

State-middleman violence: making sense of crimes in Papa Doc's Haiti*

Violência dos agentes intermediários do Estado: os crimes no Haiti de Papa Doc

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Abstract: This piece offers an economic and institutional-based analysis of variations of state violence; its arguments rest upon a study of François Duvalier's authoritarian rule in Haiti, from the late 50s to the early 70s. Even though this regime was highly centralized, it granted some level of autonomy to middlemen who perpetrated crimes to some extent in response to economic and institutional interests.

Keywords: Haiti; Haitian politics; State violence; Authoritarianism.

Resumo: *Este artigo oferece uma análise com base econômica e institucional de variações da violência do Estado; seus argumentos fundamentam-se em um estudo do regime autoritário de François Duvalier no Haiti, do fim dos anos 1950 ao início dos anos 1970. Por mais que esse regime fosse altamente centralizado, concedeu algum grau de autonomia relativa a agentes intermediários que perpetraram crimes em alguma medida em resposta a interesses econômicos e institucionais.*

Palavras-chave: *Haiti; Política haitiana; Violência do estado; Autoritarismo.*

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Introduction

States as such do not rape, torture and kill. People who control the state or act in the name of the state commit acts of state violence. To talk about state violence, or the state as the perpetrator of violence, obscures the reasons why violence in the name of the state happens, and how it happens. One must look at state authorities' decisions and interests to understand patterns of what is referred to as state violence in the literature. State authorities as I understand them are the people who control or act in the name of the state.

My definition of state authorities differs from the part of the literature that defines social roles with a focus on strategic incentives to violence. For instance, Valentino (2004) focuses on actors' goals and strategies in order to understand mass killings that remain, as he says, "an instrumental policy." Yet, his focus assumes a "relatively small group of powerful political or military leaders," who have control over the government and design a plan to eliminate opponents. In my understanding, state authorities are not only the heads of states. Operative officials who act under the auspices of the state have relative autonomy to decide and act, and the spread and form of state violence depends on the decisions and actions of state middlemen¹.

Relative autonomy in this context means that central governments play a role in planning, orienting and executing mass killings, but so do operative officials. Perpetrators do not simply follow orders; they act according to their strategies and goals. Their interests might be increasing their status within the corporation to which they are enrolled or having some sort of economic benefit. Mass killings can be profitable for state middlemen. Therefore, I assume that within the same polity state authorities do not act uniformly. Even in centralized authoritarian governments, heads of states do not fully control actions², whether violent or not, that people commit in the name of the state, whether these are violent or not. On the one hand, central-state decisions to advance a genocidal or politicidal agenda inform local and low-level state actors who align with or are part of the state structure, but they do not necessarily give details of how these

local actors should perform such agenda³. On the other hand, state middlemen have their own agendas, and violence under the name of the state might be in part a consequence of middlemen's own interests.

This paper does not aim to reject the literature on violence in the name of the state that takes into consideration strategic thinking—it may be read as an element on an ongoing effort of understanding the logic of state violence (PESCHANSKI; MORAES, 2015)—; it makes the case that one must break the assumption that mass killings depend only on the strategic thinking of a sole cohesive entity. To look at how low-level state authorities, who are here referred to as state middlemen, relate to violence contributes to the understanding of why and how mass killings occur.

In light of the aforementioned theoretical perspective, I look at François Duvalier's regime in Haiti, specifically from 1961 to 1971. Interesting characteristics of this case are at least threefold. Firstly, Duvalier's rule remains an example of a highly centralized authoritarian government, which, to some extent, accords with the common assumption of the literature that mass violence depends on a cohesive and unitary leadership. Secondly, during the period I am interested in, Duvalier did not face any "real" threat from powerful opposition groups. He had managed to crush his opponents in his first years as head of state (PESCHANSKI, 2013). In many of his speeches after 1961, Duvalier, or Papa Doc, suggested that communist groups would be trying to destabilize his government. Indeed, some small opposition groups, most of them unarmed or poorly armed, tried to organize uprisings against Duvalier, nonetheless the widespread state violence in Haiti from 1961 to 1971 appears to be a disproportionate response to such opposition. Moreover, violence under his regime did not only target existing or potential political adversaries and their supporters. Lastly, despite Duvalier's centralizing attitude to politics, he granted relative autonomy to some of his strongmen—the *tontons makouts*—to rule local regions; they had full authority in their local areas, even though they reported to the central government.

I rely on two case studies in order to understand how state middlemen's strategies brought about violence in Haiti from 1961 to 1971. The first case study is an example of routine violence in the countryside during this period. In the Northeastern department, *tontons makouts* arbitrarily forced local peasants to work for them; killings in this case were rare. The second case is one of the most notorious massacres of the period, the Jérémie Vespers. To look at how local middlemen thought of strategically that massacre is particularly

¹ I do not embrace the term local state authorities, since it supposes a geographical identification of state authority. State violence perpetrators do not always belong to the area where they act. State middlemen refer to a leadership position; it is the intermediate leader, between the head of a state and the rank-and-file.

² Scott (1998) remains an example of strong-statist approach to the understanding of social phenomena. In that work, the state is able to "read" its population, having or aiming to have a deep and broad control over society. The assumption of the cohesive strong state obscures internal mechanisms and processes within states, that play a role in shaping political action.

³ Just to give an example: heads of concentration camps developed distinct forms of fulfilling the Reich government's orders, with varying degrees of macabre efficiency in the Final Solution.

interesting, since the central government was directly involved in it. In both cases, the loose administrative and organizational structure of the *tontons makouts* and the prevailing impunity for crimes committed in the name of the state opened opportunities for violence. In my view, the reasons and ways in which violence occurred in the two cases depended on the interests and strategies of the local state authorities. The two cases are based on data from secondary sources, which is of course a limitation of this paper. The cases are, thus, used as illustrations of broader theoretical points.

This paper is organized in two parts. First, I present some background on Haiti from 1961 to 1971, focusing uniquely on institutional characteristics of Duvalier's regime, that I describe as "Papadocentric;" and on the organizational structure of the *tontons makouts*, that I describe as loose and non-cohesive. This gave relative autonomy to middlemen to act in accordance to their interests, as long as they remained loyal to the central government. Second, I present two cases of official violence in Papa Doc's Haiti emphasizing local-middlemen's agendas, and discussing whether mass killings were in their interest or not.

Papa Doc's Regime (1961-1971)

In April 1961, Duvalier controlled politically and militarily Haiti. From 1957 to early 1961 he faced powerful elite opposition that almost succeeded in overthrowing his government, and managed to survive and eliminate his opponents (PESCHANSKI, 2013). No "real" threat against his rule existed in following years. From 1961 to 1971, scattered groups—mostly students—attempted to form guerrilla-type niches of resistance in the Eastern region; these attempts were outnumbered by Duvalierists and easily smashed. Some prominent civil-society figures voiced their discontent against the regime, but they were unable to spread their opinions (PESCHANSKI, 2006). Duvalier had taken over all the important means of communication and had a cohesive group of civil-society allies, who were able to spot and neutralize any resistance from the elite. Moreover, the United States, with strategic interests in the area, undoubtedly supported the regime, before, but especially after the Missile Crisis in neighboring Cuba, in 1962 (HEINL; HEINL 1996)⁴. On April 8, 1961, Duvalier dissolved the Legislative Power, and three weeks later staged presidential elections in which he was the sole candidate⁵.

⁴ Heintl and Heintl (1996) acknowledge critiques of the US government to Duvalier's regime, yet in the context of the Cold War American presidents took him as an ally.

⁵ According to Heintl and Heintl (1996, p. 585), Duvalier received more votes than the actual number of voters in Haiti. Frauds in the election

Duvalier referred on many occasions to an internal communist threat and the risk of Castro-communist subversion⁶, but these references had the character of justifications of his abuses and of means of strengthening the US support in a context of Cold War, rather than indications of a real threat. His references to threats appear to be *après les faits*. Leaders might perceive and feel signals of threats that are not there, especially in situations of high uncertainty, but this does not appear to be the case in Haiti. Communists had never been a strong force in the political system of this country. Duvalier's main opponents, defeated before 1961, were the traditional elites. Papa Doc's regime targeted organizations and individuals who claimed to be communist, but the label "communist" was also used to justify violence against groups and persons who were not aligned to this ideology, such as the teachers' union and the archbishop of Port-au-Prince. Duvalier's references to an internal communist threat appear to be a political fabrication.

Duvalier's regime had highly centralistic features. The "Duvalierist Catechism," based on a leaflet written on biblical style and comparing Duvalier to God, became mandatory reading in all schools. In 1961, he initiated projects to build a new city, Duvalier-ville, that he supposed to become the capital of Haiti. On January, 21, 1965, Duvalier gave a speech to inaugurate the city, even though, as reports Ferguson, (1987, p. 47) "[...] twenty-five years after its inception, Duvalier-ville amounted to little more than a run-down collection of concrete bungalows, a disused cinema and a large cockfighting arena." Trouillot (1990, p. 171-172) describes the Duvalierist Executive as an "[...] omnipotent center, [...] in which the chief of state served as the sole reference point or center," and "[...] the emergence of any heterogeneous organization, the institutionalization of any practice with a semblance of autonomy, within or around the Executive, was always in potential conflict with Duvalierism, even when political loyalty was not in question." Even though I do not dispute the fact that Duvalier's regime was highly centralized, I present the case in this paper that operative Duvalierists had relative autonomy. In any case, Duvalier did manage

were so evident, that the US government made an official statement against it, and Kennedy recalled the US ambassador for consultation.

⁶ References to serious risks of internal subversion are frequent throughout the 1960s. On November, 18, 1964, Duvalier gives a speech about "anti-nationals and usurpers" who attempt to destabilize his government, and calls for energetic actions from his loyal armed forces to "repress and smash" those attempts, in order to defend the "Haitian Revolution" (Duvalier 1967, p. 234). That particular reference corroborates the idea that Duvalier mentions internal enemies to justify army abuses, since it is made in a period in which his rule is consolidated. Duvalier became president for life four months before that speech.

to weaken and sometimes dismantle hitherto important institutions, such as the army, the clergy and the press, that used to act autonomously from the central government.

During Duvalier's regime, the army as an autonomous institution was dismantled. The central government shut down the officers' academy in 1961. New officers were selected among loyal Duvalierists, and military units received orders directly from the president's cabinet. Moreover, Duvalier split the military authority, creating "pockets of power in the army," that competed for attention and resources from the government (LAGUERRE, 1993, p. 110). Low-ranking officers had direct access to the president and his ministers, disrupting the chain of command, and creating a system in which subordinates spied and reported on their superiors' activities in order to gain promotions and money. Despite the re-structuring of the army, the Garde Présidentielle, Duvalier's personal military force—that surpassed in strength and power other military units—remained the main military institution of the regime. Among its duties was the responsibility for protecting Duvalier and his family. The central government established a civilian-militia structure—the National Security Volunteers, or VSN, better known as the *tontons makouts* (which means boogymen, in Creole)—to police the country⁷.

Officially established in 1958 as a means of preventing and repressing upheavals against the regime⁸, the *tontons makouts* were the fundamental repressive and administrative institution of Duvalier's regime. Social categories that took part of the rank-and-file of that institution were fourfold, according to Pierre-Charles (1973, p. 52-53): rural landlords; former or new military officers; "[...] individuals from various social origins that seek authority and power, [...] that can be from the middle class (students who got into the university

because of their devotion to Papa Doc) to peasants, who can use the title of 'Tonton Macoute' to terrorize people in their regions and exercise their power [...];" and people who entered the militia for opportunism, economic survival and fear of threats from other militiamen. Pierre-Charles' categories are loose: no specific segment of the population joined the ranks of the *tontons makouts*, and the joining appears to be independent from class, race, training and apparently also gender⁹. *Makout* commandants appear to have come from diverse social classes as well.

Despite Duvalier's administrative efforts of centralization, the VSN was not cohesive and unitarily structured. Recognized by their bright denim uniform and the dark sunglasses, the *tontons makouts* did not seem to have much more in common, and did not work as a corporation. According to Laguerre (1993, p. 115), "[...] at the local level, the structure varied from one local to another. [...] The line of command from top to bottom was never made clear. Also, the number and identity of the Tontons Macoutes were not always known by the central government." According to the formal organization of the VSN, each *Makout* commandant had a district headquarter—formally, the district followed the boundaries of the military areas—, and was put in charge of a *Makout* contingent. Formally again, the main duties of the *tontons makouts* were threefold: policing and repression of the opposition; organization of the rural economy¹⁰; and bureaucratic administration of the district. In general, important civil figures, such as mayors, judges and local representatives, were part of the VSN. In reality, rather than formally, district boundaries were loose, and the *makout* commandants often disputed with each other the control over territories. Moreover, there was no real chain of command, and low-rank *makouts* tried on occasion to overthrow the commandant by spreading rumors, which led the central government to intervene against the commandant. District commandants organized personal groups of followers to defend themselves against other *tontons makouts* (LAGUERRE, 1993). Furthermore, no uniform national coordination existed. The central government intervened in the regions and established formal rules for the VSN, but did not create a national structure; therefore, patterns of political and administrative organization varied from one region to another. As

⁷ Heintz and Heintz (1996, p. 581) report on a US official document on how the VSN accentuated the dismantling of the army: "The practice on the part of individual *miliciens* or their leaders of establishing themselves as vagrant law officers exercising police authority with little if any training and education, and no sense of responsibility, has had a degrading effect on the regular Armed Forces, [who] appear to have lost control over the ill-defined police functions asserted by *miliciens* and are unable or unwilling to reassert control." That report reveals the authority status *de facto* of the members of the VSN, that went beyond what they were officially in charge of.

⁸ An informal army of loyal Duvalierists existed before 1958, and was called the *cagoulauds*. Laguerre (1993, p. 115) affirms that the transition from the *cagoulauds* to the *tontons makouts* expresses a fundamental change in the militiamen's activities government: "Instead of a reactive role, they took a proactive role. This proactive role allowed the leadership to be in close contact with the president and his subordinates; by excess of zeal, they continued to denounce whomever they wanted, whatever their reasons." I do not find compelling the argument that supposedly unexplained violence from the *makouts* -- denunciation in this case -- was the result of "excess of zeal," and in this paper I attempt to provide a distinct understanding of why they engaged in violent actions.

⁹ The head of Fort Dimanche, the main political prison of Haiti, was a woman, Max Adolphe, who became the Supreme Head of the *tontons makouts* in the subsequent government. Even though some reports exist of female low-ranked *tontons makouts*, no decisive research exists on the subject.

¹⁰ During his government, Duvalier released several legal documents, that informed new administrative rules and positions of state authorities. The language of those documents was loose, so that the *tontons makouts* became even in the eyes of legality very powerful in their localities.

Laguette (1993, p. 117) describes: “While in the Artibonite department the heads of Tontons Macoutes in cities and villages communicated directly to Zakarie Delva, in the central plateau area they communicated directly with Port-au-Prince authorities.”

The central government’s benefits of the loose organizational structure of the VSN were at least threefold. First, the *tontons makouts* were easy to control by the central government, because they continuously had to prove their allegiance to Duvalier in order to remain in power or function. The allegiance “[...] strengthened the government, because it proved to others that everyone was capable of rising, of growing wealthier, of doing well, if he or she decided to pay the price of this success with both life and honor [...]” (TROUILLOT, 1990, p. 154-155). Second, *tontons makouts* from all ranks had an incentive to denounce any attempt of plot against the government, and they would expect to be rewarded for their loyalty. Last, there appears to be some degree of efficiency in tax and rent collection that remained under the supervision of local *makouts*. The local *makout* commandant sent the money collected through taxes directly to the central government, which established a system of reward and punishment to make sure that local lords sent the funds. The central government rewarded efficient local lords by redistributing money to their localities; the central government’s fund distribution depended more on allegiance and loyalty to local lords than on actual needs of regions or any economic plan (TROUILLOT, 1990). Besides, the central government granted the exploitation of state farms —amounting for 30% to 50% of the total agricultural land of Haiti in 1961 (PIERRE-CHARLES, 1967)— to loyal local lords, from which they extracted their revenue. *Tontons makouts* who were found or were believed to be stealing from the funds they were supposed to send to the central government were systematically eliminated. Many—if not most—people murdered or put in jail during Duvalier’s regime had been at some point part of his group of followers. Competition for local leadership reinforced the central government’s capacity and efficiency to control what local *makout* commandants did.

The major flaws of the VSN system from the perspective of the government were its cost and inefficiency. On average, the central government used an estimate 30% of its budget to sustain the *tontons makouts*, who received financial compensation (WEINSTEIN; SEGAL, 1992, p. 41). The central government had only a vague idea of how funds were distributed. Although the compensation was personal and the government had direct contact with many of

the low-rank *makouts* no one had an exact idea of how many *tontons makouts* existed and who they were.

The unstructured system of the VSN also led to administrative inefficiencies, as described by Trouillot (1990, p. 175):

Even when an administrative superior clearly held more power than all of his immediate subordinates—and this was not often the case—the basis of such power was neither his role nor his title, much less his competence, but his subordinates’ perception of the strength of his ties to the center. [...] At the lowest levels of the administration, efforts to achieve a measure of efficiency necessarily conflicted with the centrifugal distribution of power and its intolerance of formal hierarchies.

Another indicator of inefficiency was the prevailing corruption and the collapse of the productive system (PIERRE-CHARLES, 1973). The lack of cohesiveness and esprit de corps of the VSN caused harm to the government, but it also became a fundamental support for the central government. As shown in the next part of this paper, the relative autonomy of the operative *tontons makouts*, who, despite their allegiance to the government, had to use their own discretion to deal with local politics, explains patterns of violence in Haiti from 1961 to 1971.

Logics of violence

Widespread violence—and the permanent fear of violence—became a distinctive characteristic of Duvalier’s regime, when compared to other Haitian authoritarian regimes. Violence during this period has been described as “limitless” (TROUILLOT, 1990), “total” (HEINL; HEINL 1996) and “barbarian” (PIERRE-CHARLES, 1973). Even though no reliable estimates of the number of deaths, kidnappings, rapes and other forms of violence exist, accounts from the period appear to justify such adjectives.

Most of the literature has, in my view, erroneously focused on Duvalier as the headmaster of 1961-1971 generalized violence. For example, Pierre-Charles (1973, p. 54) refers to how Papa Doc himself “ordered” and “sparked” widespread criminal acts, such as the extermination of the Sansaricq family, from Jérémie, in 1964. I discuss this specific case—called the Jérémie Vespers—in more detail below, because it is an emblematic example of violence during the period, and show how the spread and level of violence also related to local interests of the *tontons makouts*. Trouillot (1990, p. 166-168) refers to the Duvalierist state as the main perpetrator of violence. To some extent, Trouillot’s reference attempts to summarize characteristics of violence that occurred during Duvalier’s

regime. These characteristics were fourfold: (1) the use of violence “[...] beyond the socially accepted range for victims of state violence [...]”, including children and the elderly among the victims; (2) no gender distinction, so that “[...] under the Duvaliers, women were sometimes treated the same as men, often worse [...]”; (3) the targeting of high-level civil servants, who were usually shielded from violence; and (4) the use of violence against non-political groups, such as “[...] a neighborhood, an entire town, a soccer team or a group of individuals sharing a surname, though otherwise unrelated.” The attempt to summarize characteristics of violence during Duvalier’s rule shows new general patterns of violence, but to focus solely on the Duvalierist state as the perpetrator of violence obscures other key factors: who committed such acts of violence and why.

Duvalier and his direct counsellors and secretaries were involved in many crimes. They ordered killings; they targeted families of political opponents. The symbol of the central-government violence remains Fort Dimanche, that *The New York Times* (10/1/1994) calls the “Auschwitz of Haiti,” “[...] a political prison where men were beaten, electrocuted, dismembered, blinded and castrated, [and where] an estimated 3,000 people were locked inside and were never seen alive again.” The central government controlled this jail, and sentences to Fort Dimanche were often decided directly in Duvalier’s office (LEMOINE, 1996). Duvalier characteristically went after anyone who actually was or he thought could become a challenge to his rule. This included members of the VSN who were considered too powerful. Not all crimes in Haiti from 1961 to 1971 were committed under the orders of Duvalier, though. His main impact on crimes committed by *tontons makouts* was granting immunity to loyal members of the VSN; they knew their violence would remain unpunished as long as it did not interfere with the interests of the central government.

The loose structure of the VSN combined with the *carte blanche* from the government contributes to explain violence in Haiti from 1961 to 1971, but these elements are not sufficient. Relative autonomy and impunity opened opportunities for violence for the *tontons makouts*, but is not enough to explain why and how violence occurred. *Makout* crimes varied across regions in Haiti, according to the limited data available on violence from 1961 to 1971 (CNVJ, 1997; PIERRE-CHARLES, 2000). One needs to look at the interests of Duvalier’s middlemen — who acted in the name of the state — and local politics to understand violence during the period.

The two cases of violence analyzed here, which are among many others that occurred during the 1961-1971

period highlight Duvalier middlemen’s interests in those acts of violence. The two cases I have selected are different in nature. The first case illustrates routine violence in the countryside and does not involve many killings, but resulted in indiscriminate arrests and abuse of authority. The second case is the Jérémie Vespers; a massacre that is particularly interesting because it is often considered the most extreme example of Duvalier’s violence. Based on documents released in 2007, I make the case that the degree of violence of the Jérémie Vespers was dependent on local middlemen’s interests.

The first case illustrates arbitrariness from the *tontons makouts* in the Northeastern department. The case is part of Laguerre’s (1993, p. 148-161) study on what he calls “parasitic entrepreneurship.” According to Laguerre, members of the VSN forced peasants from the area to work for free or for minimal pay in their lands. Peasants who refused to work were either put in jail, and then had to work the *makout*’s land as forced labor, or killed. Killings were not frequent, since the *tontons makouts* needed the labor force. Genocide is not a plausible option when exploitative relationships happen, since these rely on an interdependent set of interests (PESCHANSKI, 2012). Killings happened as a means of showing to other peasants what could happen if they refused to work. The scheme also involved the chief of section, the *tonton makout* who was responsible for the rural administration according to Duvalier’s Rural Code: he confiscated seeds and products from peasants who refused to work for free. The *makout* farmer paid the chief of section for his services. Coerced labor, as described by Laguerre, became the main model of agricultural organization in the Northeastern department.

The role of the central government in “parasitic entrepreneurship” was threefold. First, it gave or leased properties to the *tontons makouts*, obtaining a revenue from the use of the land. The central-government personnel that co-ordinated land use was part of the bureau des contributions (Internal Revenue Service), that acted mostly autonomously from Port-au-Prince. That personnel received financial compensation from the government, but also received money from the local farmers. Second, non-*makout* landowners protested against these corrupt enterprises, but the central government did not intervene to stop the “parasitic entrepreneurs.” As Laguerre (1993, p. 159) puts it, “The officer-entrepreneur is seen by his civilian competitors as a parasite, one who participates in the competition of business without following the rules of the game and profits from a series of benefits that are denied the civilian entrepreneur.” Landowners in the area were not opponents to the government, and

therefore had an incentive to join the ranks of the *tontons makouts* in order to enter the scheme. Lastly, the central government did not punish *makout* abuses, and the prevailing impunity enabled members of the VSN to develop such scheme.

Tontons makouts were arbitrary and abusive in this case, nevertheless killings remained rare. They were a means to show to the community that they were under the threat of violence if they did not do as they were told by VSN officers. To some extent, they were discriminate, since local middlemen needed people to farm their lands, and the extermination of people would jeopardize agricultural production. Moreover, the case shows harmonic relations between different types of *tontons makouts*; they established a system of exchanges and were able to co-ordinate the scheme among themselves so that all could profit from the scheme. Non-*makout* landowners had no interest and means of resisting to the scheme, and therefore had an incentive to become part of it.

The Jérémie Vespers, one of the most well-known massacres during Papa Doc's regime, is the second case of violence I analyze in this paper. I rely on Pierre-Charles' (2000) account to describe the event. In Jérémie, a city in the Southwest, *tontons makouts* and soldiers completely wiped out several families, mostly the Sansaricq and Drouin, between August and October, 1964. At least 27 individuals were killed, including a four-year old child who was tortured in front of his parents before being executed, and an 85-year-old woman. Chassagne (1999) talks about hundreds of dead, and so do *The New York Times* and Amnesty International. Besides the killings, other members of these prominent families and their employees were sent to jail, tortured, raped and expelled from the region. Homes and shops belonging to families that opposed Duvalier or that were just loosely related to these families were looted and burned. The leaders of the *tontons makouts* and soldiers — Abel Jérôme, Sony Borges, Sanette Balmir, Gérard Brunache and Saintange Bontemps — knew the victims. Because of the cruelty of the perpetrators and the extent of the killings the massacre became a symbol of the violence during Duvalier's regime.

The Jérémie Vespers is generally considered in the literature and human-rights reports an example of Duvalier's cruelty, yet one must look at the *tontons makouts*' own interests against the families who were targeted, and not only at Papa Doc's interests against them, to make sense of the massacre. Duvalier had a direct interest in the extermination of the families who were targeted: they were political opponents, and their relatives had been involved in a recent guerrilla against the government, called the Jeune Haïti. Duvalier

wanted to make an example of the repression (HEINL; HEINL, 1996). Yet, Duvalier did not give a blueprint of how the repression should be held, and the form and spread of the massacre were decided by VSN middlemen in Jérémie.

From the perspective of the central government, the killings were indiscriminate; from the perspective of the local middlemen, they met their immediate interests. People who had nothing to do with the Jeune Haïti or politics were slaughtered, just because they had the same last name of some of the targeted families or because they had some loose professional or personal connection with them. The local middlemen knew who they were killing, and went specifically after local businessmen's families. Péan (2007) revealed documents on the relationships between the elite families in Jérémie and the local *makouts* that shed new light on the massacre. My analysis of the massacre relies on these documents.

Tensions between the Sansaricq and Drouin and the members of the VSN existed before the Jeune Haïti. In at least four occasions the *tontons makouts* looted Pierre Sansaricq's shop, Chez Desquiron, the most important of the city. The Drouin were associated to the enterprise that corresponded to three fourths of the products required by the local *makout* office, including gas. In 1963, the *makout* commandant Sanette Balmir asked for bribery from Pierre Sansaricq, who refused:

It was the period in which gas was rarer and rarer in the country. [...] One day a captain came to Pierre Sansaricq's store with a check of 40,000 gourdes, coming from Port-au-Prince, to pay for gas for the local Duvalierists. The captain proposed to Sansaricq to get only half of the money and leave him the rest. Pierre Sansaricq rejected the offer, and said that he would stop providing to the Duvalierists under those conditions. The following day he was sent to jail as long as his family, and faced very harsh treatments (PÉAN 2007, p. 122).

The *tontons makouts* tried to extract Sansaricq's safe password during torture sections, but were unable to do so at the time. Sansaricq was released from jail, but forbidden to leave the city. In the period of the Jérémie Vespers, when Duvalier ordered raids in the city, the *tontons makouts* took it as an opportunity to get the safe password. Violence against the Sansaricq was related to attempts to get the password, and the *tontons makouts* drugged Sansaricq in order to break his resistance. At some point, Sansaricq gave the password, and was then killed. The *makout* terror in Jérémie was in line with immediate financial objectives of the members of the VSN.

Yet, the cleansing of Jérémie's traditional elites was also connected to a broader strategy of controlling the

city commerce and economy. The *tontons makouts* Astrel Benjamin and Raoul Cedras, the latter also the communal judge, were involved in the crimes against the Sansaricq and Drouin, and used the crimes as a means of becoming the main suppliers of the city. Their store competed against Sansaricq's Chez Desquiron. After the killings, they took over the establishment; no member of the family was left in the city to claim the property.

The Jérémie Vespers complied with central-government interests that wanted to act against opponents' families in Jérémiebut was also dependent on the interests of the local *tontons makouts*, who acted with relative autonomy. The central government intervened in the city and sent personnel from Port-au-Prince, including Jacques Fourcand, a direct advisor of the president. The level of violence, however, should be imputed to members of the VSN, who saw the elimination of prominent families of the city as an opportunity to obtain economic benefits: the money in the Sansaricq's safe and the control over the commerce in Jérémie. The people they killed were not instrumental to their acquiring those economic benefits, so the victims became superfluous. They acted violently because they knew they would remain unpunished. The central government organized a semblant of investigation after the facts, coordinated by the same people who took part in the killings, which concluded that no abuse was committed (PÉAN, 2007). The fact that the *tontons makouts* had an interest in the killings was an incentive to kill, but this does not explain why they acted with such cruelty in that case.

Conclusion

This paper made the case that one needs to look at state middlemen's interests to understand why violence in the name of the state happens. Middlemen, who co-ordinate the rank-and-file, are the actual perpetrators of violence. They do not just follow orders from the central government, but attempt to take advantage of situations to increase their status in the corporation and, in the cases studied here, gain economic benefits. Therefore, their interests contribute to understanding why and how those killings occurred.

Despite having a highly centralized and authoritarian central government, in Haiti, from 1961 to 1971, the *tontons makouts* acted with relative autonomy in the localities they ruled. The loose organizational structure of the VSN —the *makout* administrative body— sustained such autonomy. The prevailing impunity allowed the *tontons makouts* to engage in criminal activities without fear, as long they remained loyal to the interests of the central government.

The cases presented in this paper —parasitic entrepreneurship in the Northeastern department and the Jérémie Vespers— illustrate how middlemen's interests matter to explain violence in the name of the state. In the first case, the *tontons makouts* killed indiscriminately, because they needed the local population to work for them. Moreover, potential opponents —other local landlords— had an incentive not to resist the abuses from the members of the VSN, and finally attempted to become part of the scheme. In the second case, massive killings occurred because local landlords were perceived as opponent by the central government, and because the *tontons makouts* had an incentive to eliminate business competitors. In both cases, the central government's agenda played a role, but so did the middlemen's agenda.

The two cases are an illustration, and I do not claim to have made a general theory of violence in Haiti. I rely on secondary sources, and further investigation of the cases is required to provide a better sense of what happened during operations. Other factors, such as race, might have played a role. Moreover, an analysis of the economic structure of Haiti in this period is not attempted, nor is a study of geographical differences that could explain why in one case rural exploitation was the main source of revenue for the *tontons makouts*, whereas in the second case they relied on commerce. In this paper, these elements are considered less relevant to explain the institutional and strategic character of violence. In any case, the study of Haiti from 1961 to 1971 —a period that is not often part of the literature on state violence— might contribute to developing a research agenda that focuses on local processes and mechanisms to understand why and how violence in the name of the state occurs.

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