

Lyonel Trouillot, or The Fictions of Formal Democracy

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I agree with many of the points made in this forum by Valerie Kaussen and Nick Nesbitt, and have already written at length about Alex Dupuy's *The Prophet and Power: Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the International Community, and Haiti*,¹ so I will limit this brief response to Lyonel Trouillot's "rebuttal," if that's the right word, of my *Damming the Flood: Haiti, Aristide, and the Politics of Containment*.²

Though it's not exactly a promising basis for a discussion of recent Haitian politics, Trouillot's text does at least illustrate some aspects of the main antagonism that has shaped political developments in Haiti since 1990. Over the course of the 1990s, the popular movement that adopted Jean-Bertrand Aristide as its most prominent spokesman began to encounter increasingly strident forms of elite opposition: Trouillot's critique of *Damming the Flood* is typical, in both style and substance, of the sort of arguments invented by that opposition to confound this movement and to protect the privileges it sought to challenge.

It might be worth starting with a reminder of the basic historical sequence. Building on his initial landslide election victory in 1990, the balance of political forces in Haiti was confirmed in May 2000 when Aristide's Fanmi Lavalas organization won a series of decisive legislative elections, gaining around 75 percent of the popular vote at every level of government. On 29

1 Alex Dupuy, *The Prophet and Power: Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the International Community, and Haiti* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007). Peter Hallward, "Aristide and the Violence of Democracy," review of Dupuy, *The Prophet and Power*, *Haiti Liberté*, 1–3 July 2007, <http://www.haitianalysis.com/2007/8/18/hallward-reviews-dupuy-s-the-prophet-and-power-jean-bertrand-aristide-the-international-community-and-haiti> (accessed 28 February 2009).

2 Peter Hallward, *Damming the Flood: Haiti, Aristide, and the Politics of Containment* (London: Verso, 2007); hereafter cited in text.

February 2004, three years after its inauguration, the Lavalas administration was overthrown by a loose coalition of people led by a few business magnates and self-appointed guardians of “civil society,” backed up by a small group of ex-military insurgents and significant amounts of financial and diplomatic support from Aristide’s enemies in Washington, Paris, and Ottawa. Understandably, rather than risk another futile appeal to the ballot box, when push came to shove in February 2004 Aristide’s opponents preferred to rely on the sort of military solution that has long provided Haiti’s dominant class with the most reliable means of defending an otherwise indefensible status quo. In March 2004, after Aristide had been whisked into an early political retirement by US troops, his government was replaced by an unelected (and surely unelectable) administration fronted by Gérard Latortue, a laughably incompetent US puppet with negligible political support. Over the next couple of years, government-led repression of what remained of the Lavalas movement left several thousand people dead.

Novelist Lyonel Trouillot was a prominent figure in the so-called intellectual wing of the anti-Aristide opposition. In the run-up to the 2004 coup, Trouillot and his colleagues went to considerable lengths to equate Aristide and the dictator François Duvalier. This was no small ideological feat: according to their critics, Aristide’s supporters may have been responsible for killing around thirty of their political opponents, in contested circumstances, whereas Duvalier’s army and Macoutes killed some fifty thousand people. In March 2004 Trouillot was rewarded for his contribution to the restoration of Haitian democracy with an appointment in Latortue’s ministry of culture.

I’ll consider Trouillot’s main objections to *Damming the Flood* in turn, taking the most trivial points first.

1. In the concluding flourish of his review, Trouillot leaps on an apparent inconsistency. He notes that I refer to Alex Dupuy as a “Lavalas sympathiser” (162), and then as one of several “anti-Lavalas writers” (166). Trouillot finds in this apparent contradiction the final proof he needs to dismiss *Damming the Flood* as the incoherent “madness of a fanatic,” if not several fanatics.

It might be more helpful to see here a typical instance of Trouillot’s style of scholarly debate. *Damming the Flood* actually refers to the way “erstwhile Lavalas sympathisers like Jane Regan, Charles Arthur, Alex Dupuy and Christophe Wargny” came to argue that during the “decade following 1994 Aristide reinvented himself as a Macoute” (162). I think it’s fair to say that in, for example, Alex Dupuy’s 1997 *Haiti in the New World Order*,³ he remained broadly sympathetic to the initial phase of the Lavalas project; by the time he published *The Prophet and Power* ten years later, Dupuy had certainly come to share Trouillot’s equation of Aristide and Duvalier. Trouillot’s omission of the little word “erstwhile” introduces the semblance of inconsistency where none exists. Once he has finished his perusal of Bourdieu and Marx, I

3 Alex Dupuy, *Haiti in the New World Order: The Limits of the Democratic Revolution* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1997).

would recommend that Trouillot shake the dust off his copy of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and remind himself that there is indeed a condition that allows for the "combination of contradictorily opposed predicates in one and the same object"—namely, time.⁴

All through his review Trouillot makes creative use of such selective quotation. To give another minor example, Trouillot finds it "interesting to note" that I refer to "Drèd Wilmè, the most feared gang leader and one of the most murderous of Cité-Soleil, *expert in kidnappings and rapes*, as a militant leader" (Trouillot's emphasis). It would be more accurate to say that, while acknowledging Dred's violent reputation, I cite half a dozen people who are rather better qualified and better placed than Trouillot himself to confirm what is a widely acknowledged fact—that Dred was "truly admired by the people of Cité Soleil" (Belizaire Printemps and Elias Clovis), that "most people in Cité Soleil say they saw Dred Wilme as a leader, as someone who defended their community" (Guy Delva; *DF*, 290–94).

2. After accusing me of "systematically distorting the historical truth," peddling untold amounts of "false information" and betraying an "unforgivable ignorance" of the basic facts of Haitian society, Trouillot cuts to the chase: "As to the rest, [Hallward is] lying. First, his chronology . . ."

Trouillot provides two examples of my alleged dishonesty. The first is a familiar entry in the list of anti-Aristide complaint, a much discussed confrontation between antigovernment students and progovernment militants on 5 December 2003. I describe this incident in some detail in *Damming the Flood* (193–99). Presumably so creative a writer as Trouillot need not waste time to spell out what he sees as a flagrant lie, but the main falsehood I can detect here is Trouillot's own assertion that during this confrontation the university rector's legs were broken with iron bars.⁵ Trouillot then moves briskly on to his second example, claiming that in my discussion of Aristide's return to Haiti in October 1994 I fail to mention that he returned in the company of "more than ten thousand US soldiers." Trouillot concludes that *Damming the Flood* is "full of, in fact consists only of, these false truths." In reality, my discussion of this US invasion (50–52) refers to the "20,000 Marines" (51) deployed by US president Bill Clinton to enable Aristide's return, before considering, over the next couple of pages, the ways that the US occupation of 1994–2000 might have done "as much political damage to the popular movement as did the 1991–94 coup itself" (52).

As far as I can tell, Trouillot hasn't identified a single lie in *Damming the Flood*. Perhaps he will have time to explain, on some other occasion, what is mendacious about my chronology.

I don't myself accuse Trouillot of lying here. If this review is anything to go by, I doubt he's capable of it. In the space of a few short pages, Trouillot manages to mistake the timing of the

4 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 180.

5 When the case eventually came to trial in the spring of 2006, the rector (Jean-Marie Paquiot) was unable to remember the identity of his attackers and refused a court request for medical documentation of his injuries. I spoke to the doctor who treated him at the hospital, and she confirmed that his legs were not broken after all, despite endless assertions to the contrary in the anti-Lavalas media. Interview with Dr. Marie-Antoinette Gauthier, Pétionville, 9 January 2007. A similar pattern applies to a wide range of fictions invented to demonize Lavalas and Aristide.

so-called Operation Baghdad (September 2004, not July 2005, though this is a moot point, since Trouillot's "infamous Operation Baghdad" was itself just another anti-Lavalas myth [see 278–79]), distort the results of the 2000 elections beyond recognition (the competing parties split the vote, says Trouillot, in an election in which one of these parties won 72 of 83 parliamentary seats), and pile up around a dozen false or unsubstantiated claims about Aristide. Most of these claims are so far removed from reality that it's hard to know whether Trouillot has simply invented them out of thin air.

All of the substantial points—the legitimacy and consequence of the 2000 elections, the actual levels of government-sponsored violence and repression, the real nature and basis of the anti-Lavalas opposition, the real political significance of the so-called *chimères*, and so on—receive detailed consideration in *Damming the Flood*; there is space here to consider only three of Trouillot's allegations.

Trouillot maintains, for starters, that after Aristide's "three years of golden exile in the belly of the empire," he returned to Haiti in 1994 as the "empire's slave" and then enjoyed stubborn imperial support right through to the last-minute "rescue" of 29 February 2004. Leaving aside blatant US hostility to Aristide in 1990–94 (see 40–49), it takes a good deal of creative imagination to read even the explicit statements of US diplomats during the years 2000–2004 along these lines, to say nothing of the semicovert machinations of people like US ambassador James Foley, US assistant secretary of state Roger Noriega, and the International Republican Institute's Stanley Lucas, along with their French and Canadian counterparts. As is well known, as soon as it was clear that Aristide would be reelected, the United States blocked all international aid to Haiti, effectively cutting the government's budget in half. The US sponsorship of the political opposition to Aristide is a matter of public record; US support for the paramilitary opposition was more discreet, of course, but hardly more doubtful. By January 2003, if not well before then, US, French, and Canadian calls for regime change were already unambiguous.⁶ By the middle of 2003 US subversion of Aristide's administration, orchestrated by Noriega and Lucas, was so flagrant that it was even denounced in public by Foley's predecessor, US ambassador Brian Dean Curran. Once the dust had settled, Curran's claims were eventually backed up by some of the most prominent of Trouillot's honorable associates in the democratic opposition.⁷

More important, Trouillot claims that as this opposition to Aristide grew in size and confidence, taking the country to the edge of "civil war," so then a "dictatorial" government went out of control. A regime that had become dependent on "organized crime" could only cling

6 As Roger Noriega's Canadian counterpart Denis Paradis explained after a January 2003 meeting of US, French, and Canadian diplomats at Meech Lake, "the international community" had decided that "it wouldn't want to wait for the five-year mandate of President Aristide to run its course through to 2005." Instead, they decided "Aristide should go," and the international community should prepare for a new round of humanitarian intervention and military occupation in keeping with its democratic "responsibility to protect" the vulnerable inhabitants of a "failed state." Denis Paradis, interview with CBS News, 22 March 2005. See Michel Vastel, "Il faut renverser Aristide," *L'actualité*, 28 February 2003. See also Anthony Fenton, "Interview with Denis Paradis on Haiti Regime Change," *Dominion*, 15 September 2004.

7 See, for instance, Walt Bogdanich and Jenny Nordberg, "Democracy Undone: Mixed US Signals Helped Tilt Haiti toward Chaos," *New York Times*, 29 January 2006.

to power through “fear and violence.” Aristide followed where Duvalier had led: “Repression went wild.”

Now, in *Damming the Flood* I acknowledge that opposition to Lavalas did indeed grow over the course of 2003, as the foreign-sponsored destabilization and disinformation campaign began to hit home. I devote a chapter of the book to an assessment of the mistakes Aristide’s government made in office, and to the problems that confronted Fanmi Lavalas at a time when membership in the organization effectively guaranteed some access to political and economic power. A few members of the organization and the government were undeniably corrupt or opportunistic, though no doubt a scholar of Trouillot’s stature will recall that comparable problems have often if not always beset comparable organizations in comparable situations. From early November 2003 to the end of February 2004 Aristide’s penniless administration did indeed face a vocal and well-connected opposition, led by Haiti’s most powerful businessmen, calling for Aristide to resign and the army to be reestablished. At exactly the same time, former members of this same army were busy terrorizing the people of Gonaïves and the Central Plateau, in the run-up to the full-scale military assault that began on 5 February.

I’m sure Trouillot doesn’t need me to remind him of what other criminal and dictatorial governments have done when, with their backs to the wall, they unleashed so-called wild repression upon their adversaries. In Aristide’s case, such repression involved no assassinations, no death squads, no disappearances, no political arrests, no censorship, no closure of opposition newspapers or radio stations, no use of the state security forces for harassment or intimidation. It involved, instead, an endless series of concessions along with repeated offers to share power with his opponents and to participate in further rounds of internationally supervised elections. Claims that Aristide’s government armed a *chimère* militia to stifle political dissent, or that he was unwilling to negotiate with his adversaries, are the stuff of fantasy, pure and simple (see 161–71, 220–26). Of course some of Aristide’s more militant supporters were more confrontational, especially those supporters most determined, for reasons too obvious to mention, to prevent the return of Haiti’s brutal army. As anyone could have predicted, they clashed with some university students, ex-military personnel and other “civic” protesters, when the latter began to issue calls for their government to be overthrown. Given the circumstances, however, given what Trouillot himself describes as a situation of incipient “civil war,” what is most remarkable about these clashes is the degree of popular discipline and restraint. As far as I know, during all those weeks of heated pro- and antigovernment demonstrations in Port-au-Prince that began in November 2003, in which thousands of bitter antagonists faced each other on an almost daily basis—and at a time when dozens of government supporters or employees in various parts of the country were being killed in attacks conducted by the ex-army insurgents—only two antigovernment protesters were killed. One was accidentally hit by a police tear-gas canister; the other died in a confrontation that also claimed the life of a progovernment partisan.⁸

8 “Demonstrations Escalate,” *AHP*, 11 January 2004. See also Isabel Macdonald, “Covering the Coup: Canadian News Reporting, Journalists and Sources in the 2004 Haiti Crisis” (MA diss., York University, 2007). Macdonald demonstrates

If this is what Trouillot calls wild and dictatorial repression then I am curious to know how he might characterize other recent periods in Haitian history, for example, 1986–90 or 1991–94. I am especially curious to know how he might characterize the policies implemented by the post-democratic government of which he was himself a distinguished member, which in 2004–06 killed thousands of Lavalas supporters and imprisoned or exiled almost the entire Fanmi Lavalas leadership, in blatant violation of the rule of law.

Trouillot concludes his review, finally, with a reference to the fact that “a US journalist has just revealed that three cents of every international phone call from Haiti or to Haiti went to an account belonging to Jean-Bertrand Aristide.” Here is Trouillot’s modus operandi in a nutshell. He’s referring to a story published in the summer of 2008 by Lucy Komisar, a journalist hired by the Washington-based Haiti Democracy Project (an organization founded and funded by some of Aristide’s most influential enemies in both Haiti and the United States: Rudolph Boulos, Lionel Delatour, Tim Carney, Lawrence Pezzullo . . .). Komisar did indeed accuse Aristide of taking three cents per minute, not from every US-Haiti phone call but from calls made through IDT, one of several US phone companies to offer this long-distance service. She claimed that Aristide received his cut from IDT via a Turks and Caicos shell company called Mount Salem. To prove her case, Komisar claimed that “Adrian Corr, a Turks & Caicos lawyer who was legal counsel for Aristide at Miller Simons O’Sullivan and who ran Mount Salem, confirmed that Aristide owned the shell.”⁹ As another US journalist quickly pointed out, however, there were just three small problems with Komisar’s accusation. “One, Adrian Corr was never Aristide’s legal counsel. Two, Aristide never owned a shell company named Mount Salem. Three, Corr never ‘confirmed’ to Komisar what she attributes to him,” but rather denied it as “completely false.”¹⁰

When it comes to creating and repeating useful fictions, however, so far there’s little evidence to suggest that mere refutation will ever make much of an impact on Lyonel Trouillot.

3. Trouillot’s main accusation is more eye-catching than incoherence or dishonesty. I am, Trouillot says, first and foremost a “racist.” Why? Because it seems I refuse to acknowledge the capacity of the Haitian people “to think, to act, to make their own history.” *Damming the Flood* is a racist book, according to Trouillot, because it denies Haitian people any “civic motivation,” indeed any capacity to “call themselves Haitians” at all. He continues: “What Hallward is claiming, and in so doing he is more typical of the empire than he might think, is *the right to name the other’s reality in the other’s stead*” (Trouillot’s emphasis).

Like anyone trained as a literary critic I can only admire Trouillot’s use of reflexive irony here. I have apparently failed in my scholarly duty to cite and ponder with sufficient respect the words and names of some of my fellow-scholars in Haiti, scholars who over the past few

in detail that the death of the antigovernment victim, former student Maxime Deselmour, was given full and sympathetic coverage in the press; as you might expect, the death of the progovernment and thus “unworthy” victim, Louvo Petit, was “completely ignored” (“Covering the Coup,” 67).

9 Lucy Komisar, “McCain ‘Trailblazer’ Burned,” *Portfolio*, 11 July 2008, http://www.haiti-info.com/spip.php?page=imprimer&id_article=4632 (accessed 28 February 2009).

10 Kim Ives, “IDT, Aristide, and the Haiti Democracy Project,” *Haiti Liberté*, 29 July 2008, http://www.haitiaction.net/News/HL/7_29_8/7_29_8.html (accessed 28 February 2009).

years have used their ample connections with the international media in order to insist repeatedly on an equation of Aristide and Pol Pot or Aristide and Duvalier. *Aristide* and *Pol Pot*: two names, and an interesting thought. I can think of several ways of testing such a comparison. I have tested it, and find it hard to escape the conclusion that the person who volunteers such a comparison (Trouillot's ally, the professor Laënnec Hurbon) is either an imbecile or an ideologue. But a scholar?

As far as Trouillot is concerned only a foreign racist could believe that in and after 2000 Aristide enjoyed any popular support. Bona fide Haitians only "laughed or manifested their shock at such a bad joke." It's a shame, however, that so good-humored a scholar as Trouillot feels no need to support such an assertion with any semblance of argument or proof. He knows his countrymen so well, after all, why should he bother to ask any of them for their opinions?

Lacking Trouillot's intimate knowledge of Haitian society, ignorant foreigners have little choice but to rely on more tiresome forms of investigation. They have to interview people who are widely acknowledged as spokespeople for their communities. Clearly they don't qualify as proper *Haitians*, in his rather distinctive sense of the word, but perhaps even Trouillot would find it hard to deny that when you talk to them, popular grassroots leaders such as Father Gérard Jean-Juste or Jean-Marie Samedy or So Ann do seem to say that they continue to support Aristide and Lavalas—as do, according to every study that has tried to measure popular rather than merely elite opinion, a majority of the Haitian people themselves.

Robert Fatton, for instance, looks and sounds like a Haitian, and he also happens to be a widely respected political scientist. Fatton shares some of Trouillot's criticisms of Fanmi Lavalas, but toward the end of 2002 he acknowledged nevertheless that Aristide still enjoyed "undisputed and overwhelming popularity."¹¹ The week after Aristide was abducted by US troops, Fatton remained "convinced that Aristide is still the most popular individual in Haiti. . . . If you had elections—so-called 'free and fair' elections—I'm sure that he would win."¹² When I interviewed Fatton two and half years later, in November 2006, he confirmed that "Aristide still remains the most popular politician in Haiti today. If he could stand for re-election tomorrow he would easily win."¹³ The month before Aristide's overthrow, Jean Dominique's widow, Michèle Montas—herself frequently cited by the opposition to Aristide following her husband's mysterious assassination in April 2000—observed that "the peasantry has always been very loyal to Aristide," and that "their loyalty appears intact; they legitimately fear a return to the Duvalier-style dictatorship they lived under for so long."¹⁴

In fact, if you bother to ask a range of Haitian politicians and journalists about Aristide's popularity then this is what many if not most of them will tell you, again and again. "It

11 Robert Fatton, *Haiti's Predatory Republic: The Unending Transition to Democracy* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2002), 182.

12 Robert Fatton, "A War Waged on the Aristide Regime," *Socialist Worker*, 5 March 2004.

13 Telephone interview with Robert Fatton, 9 November 2006.

14 Michèle Montas, quoted in "Fair Elections Must Be Haiti's Next Milestone," *Miami Herald*, 4 January 2004.

is undeniable,” Préval’s minister for literacy told me in January 2007, “that Jean-Bertrand Aristide is still the most popular man in Haiti, and if he could run for office again he would be re-elected tomorrow.”¹⁵ Haitian journalists (for instance Georges Honorat, Guy Delva, or Alinx Albert Obas) who have some genuine connection with the poorer neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince or Cap-Haïtien make the same point in more emphatic terms. There’s no question that it was the Lavalas *baz* who elected Aristide’s former prime minister René Préval as president in 2006, and it’s no coincidence that, ever since 2004 the largest public demonstrations in Haiti have all been organized to condemn the coup and to call for Aristide’s return. Nevertheless, Trouillot would apparently have us believe that none of the people who live in a place like Cité-Soleil, the country’s largest and most impoverished slum, support Aristide or his legacy. This is another interesting hypothesis, and again it can be tested. But since it happens to contradict every credible study and report on the subject, until Trouillot goes to the trouble to test it perhaps he should confine his observations to the domain where they belong—fiction.

Some foreign observers interested in these questions, deprived of Trouillot’s innate knowledge of his countrymen, have even had to fall back on mere numerical measurement. I hope Trouillot will forgive me if I refer once again to some of the measurements mentioned in *Damming the Flood*. In a US-commissioned Gallup poll of October 2000, Fanmi Lavalas figured as thirteen-times more popular than its closest competitor, and over half of those polled identified Aristide as their most trusted leader. According to the last “impartial” measure made before the 2004 coup, a further Gallup poll conducted in March 2002, FL remained four times more popular than all its significant competitors combined; 60 percent of respondents again picked Aristide as the leader they trusted most, while his nearest rival, Democratic Convergence leader Gérard Gourgue, won the backing of just 3.7 percent of respondents.¹⁶ Based on her experience and assessment of the situation in Port-au-Prince 2003–4, the French aid worker Eléonore Senlis (who in early 2004 was as well placed as any foreign observer to judge the political mood in Cité-Soleil) thinks that “at no point during its last year in office would any serious political poll have shown support for Fanmi Lavalas to be less than 60%; Aristide’s electoral base remained solidly behind him, even if they still hoped that the government would do more.”¹⁷

A few days after the 2004 coup, the veteran international journalist Daniel Lak made a similar point on the flagship BBC radio program. Asked by the program anchor whether Aristide actually does have people who support him, rather than “just a handful of thugs who are paid by him,” Lak confirmed what grassroots leaders in places like Bel-Air and Cité-Soleil had been saying all along: “Oh, absolutely. The people who support him are the poor of this country, the vast majority. There are 8 million Haitians, and probably 95% of them are desperately

15 Interview with Carol Joseph, Cap-Haïtien, 14 January 2007.

16 See also Tom Reeves, “Haiti’s Disappeared,” *ZNet*, 5 May 2004, <http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?SectionID=55&ItemID=5467> (accessed 28 February 2009).

17 Letter from Eléonore Senlis, 27 March 2007.

poor. It's the rich and the small middle class who support Aristide's opponents, and the poor who generally support Aristide."¹⁸ And they generally support him, as I argue in *Damming the Flood*, not as a demagogic savior or as a reincarnation of the "good doctor" Duvalier, but as their most articulate political *spokesman*. The poor have supported Aristide, and continue to support Aristide, because during the decisive moments of the popular struggle he was the person who found the courage to say the things they wanted to be said. They support Aristide as someone who consistently spoke up for equality and justice at a time when Haiti was dominated by the army and the Macoutes. They support him as someone who started to dismantle the rigid class barriers that divide rich from poor. They support him to this day because he has done more than any other Haitian politician to translate—with limited yet unprecedented success—widespread popular demands into a viable political project for social change.

Where is this "vast majority" of the Haitian people in Trouillot's own account of his country's recent history? Nowhere. Trouillot is not a racist, after all. A genuine civic antiracist on the Trouillot model, it seems, is someone capable of inventing principled grounds for erasing the views and votes of most of his fellow citizens.

I imagine that Trouillot knows his Bourdieu well enough, at this stage, to remember the meaning of his concept of *habitus*. Trouillot exemplifies, to the point of caricature, precisely that habitus that Aristide and his allies set out to confront in the late 1980s—the complacent bigotry of Haiti's privileged few, people whose background, education, and worldview help blot out the less privileged as invisible *moun andeyo*.

All the same, over the last couple of decades, Trouillot and his colleagues have learned at least one difficult but valuable lesson: rather than treat the people with open contempt, it is sometimes better to disguise this contempt through recourse to the language of pluralism and "formal democracy." Rather than evoke old-fashioned antagonisms based on class or wealth, Trouillot appears to have realized that it's much better to refer to an abundance of "civic" actors whose very multiplicity might seem to refute such simplistic forms of "binary thinking." (I'm sure Trouillot, like Bourdieu, remembers very well what Marx himself thought of such appeals to "civil society"). Here as elsewhere, Trouillot is a worthy descendant of his Thermidorian predecessors. He duly rattles off an impressive catalogue of civic actors who turned against Aristide, listed with an admirably indefinite use of the definite article—"associations for women's rights [*les associations de défense des droits des femmes*]," "peasant associations [*les associations paysannes*]," "the body of unions," "the traditional left," and so on. I believe that if Trouillot had more time he might even have listed the names of as many as 184 such organizations—organizations, or at least names, that over the course of 2003 joined the noble cause of eliminating Aristide, under the democratic leadership of civic sweatshop owners Andy Apaid and Charles Baker.

18 Daniel Lak, "The World at One," *BBC Radio 4*, 8 March 2004.

No doubt Apaid and Baker are still much admired, in Haitian civil society circles, for their support of trade unions and peasant associations.

It all sounds very compelling, until you look just a little closer at the people running the organizations involved, most of whom (e.g., a small, women's group like Solidarite fanm ayisyen, or the right-wing radio stations grouped in the National Association of Haitian Media) belong to exactly the same narrow slice of Haitian society as Trouillot himself. Apart from the US-funded "trade union" Batay Ouvriye, I'm not sure which unions Trouillot has in mind—presumably it's been a little while since he has spoken with the leaders of the CTH (Confédération des travailleurs haitiens), Haiti's largest and most significant trade union.

"Peasant associations," however—now that does sound very damning. Surely a Haitian politician who has lost the support of *les associations paysannes* deserves to be overthrown by fair means or foul. Again, the point can be tested. As far as I know, the most important of these associations, in political terms, was the Mouvman peyizan papaye (MPP). The MPP is led by Chavannes Jean-Baptiste, who retains a certain cachet in North American nongovernmental organization (NGO) circles, and in the MPP heartland around Hinche. An initial ally of Aristide, Chavannes turned against him in the mid-1990s once it became clear that he had no chance of taking his place in the Presidential Palace. By 2000 Chavannes had aligned his group with the Duvalierists in the Democratic Convergence, having reached the conclusion that "it wasn't Cédras but Aristide who almost eliminated the popular movements."¹⁹ On 24 February 2004 Chavannes issued a statement that was almost worthy of Trouillot himself: "Aristide is a criminal, an assassin, a thief, a liar, a traitor, a gang leader, a dictator. There is no hope with him. All sectors of national life are finished with him. No compromise with him is possible. . . . We must cut out this cancer."²⁰ Insurgent leader Guy Philippe would later admit that he was grateful to Chavannes and the MPP for their "good advice and logistical help" during the military campaign to overthrow dictatorship.²¹ By 2006, Chavannes was even prepared to form an electoral alliance with the far-right industrialist and Group of 184 leader Charles Baker. But whatever a foreign observer might make of Chavannes's political evolution, Haitian voters themselves seem unequivocal: in its regional stronghold of Hinche the MPP decided to run its own candidates in the May 2000 elections, and Charles Arthur, who observed these elections as part of the Organization of American States (OAS) mission (and who shares some of Trouillot's aversion to Aristide and Fanmi Lavalas), noted that the MPP candidates "polled very poorly, below the OPL [Organisation du peuple en lutte] and the Espace de Concertation and far below Fanmi Lavalas."²² I'm not aware of many commentators, today, who still rate the MPP as a significant political force.

19 Chavannes Jean-Baptiste, interview with Michael Deibert, November 2000, in Michael Deibert, *Notes from the Last Testament: The Struggle for Haiti* (New York: Seven Stories, 2005), 127; see also 263–65.

20 Chavannes Jean-Baptiste, "MPP Speaks to the New Dimension of the Haitian Crisis," press release, 24 February 2004, <http://www.grassrootsonline.org/node/466> (accessed 28 February 2009).

21 Peter Hallward, "Insurgency and Betrayal: An Interview with Guy Philippe," *HaitiAnalysis*, 23 March 2007; see also Tom Reeves, "The Puzzling Alliance of Chavannes Jean-Baptiste and Charles Henri Baker," *Counterpunch*, 1 March 2006.

22 Letter from Charles Arthur, 5 April 2004.

What about Trouillot's commitment to formal democracy? "Formal democracy" is a phrase that recurs half a dozen times in Trouillot's review. As Aristide slid toward dictatorship, Trouillot says, the majority of Haitians finally came to agree "on one thing: the political expression of social conflicts within the context of formal democracy."

Beyond the confines of the anti-Lavalas intelligentsia, some foreign analysts are cynical enough to believe that the ongoing replacement, in various parts of the world, of popular democracy with its merely formal substitute "has been accompanied by increasing disillusionment about democracy" itself.²³ But Trouillot is no cynic. Trouillot not only is an advocate for formal over popular democracy, he also has the relatively rare virtue, among formal democrats, of spelling out what his position actually implies.

In 2003–4 the opponents of dictatorship in Haiti had a perfect opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to formal democracy. They were confronted by a president who had apparently lost all popular support, yet who was nevertheless deluded enough to keep proposing a new round of elections. The opponents of tyranny controlled their country's most significant and influential media outlets, which for years were able to wage a vigorous antigovernment campaign in conditions of unprecedented press freedom. They enjoyed the fulsome financial and diplomatic support of Haiti's most powerful "international partners": the United States, France, and Canada. By 2003 mainstream French newspapers like *Le monde* had become little more than an international extension of Haiti's antigovernment press. *Le monde's* counterparts in the United States and Canada took up the same democratic cause with a vengeance, in the first months of 2004.

What then did Trouillot's fervent commitment to "formal democracy" amount to, in such propitious circumstances? It amounted to support for another military coup d'état. Rather than seek to remove Aristide from office via the formal democratic instrument ordinarily reserved for that purpose, the formal democratic opponents of tyranny opted for a somewhat less formal reliance on a group of internationally sponsored ex-army and ex-FRAPH (Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haiti) insurgents, led by some of the most notorious abusers of human rights in recent Haitian history.

Though it doesn't seem to include a willingness either to participate in an actual democratic election or to accept the outcome of the most recent such election, Trouillot's respect for formal democracy clearly does involve a readiness to participate in the unelected substitute for an elected government, one imposed on a resentful population down the barrel of foreign guns. Trouillot's formal democracy means a willingness to violate both the letter and the spirit of the Haitian constitution, in close alliance with his people's most implacable international foes. Formal democracy à la Trouillot, in other words, is indistinguishable from the literal opposite to democracy.

23 Noam Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance* (London: Penguin, 2004), 137.

Trouillot pays me the compliment of trying to understand what could have motivated me to write a book that investigates why and how, in 2000–2006, the government of my country, with its allies, decided to support another coup d'état in Haiti. As far as I know, Trouillot is the first writer to have turned me into a fictional character. I don't aspire to similar insights into Trouillot's own purpose. All the same I'm curious to know how Trouillot squares his commitment to formal democracy with his readiness to overthrow by force a government that enjoyed a massive parliamentary majority. I'm curious to know why he was then prepared to participate in an interim administration that lacked the merest pretence of any democratic or constitutional legitimacy. I wonder if he agreed with his prime minister's affirmation of Chamberlain's murderous insurgents as "freedom fighters." I wonder if he regrets his collusion in a campaign of political repression that left thousands of Lavalas supporters dead and confined many hundreds more to prison. I wonder if he was disappointed when his administration, endowed with vastly more financial resources and military power than Aristide's embargoed government, managed over the course of its dismal two-year tenure to accomplish literally nothing of any significance, prompting even strident critics of Aristide to dismiss it as "an absolute dead loss."²⁴

Perhaps Trouillot will treat us to suitably imaginative answers to such questions in his next novel.

24 Interview with Father Rick Freshette, Port-au-Prince, 18 April 2006; see also Hallward, *Damming the Flood*, 261–63.