factors for a country’s underdevelopment used to be the mainstream position in academics until the 1950s (Reitsma & Kleinpenning, 1985). In the Haitian case, geography and climate, demography, culture and religion, or domestic politics were

said to have contributed to Haiti's poverty situation. However, rather than root causes of underdevelopment, most of these factors proved better at explaining why Haiti has been struggling escape the trap of poverty in the last few decades.

### **2.1.1. Geography and climate**

To begin with, geography was raised as an explanatory factor for Haiti's economic underdevelopment. Indeed, the Caribbean Island Hispaniola – divided between Haiti on the west side and the Dominican Republic on the east side – suffers from a tropical environment, which may have hindered its development.

Sachs (2001), most notably, provided evidence of an income gap between those countries located in the tropics and the others positioned in regions with a more temperate climate. According to him, tropical conditions may hinder agricultural productivity, technological progress, and economic production, as well as create specific health issues. Hence, for the American scholar, geography must be one of the primary causes of underdevelopment.

Yet, in the specific Haitian case, other scholars exposed that the natural environment of Hispaniola, despite tropical weather, was actually initially favorable to agricultural exploitation. For instance, Joachim (1979) revealed that, owing to its mountainous terrain, the island was originally enjoying a wide variation of different climates and soil types. These assets would have allowed to grow various agricultural products – some of which suited for a hot and humid climate, and some others for milder temperatures. Hence, geography alone cannot be a root cause of Haiti's underdevelopment.

Still, the devastating natural hazards hitting Haiti did represent a significant obstacle to its development so far. Every year or so, and to a greater extent than the average in the Caribbean (Singh & Barton-Dock, 2015), the country has been affected by recurring earthquakes, floods, storms and hurricanes. Such natural catastrophes have had very negative impacts on Haiti's economy:

the 2010 earthquake for example led to the equivalent of 120% of the country's GDP being destroyed that year (Singh & Barton-Dock, 2015). In that regard and from the economic angle, climate appears as a convincing argument to explain why Haiti still struggles today to escape the trap of poverty.

To sum up, the role of geography as a root cause of Haiti's underdevelopment remains limited. Indeed, the focus on this internal condition omits historical factors, such as the plundering of natural resources under colonial rule (Diamond, 2005) or the devastating effect of the Haitian Revolution (Diamond, 2005; Joachim, 1979). Even though Haiti's climate may be considered as a serious obstacle to the country's economic development, the environmentalist approach is insufficient to find the root causes of the Haitians being deprived of their capabilities. Other credible internal factors still remain to be assessed.

### **2.1.2. Demography**

Demography, or more accurately overpopulation, was brought out as a second internal condition hindering Haiti's socioeconomic development.

In 1804, the idea that the newly autonomous 'Black Republic' would suffer from a shortage of labor because of the terrible loss of black lives caused by the War of Independence was first widespread among the Haitian leaders (Joachim, 1979). The slaughter of the white settlers during the Revolution, or emigration of the survivors out of the Caribbean Island, was also said to have represented a serious loss of human capital for the country (Diamond, 2005). But as early as in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the trend actually reversed. Therefore, the argument of a reduced population as a cause of Haiti's underdevelopment was rapidly dismissed as the country's population began to grow again (Joachim, 1979).

Haiti's population growth was in fact particularly high and increasing demographic pressure became a new matter of concern.

The idea that rapid demographic expansion may be an obstacle to socioeconomic development finds its roots in Malthus' (1798/1958) theory of population. According to Malthusianism, linear agricultural production cannot keep at pace with an exponential demographic growth, which will consequently result in food shortage and, eventually, poverty. This argument was however overcome by the positive impact of technology on agricultural productivity. Such as geography, demography is therefore insufficient to act as a root cause of Haiti's underdevelopment.

Still, overpopulation was frequently advanced by scholars to explain why Haiti remains poor today. Diamond (2005) for example used the concept of a "population trap" to explain why Haiti and the Dominican Republic experienced different economic fates despite sharing one territory. According to the World Bank (n.d.) indeed, Haiti's density of population remains twice as high as that of the Dominican Republic today. The western part of the island was already considered overcrowded in the 1970s with five million inhabitants within 28.000 square kilometers (Joachim, 1979), whereas the Haitian population amounted to 11,4 million people in 2020 (World Bank, n.d.). In a report addressed to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Collier (2009) described the "exceptionally rapid population growth" in the Caribbean Island as a "youth tsunami . . . accelerating the process of environmental degradation and adding to the potentially explosive pool of underemployed youth" (para. 6). Hence, the demographic situation in Haiti was generally perceived as a threat to development.

Thus, just as climate, overpopulation in Haiti has become a serious obstacle for the country's development. However, it did not reveal convincing enough to explain root causes of underdevelopment in the Caribbean Island, taken as unfreedom.

### **2.1.3. Culture and religion**

A third internal factor for Haiti's underdevelopment was identified by some scholars in the Haitian culture, and in particular

in the voodoo religion.

Diamond (2005) for example found that some of the specific Haitian attitudes turned out to be detrimental to economic development on the island. In the wake of independence, for instance, the Haitians had defined themselves as a nation of former slaves speaking Creole, having freed themselves from the white settlers, and fiercely fighting for their liberty since then. For the American author, this ‘Haitian culture’ made the western part of Hispaniola a hostile environment for trade and business with the Europeans in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in comparison with the Spanish-speaking Dominican Republic. In short, Diamond (2005) argued that the development gap between the two Caribbean countries – the Dominican Republic’s national income per capita was more than three times Haiti’s figure at the time of writing – was also related to cultural differences. Yes, this picture of free and emancipated Haitian individuals accurately squares with the period of the Haitian Revolution. However, it appears strongly inconsistent with the descriptions made in the following decades, which depicted life in Haiti as pointless and meaningless (Schoelcher, 1843). Thus, the paradox exposed earlier remains unexplained.

The Haitians’ passive behavior was better grasped by Harrison (1993). For the former USAID director, beliefs and attitudes in the Haitian society are closely intertwined with the voodoo religion originating in the African continent. According to his research, as spirits are the ones held accountable for influencing the course of events in the voodoo religion, individuals do not consider that they could be able to exert control over their own lives. Much more importance is also given to what happened in the past or occurs in the present, rather than to what the future may hold. Therefore, for Harrison (1993), the Haitians have lacked a sense of responsibility and have not been driven by the idea of progress, which could not fuel the country’s development. In short, “culture is the only possible explanation for Haiti’s unending tragedy” (p. 105). For Harrison (1991), a long-term developmental strategy should thus start with education and religious reform to help change the Haitian



mentalities.

However, sharp criticism was raised against Harrison's (1993) theory on the 'cultural roots' of Haiti's underdevelopment. For Farmer (1994/2006), a former United Nations Special Envoy to Haiti, this narrative that the Haitian culture should be blamed for the country's non-development forms part of 'myths' that Western nations and especially the United States have been building around the Caribbean Island to serve their own interests. In a more measured way than Farmer's argument, it can be said that Harrison's analysis failed to explain how the Haitian people, under the influence of the voodoo religion, could be the actors of one of the most unique emancipation processes in world history during the Haitian Revolution.

Either way, in sum, both theories exposed in this section appear insufficient to account for the root causes of Haiti's unfreedom.

#### **2.1.4. Domestic politics**

Domestic politics are the last internal factor which is said to have undermined Haiti's development since its independence – and the one that deserves the greatest consideration.

For starters, political instability in Haiti was repeatedly highlighted as an impediment to the formulation of a long-term development strategy for the country. Indeed, since its establishment in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Haitian Republic has faced a high number of complex political crises (Singh & Barton-Dock, 2015). Since the end of the almost 30-year-long dictatorial rule by the Duvaliers in 1986, for instance, the island state experienced more than 20 power shifts. In July 2021, the assassination of Haiti President Moïse raised international concern once again about the country's domestic politics. Political instability was the main reason for the several trade and aid embargos from the international community on Haiti and for two UN peacekeeping missions – namely MINUSTAH, followed by MINUJUSTH. According to the World Bank lead economists in Haiti Singh &

Barton–Dock (2015), political turmoil could not therefore allow the establishment of sound institutions needed for socioeconomic development. However, political instability, just as climate and overpopulation, appears better at explaining why Haiti still remains underdeveloped today, rather than why the country initially got caught into the trap of poverty.

More likely, policy choices made by the Haitian leaders since self-proclaimed independence in 1804 may have acted as root causes of underdevelopment on the Caribbean Island. The effect of restrictions set on foreigners after Haiti's emancipation from the French colonial rule, for instance, raised particular interest among scholars. In 1805, Article 12 of the Preliminary Declaration of the Constitution of Haiti (as cited in Corbett, 1999) proclaimed that "[n]o whiteman of whatever nation he may be, shall put his foot on this territory with the title of master or proprietor, neither shall he in future acquire any property therein" (art. 12). This ban on foreigner property was a means of strengthening national sovereignty and of anchoring the idea of Haiti's freedom from the foreign slave masters (Joachim, 1979). However, the fact that the Europeans could not immigrate to Haiti anymore and were not legally allowed to invest in the country's economy may have contributed to the economic stagnation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Comparative studies with the Dominican Republic confirmed the theory, as this country, in contrast with Haiti, largely benefited from foreign capital flows to grow as a potential market economy in the same period (Diamond, 2005). This factor, however, only deals with the economic angle of development, unlike the definition adopted in this thesis.

To cite another example, academics agreed about the shortcomings of education policies in Haiti. Despite first promising efforts in the wake of independence, education and vocational training were rapidly neglected by the successive Haitian governments (Joachim, 1979). It is for example alleged that Haiti President Boyer declared in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that spreading education was to spread revolution (Joachim, 1979).

Hence, rather than spreading knowledge and reducing inequality, the Haitian leaders pursued policies in favor of private education and of a conservative elite that would maintain a highly unequal social order.

By the same reasoning, it was also argued that the self-interests of the local ruling class sustained a vulnerable economic model that caused the Haitian economy to collapse. After independence, export revenues were the primary source of income for Haiti's elite. Consequently, the fact that the country's economy was highly reliant on external trade, and thus extremely sensitive to external shocks, was of secondary concern for the Haitian leaders (Bulmer-Thomas, 2012). Based on reconstructed data on export volume, public budget, or the number of infrastructures in the Caribbean countries over the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Bulmer-Thomas (2012) found that Haiti's economy collapsed from the 1890s as a direct consequence of a drop in coffee prices – due to increased supply from Brazil. According to the economist, because of its heavy reliance on coffee as a single export commodity, the Caribbean economy “never recovered” from the event (Bulmer-Thomas, 2012, p. 162). In other words, the Haitian upper classes favored higher income on the short term over a longer-term development strategy, implying diversifying the sources of public income and investing in infrastructures and education.

More generally, the anti-national self-interests of a Haitian privileged elite were thus identified by some scholars as the root cause of Haiti's economic failure. Haiti's ruling and property-owning classes were said to have been more worried since the 19<sup>th</sup> century about their own economic and political privileges than concerned with the living conditions of the Haitian overall population (Joachim, 1979). In this regard, their behavior was largely inspired by exploitation patterns from the colonial model (Diamond, 2005).

In that sense, the Haitian case echoes Lacoste's (1959) general theory about ‘Third World’ countries. The French geographer argued that the primary factor of underdevelopment lies in the existence of a domestic elite minority in power absorbing a

significant part of the public revenue, at the detriment of the majority remaining in poverty. For him, underdevelopment endures where democracy lacks, allowing the selfish interests of a socially, economically, and politically privileged elite to prevail. Besides, these interests are often aligned with those of a present or past colonial master (Lacoste, 1959) – if any. In sum, domestic politics are a credible reason behind economic non-development in the Global South.

To go back to the Haitian case, the 1825 indemnity owed to France for Haiti's independence was considered by some scholars as such an internal factor of underdevelopment. The idea deserves more development as the consequences of the so-called 'double debt' stand as this thesis' main concern. In particular, Bulmer-Thomas (2012) considered that the Haitian leaders themselves were to blame for the "terrible burden" (p. 187) that the independence debt represented for Haiti's development. In his words: "Boyer's unwise decision to accept the terms set out by the French king had terrible long-term consequences for Haiti" (Bulmer-Thomas, 2012, p. 182). According to the economist, Boyer's position could be explained by the short-term need of the Haitian leaders to restore trade with France – on which their revenues were heavily relying. For him, Haiti chose to service its debt to France also to satisfy that "great sense of pride among the elite . . . that Haiti had met its external obligations" (Bulmer-Thomas, 2012, p. 191).

The 1825 financial indemnity imposed by France for the recognition of its former colony's independence, together with the private loan taken from French banks to pay the first annuity, did indeed weigh heavily on the young Republic's public finance in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Bulmer-Thomas (2012) estimated that, from 1840 to 1850 for example, around 50% of Haiti's public revenue was allocated to external debt service. Thus, the independence debt that the Haitian leaders had agreed on significantly burdened public expenditure. By doing so, it strongly restricted financial resources available for needed investment in infrastructures, institutions,

agriculture, or education. In sum, for the expert on the Caribbean, the negative consequences of the 1825 independence debt on Haiti's economic development can be regarded as the result of the selfish political decisions made by the domestic elite. This argument, however powerful, fails to understand underdevelopment as a more complex concept which also includes social and historical considerations.

All in all, this section demonstrated how internal conditions such as geography, demography, and culture, are insufficient to stand as the root causes of Haiti's underdevelopment. Rather than credible initial reasons behind Haiti's non-development, climate, overpopulation, and political instability have been better at explaining why Haiti still struggles to escape poverty today.

So far, domestic politics, and in particular the selfish interests of the Haitian ruling elite, appeared as the most convincing argument to explain Haiti's underdevelopment. However, the literature on the Haitian case tended to focus on the sole economic angle, understanding development as income growth. In that regard, previous research focusing on internal factors have been limited to solve the paradoxical question of Haiti's unfreedom. For that reason, another generation of scholars, who highlighted the country's external relations as decisive for its socioeconomic stagnation for more than two centuries, will now be considered.

## 2.2. External relations

From the end of the 1950s, external explanatory factors gained in importance in the debate on the causes of poverty in the 'Third World' countries (Reitsma & Kleinpenning, 1985). In the Haitian case, the negative consequences of foreign interference and of (neo-)colonialism for the country's development raised particular interest among scholars. These approaches proved better at considering underdevelopment as a multidimensional process

including economic, but also social and historical considerations.

### **2.2.1. Foreign interference**

More than once in Haitian history, foreign nations interfered with the country's course of action. For many scholars, the hostile behavior of Western powers, in particular, worked against Haiti's development opportunities.

Examples of foreign interference in the Haitian domestic affairs include the United States occupation from 1915 to 1934. For Bulmer–Thomas (2012), the period paved the way for the autocratic power of the Duvalier dynasty to emerge in 1957 and therefore started a “downward spiral” of “extreme political instability” (p. 162). However, this peculiar historical event could not be considered as a root cause of Haiti's underdevelopment, as the country already displayed characteristics of an underdeveloped state way before 1915 (Bulmer–Thomas, 2012).

In the same logic, the successive commercial and political embargos imposed on Haiti by foreign countries were criticized for their disastrous impact on the already harsh living conditions of the poorest on the Caribbean Island. Among the latest to date, the 1991 international embargo on trade and aid was said to have resulted in the breakdown of Haiti's public health system, thereby increasing disease transmission, infant mortality, and hunger (Farmer, 1994/2006). Similarly, the international aid embargo from 2001 to 2004 was opposed by humanitarian organizations and scholars. These condemned the behavior of the international community seeking to influence Haiti's domestic politics, but at the expense of the basic needs of the most vulnerable (Farmer, Fawzi & Nevil, 2003).

International organizations were also pointed at for their harmful behavior in Haiti. A last example of detrimental external interference was found in the loans granted by the international financial institutions – in particular the Inter–American Development Bank – and foreign governments to the Duvalier

dictators. The foreign creditors were blamed for having chosen to deliberately ignore the obvious fact that the so-called 'odious' debt would be unsustainable in the future considering Haiti's repayment capacity (Farmer, 1994/2006). The fact that they even claimed interest on arrears when payment did arrive late, thereby harming the country's economy further, also caused harsh criticisms (Farmer, 1994/2006).

All in all, these scholars considered that Haiti suffered unfair treatment from the Western powers, which may have contributed to its backwardness. The historical events mentioned so far, however, all took place in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, whereas Haiti was already standing as one of the least developed countries in the world. For that reason, two additional external factors taking place in the 19<sup>th</sup> century appear as more convincing to explain the original causes of sovereign Haiti's underdevelopment.

First, aggressive military action by the Europeans and the Americans after Haiti's independence in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century contributed to economic failure in the Caribbean Island. According to Bulmer-Thomas (2012), military spending was heavily burdening the public budget of the newly established Republic after 1804. Around 50% of Haiti's public revenue in average was allocated to military expenditure in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Bulmer-Thomas, 2012). Besides, the Armed Forces of Haiti were also mobilizing a significant share of the island's human forces at the time. This is probably one of the reasons why the labor-intensive production of sugar and cotton drastically diminished after independence (Bulmer-Thomas, 2012). Hence, successive attempts of armed invasion by the European nations were said to have played a role in Haiti's underdevelopment, as the country was struggling to maintain independence.

Second, the 1825 independence debt imposed by France on its former colony was also regarded by some scholars as external interference that did harm to Haiti's economic development. Farmer (1994/2006) for example expressed severe opinion on the negative effects of Haiti's "double debt". He wrote: "[b]y any account, the

impact of the debt repayments – which continued until after World War II – was devastating” and “Haiti’s economy was being dealt a lethal blow” (Farmer, 1994/2006, p. 379). For this reason, Farmer and others concluded that France did bear significant responsibility in the Caribbean Island’s underdevelopment. As the aftermaths of the French debt in Haiti are this thesis’ main interest, the findings of two economic analyses on this issue shall be developed further.

To begin with, Piketty (2019/2020) considered the financial indemnity imposed on Haiti in 1825 as an injustice “that did much to undermine the development of Haiti over the next two centuries” (p. 217). Indeed, the French economist estimated that the initial sum requested of 150 million gold francs represented 300% of the Haitian national income in 1825 or, in other words, the total amount Haiti could produce in 3 years. For the best-selling author, then, the double debt was not only a massive burden for Haiti’s economy, but also exposed “how deeply ambivalent the French Revolution was regarding questions of inequality and property” (Piketty, 2019/2020, p. 219–220). Therefore, this analysis illustrated how France placed an economic burden on the newly independent Black Republic just two decades after self-declaration of independence.

For his argument, Piketty (2019/2020) largely drew on research by his student Henochsberg (2016). By expanding the database of Bulmer–Thomas (2012) and building estimates of Haiti’s GDP in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Henochsberg (2016) confirmed the idea that external debt service related to the unfair financial indemnity significantly burdened the country’s public revenue. In Henochsberg’s (2016) words, “[t]he “double debt” imposed by France was very detrimental to Haiti which had to pay approximately one tenth of the cost of slavery over a century to countries much richer” (p. 51). Consequently, the independence debt largely contributed to the failure of the Haitian economy as soon as in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Piketty’s student also stressed new evidence about the indirect consequences of the ‘double debt’ in Haiti. According to him, indeed, the “Code Rural” proclaimed in 1826 by President Boyer was aimed



at returning to previous levels of productivity that the Caribbean Island used to record as a French colony, in order to achieve economic prosperity and meet debt obligations. But in reality, the new labor law reestablished harsh working conditions, regarded as a new form of slavery. Hence, Henochsberg (2016) described the French indemnity as “financial enslavement” (p. 41). For this reason, he concluded that, France has a “greater than admitted” (p. 51) responsibility in Haiti’s underdevelopment.

To sum up, foreign interference in sovereign Haiti occurred for two centuries. Yet, historical events from the 19<sup>th</sup> century are more likely to be considered as genuine root causes of Haiti’s underdevelopment. In particular, Piketty (2019/2020) and Henochsberg (2016) highlighted the important role played by the 1825 independence debt imposed by the French colonial power. In that sense, they both tended to blame French behavior for Haiti’s economic failure. However, these analyses still failed to consider underdevelopment as more than the lack of income growth, but rather as the deprivation of individual capabilities.

### **2.2.2. Imperialism, colonization and neo-colonization**

Until now in literature, theories focusing on the consequences of foreign imperialism and of colonialism and neo-colonialism have been more able to consider Haiti’s underdevelopment as unfreedom.

The consequences of colonialism, first, were at the center of the debate when addressing how external relations hindered Haiti’s development. Indeed, colonization of the Caribbean Island by Spain in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century, replaced by France as colonial master in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, is said to have left an indelible mark on today’s Haiti. So does the slave economy the two European powers established on the island during their colonial rule. In particular, inherited socioeconomic structures such as feudalism and aristocracy contributed to shaping an unequal society and a dependent economy, which are characteristic features of underdevelopment (Dupuy, 1976). In Dupuy’s (1976) words, “Haiti

is said to be underdeveloped today precisely because the present level of development of its productive forces is not the result of the Haitian people's own making” (p. 7). In that perspective, Haiti’s backwardness is rooted in its colonial history.

However, foreign imperialism in the Caribbean Island did not end with independence in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This led scholars to focus on the outcomes of the so-called ‘neo-colonial’ relationship of sovereign Haiti with the Western powers. According to Joachim (1979), a new kind of feudalism between Haiti’s ruling class and the European liberal bourgeoisie took shape after the Haitian Revolution and in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. This ‘neo-colonial’ economic relationship had disastrous effects on the Haitian economy, as it resulted in Haiti accepting highly unequal trade conditions (Joachim, 1979). For Joachim (1979), the island state suffered from unequal exchange and deteriorating terms of trade. Between 1829 and 1913, for instance, Haiti was importing about fifty categories of products, while exporting only fifteen different commodities, seven of which in a significant proportion (Joachim, 1979). Thus, highly unbalanced trade relations contributed to the extreme vulnerability of the Haitian economy to external shocks, and then to economic downfall.

The European nations were not the only ones blamed for the consequences of their imperialist attitude on Haiti’s development. The United States occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934 was also described as ‘neo-colonization’. Article 5 of the 1918 Constitution of Haiti had granted back foreigners the right to own property on the Haitian soil. The period was then marked by the dispossession of the Haitian people, the reestablishment of harsh working conditions in the plantations, and overexploitation of the island’s natural resources (Joachim, 1979).

Overall, Western imperialist powers were blamed as significantly responsible for making Haiti one of the poorest countries in the world. From this point of view, Farmer (1994/2006) portrayed the relationship between Haiti and the wealthy Western nations as one of dependency, if not servitude. In

his words, “if Haiti is not a victim of imperialism, one might incredulously counter, what country has ever been the victim of imperialism?” (Farmer, 1994/2006, p. 285). Hence, Haiti’s underdevelopment was seen as an outcome of foreign oppression and of the neo-colonial bonds with both the European countries and the United States.

It is of importance to mention that those scholars drew on a more general theoretical framework known as theories of imperialism and dependency. Studying such movements of thought in detail would fall out of the scope of this literature review. However, a few elements provided by some of their most representative authors were used above, and thus deserve to be mentioned. The idea that colonialism had negative consequences on development found its roots in Hobson (1902/2005) and Lenin (1917/1973), two early contributors to the theory of imperialism. In line with this, Jalée (1973) highlighted how the resources from the ‘Third World’ had been plundered by the exploitative system of global capitalism, in the benefit of the Western powers and in the detriment of the other countries’ development. The theories of ‘deterioration of the terms of trade’ and of ‘unequal exchange’, applied to Haiti earlier, were developed by Prebisch (1959) and Emmanuel (1969/1972) respectively. These concepts were used to analyze the trade relations between industrialized countries exporting manufactured goods and other nations exporting primary commodities. In the same perspective, the conceptualization of ‘economic neo-colonialism’ can largely be ascribed to the dependency theory. Frank (1970), for example, considered foreign domination and the aggressive behavior of imperialist powers and their capitalist firms as the major obstacle to development in Latin America in the 1960s.

This broad analytical background was sometimes criticized for its lack of nuance and of empirical evidence, as well as for its oversight of the countries’ self-behavior and of pre-colonial history. Still, it allowed scholars interested in the Haitian case to demonstrate how the failure of the country’s institutions, the

inequality of its social structures, or the dependency of its economy can be regarded as outcomes of abusive behavior by foreign nations. Thereby, these theories were better at portraying Haiti's underdevelopment as more than just the lack of economic growth, but rather as a multidimensional process of cumulative unfreedoms. Still, the paradox of how emancipated sovereign Haiti was returned into a 'victim of imperialism' in the 19<sup>th</sup> century remains unsolved.

In conclusion, both internal and external factors were put forward by scholars to explain what made Haiti one of the least developed countries in the world.

On the one hand, this literature review found that internal conditions such as geography, demography, and culture, could not convincingly enough act as root causes of Haiti's underdevelopment. Domestic politics and the selfish interests of the Haitian ruling elite in the 19<sup>th</sup> century appeared as more credible explanatory factors, but this theory could not go beyond a limited conceptualization of underdevelopment as the lack of economic growth.

On the other hand, it was acknowledged that external relations also could be considered as primary reasons behind Haiti's underdevelopment. Foreign interference by Western powers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century could significantly explain Haiti's economic failure as well. Theories highlighting the imperialist, colonial and neo-colonial relationship between Haiti and the Western nations appeared more in line with a definition of underdevelopment as unfreedom.

Still, the controversial issue of the consequences of the 1825 independence debt remained only partially addressed by researchers, who focused on the sole economic angle. Therefore, this literature review revealed a gap in knowledge when it comes to interpreting the outcomes of the so-called 'double debt' from a socio-historical perspective. This approach will be needed to match a definition of underdevelopment as a multidimensional process that goes beyond the lack of income growth.

Besides, the question of how sovereign Haiti, born out of the

Haitian Revolution, considered as one of the most unique emancipation processes in history, was ironically turned into an underdeveloped state in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, remained unresolved. So did the debate on who should bear responsibility for Haiti's poverty situation. In particular, while Bulmer–Thomas (2012) argued that the Haitian political leaders themselves were to blame for it, Piketty (2019/2020) and Henochsberg (2016) held the French colonial power accountable for the devastating effects of the 1825 independence debt on Haiti's economy.

The present thesis will now aim at filling this gap in knowledge by responding to how the independence debt imposed by France impacted the development capacity of sovereign Haiti in the 19<sup>th</sup> century from a socio–historical perspective. By doing so, this study will also attempt to solve the academic debate on the causes of Haiti's underdevelopment, opposing internal conditions to external relations.

## Chapter 3. Research Design

### 3.1. Research method

This subsection will outline the methodology that was used to demonstrate how the 1825 ‘double debt’ was a root cause of underdevelopment in sovereign Haiti in the 19<sup>th</sup> century from a socio–historical perspective.

The relation between the debt imposed by France in 1825 and sovereign Haiti’s underdevelopment had already been addressed by economists. It was indeed deduced from the literature review that Haiti’s independence debt significantly hindered economic growth on the Caribbean Island in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The present study researched new explanatory factors that could validate that Haiti’s non–development stems from the financial indemnity paid to France, but when development is taken as a more complex process including social and historical factors. This different approach was needed because such a gap in knowledge had been identified in last section.

Indeed, it has been acknowledged in academics that the concept of development should be understood as more than income growth or industrialization. In that regard, Haiti’s underdevelopment was defined as ‘unfreedom’ or as the deprivation of individual capabilities, according to a new development paradigm based on a human–rights based or a capability approach, as originally developed by Sen (1999). This conceptualization also relates to Bettelheim (1973), who argued that the phrase ‘exploited and dominated countries’ could offer a better alternative to the notion of ‘underdeveloped countries’.

With this conceptualization in mind, this thesis researched the reasons why the 1825 independence debt could be said to be a cause of underdevelopment in Haiti from the socio–historical perspective. To do so, it investigated the direct consequences of

the French indemnity on the freedoms and on the capabilities of the Haitians in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

This socio–historical interpretation of the outcomes of Haiti’s double debt was allowed by a theoretical framework drawing on the sociological and philosophical literature. These theories, of which more details will be provided in the next subsection, understand debt as a social relationship of power between debtor and creditor. This method was inspired by Zambrana’s (2021) work about Puerto Rico’s public debt. By applying a similar – albeit extended – framework including philosophical theories of debt to the Puerto Rican case, the philosopher had analyzed the relationship between the United States and the Caribbean Island as one of political and economic domination through debt bondage.

This method appeared to be the most suitable to analyze the relation between the independence debt and Haiti’s underdevelopment from the socio–historical perspective. Indeed, a different understanding of the concept of development required a consistent conceptualization of debt. Haiti’s underdevelopment, taken as more than the lack of income growth, could not coexist with the Haitian debt being simply taken as a tangible amount of money due by the newly sovereign state to its former colonial master. If development is defined as a multidimensional process including social, economic, and historical factors, debt should be considered, similarly, as a social object. Besides, as these theories or similar approaches had never been applied to the Haitian case so far, the method allowed to find original explanations for a causation link between the 1825 indemnity and Haiti’s underdevelopment.

To test the applicability of this analytical framework to the Haitian case, empirical evidence was researched in Haiti’s 19<sup>th</sup>–century history. Due to the lack of direct access to historical archives, this study relied on secondary data from the work of both Haitian and foreign historians. This last point is of importance because it illustrates how proof was selected in a way that minimizes any potential bias in the research.

## 3.2. Analytical framework

As explained, this thesis' objective is to analyze the negative outcomes of the 1825 independence debt for Haiti's development from a socio-historical perspective. In order to reach this goal, an analytical framework was built drawing on the sociological and philosophical literature regarding debt and credit as social facts. These theories will be developed further when applied to the Haitian case in next chapter. Still, this subsection will already provide a few general elements in order to enable a better understanding of the theoretical background for this thesis' core analysis.

As a first basis for this thesis' analytical framework, debt can be conceived as what shapes social relations. Drawing on Marx's approach (1844/2005), the Haitian independence debt was analyzed as an intersubjective object, a social bond, or a horizontal relationship between a borrower and a lender, in which one can take power over the other, leading to 'estrangement'. The sense of morality that went along with the double debt in Haiti according to Nietzsche (1887/1998) was then emphasized. This added on Marx's views by outlining how debt allows to set a financial value on human morals. Lastly, the idea of a process of internalization by the debtor of a feeling of responsibility and guilt was applied to Haiti as a borrower in the way it was put forward by Deleuze & Guattari (1972/1983).

Then, three other authors were selected for their individual contribution to a social conception of debt and credit. Their theories allowed to bring an additional level of analysis to this thesis' core chapter. Drawing on them, debt can be defined as an unequal relationship leading to the legitimization of violence (Graeber, 2011), as a moral bond based on power and enabling capture of the debtor's resources and time (Lazzarato, 2011/2012), and as an unbalanced relation of dependency tilted in favor of the creditor (Gregoratto, 2016). These ideas provided a complementary conceptual lens to look at the consequences of Haiti's independence



debt from a socio–historical perspective.

These theories offered cumulative and non–exclusive conceptualizations of debt as a social relationship. Indeed, they all considered money and credit as more than the tangible financial value set on payments owed and interest due. Instead, debt here acts as “the very substance of all human relations” (Graeber, 2011, p. 207), or “the basis of social life” (Lazzarato, 2011/2012, p. 12). For that reason, these approaches were combined into one analytical framework which could enable a socio–historical interpretation of the outcomes of the Haitian independence debt, more in line with a multidimensional definition of underdevelopment as unfreedom.

### **3.3. Historical background**

Before testing applicability of the theories from the analytical framework to Haiti’s 1825 independence debt, it appears necessary to gain more knowledge about the historical context of the so–called Haitian ‘double debt’ in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

This historical subsection must start in the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, with the arrival of the Europeans on Haiti. Following Christopher Columbus’ ‘discovery’ in 1492, the Caribbean Island, then named Hispaniola, was entirely placed under Spanish colonial rule. It remained a territory of Spain for more than two centuries. The western part of the island was then ceded to France upon signature of the Treaty of Ryswick in 1697 and renamed Saint–Domingue. This partition of Hispaniola between Haiti and the Dominican Republic still stands today. From then on, Saint–Domingue became one of the most lucrative French colonies in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In 1788, it was producing twice as many commodities as, and exported four times more to France, than all other French territories in the Caribbean (Beauvois, 2009). Profitability in the colony was largely enabled by an economic system based on slavery. As a result of the harsh working conditions in the

plantations of Saint-Domingue, slave revolts broke out in the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The resulting – successful – independence war which took place from 1791 to 1804 is known as the Haitian Revolution.

On January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1804, Haiti declared independence from the French colonial rule. In the first place however, Haiti's sovereignty was not officially recognized by France and the other Western powers, including Great Britain and the United States (Wesley, 1917). The few commercial relations Haiti maintained with the European nations and the U.S. after 1804 were outside of any proper legal framework (Joachim, 1979). Resuming external trade on a more significant level was however needed, as Haiti was essentially relying on its revenue (Farmer, 1994/2006). For this purpose, successive delegations from France and Haiti met from 1814 – sometimes officially, sometimes not – to set out the terms by which the French government would acknowledge the existence of the Haitian Republic (Beauvois, 2009). However, France was not satisfied with the Haitian proposals. The European power requested more in order to grant recognition of the Caribbean country's independence, that is a financial indemnity to be paid to compensate the economic losses endured by ex-slave owners and their family (Beauvois, 2010). As already mentioned in Chapter 2, indeed, Article 12 of the Preliminary Declaration of the 1805 Constitution of Haiti had dispossessed foreigners and white settlers of their property on the Caribbean Island (Corbett, 1999). For the Haitian delegates could not give their assent to this kind of arrangement, negotiations between the two countries remained stalled for the next ten years.

In 1825, the King of France Charles X who had just come to power decided to solve the issue by force. The Baron de Mackau was sent to Haiti as an emissary carrying a decree dated April 17<sup>th</sup> and unilaterally drafted by the French government. He was accompanied by a military convoy threatening to bomb the capital city Port-au-Prince. On July 8<sup>th</sup>, 5 days after arrival of the French emissary on the Caribbean Island, Haiti President Jean-Pierre

Boyer accepted the French terms and gave its approval to the document (Madiou, 1998/2010). According to the Ordinance of Charles X, France was officially recognizing independence of the Haitian Republic on two main conditions. First, it was specified that all tariffs on trade with the French partners had to be reduced by 50% indefinitely – at the time, Haiti was applying customs duties estimated at 10% to 12% on the value of imports (Beauvois, 2009). Second, the Ordinance also stipulated that an indemnity of 150 million gold francs had to be paid by Haiti for its independence. The sum of money was due in five annual payments and was said to be valued based on the past profits the French settlers used to make in the colony (Piketty, 2019/2020).

In October 1825, Haiti took a first 25-year commercial loan of 30 million francs to pay the first annuity of the French indemnity. 30,000 bonds of 1,000 francs were emitted by the Parisian bank Charles Ternaux, James Gandolphe & Cie, and were purchased by a consortium of French bankers and investors (Brière, 2008). An interest rate of 6% was charged on the loan (Piketty, 2019/2020). Hence, what has been called the Haitian ‘double debt’ included both the initial financial indemnity owed to France and the loan amount owed to private lenders to pay the first annuity.

As soon as in 1827 and in subsequent years, however, Haiti was unable to keep pace with the annuities of the indemnity as well as with interest payments on its private loan. The terms of the double debt had to be renegotiated. After more than 10 years of tensions between the Caribbean Island and its French creditors, a second treaty was finally signed between Haiti and France on February 12<sup>th</sup>, 1838. The new agreement stipulated that the remaining amount owed of 120 million francs for the indemnity would be reduced to 60 million francs. The payments would be rescheduled over 30 years. All unpaid interests on the commercial loans for the period between 1828 and 1838 would also be abandoned and the interest rate on the bonds halved (Joachim, 1979). Besides, Haiti’s independence was, this time, recognized by France unconditionally.

From then on, Haiti kept paying its creditors on a more or less regular basis, thanks to additional foreign loans taken out by the Haitian governments from the French banks (Piketty, 2019/2020). Despite recurring suspensions of payments, Haiti paid the total indemnity of 90 million francs, and in 1883 – 15 years after the due date –, the Haitian double debt for independence was fully honored<sup>①</sup>. France, however, only recognized full payment officially in 1893 (Brière, 2006). Still, the extra loans taken out to achieve payment of the French indemnity remained after this date. Those loans binding Haiti to the French banks were transferred to the American banks under the United States occupation of the island from 1915 to 1934, and were only considered as fully paid off by the beginning of the 1950s (Piketty, 2019/2020).

In sum, the double debt owed by Haiti to France in exchange of independence marked the 19<sup>th</sup>–century history of the Caribbean Island. With those clear contextual elements about the 1825 debt in mind, it will now be possible to go on with the socio–historical analysis of its negative consequences on Haiti’s development.

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<sup>①</sup> This consideration includes both the French indemnity in the renegotiated terms of 1838 and the first commercial loan taken in 1825, as well as interests and bank commissions. It however excludes the additional loans taken in the following years mentioned above.

## Chapter 4. Analysis – A socio–historical interpretation of the outcomes of the independence debt

This chapter aims to demonstrate how the 1825 ‘double debt’ was a root cause of underdevelopment in sovereign Haiti in the 19<sup>th</sup> century from a socio–historical perspective. To do so, an analysis of the consequences of the 1825 independence debt on the capabilities of the Haitians and on Haiti’s emancipation process in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was conducted.

How did the independence debt imposed by France impact the development capacity of sovereign Haiti in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, from a socio–historical perspective? Can theories that consider debt as a social relationship of power between creditor and debtor be applied to the Haitian case? And does 19<sup>th</sup>–century history provide evidence that the debt was a means for the French colonial power to subjugate Haiti again? Overall, what were the consequences of the double debt on the capabilities of the Haitians and on Haiti’s emancipation process? These are the main questions that this chapter will answer to.

The present section will reflect this thesis’ main finding that, from a socio–historical perspective, the 1825 independence debt hindered Haiti’s development capacity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, because it resulted in the domination of the newly sovereign state by France and in the deprivation of the Haitians’ capabilities. Indeed, research revealed that the theories from the analytical framework were highly applicable to the Haitian case. 19<sup>th</sup>–century history does provide evidence that the independence debt was used by France to subjugate Haiti again at the time. Hence, this section will conclude that the double debt had two main consequences for Haiti’s development capacity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. First, it resulted in a renewed form of domination and exploitation of sovereign Haiti by France, which deprived the Haitians of their freedom and of their

capabilities. And second, it led to the Haitians internalizing their state of subjection, thus preventing any potential emancipation process from occurring again on the Caribbean Island.

## **4.1. A renewed form of domination and exploitation of Haiti**

This part will argue that, from a socio-historical perspective, the independence debt imposed on Haiti in 1825 placed the newly sovereign state in a dominated position. Indeed, the double debt owed to France established a highly asymmetrical relationship of dependency between the Caribbean Island and its former colonial master. More than that, it became the foundation stone for post-colonial domination, akin to what was later conceptualized as neo-colonialism or coloniality of power. In that regard, Haiti's 1825 debt acted as a tool of capture and exploitation of Haiti's time and resources. In short, it resulted in the Haitians being deprived of their freedoms and of their capabilities. Therefore, it can be said that the French indemnity led to underdevelopment on the Caribbean Island.

### **4.1.1 Tilting the balance of power against Haiti**

Theories that consider debt as a highly asymmetrical relationship of power which strongly disadvantages the debtor prove to be highly applicable to Haiti's 1825 independence debt. The relationship between the French creditor and the Haitian debtor was however singular because it did not turn out as simply unbalanced. More than that, the financial indemnity provided by the Ordinance of Charles X conferred almighty power to France over the newly sovereign Caribbean state.

When the Haitian government gave its approval to the Ordinance of Charles X in July 1825, the financial indemnity it agreed to pay to France for its independence marked, theoretically,

the beginning of a diplomatic relationship between two sovereign states. After the Haitian Revolution, Haiti had indeed gained independence and autonomy from French rule. This relationship based on a debt contract, however, would rapidly prove to be extremely asymmetrical and hierarchical. Usually, debt can be understood as a relationship of mutual dependency, in which the lender is, in theory, as reliant on the borrower than the borrower is on the lender. The higher the amount of borrowed money, the greater the reliance of the creditor on payment by the debtor. But, in reality, the debt contract is often significantly unbalanced in favor of the creditor.

In the case of Haiti's independence debt, Gregoratto's (2016) work proves to be a relevant theoretical framework to understand what made the relationship between France and its former colony more than extremely asymmetrical. In Gregoratto's words (2016), in a relationship based on debt:

one can say that the degrees of dependence and independence are determined by the following elements: by the need of the creditor to be paid back (which also depends on the amount of the loan), . . . the means that are available to her to compel the debtor and, finally, the means the debtor has to resist the demand for repayment. (p. 236)

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the new relationship between France and Haiti established by the 1825 debt was indeed characterized by an exceptionally high dependency of the Haitian debtor. Empirical evidence reveals that the three elements highlighted by Gregoratto (2016) did indeed find their culmination in the Haitian case.

First, France was simply not relying on payment of the financial indemnity. What the amount of the independence debt could represent for the French economy was out of all proportion to what it meant for the Haitian economy. Indeed, in 1825, the initial sum of the independence debt of 150 million francs represented only 2% of the national income in France, against 300% of the national income

in Haiti (Piketty, 2019/2020). Hence, it can be reasonably argued that France as a creditor was not in urgent need of payment, to say the least. This provides first evidence of the non-dependency of the French creditor to its Haitian counterpart in the debt contract.

Second, France had more than convincing means to compel Haiti to accept the terms of the 1825 debt. Indeed, the French government used coercive military force to support signature by its former colony of the Ordinance of Charles X. The orders provided on April 17<sup>th</sup>, 1825, by the French Minister of the Navy, the Comte de Chabrol (1825, as cited in Brière, 2008), to the Baron de Mackau – the French emissary carrying the decree to Haiti – provide evidence that the French were more than ready to resort to force to impose their conditions. Should Mackau have faced refusal of the terms of the Ordinance from the Haitian government, Haiti would have been immediately treated as an enemy. A blockade of the Haitian ports would have been established, all maritime trade would have been interrupted, and additional military vessels would have been sent from France until Haiti would have finally buckled under pressure (Brière, 2008). Hence, the theoretical balance in the debt contract signed between Haiti and France in 1825 was severely disrupted by the strong military capability of the French creditor, threatening to re-colonize the Caribbean Island.

Third, Haiti had by no means the ability to resist the French demands. When the French emissary Mackau entered Port-au-Prince in July 1825 with a military boat convoy threatening to bomb Port-au-Prince, the Haitian government had no choice but to cooperate. Indeed, the military capacity of the newly established state could not hold out against the threat of an attack by one of the most powerful military nations in the world at the time. For the same reason, when the time came to negotiate the terms of the 1825 commercial loan to pay the first annuity of the indemnity, the Haitian commissioners could not enjoy any significant bargaining power against the French banks. Thus, Haiti's limited capacity to withstand the French pressure explains the establishment of a debt bondage relationship with its former colonial master.



The debt relationship between Haiti and France was not only biased in terms of mutual dependency, but also, and above all, in terms of power. By requiring the newly autonomous Haitian Republic to pay a financial indemnity, France was becoming Haiti's lender. But by imposing debt in such unbalanced terms, including military intervention and political interference in case of Haiti's resistance, the European power made the balance of power tilt in its absolute favor.

This idea is rooted in Marx's (1844/2005) conception of debt as a social relationship which can grant the greatest power to the creditor's side. Indeed, when the lender does not rely on the borrower at all, they see their power massively increased in the debt relationship. They become able to withstand non-payment without any potentially severe aftereffects. Gregoratto (2016) summed up the process in the following words:

The power of the creditor derives from the weakening of the dependency that ties her to the debtor, without there being any corresponding reduction in dependency on the debtor side. Power is a matter of relationality: it is the outcome of a power and counter-power struggle. The power of the creditor results from the impossibility for the debtor to counter-balance the creditor's power. The lower the dependency degree on the side of the creditor, the greater will be the power she gains. (p. 235)

It is now quite evident that this theory accurately applies to the Haitian case. The low dependency of France to effective payment of the 1825 financial indemnity by the Haitian debtor, as demonstrated above, granted the French creditor an overpowering position in the relationship. To go one step further in the analysis, the extremely high level of dependency of Haiti to France because of the independence debt was also quite unique in the world history of credit. To cite just one example among many, Mexico's power relationship with its creditors was without parallel with the Haitian case, even when the Mexican external debt reached the enormous

figure of \$80 billion in the early 1980s (Cline, 1982). The extremely high amount of the loans indeed made risk weigh heavily on the creditor side. The largest U.S. banks for example had lent an amount equivalent to 44% of their capital to the Central American country, which would make them critically dependent on actual payment by the Mexican debtor (Cline, 1982). Most importantly, at no time did the debt contract between Mexico and the American banks stipulate that the United States would invade Mexico, should the country default its debt. Hence, what made Haiti's 1825 independence debt a unique case in history was not only the fact that the French creditor was not significantly relying on actual payment by the Haitian debtor, but was above all the fact that the terms of the debt contract included threat of re-colonization.

To sum up, with signature of the 1825 ordinance, Haiti had become bound again to its former colonial master. The degree of imbalance in the power relationship between creditor and debtor was fully singular. In short, as the newly sovereign state was being put into debt, the relationship of power radically tilted against it. To go even further, the massive advantage provided to France by the debt contract resulted in Haiti's practical independence being taken away.

#### **4.1.2 Laying the foundations of post-colonial domination of Haiti**

The general theory that the creditor will use their advantage in terms of power to subjugate the debtor in a highly unbalanced debt relationship can therefore be applied to Haiti's independence debt. The power granted by the 1825 indemnity to France over Haiti did not only allowed to establish a highly asymmetrical relationship between the two countries, but also to lay the foundations of post-colonial domination of the Caribbean Island.

In the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the double debt enabled France to reaffirm its position of authority over rebellious Saint-Domingue. According to Gregoratto (2016), the debtor's

subordination to the creditor as described in the last section is not only allowed by the borrower's heavier dependency, but also by the lender's accommodation with their own power. In a relationship based on debt, if the creditor has the advantage over the debtor, they will consciously try to derive as much benefits as possible from their position of superiority – namely financial profit. More than a commercial contract, debt becomes a relation of domination.

In the Haitian case, France as a creditor did consciously seek to benefit from its dominant position. Evidence for this argument can be found in the memorandum on the situation in Saint-Domingue written by the Comte de Viel-Castel in 1821 and addressed to the French Ministry of the Colonies. At the time, a fierce debate was going on in France between abolitionists and former settlers, fighting over how to deal with the lost colony of Saint-Domingue. In this context, Viel-Castel (1821) argued for a third way. For him, to impose the payment of financial compensations on Haiti would pave the way for a “new kind of colonization” (Viel-Castel, 1821). And to turn the Caribbean Island into a “commercial colony” would spare the costs and complications of the past, with debt as a guarantee of the Haitians' loyalty (Viel-Castel, 1821). In fact, this idea was confirmed by the report written by the Baron de Mackau (1825, as cited in Brière, 2008) back from his mission in Haiti. In this document, the French emissary welcomed the successful outcome of the expedition by stating that the Ordinance of Charles X would convert Haiti in a province of France yielding a lot of money without costing any. In this regard, Haiti's 1825 independence debt was indeed used by France to create an early form of what was later conceptualized as a ‘neo-colonial’ relationship.

The Haitian independence debt can even be considered as some kind of ‘coloniality of power’. This concept was recently developed to describe the relationship of capitalist domination of the Western countries and their private firms with their former colonies, in particular in Latin America (Quijano, 1991/2007). For Quijano (1991/2007), the European nations have based their global power on an ethnocentric perspective which assumes their own superiority

over the rest of the world – conceptualized as ‘Eurocentrism’. Accordingly, the foreign policies of these Western countries since the 17<sup>th</sup> century were said to reflect their strategy to become the main place of concentration of capital, and thus, their will to rule a world order based on global capitalism (Quijano, 1991/2007). If this general theory does not allow much nuance, it definitely finds particular resonance with the demonstration conducted in this section so far about Haiti’s 1825 debt.

Indeed, it was argued by Zambrana (2021) that debt generally “functions as a form of coloniality” (p. 10). In that respect, debt can be defined as “the afterlife of colonialism that reinstalls the colony” (Zambrana, 2021, p. 78), or, in other words, “as an apparatus of capture, predation, dispossession, and expulsion” (Zambrana, 2021, p. 12). In the Haitian case, understanding the independence debt as coloniality proves to be particularly appropriate to analyze the specific relationship between Haiti and its private creditors, that is the French banks.

Evidence of this argument can be provided by the fact that the terms of the commercial loan taken by the Haitian government in 1825 in order to pay the first annuity of the indemnity amounting to 30 million francs were entirely decided by the French financial speculators only. These seized the opportunity for profit through the payment of particularly high interest and bank commissions by the Haitian debtor. Indeed, at the time, the French bankers only provided 800 francs to Haiti for one bond in denomination of 1,000 francs (Madiou, 1988/2010). This means that, on the total loan of 30 million francs, Haiti actually paid an amount of 6 million francs in banking commissions (Madiou, 1988/2010). In other words, Haiti’s debt was made even higher by the behavior of the French financiers to reach a total sum of 156 million francs – without mentioning the due interests valued at 1.8 million francs for the same loan (Brière, 2006). To say the least, the terms of the 1825 commercial loan were not in the interests of the Haitian Republic, but were indeed rather in the overwhelming advantage of its private creditors. This reality was well outlined, even on the Haitian side, by the

presidential adviser Inginac in the immediate aftermath of the signature of the debt contract (Madiou, 1988/2010). Hence, only two decades after the establishment of the Haitian Republic's sovereignty, the 1825 independence debt imposed by France reintegrated the Caribbean state into a capitalistic world order largely dominated by the European nations and their financial firms. In other words, the Haitian double debt reinstalled a form of colonial domination, understood as an early form of Eurocentric coloniality of power.

Finally, the strongest evidence for the claim that France was seeking to reaffirm domination on Haiti through debt lies in the way the amount of the financial indemnity was unilaterally calculated by the European colonial power. As already mentioned earlier, the initial indemnity required by France in 1825 represented an enormous sum in comparison with the island's estimated revenue (Piketty, 2019/2020). Therefore, one can reasonably deduce that the Haitian independence debt was more of a tool used by France to subjugate the insurgent colony again, than a genuine compensation for the losses of ex-owners of slaves as originally claimed<sup>②</sup>.

To carry this argument further, the sum of 150 million francs was equivalent to the annual income earned by slave owners in 1789 in Saint-Domingue (Beauvois, 2009). This conclusion had been reached by the French Commission responsible for estimating the value of the settlers' losses in Haiti in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Considering amortization over 10 years – which is the usual period of time taken for a colonial property –, the amount of the indemnity owed by Haiti in 1825 represented 10% only of the initial value of the settlers' investment (Beauvois, 2009). When considering the renegotiated amount of 60 million francs Haiti and France agreed on in 1838, the rate falls to 6% of initial investment (Beauvois, 2009). If these figures should be taken as broad

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<sup>②</sup> Article 2 of the 1825 Ordinance of Charles X (as cited in Brière, 2008, p. 111-112) had mentioned that the sum of 150 million francs would be aimed at compensating the former settlers that were claiming an indemnity for their financial losses.

estimates rather than as absolutely accurate calculations, the point of this demonstration here is, above all, to give some idea of the low level of significance of the Haitian financial indemnity for the French settlers and their family, in comparison with their genuine losses.

Indeed, the sums of money that most of the ex-owners of slaves actually received as compensation were more than negligible. According to a report written by the French deputy M. de Carné in 1840, a number of 25,838 families of former settlers could pretend to compensation after 1838. This meant that each family would receive a little less than 3,500 francs over 30 years in average, or 116 francs per year (Beauvois, 2009). Also, more than 30 years after the actual dispossession of the settlers' properties in Saint-Domingue, this amount had to be divided between many family members. Simply put, final individuals would be provided with absurdly small amounts<sup>③</sup>. Hence, the claim that the Haitian independence debt would compensate the dispossessed settlers was more of a pretext than a reality.

If the amounts of money received by the French former settlers hardly made any difference for most of them, Haiti, in contrast, was struggling to pay. Indeed, it is of importance to point out that the price of the indemnity was much higher than any amount that the Haitian delegates had ever put forward in the past years' negotiations – thus, that Haiti could possibly be able to pay. Indeed, the Haitian commissioners had only alleged during the negotiations between 1814 and 1825 that France could earn up to 80 million francs of extra revenue from tariff reduction. And this estimate had probably already been magnified if compared with Haiti's real trade capacities (Beauvois, 2009).

As a conclusion, it is therefore argued that the real purpose of the independence debt imposed to Haiti by France was rather to act

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<sup>③</sup> As an example, 85 francs – equivalent to \$17 today – were paid in 1841 to former settler Jean-Louis Lonchamp's family to cover 3 years of compensation. After dividing the money between the family's eleven members, the indemnity only represented in the end the paltry sum of \$0.52 per person per year (Blancpain, 2001, as cited in Bulmer-Thomas, 2012).

as a tool of political domination and economic subjection. Indeed, the financial indemnity was meant to extract as much wealth as possible from Haiti, which was allowed by the enormous political power of the French creditor. For that reason, the 1825 debt laid the foundations of a neocolonial relationship between the sovereign Caribbean state and its former colonial master.

#### **4.1.3. Capturing the Haitians’ freedoms and capabilities**

To go further in the analysis, the idea that debt, in this context, becomes a tool of capture of the resources of the debtor, including wealth, time, and a sense of self-initiative, is highly applicable to the Haitian case. It will be argued that the 1825 independence debt led to Haiti being deprived of such resources, otherwise highly needed for its development.

By imposing such a biased debt contract to its former colony in exchange of recognition of its independence, France as creditor recovered a position where the former colonial master could once again exploit the island’s wealth. Indeed, as already demonstrated earlier, credit can be turned into the most unequal relationship of power between those who need financing – and therefore borrow – and those who can provide funding – and therefore lend.

From this idea, it derives that it will be made possible for the creditor to take advantage of their strong position to drain enormous parts of the debtor’s revenue. To quote a former president of the Finance Committee of the French National Assembly, debt is “one of the most effective instruments of exploitation man has managed to create, since certain people, by producing credit, are able to appropriate the labor and wealth of others” (Ardant, 1976, as cited in Lazzarato, 2011/2012, p. 20–21). In Lazzarato’s (2011/2012) own words, debt “is not an economic problem but an apparatus of power designed not only to impoverish us, but to bring about catastrophe” (p. 164). Therefore, the words ‘capture’, ‘predation’, or ‘extraction’ were often quoted in the literature on Haiti’s independence debt.

Indeed, it was already demonstrated earlier how the 1825 financial indemnity imposed on the Caribbean Island could not genuinely be meant to compensate the French ex-owners of slaves but had rather been unilaterally calculated according to what the French thought was Haiti's maximal payment capacity. In the French minds, the Haitian market was still assimilated with economic prestige and with high levels of productivity for the production of raw materials such as sugar, coffee, and cotton, as the former French colony Saint-Domingue used to record (Joachim, 1979).

Additionally, the fact that the amount of the indemnity had also been determined on the basis of the alleged value of King Christophe's treasure in Cap-Haïtien provides evidence for a genuine speculative movement in France about the extent of Haiti's richness. Indeed, a rumor spread after a publication of the business newspaper *Le Journal du Commerce* (1821, January, as cited in Joachim, 1979) led the French to believe that a treasure valued at 250 million francs had been hidden by the Haitian King Henri Christophe in the Citadel of Cap-Haïtien<sup>④</sup> (Beauvois, 2009). Thus, the amount of the financial indemnity was unilaterally designed by the French according to an idea of how much wealth could be captured from the Haitians.

However, expectations fueling this greedy behavior were well beyond reality of the actual payment capacity of the Caribbean Island. Haiti's default as early as in 1827 resulted in the necessity to scale down the severe terms of the deal between France and its former colony. Still, the amount of money Haiti actually paid to its French creditors did result in a significant part of the country's resources being drained out. Indeed, according to Piketty (2019/2020), 5% in average of the Haitian national income was extorted each year between 1849 and 1915 by France through the double debt and the subsequent loans taken to pay it, which could

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<sup>④</sup> A value of 5 million francs only of this alleged treasure would ever be discovered in reality (Beauvois, 2009).



have represented an equivalent of Haiti's average trade surplus at the time. Haiti put in debt peonage had been made unable to benefit from the extra revenue generated by its own means. Hence, the predatory power of the 1825 independence debt imposed on Haiti appears indisputable. The "greatest heist in history" (Daut, 2020) resulted in Haiti being turned into not only a dominated country, but also an exploited one.

The 1825 independence debt not only contributed to Haiti's economic impoverishment, but also resulted in the capture of the wealth of the Haitian society as a whole. When the financial indemnity of 150 million francs was recognized as 'national debt' by a bill voted in the Haitian Senate on February 25<sup>th</sup>, 1826 (Ardouin, 1856/2005), the independence debt imposed by France became Haiti's public debt. In a social consideration of credit, public debt comes with particular implications, because it is able to reach every single member of an entire society. As repayment hinges on taxation on a national scale, this form of credit involves every citizen. In other words, "[e]ven those too poor to have access to credit must pay interest to creditors through the reimbursement of public debt" (Lazzarato, 2011/2012, p. 32). In Haiti, indeed, the Senate vote implied passing a second law imposing on every single Haitian citizen an extraordinary contribution of 30 million gourdes to be paid over 10 years – an amount later reduced to 2 million gourdes in 1827 (Ardouin, 1856/2005). Hence, everyone in the Haitian society was being compelled to contribute to the effort of paying the independence debt, regardless of their level of income. In other words, the Haitian debtor had to exploit resources from its entire population, including the poorest, for the benefit of its French creditor.

However, the argument so far still remained focused on the sole economic angle. One step further must therefore be taken to demonstrate how the independence debt could have led to the deprivation of the Haitians' capabilities, that is their ability to decide for their own life. It is true that the 1825 debt led to the exploitation of Haiti's economic resources by France. But it also resulted in the

capture of time in the Caribbean Island, as the immediate need to pay the double debt undermined any of its prospects of a future. The due payment period of the indemnity, extended from 5 years in 1825 to 30 years in 1838, was implying that the cost of Haiti's debt would also be borne by future generations, who would have had no say on the issue. In that regard, public debt is "one form of debt that can still be transmitted across generations, allowing potentially unlimited financial burdens to weigh on progeny, who must pay for the sins of their parents" (Piketty, 2019/2020, p. 220). This idea that public debt has this special ability to survive across the ages is relevant for the Haitian case.

In this regard, general theory argued that the creditor are more powerful in the relationship because they are able to prevent their own uncertainty and to hedge their own risk by objectivizing the future of the debtor (Lazzarato, 2011/2012). In Lazzarato's (2011/2012) own words, "[t]he principal explanation for the strange sensation of living in a society without time, without possibility, without foreseeable rupture, is debt" (p. 47). This idea draws on Marx's (1844/2005) consideration of the debt relationship as an intersubjective bond leading to the debtor's 'estrangement', that is their inability to determine their own life or to have control over their own actions.

This theory proves to be particularly applicable to the Haitian case in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, the pointless existence of the Haitian youth left with no perspective at that time was witnessed by the French abolitionist Schoelcher (1843) during his trip to Haiti in 1841. From his point of view, he would write about the life in the Caribbean Island that "it seems as if there is no future," "there is no tomorrow" (Schoelcher, 1843, as cited in Dubois, 2012, p. 120). Hence, idleness and the lack of prospect for a better life were characteristic features of the Haitian society at the time. The Haitian men, in particular, seemed to be deprived of a sense of responsibility. Hence, the burden of supporting the family was usually borne by the women in Haiti. Each of them could for example provide for not less than five individuals in average in the

Caribbean Island (Girard, 2010). In short, Haiti's future, as well as its people's capabilities, had been taken away by the 1825 debt.

One step further can even be taken in this analysis. Indeed, the life duration of the additional loans taken by Haiti to pay the initial 1825 financial indemnity made the independence debt akin to 'infinite debt'. This concept was developed by Lazzarato (2011/2012). The author suggested that, when prospects of a future are being captured by debt, indebtedness is "for life" (Lazzarato, 2011/2012, p. 77) and the "indebted man" becomes a "permanent debtor" (Lazzarato, 2011/2012, p. 21). Indeed, as mentioned in Chapter 3, Haiti had to borrow from the French banks to pay the first annuity of the indemnity. It had then to borrow again to make the following payments and to cover both the interest expense and the bank commission costs on the first commercial loan taken in 1825. In that sense, the independence debt can be assimilated with endless indebtedness. One loan leading to another, Haiti was trapped into a situation where it seemed that it would forever have to endure the price of its independence. Hence, as Haiti's future was forever devoted to paying the double debt, the country's people were deprived of any other prospect that could relate to a development or emancipation process.

To sum up, France had the coercive power to compel Haiti to honor its 1825 independence debt, therefore akin to an infinite obligation of payment. Because the debt captured their resources and their future, the Haitians were thus deprived of their ability to make decisions for their own life, to innovate or simply to govern themselves. In other words, the double debt incurred deprivation of the Haitians of their freedoms and capabilities, which stands for the very definition of underdevelopment adopted by this thesis.

As a conclusion to the first part of this analysis, theories that consider debt as a social relationship of power proved to be highly applicable to the Haitian case. 19<sup>th</sup>-century history did provide evidence that the independence debt was used by France to subjugate Haiti again. Because the double debt was indeed one of

the most extremely asymmetrical relationships of power between a creditor and its debtor, it turned the newly sovereign Haitian Republic into a country fully dominated and exploited by its former colonial master after 1825. Consequently, the double debt hindered long-term initiative and innovation in Haiti. In other words, it deprived the Haitians of their freedoms and capabilities. As underdevelopment stands for unfreedom, this socio-historical approach allowed to conclude that the 1825 independence debt made Haiti an underdeveloped country in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In the next part of this chapter, the second main finding about the consequences of the independence debt for Haiti's development capacity will be developed. It will be found that the double debt resulted in full internalization by Haiti of its state of subjection, thus preventing any potential emancipation process from occurring on the Caribbean Island again.

## **4.2. Internalization by Haiti of its state of subjection**

The last subsection demonstrated that the debt imposed by France on sovereign Haiti in 1825 allowed the European nation to exert a renewed form of extremely powerful domination and exploitation over its former colony. Still, one question remains: how could the Haitians resign to this fate, after having fought so fiercely for independence just a few decades before?

The core argument of the second part of this analysis will be that theories on the social mechanisms of debt provide a convincing explanation for such a paradox. Haiti's independence debt was a much more ambivalent form of domination than slavery and colonization had been. Because it was embedded with the feeling of guilt and with self-blaming, the double debt resulted in the Haitians internalizing their state of subjection, as well as the Western-led narrative that their country was a failed state. In short, the 1825 independence debt hindered any new potential emancipation

process on the Caribbean Island. Put another way, it led to Haiti's underdevelopment.

#### **4.2.1. Disguising Haiti's new form of bondage with freedom**

General theory provided that the debt contract usually relies on an abstract promise of possible freedom for the debtor and of equality with one's creditor. It was found that this idea indeed explains why the Haitian leaders normalized the 1825 independence debt in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, akin to a highly ambivalent form of domination.

Initially, Haiti chose to comply with the terms of the independence debt also because it would – at least in appearances – come with recognition on the international stage of its freedom as a sovereign state. Liberty, indeed, was of utmost importance to the Haitians in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The value of freedom was clearly spelt out in the Haitian Declaration of Independence signed on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1804 by Dessalines and the Haitian Generals. The address indeed claimed “Liberty or Death”, and the Haitians swore “before the whole universe, to posterity, to [them]selves to renounce France forever, and to die rather than live under its dominion”, as well as “to fight until their last breath for the independence of [their] country” (Haitian Declaration of Independence, 1804, as cited in Gaffield, 2016, p. 245). This other citation is acknowledged as the last words of the leader in the Haitian Revolution Toussaint Louverture, just before he died as a prisoner of France: “in overthrowing me, you have cut down in San Domingo only the trunk of the tree of black liberty. It will spring up again by the roots for they are numerous and deep” (Farmer, 1994/2006, p. 377). This quote, still well-known in the Caribbean Island, is additional evidence of how much liberty meant to the Haitians.

In accordance with how dearly valued liberty was by the Haitians, Article 3 of the 1825 Ordinance of Charles X, and then Article One of the 1838 Treaty acknowledged, in theory,

sovereignty and independence of Haiti from France. Therefore, the financial indemnity that was also provided by these two (principle) agreements was “accepted with resignation” (Piketty, 2019/2020, p. 219) by most of the Haitians. Because the 1825 debt was thought to allow official recognition of Haiti’s hard-earned autonomy and freedom, the unilaterally decided conditions of payment of the double debt were not strongly opposed by the Haitian government.

In order to better explain this apparent paradox, it can be argued that the Haitians could not foresee at the time how the independence debt was bringing their country back under the dominion of France. They were indeed deluded by the exact opposite illusion of achievable equality underlying the debt contract. According to theory, debt has this insidious power to bind debtors to their creditor while misleading them into believing that the relationship can be one of formal equality. It is a particular feature of the credit deal that it relies on this abstract idea of equality between the parties. Each of them is assumed to act of their own free will. This conception of debt draws on Graeber (2011), who wrote about the relationship between the creditor and the debtor that “[l]egally, at least as far as the contract is concerned, they are the same” (p. 86). In an explicitly feudal relationship, the debtor would not indeed be able to fully commit and comply, as they would be aware of the strong imbalance of the contract to their disadvantage.

This idea illustrates the Haitian situation in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The illusive perspective of equity advertised by the independence debt constitutes what precisely allowed its normalization in the rhetoric of the Haitian leaders. Evidence can be found in Boyer’s address on July 11<sup>th</sup>, 1825. The Haitian President defined the new relationship with France under the Ordinance of Charles X as one of ‘reciprocal trust’ and ‘honesty’ (Ardouin, 1856/2005). In the same idea, Article 2 of the Treaty of 1838 (as cited in Brière, 2008, p. 332) provided ‘constant peace’ and ‘eternal amity’ between the European nation and the sovereign Haitian Republic. This was a striking change in Haiti’s rhetoric about its

relationship with its former colonial master compared with the 1804 Declaration of Independence. In fact, Haiti could now think of itself as a sovereign nation ‘equal’ to France.

In this context, the independence debt was seen as the legitimate cost to pay in exchange of recognition of independence. Formal equality with its French creditor resulted in Haiti legitimizing the idea that it should now undertake the price of its autonomy – namely, pay the financial indemnity imposed by France. Here lies one of the main reasons behind the paradox of Haiti normalizing the same independence debt that was turning it back into a dominated country – an idea demonstrated in the first part of this analysis.

It can be proved, indeed, that the double debt was a highly ambivalent form of domination of Haiti. This argument relates to the idea that the illusion of equality and freedom in the debt contract can disguise even the most extremely asymmetrical relationship. Indeed, domination by the creditor over the debtor can be tied up with a definition of power as “an action that keeps the person over which power is exercised “free”” (Lazzarato, 2011/2012, p. 31). As the bonds of dependency that tie the borrower to their lender are not explicitly expressed, the former is more likely to accept a relationship that might turn out to be one of subordination to the latter.

In the Haitian case, historical archives from the 19<sup>th</sup> century provide evidence for this theory. Viel–Castel (1821) for example made clear in his memorandum that Haiti’s freedom granted by a financial indemnity would not be genuine. Instead, it would rather be akin to a ‘de facto’ independence that would neatly replace the colonial bonds of the past (Viel–Castel, 1821). From the Haitian perspective, the historian Madiou (1988/2010) was considering that the Ordinance of 1825 would allow Haiti to be admitted into the family of ‘civilized nations’. Ironically, the recognition of Haiti’s freedom that went along paying the 1825 independence debt was precisely what allowed France to refresh a relationship with its former colony based on exploitation and domination, without

meeting strong resistance from the Haitians.

In sum, Haiti's independence debt allowed to disguise enduring bonds to the French colonial power, still bearing strong marks of violence and coercion, with nominal freedom and virtual equality. The ambivalence of Haiti's relationship with its French creditor can be summarized as "being freed from slavery and free of resources, emancipated and subordinated, self-possessed and indebted, equal and inferior, liberated and encumbered, sovereign and dominated, citizen and subject" (Hartman, 1997, p. 118)<sup>⑤</sup>. In short, Haiti's entrapment into debt bondage in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was much more subtle than the forms of servitude that the Caribbean Island had experienced in the past – namely slavery and colonization. This explains why the Haitian leaders paradoxically normalized the independence debt in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, even after having fought so fiercely for the independence of their country just two decades earlier.

Hence, the double debt allowed a highly ambivalent form of domination of Haiti based on theoretical freedom. Ultimately, it would result in the country internalizing its new state of practical subjection. The new sense of morality and the heavy feeling of guilt borne by the debtor in the debt relationship also contributed to the process, as next subsection will demonstrate.

#### **4.2.2. Burdening Haiti with a new sense of morality and guilt**

In the sociological and philosophical literature, the debtor is the one bearing the heavy burden of guilt in the relationship between lender and borrower, as debt comes with a new sense of morality. This idea, once again, proves to be relevant to analyze the relationship between Haiti and France in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It will be argued that the double debt legitimized a new

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<sup>⑤</sup> Albeit used in a completely different context – that is the emancipation of the black slaves in the United States –, this quote from Hartman (1997) was used because it did echo a lot with the Haitian case and the demonstration conducted in this subsection.



Western-based narrative, according to which Haiti was a failed state.

In theory, when the balance of power tilts in the favor of the creditor's side, the guilty conscience and the moral judgment consequently weigh more heavily on the debtor's side. Indeed, to incur debt is to take a pledge to pay it back. One can for example observe the etymological origins of the English word 'should' in the word 'Schulden' meaning debt in German (Graeber, 2011). By accepting the terms of the double debt, Haiti had now to demonstrate that it was worthy of trust. Its very value as a nation had become contingent on the country keeping its word.

To go further, from the social perspective, when one's ability to pay their debt is estimated, it is their fundamental level of morality which is valued. By setting a precisely calculated money value on one's due, as well as specific terms for how it should pay it back, debt greatly facilitates the judging of one's ethics. Put another way, debt theoretically allows to evaluate and judge one's social existence. This idea largely draws on Nietzsche's (1887/1998) conception of debt as the root of morals, and thus of the human social relations. The 'indebted man' is an individual morally bonded to its creditor (Lazzarato, 2011/2012). In other words, credit generates its own idea of what is moral or ethical and what is not – namely, to honor its promise and to default.

This theoretical framework can convincingly be applied to the Haitian case. There is indeed evidence that the independence debt set by France in 1825 did impose a new sense of morality to the former slave colony. There was a strong assumption that, as a 'free nation', the newly established Haitian Republic should be held responsible in case of nonpayment. Hence, Haiti President Boyer used to be depicted as a 'great' and 'generous' leader, a 'responsible guarantor' for France, or a 'new Washington' at time of negotiations in the early 1820s (Viel-Castel, 1821). But after Haiti's default in 1827, his reputation to the French switched to a 'reluctant', 'weak' and 'inconsistent' man, acting in 'bad faith' (Mélau and Maler, 1827, February 25, as cited in Brière, 2008). For

their part, Haiti's inhabitants were portrayed as simple-minded individuals unable to make the needed sacrifices for their own peace (Laffitte, 1828, November 4, as cited in Brière, 2008). They were considered by the Europeans as lazy workers incapable of benefiting from the wealth of their own land (Las Cases, 1838, February 17, as cited in Brière, 2008). This proves well how the feeling of guilt aroused by default of the 1825 debt was unilaterally placed on the Haitian ex-slaves, while their French oppressors could walk away with an eased conscience. Not once did Haiti's inability to pay caused a reassessment of the legitimacy of the debt by the French.

Hence, the independence debt legitimized a French, and more generally a Western-based narrative, according to which the Caribbean Island deserved to be punished for having disrupted the established world order led by the European powers. This idea stems from the socio-historical literature. According to Graeber (2011), "debt is not just victor's justice; it can also be a way of punishing winners who weren't supposed to win" (p. 6). In the perspective of the hegemons, Haiti's freedom in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was indeed seen as a "threat to "Western civilization"" (Werner, 2016, p. 149). The Haitian slaves had succeeded to win over the powerful French colonial empire. For that reason, the independence debt provided not only a way to sanction Haiti for its daring at the time, but also to make the Caribbean Island a deterrent example for other colonies tempted to rebel.

Evidence of the Europeans' paranoid attitude towards Haiti can be found in the regular allegations made that the Black Republic was trying to instigate revolt in the neighboring island colonies. The Aponte Rebellion in 1812 in Cuba, for example, was linked to the Haitian Revolution in the Spanish minds for the simple reason that images of the Haitian generals Toussaint Louverture and Jean-Jacques Dessalines had been discovered in the house of José Aponte, the leader of the Cuban slave rebels (Childs, 2001). The fact that the 1804 Haitian Declaration of Independence had been

written in both French and English also fueled a narrative in Europe that Haiti's government was aiming at reaching an international audience to influence other black slave nations and spread revolution (Girard, 2016).

Guiltiness ascribed to Haiti after default of the double debt as soon as 1827 also allowed a second Western-led narrative to emerge about the newly established Republic. As demonstrated above, the fact that the Haitian government could not fulfill its pledge to pay its debt provided the best justification for foreign observers to pass a negative moral judgement on the governance of the newly independent nation. But more than that, the Europeans rushed into a conclusion that a country led by former black slaves was incapable of self-management. In other words, the Haitian case was seen as the living proof that "blacks were incapable of self-rule" (Farmer, 1994/2006, p. 287). In parallel, the Haitian failure was displayed as an illustration of the European self-proclaimed superiority based on racism.

19<sup>th</sup>-century French literature provides evidence for this idea. Because of debt default, Haiti was depicted as the living proof of a premature emancipation of the 'African race' (Pichon, 1830, September 2, as cited in Brière, 2008). Disappointed judgment on Haiti's government capacity was made final and without appeal even by convinced abolitionists. Despite its potential as a role model for all other slave societies, Haiti had proved unreliable as a debtor. For that reason, the country was blamed as even more guilty. Victor Schoelcher (1843), for example, addressed severe reproach to the Haitian government for having failed to fulfill its pledge: "Have you not thought about what you are doing? Have you not considered the responsibility that weighs on you?" (as cited in Dubois, 2012, p. 120). This last burden was quite heavy to bear on the conscience of the newly sovereign Haitian state.

To sum up, the extremely high asymmetry in the power relationship between Haiti and its French creditor allowed a new sense of morality and guilt to unilaterally weigh on the side of the Haitian debtor. Therefore, default of the double debt resulted in the

emergence of new Western-based narratives in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, according to which newly sovereign Haiti was a failed state. In fact, this idea would rapidly be internalized by the Haitians themselves, thereby hindering any future potential emancipation process.

#### **4.2.3. Making Haiti internalize its failure as a state**

Finally, theory provides that the moral judgment and the feeling of guilt are being internalized by the debtor themselves. It is true indeed that the Haitian political leaders ultimately considered that paying the independence debt was legitimate and would prove Haiti's value as a sovereign state. With debt default, the Haitians internalized their failure as a state, which would make them unable to engage in any future emancipation process.

By normalizing the independence debt, Haiti first internalized the idea that its moral value would now depend on its ability to respect its financial engagement. Evidence for this idea can be found in Boyer's address made before the Haitian House of Commons on January 14<sup>th</sup>, 1826, after signing the Ordinance of Charles X. The Haitian President indeed expressed that the Republic should now give pledges of its good faith to its French creditor. This was done as soon as on February 25<sup>th</sup>, 1826, with the vote of the Haitian Senate turning the independence debt into 'national debt' (Ardouin, 1856/2005). In the words of the Senate in a message addressed to Boyer on January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1835, the 1825 commercial loan taken to pay the first annuity of the indemnity was also engaging Haiti's 'national honor' (the Haitian Senate, 1835, as cited in Ardouin, 1856/2005). Additionally, Boyer (1838, as cited in Ardouin, 1856/2005) further signified in a message to the Senate dated July 28<sup>th</sup>, 1838, that it was now Haiti's turn to prove its worth and loyalty. In parallel, the renegotiation of the terms of the double debt and the signature of the 1838 Treaty would then be said to have proved 'sincerity' of France (Boyer, 1838, as cited in Ardouin, 1856/2005).

All these elements prove that the Haitian leaders internalized the particular understanding of morality embedded in the 1825 debt. Especially after 1838, and because the new treaty was perceived as a generous gesture from the French creditors, Haiti completely integrated the idea that paying the independence debt, yet in the harsh terms decided by the French, would be the needed condition to justify its moral value as a newly sovereign state and as a free country.

Haiti internalized this new sense of morality, but also the feeling of guilt that weighs on the side of the debtor. As already mentioned earlier, this feeling was intrinsically linked with debt in the philosophical literature. Indeed, one needs to take the blame for failing to pay back their debt. Nietzsche (1887/1998) for example highlighted how the German word for 'guilt', 'Schuld', becomes in plural form 'Schulden', meaning 'debt'. But Deleuze & Guattari (1972/1983) extended the scope of this analysis. Because they do feel guilty, the debtor internalizes the idea of a responsibility of their own.

Applying this theory to the Haitian case implies that the strong feeling of guilt embedded in the debt relationship made the Haitian Republic look at itself as a failed state, when the government could not keep at pace with the payments of the independence debt in 1827 and throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This idea proves to be true especially after signature of the new treaty with France in 1838. Indeed, after this date, no more evidence of any potential denunciation of the legitimacy of the independence debt could be found, even from the Haitian side. Haiti ultimately assumed responsibility for its own failure as a debtor. Therefore, it can be concluded that Haiti's self-blaming allowed by the social mechanisms of debt contributed to internalization by the Caribbean country of its state of subjection after 1838.

In that perspective, the double debt therefore made Haiti internalize the Western-based narratives mentioned earlier. The feeling of guilt accompanying the 1825 independence debt resulted in the Haitians legitimizing the idea that they did deserve their

sentence. In general theory, this was once again conceptualized as an insidious power of debt, which remains intrinsically linked with a sense of hierarchy and violence. Distinctiveness of debt is that it leads to the internalization by the debtor of its dominated position, and therefore to the naturalization of violence, become morally acceptable. Put another way:

If history shows anything, it is that there's no better way to justify relations founded on violence, to make such relations seem moral, than by reframing them in the language of debt – above all, because it immediately makes it seem that it's the victim who's doing something wrong. (Graeber, 2011, p. 5)

Indeed, the independence debt did come with a uniquely severe form of violence, as described in the first part of this analysis. But the fact that, especially after 1838, the same Haitian people that had fought so fiercely for independence during the Revolution did not rebel must mean that, this time, this new form of domination was taken as legitimate. When Haiti committed to pay the independence debt, the country endorsed its reputation as a guilty troublemaker. And when Haiti could not keep up with the payments, the Haitians assimilated the idea that they should be held responsible as guilty individuals. The Haitian government shifted its focus on paying its dues to its French creditors and clearing Haiti's name. In other words, the Haitians internalized the Western-based narrative in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that their country was a failed state.

Besides, the Haitians themselves also assimilated the European narrative according to which Haiti was responsible not only for proving its own value as a free nation, but also for demonstrating the worth of the sovereign black man at large. To cite an example, the Haitian philosopher Firmin (1885) referred to that assumption as the “national duty” of the first Black Republic, that would represent both a “glory” and a “martyrdom” for the island country. Made guilty individuals, the Haitians ironically took the perspective of their oppressors for their own.

To sum up, the Haitian political leaders in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century did indeed consider that paying the independence debt would prove Haiti's value as a sovereign state. This new sense of morality, alongside the feeling of guilt when Haiti defaulted payment of the 1825 debt, made the Haitians internalize their country's failure and state of subjection, thus hindering any future emancipation process.

To conclude, this chapter stated that, from a socio-historical perspective, the 1825 independence debt hindered Haiti's development capacity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, because it resulted in the domination of the newly sovereign state by France and in the deprivation of the Haitians' capabilities. The sociological and philosophical theories of debt as a social relationship of power proved to be applicable to the Haitian case. In that sense, 19<sup>th</sup>-century history provided evidence that the independence debt was used as a means by France to subjugate its former colony again.

To sum up, the double debt had two main socio-historical consequences for Haiti's development capacity in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. First, it resulted in a renewed form of domination and exploitation of sovereign Haiti by its former colonial power. By doing so, it led to the deprivation of the Haitians of their freedoms and capabilities. Second, the double debt also allowed internalization by the Haitians of their country's state of subjection. In that respect, the 1825 indemnity prevented any potential emancipation process from occurring again on the Caribbean Island.

The socio-historical analysis of the outcomes of the 1825 independence debt conducted in this chapter therefore allowed to state that, from a socio-historical perspective, the debt owed to France was a root cause of underdevelopment in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Haiti, taken as unfreedom. The implications of this original interpretation, as well as its limitations, shall now be presented in next chapter.

## Chapter 5. Implications and limitations

This thesis stated that, from a socio-historical perspective taking development as freedom and debt as a social relationship between creditor and debtor, Haiti's underdevelopment stems from the independence debt that France imposed on its former colony in 1825. Indeed, the double debt resulted in the deprivation of the Haitians' capabilities and in the domination by the French colonial power of the newly sovereign Caribbean state in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

This chapter will now allow to better define the scope of this thesis' findings on this particularly controversial issue. First, this research allowed to fill the gap in knowledge identified in the literature review on the socio-historical consequences of the 1825 independence debt for Haiti's development capacity. Second, this study could also solve the academic debate opposing internal conditions to external relations to explain Haiti's underdevelopment. Indeed, if development is defined as freedom, the French colonial power bears the greatest responsibility for subjugating sovereign Haiti through debt in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### 5.1. Filling a gap in knowledge

This thesis' findings as exposed in Chapter 4 brought a needed contribution to the question of a relation between the Haitian independence debt and underdevelopment in the Caribbean country. It was found that the 1825 debt hindered sovereign Haiti's development capacity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century from a socio-historical perspective. Indeed, the so-called double debt deprived the Haitians of their freedoms and capabilities, as well as made them internalize their dominated position, thus preventing any emancipation process from possibly emerging in the future.



This socio–historical perspective on the outcomes of the 1825 independence debt had been identified as a gap in knowledge. To recall, the previous literature on this topic had addressed the question from the sole economic angle. In particular, Bulmer–Thomas (2012), Henochsberg (2016) and Piketty (2019/2020) had found a causation link between the external debt service and the collapse of the Haitian economy at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, payment of the double debt by Haiti significantly restricted the country’s public budget for national productive investment, and thus reduced its capacity for economic growth. Yet, it was commonly acknowledged in development studies since the 1990s that underdevelopment should be understood as more than the lack of income growth or the absence of industrialization. The concept should indeed be considered as a multidimensional process including sociological and historical factors.

For this reason, this thesis had adopted a meaningful definition of underdevelopment as ‘unfreedom’, or as the deprivation of individual capabilities. A consistent conceptualization of debt as more than a tangible amount of money due, but rather as a social relationship of power, was also considered. This unprecedented socio–historical perspective allowed to reveal new negative consequences of the 1825 double debt for the Haitians’ freedoms and capabilities in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Hence, this thesis did provide an unprecedented interpretation of the causation link between the financial indemnity imposed by France on its former colony and non–development on the Caribbean Island. That original angle also led to original findings regarding the period from which it can be considered that sovereign Haiti became an underdeveloped country. Indeed, Chapter 4 demonstrated that the process could be dated in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>®</sup>. In particular, it was found that Haiti’s state of subjection was completely internalized after signature of the second Treaty

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<sup>®</sup> Instead, Bulmer–Thomas (2012) and Henochsberg (2016) had argued that, according to economic data, the Haitian economy fell behind in the second half of the 19th century.

between France and sovereign Haiti in 1838.

It must be understood that this thesis does not intend to refute past economic arguments. Yes, it can be taken for granted that the 1825 independence debt was a cause of Haiti's economic failure in the 1890s. Rather, this study aims at making a clearer distinction between the lack of economic growth on the Caribbean Island and Haiti's underdevelopment. Simply put, this thesis stated that the Haitian double debt was a root cause of underdevelopment for sovereign Haiti as soon as in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, because it resulted in the Haitians' being deprived of their freedoms, as well as of the ability to engage in any potential emancipation process. By taking development as freedom, this analysis was more in line with the latest development paradigm in date than the previous strictly economic research.

With that in mind, the findings of the present analysis also appear to be strong enough to respond to at least two anticipated criticisms. First, a paradox could arise from the argument that sovereign Haiti was turned into an underdeveloped country in the early decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the Haitians normalized the 1825 independence debt and internalized their country's new state of subjection. If the Haitians legitimized the double debt as the price of independence, how is it that the question has recently become one of the most controversial political issues in the Caribbean Island? Indeed, as mentioned in introduction, since Haiti President Aristide's claim for reparation from France in 2003, some Haitian political leaders, scholars, and activists fiercely put the legitimacy of the 1825 debt back into question. To respond to that comment and explain this apparent contradiction, it can be suggested that the final settlement in the 1950s of all the subsequent loans that Haiti had taken to pay the initial double debt (Piketty, 2019/2020) gave the Black Republic a chance to escape the heavy feelings of guilt and of self-blame borne by the debtor. This argument can also be supported by the fact that Haiti could benefit from debt relief

measures as a Highly Indebted Poor Country in the 2000s<sup>⑦</sup>. In short, Haiti got out of its position as a debtor compelled by the uniquely coercive terms of the 1825 debt contract with its former colonial master. This could explain the emergence of a protest movement against the French state newly made possible today.

Second, one may reasonably question what made sovereign Haiti in the 19<sup>th</sup> century singular when compared to other nations. Indeed, every country in the world has experienced indebtedness. By no means could debt in itself however be sufficient to make each one of them an underdeveloped country. Hence, the strength of this thesis' argument rests on two main characteristics of the specific Haitian case. On the one hand, the independence debt did not finance any productive investment in Haiti. This is particularly important to the argument that the 1825 debt resulted in post-colonial domination of the Caribbean debtor and in the deprivation of its inhabitants' capabilities. To take a comparative example, the loans taken by Mexico from the British banks in the 1820s were aimed at compensating the costs that the war of independence against the Spanish colonial empire had incurred and at building the newly autonomous Mexican state (True, 1937; Salvucci, 2009). The Mexican debt actually had a concrete purpose. Therefore, it cannot easily be concluded that it acted as a tool of capture of the meaning of the Mexicans' life, or of their prospects for a future. In other words, distinctiveness of the Haitian debt in the 19<sup>th</sup> century lies in the fact that the 1825 indemnity was akin to a direct subsidy to the French state. As explained in Chapter 4, this stands as one of the main reasons why philosophical theories on the social impact of debt particularly well apply to the Haitian case.

On the other hand, the extremely high level of the coercive power of the French creditor in the debt contract with Haiti was out of all proportion with comparable treaties signed in other countries.

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<sup>⑦</sup> The Caribbean Island was granted US\$1.2 billion of debt relief by the international financial institutions and by foreign lenders in 2009, before a total cancellation of its remaining public debt in 2010 in support of reconstruction efforts after the earthquake (World Bank, 2010).

Even among those nations that were facing similar requests for payment of a financial indemnity in exchange of recognition of their autonomy from their former colonial master, Haiti stands as a singular case. In 1825, the amity treaty signed between Brazil and Portugal for example provided the payment of two million pounds sterling by the newly sovereign Latin American country to its former colonial power (Stuart, Carvalho e Mello & Santo Amaro, 2018). The indemnity was meant to compensate the losses of the European power. In return, it granted diplomatic recognition of Brazil's independence, under mediation of Great Britain which provided the needed loans. However, the power relationship between Brazil and Portugal in the 1820s was very different to the one between Haiti and France at the same time. In short, Portugal had no means anymore to intervene politically in Latin America or to exert any exaggerated control over its former colony (Manchester, 1951). In contrast, the terms of the 1825 debt contract in Haiti included threat of re-colonization, which made the balance of power tilt in favor of the French creditor to the most extreme extent, as demonstrated in Chapter 4. This therefore explains why the Haitian debt and its consequences on Haiti's development capacity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century stand as a singular case.

Hence, because the Haitian study case is so unique, the findings of this research could not be generalized to other underdeveloped countries. The fact that the 1825 independence debt was a root cause of sovereign Haiti's underdevelopment in the 19<sup>th</sup> century does not entail that debt causes underdevelopment overall. This should be recognized as a limitation to this thesis, which better defines the scope of its conclusions.

In sum, to argue that the Haitian double debt led to Haiti's unfreedom in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was more in line with the latest development paradigm and therefore convincingly filled a critical gap in knowledge. Besides, it also allowed to solve the debate on the causes of Haiti's underdevelopment opposing internal conditions to external relations, as next subsection will further develop.

## 5.2. Solving the debate

This research concluded that the independence debt was indeed a root cause of underdevelopment in sovereign Haiti in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, because it allowed the French colonial power to subjugate its former colony again. In that regard, this thesis clearly supported the idea that external relations, rather than internal conditions, were the major original causes of underdevelopment in Haiti. In that sense, it allowed to solve the important debate on who must bear responsibility for Haiti's unfreedom in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The literature review conducted earlier had already enabled to reject factors such as geography, demography, culture, political instability, or external political interference in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the root causes of Haiti's underdevelopment. On the side of internal conditions, domestic politics and the selfish interests of the Haitian ruling elite in the 19<sup>th</sup> century had remained as the most credible explanatory factor. On the side of external conditions, foreign interference in the 19<sup>th</sup> century had alternatively been identified as one of the most convincing causes of Haiti's underdevelopment. However, this debate could not be resolved because both of these two opposing theories had failed to conceptualize underdevelopment as more than the lack of economic growth. Additionally, it was also found that theories highlighting the imperialist, or colonial and neo-colonial relationship between Haiti and the Western nations were more in line with a definition of underdevelopment as unfreedom. However, they were also considered insufficient as they couldn't solve the paradoxical question of how sovereign Haiti, born out of one of the most unique emancipation processes in history, could ironically be turned into an underdeveloped state in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Hence, this thesis finally proved that the 1825 independence debt should act as the most important factor that could better explain Haiti's underdevelopment, when defined as a multidimensional process assimilated to 'unfreedom'. Indeed, it was found that the double debt led to the deprivation of the Haitians'

freedoms and capabilities in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, this analysis was more in line with the latest development paradigm. Besides, the Haitian double debt appeared as the most convincing explanatory factor to the apparent paradox highlighted above. It was indeed demonstrated that the 1825 independence debt was an ambivalent form of domination disguising Haiti's bondage with a promise of virtual freedom. At the same time, it made the Haitians internalize the idea that their country was a failed state, and thus hindered any future emancipation process. In short, the 1825 independence debt resulted in Haiti being turned into an underdeveloped country in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, even though the Haitian black slaves had succeeded in emancipating themselves from the colonial master just a few decades earlier.

The strength of this analysis thus lies in explaining the root causes of sovereign Haiti's underdevelopment back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, it turned out more limited to outline the reasons why non-development has still endured until today. As mentioned earlier, Haiti escaped its position as a dominated debtor in the 1950s, and even further in the 2000s. Why then could it not enter a sustainable development path or a credible emancipation process? This is where the scope of the present research does encounter its boundaries. To recall, the literature review did however provide some explanations of why Haiti still remains trapped in poverty today. Some internal conditions, in particular climate, overpopulation and political stability, had indeed proved convincing to solve this question. Hence, underdevelopment remains a highly complex process. According to Reitsma and Kleinpenning (1985), "[u]nderdevelopment . . . must be seen as the product of an array of complex and continuously changing interactions between past and present, between natural and human factors, and between internal conditions and external relations" (p. 222). To sum up, it was found that underdevelopment of sovereign Haiti initially stems from the independence debt imposed by France in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, domestic factors could better explain why Haiti has still been struggling to escape the trap of poverty lately.

To go back to the present research, this thesis' core argument strongly supports the idea that external relations are the root causes of Haiti's underdevelopment. The socio-historical perspective allowed to conclude that the 1825 independence debt did allow the French colonial power to subjugate sovereign Haiti again. The double debt, as an external factor, hindered sovereign Haiti's development capabilities. In that sense, this study allowed to solve the debate of who, the Haitian political leaders themselves or the French colonial power, should bear responsibility for Haiti's poverty situation. Indeed, this thesis' conclusions connect with Piketty's (2019/2020) and Henochsberg's (2016) argument that the French creditors in the 19<sup>th</sup> century are the ones to be blamed for the negative impact of the 1825 independence debt on Haiti's development capacity. It was actually important to reach a conclusion on this question, because, as mentioned earlier, this debate has fueled political tensions today between France and Haiti. In that regard, it is now proved that the French colonial power in the 19<sup>th</sup> century can be held accountable for underdevelopment in sovereign Haiti at the same period.

However, this thesis cannot ignore the possible implications that this conclusion could have for the polemical question of reparations owed by France to Haiti. Yes, the French responsibility in the root causes of Haiti's underdevelopment in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was demonstrated. However, readers must be warned that the aim of this thesis was never to fuel controversy nor to provide further arguments in favor of a Haitian request for compensation. The question of reparations deserves to be dealt with as an individual case study. Indeed, the issue requires particularly careful legal considerations, which clearly stands beyond the scope of this study.

Still, this thesis' statement allows a prudent suggestion. Haiti would certainly do better to demand recognition by the French state of its past responsibility, rather than to loudly claim reparation. At a minimum, official acknowledgement by France of the negative consequences of its past behavior in Haiti could help ease current political tensions. This would more easily contribute to building

better and more peaceful cooperation for development between the two countries.



## Chapter 6. Conclusion

This thesis demonstrated how the ‘double debt’ was a root cause of underdevelopment in sovereign Haiti in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when that concept is defined as ‘unfreedom’. To do so, the negative consequences of the 1825 independence debt for Haiti’s development capacity were analyzed from a socio–historical perspective. It was found that sociological and philosophical theories that consider debt as a social fact are highly applicable to the Haitian case. 19<sup>th</sup>–century history does indeed provide evidence that the independence debt was used by France to subjugate its former colony again in the first decades after the Haitian Revolution. In that regard, this research responded to the following key question: how did the independence debt imposed by France impact the development capacity of sovereign Haiti in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, from a socio–historical perspective? In short, this thesis stated that, from a socio–historical perspective, the 1825 independence debt hindered Haiti’s development capacity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, because it resulted in the domination of the newly sovereign state by France and in the deprivation of the Haitians’ capabilities.

Some scholars had already taken interest in investigating the negative outcomes of the independence debt on Haiti’s development. Through economic analyses, Bulmer–Thomas (2012), Henochsberg (2016) and Piketty (2019/2020) had found that the external debt service costs had significantly burdened Haiti’s public finance in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and until the 1950s. Therefore, they had concluded that the double debt could be considered as a cause of the Haitian economy falling behind in the 1890s. The strength of these studies lies in the dataset that the economists had managed to construct on the 19<sup>th</sup>–century Haitian economy. However, the evolution of the debate in development studies proved this economic approach to be insufficient to make a conclusion about the root causes of Haiti’s unfreedom. Indeed, according to the latest paradigm in the field,

development should be understood as more than a process of output growth, capital accumulation or industrialization, but rather as a process of emancipation that contributes to attaining a capacity of self-determination.

Hence, this thesis defined Haiti's underdevelopment as unfreedom, or as the deprivation of the Haitians from their capabilities. Consistently, the Haitian public debt was conceptualized not just as a tangible amount of money owed to France, but rather as a social relationship of power between France as creditor and Haiti as debtor. Drawing on the sociological and philosophical literature, an analytical framework was built. It allowed a socio-historical interpretation of the causation link between the financial indemnity imposed by France on its former colony and non-development on the Caribbean Island. In that regard, this thesis' analysis was more in line with the latest development paradigm, taking underdevelopment as a multidimensional process also including sociological and historical factors.

This socio-historical analysis allowed to highlight two main findings. Two essential outcomes of the Haitian so-called 'double debt', including both the initial indemnity owed to France for recognition of independence and the subsequent commercial loan taken from French private banks to pay the first annuity in 1825, were indeed outlined. First, Haiti's 1825 debt resulted in a renewed form of domination and exploitation of sovereign Haiti by France, which deprived the Haitians of their freedom and of their capabilities in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Second, it also led to the Haitians internalizing their state of subjection, thus hindering any potential emancipation process on the Caribbean Island, especially after 1838. In short, the 1825 independence was a root cause of underdevelopment in sovereign Haiti in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

To briefly develop the key findings of this thesis, the sociological and philosophical literature taking debt as a social fact proved highly applicable to the Haitian case. This allowed an original interpretation of Haiti's independence debt as a social

relationship of power between the Haitian debtor and its French creditors. From that perspective, the 1825 debt established a uniquely asymmetrical relationship between the newly established Haitian Republic and its former colonial master. The extremely high power granted by the coercive terms of the double debt to the creditor side was used by France as a means to exert post-colonial domination over the island state. This form of subjection was akin to an early shape of neo-colonialism or of coloniality of power. In that regard, by capturing Haiti's whole society, the Haitian independence debt resulted in the deprivation of the island's resources, including the capacity for initiative, the sense of responsibility, and the prospects for a future of its inhabitants. As this description actually stands for the very definition of underdevelopment adopted by this thesis, it was concluded that the 1825 double debt caused sovereign Haiti's underdevelopment in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In parallel, general theory also provided that the social mechanisms that accompany indebtedness would then allow the debtor to internalize its own failure. Once again, 19<sup>th</sup>-century provided evidence of the applicability of this idea to the specific Haitian study case. In 1825, the Haitian leaders were deluded by the illusion of achievable equality and freedom underlying the debt contract. For that reason, they normalized the independence debt that was in reality bringing their country back under the dominion of France. Haiti then became burdened with a feeling of guilt after default as soon as in 1827 and obsessed with the need to prove its moral value as an indebted sovereign nation. In that sense, the new forms of violence that went with debt bondage were being legitimized, and that, especially after 1838. This actually explains why the Haitians assimilated a Western narrative that would depict their country not only as a failed state, but also as a living proof of the incapacity of former black slaves to self-manage. Indeed, this assertion initially stood as a paradoxical contradiction, as the Haitians had been fighting so fiercely for independence from France during the Haitian Revolution. Simply put, from a socio-historical

perspective, the 1825 independence debt made newly established Haiti an underdeveloped country in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

With that conclusion, this thesis could fill a critical gap in knowledge about socio-historical consequences of the 1825 independence debt for Haiti's development capacity. Indeed, this study made a clearer distinction between a lack of economic growth on the Caribbean Island and Haiti's underdevelopment. In particular, it was argued that the Haitian double debt led to Haiti's unfreedom in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This finding was therefore more in line with the latest development paradigm. In that regard, however, Haiti stands as a unique case. The 1825 independence debt was singular in world history, because it did not finance any productive investment on the Caribbean Island, and because the level of the French creditor's coercive power in the debt contract was extremely high. Therefore, it should not be generalized that debt causes underdevelopment overall.

That said, and for the Haitian particular case, this thesis allowed to solve the debate on the causes of underdevelopment opposing internal conditions to external relations. Indeed, this research concluded that the 1825 independence debt, as an external factor, acts as the most convincing root cause of underdevelopment in 19<sup>th</sup>-century sovereign Haiti when the concept is defined as a multidimensional process akin to 'unfreedom'. Indeed, it was found that the double debt owed to France led to the deprivation of the Haitians' freedoms and capabilities in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Most of the other explanatory factors previously raised by scholars had failed to account for this definition yet adopted by the latest development paradigm. Besides, the Haitian double debt also appeared as the most convincing explanatory factor to solve the paradox mentioned in introduction. Indeed, the social mechanisms embedded in the 1825 independence debt could better explain how a country where black slaves succeeded in emancipating themselves from their colonial master could then be turned into an underdeveloped, dominated state, just decades after autonomy.

Lastly, this thesis solved the debate about who must be held

accountable for Haiti's unfreedom in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Because it highlighted how the double debt allowed the French colonial power to subjugate its former colony again, this study inferred responsibility of 19<sup>th</sup>-century France in underdevelopment of sovereign Haiti. It was important to reach a conclusion on this question, because the debate has fueled political tensions between France and Haiti today. However, this finding should not be used as a supportive argument for the Haitian claim for compensation. Indeed, the question of the legitimacy or the practicability of payment of reparations by the French Republic to Haiti should be the specific subject matter of future research based on a juridical-legal approach. To wrap up, the present study suggested that recognition by France should first come as a potentially preferable outcome to promote peaceful cooperation between the two countries, and thus to help Haiti finally escape the trap of poverty.

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## Abstract in Korean

아이티가 1825년 프랑스에게 지급한 독립 배상금과 카리브 제도의 저개발 간의 관계는 논쟁이 다분한 경제학 연구 주제이다. 발전(Development)이 단순한 소득 증가 이상의 복합적인 과정으로 이해되어야 한다는 점에서, 본 논문은 독립 부채가 아이티의 발전에 미치는 부정적인 영향을 사회·역사적 측면을 고려하는 독창적인 관점에서 분석한다. 이러한 접근법은 저개발(Underdevelopment)을 부자유(unfreedom)로, 아이티의 배상금은 채무자로서의 아이티와 채권자로서의 프랑스 사이의 사회적 관계의 산물로 간주한다. 본 논문은 사회학 및 철학 문헌 연구에 기반한 분석들을 사용하였고, 19세기 아이티 역사를 바탕으로 경험적 증거를 수집하였다. 분석 결과, 아이티의 이중 채무는 19세기 전반기에 생겨난 신생 국가들에 대한 새로운 형태의 지배 및 착취로 기능하였으며, 아이티인들이 프랑스에 대한 종속을 내면화하게 되는 계기가 되었음이 확인되었다. 따라서, 사회·역사적 관점에서 보았을 때, 주권국가로서의 아이티의 저개발은 1825년 프랑스가 아이티에 요구한 독립 배상금에서 기인한 것임을 알 수 있다.