

***Natural Disasters and the Politics of International
Development: The 2010 Earthquake in Haiti***

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The dissertation aims to understand the link between natural disasters and the politics of international development, with particular attention paid to the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti. To this end, it is argued that natural disasters need to be understood socio-economically and politically rather than merely in technical terms. It is suggested that there is a double political link between natural disasters and international development: first with reference to socially contingent patterns of disaster vulnerability which cannot be disassociated from the particular development policies that have been pursued prior to the disaster, and second due to the politics of disaster interpretation in which the causes of preceding vulnerabilities are often only selectively addressed. This analytic framework is given further specificity by explicating the role of the free market economy in liberal development policies with the help of Karl Polanyi's work. Polanyi argued that rapid economic modernisation guided by a doctrinaire belief in the virtues of the self-regulating market often leads to social dislocation, as the need to protect society from the detrimental exposure to unmitigated market forces fails to be acknowledged. This holds true in the case of Haiti, where liberal economic development policies have resulted in an increase of disaster vulnerability in the capital city of Port-au-Prince; yet similar market-centred development policies have continued to be advocated in the aftermath of the earthquake. The liberal economic belief in the self-regulating market has been at the core of this double link between natural disaster and the politics of international development. A similar picture emerges if the argument is extended to the developing world more generally.

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Introduction

January 12, 2010, an earthquake with a catastrophic magnitude of 7.0 M_w struck Haiti's capital city of Port-au-Prince. The earthquake claimed about 220'000 lives, and made almost 2.3 million people homeless. As calamitous as these figures sound in absolute terms; in a small country like Haiti, they describe a catastrophe of incomprehensible proportions. The earthquake levelled the cultural, political and economic centre of the country, made one out of five inhabitants homeless and caused damage which, in financial terms, is equivalent to more than Haiti's annual GDP. The Inter-American Development Bank has called the earthquake the "worst natural disaster ever to strike a country."¹

The earthquake did not happen just in any country. Media coverage of the earthquake consistently referred to Haiti as 'the poorest country of the Western hemisphere', thereby implying a link between the level of economic development of the country and its vulnerability to natural disasters. As the World Bank puts it more generally, "*a lack of development itself contributes to disaster impacts*".² The conclusion seems to be straightforward: what countries like Haiti need in order to make them less vulnerable to natural disasters is more international development. Disaster vulnerability in other words is seen to be originating in a lack of development. While the underdevelopment-disaster link as suggested above by the World Bank is not necessarily false – Western countries do tend to have less fatal

¹ IADB, "Helping Haiti recover from the earthquake-IDB - Inter-American Development Bank", 2010, <http://www.iadb.org/en/news/webstories/2010-07-12/helping-haiti-recover-from-the-earthquake-idb,7421.html>.

² World Bank, "Hazards of Nature,Risks to Development: An IEG Evaluation of World Bank Assistance for Natural Disasters", 2006, xix, [http://lnweb90.worldbank.org/oed/oeddoelib.nsf/DocUNIDViewForJavaSearch/F0FCEB17632CB93485257155005081BE/\\$file/natural_disasters_evaluation.pdf](http://lnweb90.worldbank.org/oed/oeddoelib.nsf/DocUNIDViewForJavaSearch/F0FCEB17632CB93485257155005081BE/$file/natural_disasters_evaluation.pdf).

natural disasters and well-conceived development policies can do a lot to reduce communities' exposure to natural hazards – the straightforward implication that development policies always work to reduce disaster risk needs to be questioned. What is more, the assertion that it was underdevelopment which made the Haitian earthquake so devastating categorically rules out the option that past development policies themselves might have been implicated in Port-au-Prince residents' undue exposure to natural hazard.

Development, although perhaps implying a steady state of socio-economic improvement, does not *a priori* equal a reduction of disaster proneness. As the UNDP puts it, “well-meaning efforts to increase social and economic development might inadvertently increase disaster risk”.³ What is more, the UNDP argues that “it has been clearly demonstrated how disaster risk accumulates historically through inappropriate development interventions.”⁴ Development interventions in other words have the potential to make populations more vulnerable to natural disaster. Since these development interventions constantly have to choose between multiple options, visions and strategies of what development should be about, it is more accurate to speak of the politics of international development.

The aim of the dissertation is to question the link between natural disasters and the politics of international development. As will be suggested, there is a need to critically rethink the relation between natural disasters and international development policies, particularly of the liberal economic type that have shaped Haiti's social landscape for three decades prior to the earthquake. The purpose of the dissertation is thus to emphasise the political nature of natural disasters, and in this sense to question the extent of our own collective entanglement in patterns of disaster vulnerability.

³ UNDP, “Reducing Disaster Risk: A Challenge for Development” (United Nations Development Programme, 2004), 15, http://www.undp.org/cpr/whats_new/rdr_english.pdf.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

Two distinct arguments will be made, both necessary but neither of them sufficient on their own. First, it will be argued that the link between natural disaster and international development is an inherently political one both in a socio-economic as well as in an interpretive sense. Second, it will be suggested that the work of Karl Polanyi is particularly well suited for explicating this double link with regards to the liberal economic politics of development that have dominated Haiti prior to the earthquake. By drawing analogies to Polanyi's *The Great Transformation*, the liberal pursuit of the ideal of a self-regulating free market will be identified as being at the core of the link between natural disasters and international development not only in Haiti, but also globally.

The argument will be presented in five chapters. The first of the two argument referred to above will be advanced in chapter one, where the dominant understandings of natural disasters are put to critical scrutiny. The chapter will suggest an alternative and thoroughly political framework for making sense of natural disasters, one that links natural disasters and international development both on the level of socio-economic structures and interpretive practices. The second chapter will apply this framework to the main narratives that have emerged as explanations of the Haitian earthquake. It will be argued that most narratives fall into two hostile camps, underwritten implicitly or explicitly by liberal economic or Marxist ideas. Arguing that both accounts of the earthquake and their underlying theories of the market economy are problematic, the third chapter will suggest that the work of Karl Polanyi offers a more pragmatic way of thinking about the market-centred liberal politics of development. The fourth chapter will return to the case of Haiti and will, through a Polanyian prism, explicate the link between the earthquake and preceding as well as succeeding development policies. Finally, the last chapter will make a brief argument

for the global dimension of the link between natural disasters and the liberal politics of development. Concluding the dissertation, some limitations and weaknesses of the argument will be identified and addressed.

1) A Political Perspective on Natural Disasters

It has become something of a truism to state that “there is no such thing as a natural disaster”,¹ meaning that exposure to natural hazard is codetermined by natural as well as human factors. It is less widely acknowledged however that natural disasters, rather than being technical issues best left to civil engineers and other hazard specialists, are deeply political and need to be understood as such. Although policymakers like to present disaster responses as essentially apolitical, they are not. Preventive measures, relief operations and reconstruction projects are political in the sense of being about the “allocation of survival and life chances” and are thus inherently contentious.² Besides these unavoidable practical dilemmas, the most obviously political element of a natural disaster is “the need to not only manage the situation but also to explain it.”³ As Olson argues, “disasters strip away layers of semantic, symbolic, and process cover to provide clear insights into the nature, priorities, and capabilities of authorities, governments, and entire regimes.”⁴ In other words, every disaster has the potential to lead to a set of radical questions about the status quo. Why has the government not done more to prevent disaster? Why have some people been more affected than others? Do we need new policies? These questions need to be addressed in some way or another. This involves a multiplicity of intentional as well as unintentional strategies and processes like the de-legitimation of opponents and re- legitimation of one’s own policies, affective control of the

¹ N. Smith, “There’s No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster”, June 11, 2006, <http://understandingkatrina.ssrc.org/Smith/>.

² Richard Stuart Olson, “Toward a Politics of Disaster: Losses, Values, Agendas, and Blame,” in *Crisis Management, A Three-Volume Set*, ed. R.A. Boin, vol. 2 (London: Sage, 2008), 158.

³ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 167.

masses, planned and unplanned silences and gaps, drawing certain lessons but not others, and most importantly the allocation of blame.⁵ The way a disaster comes to be interpreted publicly is thus the outcome of a deeply political process.

Additionally to the politics of disaster interpretation, there is a second reason why natural disasters are more than just technical issues. It has to do with our very understanding of natural disasters as sudden and unforeseeable *events* interrupting the normal functioning of society. As some scholars have argued, this common-sense definition of natural disasters as is not without problems. This becomes more explicit considering the implication of disaster vulnerability if defined as

*“the intersection between the physical process of a hazard agent with the local characteristics of everyday life in a place and the larger social and economic social forces that structure that realm”.*⁶

Although representing the nexus between the natural and human world, except in very rare and extreme cases, natural disasters are only catastrophic events because of socially determined patterns of disaster vulnerability. In this sense, even though it is a natural occurrence that triggers disaster in an immediate sense, natural disasters are nevertheless better thought of as “part of a set of negative externalities that occur as a consequence of larger socio-economic trends”.⁷ As such, they should be examined with reference to these ‘larger socio-economic trends’ rather than through what could be called the ‘metaphysics of the accident’.⁸

⁵ Olson, “Toward a Politics of Disaster: Losses, Values, Agendas, and Blame”; Paul ’t Hart, “Symbols, Rituals and Power: The Lost Dimensions of Crisis Management,” *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management* 1, no. 1 (1993): 36-50.

⁶ Robert Bolin and Lois Stanford, *The Northridge earthquake: vulnerability and disaster* (Routledge, 1998), 27.

⁷ Kathleen Tierney, “From the Margins to the Mainstream? Disaster Research at the Crossroads,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 33, no. 1 (2007): 510.

⁸ Kenneth Hewitt, “The idea of calamity in a technocratic age,” in *Interpretations of Calamity: From the Viewpoint of Human Ecology*, ed. Kenneth Hewitt (Boston MA: Allen and Unwin, 1983), 16.

Natural disasters in other words are inherent in the social order itself. They are “episodic, foreseeable manifestations of the broader social forces that shape societies”.⁹ Rather than accidental events concentrated in time and space, they are inescapably social and dissociable from larger socio-economic processes and structures. In short, we need to see “disaster as an expansion of everyday life”.¹⁰ Accordingly, a narrow focus on ‘getting things back to normal as soon as possible’ after a disaster can be highly problematic as in many cases, the ‘normal life’ that is to be re-established has been inextricably implicated in the natural disaster in the first place *qua* the creation of specific patterns of disaster vulnerability.¹¹ By asking how vulnerabilities to disaster have arisen, we are therefore by implication also questioning “the ongoing social order” itself.¹²

Drawing on the arguments introduced so far, we can amend the common-sense definitions of disaster in the following way. First, natural disasters are not sudden accidental events, but the outcome of particular patterns of disaster vulnerability which are inextricably interwoven with socio-economic processes and structures ranging from the local to the global level. This has been well illustrated by Terry Cannon in figure 1, showing that disaster vulnerability is mitigated by several socio-economic layers, reaching all the way to global ‘economic systems’ and ‘ideologies’.

⁹ Tierney, “From the Margins to the Mainstream?,” 509.

¹⁰ Paul Susman, Phil O’Keefe, and Ben Wisner, “Global disasters, a radical interpretation,” in *Interpretations of Calamity: From the Viewpoint of Human Ecology*, ed. Kenneth Hewitt (Boston MA: Allen and Unwin, 1983), 203.

¹¹ Mohamed Hamza and Roger Zetter, “Structural adjustment, urban systems, and disaster vulnerability in developing countries,” *Cities* 15, no. 4 (1998): 291.

¹² Bolin and Stanford, *The Northridge earthquake*, 5.

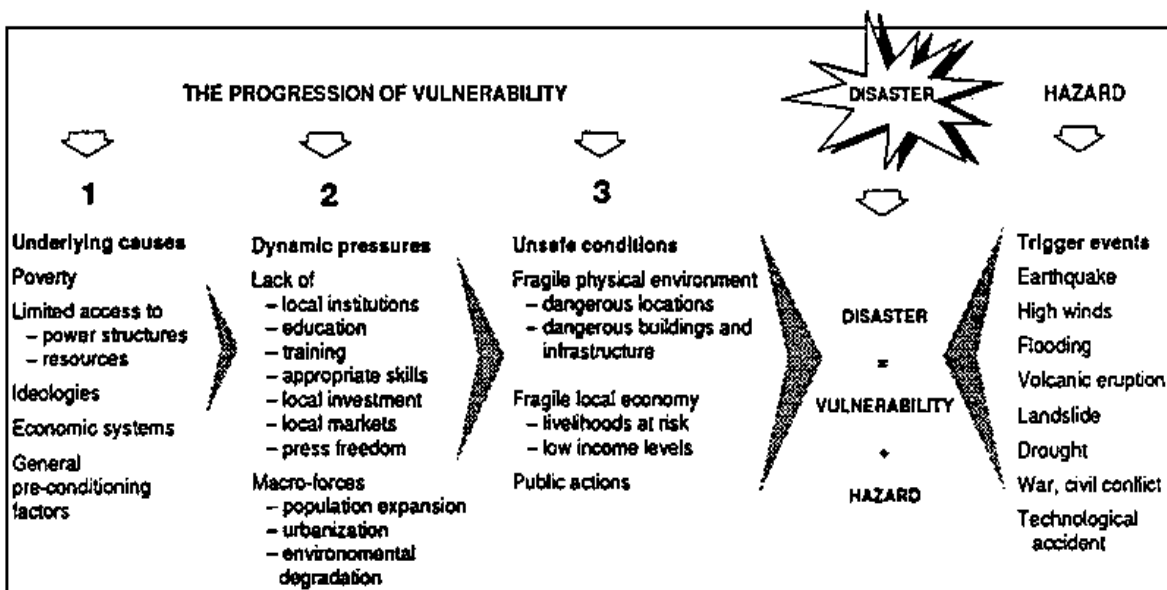


Figure 1: The Disaster Crunch Model (Terry Cannon, 1994)¹³

Additionally to this socio-economic dimension of disaster vulnerability, it has also been argued that there exists a politics of interpretation with regards to natural disasters. Terry Cannon's figure again helps to illustrate this. Whether and how far the explanation of a given disaster moves towards the left side of the diagram or stops short after finding more immediate disaster causes is in no way predetermined, but a contested political process deeply implicated in questions of blame and legitimacy.

This is not to argue that political explanations should be given undue attention, ignoring technical measures to mitigate environmental hazards. However, what is argued here is that a 'technocratic' understanding of disaster forecloses a more political interpretation of disaster, while a political approach does not rule out complementary technical measures. Tier one factors, in this sense, are not a mutually exclusive to the ones in tiers two or three, and need to be taken into consideration if they are to be fully understood. As Terry Cannon puts it, "that vulnerability analysis is

¹³ figure available online at:
<http://t2.gstatic.com/images?q=tbn:ANd9GcSo7ZXgEnrx5yADYRWiPfq135eIAPe5psK4VwIwMXJ1vHOUj-9UQ>

inherently political is no argument for abandoning it as a superior way of understanding disaster.”¹⁴

The politicality of natural disasters relates in several ways to the practice and politics of international development. On a more general level, international development is both a product of and in turn helps in the maintenance and reproduction of the larger social order into which natural disasters are invariably embedded. It is important to stress the politicality of development policies, as this “elucidates the political and ideological underpinnings of global development by locating this idea and practice within a broader structural framework of global politics and in the context of the organisation of capitalism”.¹⁵ There are however also more explicit links between natural disasters and development policies. By virtue of the politics of development being one of the most important determinants of social life in developing countries, the two political dimensions of natural disasters identified above are directly applicable to the politics of development with respect to disasters occurring in the ‘global South’.

In this sense, the relation between natural disasters in the global South and international development is twofold. First, by shaping policymaking in developing countries, the politics of development is inextricably interlinked with socially contingent patterns of disaster vulnerability. Rather than spatially and temporally discrete accidental events, natural disasters are the negative externalities of ‘everyday life’ and by extension the development policies that shape everyday life in countries like Haiti. Second, *qua* the politically loaded public interpretation of disasters,

¹⁴ Terry Cannon, “Vulnerability Analysis and the Explanation of Natural Disasters,” in *Disasters, development and environment*, ed. Ann Varley (Baffins Lane, Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 1994), 26.

¹⁵ Heloise Weber, “Reconstituting the ‘Third World’? poverty reduction and territoriality in the global politics of development,” *Third World Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (February 2004): 189.

international development policies are put into a particular relation with the natural disaster after a catastrophe. Preceding development policies can be reaffirmed, quietly ignored, criticised or abandoned; in any case, a politically mitigated link is drawn between a particular politics of development and natural disasters. It is this second dimension of the link between natural disaster and the politics of international development that will be examined with regards to Haiti in the next chapter.

2) Narratives of the Earthquake in Haiti

The previous chapter has made the case for a double link between natural disasters and the politics of international development. It has been argued that development practices cannot be disassociated from patterns of disaster vulnerability, and that whether this link is acknowledged in the aftermath of a disaster is largely dependent on a politically contingent process of the public interpretation and explanation of the disaster. The aim of the current chapter is to scrutinise the two main narratives that have arisen as interpretations of the earthquake in Haiti.

The first account of the earthquake that will be briefly looked at is the ‘dominant’ or ‘official’ public interpretation of the earthquake. The dominance of a particular disaster interpretation depends on there being “sufficient consensus” for making this interpretation the most widely accepted position, reflected in terms of resource allocation and acceptance by most major international actors.¹ In the case of the Haitian earthquake, the dominant account of the disaster would therefore be the shared ground between the government of Haiti,² political heavyweights like the United States,³ the United Nations and its subsidiaries,⁴ well-funded think tanks like

¹ Kenneth Hewitt, “Sustainable Disasters?,” in *Power of Development*, ed. Jonathan Crush (London: Routledge, 1995), 4.

² Government of Haiti, “Haiti Earthquake PDNA: Assessment of damage, losses, general and sectoral needs”, 2010, http://www.refondation.ht/resources/PDNA_Working_Document.pdf; Government of Haiti, “Action Plan for National Recovery and Development of Haiti”, 2010, http://www.haiticonference.org/Haiti_Action_Plan_ENG.pdf.

³ White House, “The United States Government’s Haiti Earthquake Response | The White House”, June 25, 2010, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/united-states-governments-haiti-earthquake-response>.

⁴ Ban Ki-moon, “Exclusive: Transcript of Ban Ki-moon speech | Yale Daily News”, January 15, 2010, <http://www.yaledailynews.com/news/2010/jan/15/exclusive-transcript-of-ban-ki-moon-speech/>; UNOCHA, “Evaluation of OCHA Response to the Haiti Earthquake” (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2011), <http://ochanet.unocha.org/p/Documents/Evaluation%20of%20OCHA%20Response%20to%20the%20Haiti%20Earthquake.pdf>; UN, “Report of the United Nations in Haiti 2010: Situation, Challenges and Outlook” (United Nations, 2010), <http://www.onu-haiti.org/Report2010/>.

the RAND Corporation⁵ and academics who in most respects share the position of the aforementioned international actors.⁶ Together, they form what could be termed the dominant ‘mainstream’ narrative of the earthquake.

The central consensus of this narrative is on the exceptional nature of the Haitian earthquake, the benevolence of the international relief effort, and the need to jump-start Haiti’s economic development as part of the reconstruction of the country. Regarding the reasons for the high number of casualties in Haiti, there is coalescence around a number of key factors, such as widespread poverty, low building standards coupled with a very high population density in Port-au-Prince, and Haiti’s history of corruption and state weakness. These factors however are seldom linked to structures, processes, ideas or actors outside of Haiti. Development economist Mats Lundahl for example argues that the causes of Haiti’s earthquake vulnerability can be reduced to two key factors, namely population growth and political irresponsibility⁷. The Clinton Bush Haiti Fund, to name another example, links earthquake vulnerability to poverty, explaining that the latter is the consequence of “a regulatory, legal and educational environment in Haiti that was not conducive to economic growth⁸”. A will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4, no major policy changes were decided after the earthquakes.⁹ In sum then, the dominant account of the earthquake is characterised by a broad consensus on benevolent nature of the international

⁵ RAND Corporation, “Building a More Resilient Haitian State”, 2010, http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2010/RAND_MG1039.pdf.

⁶ Philippe Girard, *Haiti : the tumultuous history-from pearl of the Caribbean to broken nation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Mats Lundahl, *Poverty in Haiti : essays on underdevelopment and post disaster prospects* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

⁷ Lundahl, *Poverty in Haiti*, xviii.

⁸ Clinton Bush Haiti Fund, “Frequently Asked Questions | Clinton Bush Haiti Fund”, 2010, <http://www.clintonbushhaitifund.org/pages/faq#2>.

⁹ Claire McGuigan, “Agricultural Liberalisation in Haiti” (Christian Aid, 2006), 4, <http://www.christianaid.org.uk/Images/ca-agricultural-liberalisation.pdf>; Laurie Richardson, “Feeding Dependency, Starving Democracy: USAID Policies in Haiti” (Grassroots International, 2010 1997), i, <http://www.grassrootsonline.org/publications/fact-sheets-and-reports/feeding-dependency-starving-democracy-1997-full-report>; Alex Dupuy, “Commentary Beyond the Earthquake,” *Latin American Perspectives* 37, no. 3 (2010): 8.

earthquake relief effort, the attribution of Haiti's disaster vulnerability to overwhelmingly domestic causes, and a reliance on established mechanisms and strategies for rebuilding the country.

Even though this first narrative is firmly embedded in the publications and actions of most established international actors, a second narrative of the Haitian earthquake radically questions its validity. The inspiration for this second narrative, propagated by smaller NGOs inside and outside of Haiti as well as a number of academics, can often though not always be traced back to more or less Marxist positions on the global economy, such as for example Naomi Klein's book on 'disaster capitalism' and its academic offshoots.¹⁰ This set of narratives denounces the particular shape the international relief effort has taken as an opportunistic campaign for the expansion of the neoliberal economy in Haiti. Additionally, the deployment of US armed forces is often equated with an "invasion", "occupation" or "imperialist stranglehold" of Haiti.¹¹ With respect to the underlying causes of Haiti's vulnerability to the earthquake, it is argued that there has been a historic as well as on-going active impoverishment of Haiti by external forces working together with local elites.¹² Critics also often refer to the liberalisation of Haiti's economy, which has exposed Haitian peasants to global competition and forced many of them to migrate either into Port-au-Prince or abroad. With regards to the future of Haiti, suggestions are significantly more radical than those found in the mainstream narrative of the Haitian

¹⁰ Naomi Klein, *The shock doctrine : the rise of disaster capitalism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007); Mark Schuller, "'Haiti is Finished!': Haiti's End Meets the Ends of Capitalism," in *Capitalizing on catastrophe: neoliberal strategies in disaster reconstruction*, ed. Nandini Gunewardena and Mark Schuller (Plymouth: AltaMira Press, 2008), 191-214.

¹¹ Peter Hallward, "Haiti 2010: Exploiting Disaster", 2010, <http://canadahaitiaction.ca/content/haiti-2010-exploiting-disaster>; Peter Hallward, "Securing Disaster in Haiti," *Monthly Review*, January 24, 2010, <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2010/hallward240110.html>; A. Smith, "Haiti After the Quake: Imperialism with a Human Face," *International Socialist Review* 70, no. March-April (2010).

¹² Hannah Mowat, "The Haiti Earthquake: A Disaster Set Apart from Others?," *Aon Benfield UCL Hazard Research Centre: Disaster Studies Working Paper* 27 (2011), <http://www.abuhrc.org/Publications/WP27.pdf>.

earthquake. They reach from Beverley Bell's call for local grassroots development and a focus on sustainable agriculture to Peter Hallward's admiration of socialist Cuba's successes in reducing the natural hazard vulnerability of its citizens to.¹³ In short, the benevolent nature of the international relief operation is questioned, the search for the underlying causes of Haiti's vulnerability is directed outward rather than inward, and finally a variety of more or less radical deviations from market-led models of development are advocated.

Both the 'mainstream' and 'radical' approaches to the earthquake in Haiti have problematic elements. The dominant account is symptomatic of the technocratic approach to natural disaster that has been criticised in chapter one; it turns the earthquake into an exceptional event and drowns out any serious consideration of the underlying socio-economic order or the negative role international actors might have played in the past. The narrative is not technocratic and de-politicised in the sense of limiting its focus to environmental and technical questions. It is more so in the sense that "social economic and political 'people factors' can also be approached technocratically".¹⁴ In other words, "the inadequacies of the dominant view arise less from what it says about disaster, than what it chooses to infer about the rest of human activity".¹⁵ The dominant position is technocratic and de-politicising insofar as it excludes its own potential involvement in the disaster. As all determinants of poverty and vulnerability are located on a domestic level inside Haiti, past development policies are excluded from critical analysis by virtue of an *a priori* assumption that

¹³ Beverly Bell, "A Future for Agriculture, a Future for Haiti", 2 March 2010., http://www.huffingtonpost.com/beverly-bell/a-future-for-agriculture_b_482393.html; Peter Hallward, "Our role in Haiti's plight | Peter Hallward | Comment is free | The Guardian", January 13, 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/jan/13/our-role-in-haitis-plight>.

¹⁴ Hewitt, "The idea of calamity in a technocratic age," 8.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

they can only ever be the anonym of natural disaster. Having thus safely separated the disaster event from the process of development; the “(re)establishment of productivity and (re)-imposition of ‘normal’ relations become the main prescriptions of crisis management, relief and reconstruction.”¹⁶

The shortcomings of the dominant account of the earthquake do not amount to a wholesale acceptance of the radical counter-narrative outlined above. The critical counter-narrative is plagued by problems and inconsistencies as well, not least with regards to the somewhat outlandish allegations of imperialism and neo-colonial occupation of Haiti by foreign powers. Such a rigid world-systems perspective in which peripheral countries will always remain poor and exploited ignores the success of some countries who have managed to ‘climb the ranks’ of development. Statements such as that “the only models for successful disaster mitigation are those conceived in the struggle against exploitation” or that “development planning must be, broadly speaking, socialist”¹⁷ foreclose policy options that might be beneficial on a local level even if a foreign country generates a profit in the process, and more generally forgets that some of the worst famines for example have happened in socialist countries.¹⁸

Despite their respective weaknesses however, both narratives are able to marshal an extensive range of evidence in their favour; leading to a situation where they mutually destabilise each other, yet are not able to reach a compromise position. As Mark Schuller argues, explanations of Haiti and its enduring state of poverty have long been divided into two opposed camps. These are largely congruent with the two earthquake narratives we discerned above. To put it very crudely, one blames Haitians and the other blames international actors. Their resolution, according to Schuller, “is

¹⁶ Ibid., 29.

¹⁷ Susman, O’Keefe, and Wisner, “Global disasters, a radical interpretation,” 220.

¹⁸ Cannon, “Vulnerability Analysis and the Explanation of Natural Disasters,” 21-25.

impossible, as they are not talking about the same set of actors or even events ... they are two different [narratives] talking past one another".¹⁹.

In short, both narratives imply a completely different relation between the global economy, international development and natural disasters. Applied to Haiti's earthquake, one position attributes the country's poverty and resultant disaster vulnerability to *too much* integration into (read exploitation by) the global market economy, while the other has been consistently arguing for *more* economic integration as the solution to the country's problems. Their different positions are derivatives of divergent ontological and ideological positions, one grounded in a liberal understanding of the global economy and the other rooted implicitly or explicitly in broadly Marxist theories. The liberal position, in accordance with liberal economic theory, regards global economic integration and the market economy more generally as an essentially harmonious sphere of freedom allowing for the realisation of growth and welfare through the pursuit of economic self-interest. A Marxist position on the other hand sees the economic sphere as an essentially conflict-ridden sphere where poor peripheral countries are exploited by the rich core economies, often necessitating simultaneous political techniques of domination as well. We thus have two very different arguments about the relation of natural disasters to the global economy and by extension the politics of international development.

The argument as developed in chapter one has helped us to make explicit the double link between natural disasters and politics of development, first through the notion of socially contingent patterns of disaster vulnerability and second through the de/re-legitimising effects of the dominant public interpretation of a disaster. It has

¹⁹ Mark Schuller, "Haiti's 200-Year Ménage-à-Trois: Globalization, the State, and Civil Society," *Caribbean Studies* 35, no. 1 (2007): 157.

further allowed us to recognise overly technocratic and de-politicised explanations of natural disasters as themselves being part of the political disaster-development link. What this framework however was unable to do by itself is to explicate the precise nature of the relation between development and disaster other than pointing to its political mitigation. This has become more than clear with respects to the two competing explanations of the Haitian earthquake outlined above. The argument about the double link between natural disasters and the politics of international development is thus not sufficient on its own. It was a necessary argument to make, but is clearly inefficient without further elaboration since, as we have seen, it is ultimately the underlying ‘economic theory’ one ascribes to that determines the link one establishes between development and disaster in the case of Haiti.

Having argued that both liberal economic theory and Marxist positions have led to problematic accounts of the Haitian earthquake, what needs to be done is to develop an alternative grounded standpoint from which the link between the liberal politics of international development and the earthquake in Haiti can be explicated in substantive rather than solely ‘deconstructive’ terms. The first core argument about the link between natural disasters and the politics of international development will thus have to be complemented by a grounded and substantive critique of liberal development policies and the larger social order that gives rise to them. Given that both liberal economic theories as well as Marxist positions have been deemed to be problematic as the underlying guiding theories of such a critique, the next chapter will introduce the work of Karl Polanyi as a more pragmatic alternative, one that unlike liberal or Marxist positions does not *a priori* embrace or dismiss the market economy but instead evaluates its merit with respect to its actual real-life contribution to the welfare of society.

3) A Polanyian Framework of the Market Economy

The previous chapter has argued that the conclusions of any approach seeking to establish a link between natural disasters and international development will be to a large extent determined by their underlying theory of the market economy. At the same time, it has also been argued that both the liberal and broadly Marxist accounts of the Haitian earthquake contain some major shortcomings or inconsistencies. While liberal economic thought, being the pre-dominant position of our times, lacks in critical self-awareness and thus results in an overly technocratic and depoliticised account of natural disasters; the Marxist alternative is somewhat too prone to reduce all economic relations to exploitation and domination.

Karl Polanyi, it will be argued in this chapter, offers an alternative and more pragmatic analytic framework for thinking about international development and natural disasters by criticising both liberal and Marxist on grounds their ‘economic reductionism’. What Polanyi means by this is that both liberal and Marxist economists tend to think of the economy in abstraction, establishing timeless laws, principles and mathematical equations which are said to contain ‘the truth’ about the economy. Polanyi in contrast always takes society ‘as it actually is’ as his reference point. In this sense, he argues that attempts to induce economic change (as is the aim of most development policies) should always be evaluated according to their concrete effects on a given society rather than seen as the manipulation of an economic realm existing independently of its effects on peoples’ lives. In this sense, Polanyi could both “sing the praises of capitalism, which he noted had produced a prosperity of gigantic proportions for the whole of humankind”, as well as criticise the market economy for

having led to social dislocation of equally gigantic proportions.¹ Even though Polanyi's take on 'capitalism' is not a neutral one; it is nevertheless one that allows for a great deal of flexibility in acknowledging both the negative and positive impact of market economies on society.

Having briefly introduced Karl Polanyi, it might still appear uncertain what an economic historian and anthropologist whose most famous book was written over six decades ago on early modern Britain could possibly contribute to understanding an earthquake in the twenty-first century. The short answer is that the 'great transformation' Polanyi has written about is not dissimilar to what is happening throughout the world in the era of globalisation, namely the introduction and/or deepening of the market logic as the predominant force shaping society. Indeed, there has been a veritable rediscovery of Polanyi in recent times.² Nobel Prize laureate Joseph Stiglitz for example, who wrote the preface to the most recent reprint of *The Great Transformation*, states that "because the transformation of European civilisation is analogous to the transformation confronting developing countries around the world today, it often seems that Polanyi is speaking directly to present day issues."³

The book itself has too many facets for a comprehensive summary. Therefore, only those arguments that are deemed to be most relevant as guiding principles for explicating the twofold link between natural disasters and the politics of international development will be elaborated. These two links, as a reminder, the concept of

¹ Allan Carlson, "The Problem of Karl Polanyi," *The Intercollegiate Review* Spring (2006): 32.

² Don Kalb, "From flows to violence," *Anthropological Theory* 5, no. 2 (2005): 176 -204; Jan Breman, "The Great Transformation in the Setting of Asia: Address delivered on the occasion of the award of the degree Doctor Honoris Causa on the 57th Anniversary of the International Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, The Netherlands, 29 October 2009.", 2009, http://www.iss.nl/content/download/17840/169593/file/breman_address_web.pdf; Chris Hann and Keith Hart, "Introduction: Learning from Polanyi," in *Market and society : the great transformation today*, ed. Chris Hann and Keith Hart (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1-17.

³ Joseph Stiglitz, "Foreword," in *The great transformation : the political and economic origins of our time*, by Karl Polanyi, 2nd ed. (Boston MA: Beacon Press, 2001), vii.

vulnerability as embedded in larger socio-economic structures and the notion of the politically loaded explanations of these vulnerabilities in the aftermath of a disaster. In what follows, it will be explored what Polanyi has to say with respect to these two concepts.

Economic Transformation and its Social Effects

Polanyi's key interest in *The Great Transformation* is the process of large-scale economic change towards a liberal market economy. Given Polanyi's focus on the welfare of society, the impact of this process of economic transformation is not pre-determined but depends on its effects on societal wellbeing. A narrow 'economistic' focus on abstract notions like efficiency or productivity gains does not therefore suffice in evaluating the effects of large-scale socio-economic change on societies. Instead, Polanyi argues that change which has the potential to lead to an increase in society-wide welfare *qua* more productivity or efficiency can turn into a harmful process if it causes too much social dislocation in the process. A good example for the flexible outcome of economic change is the enclosure movement in sixteenth and seventeenth century England, which was about the restriction of land use to a single owner as opposed to the community in general. Even though the enclosure movement increased agricultural productivity and had a positive overall effect on society in the longer term, it created a class of dispossessed and landless former peasants who had to find new livelihoods. Whether they succeeded in doing so depended on the *speed of change* and the circumstances under which change took place at least as much as on the intrinsic characteristics of the transformation itself. This crucial point warrants to be emphasised in Polanyi's own words.

“The rate of that [the enclosures movement] progress might have been ruinous, and have turned the process itself into a degenerative instead of a constructive event. For upon this rate, mainly, depended whether the disposed could adjust themselves to changed conditions without fatally damaging their substance, human and economic, physical and moral; whether they would find new employment in the fields of opportunity indirectly connected with the change; and whether the effects of increased imports induced by increased exports would enable those who lost their employment through the change to find new sources of sustenance. The answer depended in every case on the relative rates of change and adjustment. [...] England withstood without grave damage the calamity of the enclosures only because the Tudors and the early Stuarts used the power of the Crown to slow down the process of economic improvements until it became socially bearable.”⁴

The enclosures movement and the associated increase of agricultural productivity were successful without causing widespread social dislocation only because the rate of change was slowed down sufficiently until it became ‘socially bearable’, even if this was largely the result of a dialectics of particular interests rather than conscious planning. Had change occurred too rapidly, the social costs associated with the transformation of landholding patterns might well have outnumbered its economic benefits. Note that Polanyi argues not only that a process with positive long-term effects can turn into a degenerative one if it is enacted too abruptly and without an adequate compensatory framework for those who lose out in the short

⁴ Karl Polanyi, *The great transformation : the political and economic origins of our time*, 2nd ed. (Boston MA: Beacon Press, 2001), 39, 40.

term; but also that negative effects are not measurable solely in economic terms but with reference to the cultural and moral elements of social life.

The first intellectual cue taken from Polanyi is thus his society-centred rather than ‘economistic’ appraisal of socio-economic change, in which economic figures alone have little to say about the impact of a process of economic transformation on a given society’s wellbeing or vulnerability. Instead, it is the economically not measurable social effects of the rise or external introduction of a market economy – which can, according to its circumstances, be either positive or negative - that is the focus of Polanyi’s analysis. To avoid the havoc caused by the unmitigated exposure of a society to the free market Polanyi advocated the conscious protection of society from full exposure to the market. Whether Polanyi was a social democrat or a socialist remains debated; however, what we know is that Polanyi regarded Rooseveltian or Scandinavian style social democracies as having achieved a sufficient degree of social protection to allow the market economy to take on positive, welfare-enhancing role.⁵ In this sense, “market economies can be safely introduced” only once the prerequisites of an extensive protection of society from unmitigated market forces is fulfilled.⁶ Tools of social protection are absolutely necessary, and are indeed widespread (although to varying extents) in all of today’s Western democracies.

However, warns Polanyi, the fact that the market economy enhances welfare in the West does not mean that the market economy can be imposed willy-nilly on countries in the developing world. As he puts it, “wherever a market economy was forced upon a helpless people in the absence of protective measures, as in exotic and semi-colonial regions, unspeakable suffering ensued.”⁷ In such cases, the social

⁵ Ibid., xxxv.

⁶ Ibid., 223.

⁷ Ibid.

dislocation caused by the market can greatly outweigh any narrowly defined productivity or efficiency gains achieved in the process.

The Liberal Market Economy and Liberal Economic Thinking

Polanyi's main focus in *The Great Transformation* is the rise of the liberal market economy, a transformation with infinitely more wide-ranging consequences than the enclosures movement mentioned above.⁸ Polanyi did not *a priori* praise or condemn the great transformation; in fact he argued that the escape of peasants from traditional rural hierarchies into the urban-industrial world could in many cases be a liberating one for them.

There is however a crucial difference with regards to the transformation to a capitalist economy that sets it apart to all prior episodes of socio-economic change. For the first time in history, argues Polanyi, has the logic of the market taken primacy over all other forms of rationality, turning human labour and land into commodities of a self-regulating and autonomous market. In this sense, the rise of capitalism has "disentangled the economy from the political, social and cultural framework in which it had been embedded".⁹ To turn human beings (qua their labour power) into commodities, according to Polanyi, "means to subordinate the sustenance of society itself to the market".¹⁰ For the first time in history, a 'market logic' based on the notion of a self-regulating and free economy has replaced political, social and cultural reasoning as the predominant formula for organising society. Crucially however, for Polanyi the notion of an autonomous and self-regulating market economy, one which incorporates human beings as commodities, can only ever exist as an unachievable

⁸ Breman, "The Great Transformation in the Setting of Asia."

⁹ Ibid., 3.

¹⁰ Polanyi, *The great transformation*, 74-75.

utopia. People cannot be shifted around the world indiscriminately, stored when not needed, and re-activated according to the needs of the market, nor can nature be exploited and polluted indefinitely.¹¹ The market logic could thus never exist in abstraction from its effects on society. The crux of Polanyi's argument is that the "commodification of land and labour, first in Europe and throughout the world, must be understood as the imaginary product of a belief in the (world) market".¹² The idea of a self-regulating and naturally balanced free market economy in other words is myth, one that can only be upheld by organising society around the needs of the market rather than the market around the needs of society.

As already argued, human labour is not a commodity that can be accommodated to the needs to the market without bounds. This could be starkly seen in Britain during the Victorian era, an epoch which saw the emergence of the urban slum phenomenon as chronicled for example in the novels of Charles Dickens. With liberal economic thought having come to dominate policymaking, there was little conscious effort of attempting to slow down the rapid expansion of the market economy. At the heart of the Industrial Revolution, as Polanyi writes, was thus "an almost miraculous improvement of the tools of production, which was accompanied by a catastrophic dislocation of the lives of the common people".¹³ Yet, the causal links between the expansion of the market economy into novel spheres of social life and the widespread social dislocation that existed in nineteenth century England have been denied or ignored both in liberal policymaking as well as in mainstream liberal historiography. According to liberal economic thought, "nothing in the nature of a sudden deterioration of standards has ever overwhelmed the common people ... for

¹¹ Ibid., 137.

¹² Jean-Michel Servet, "Toward an alternative economy: Reconsidering the market, money and value," in *Market and Society: The Great Transformation Today*, ed. Chris Hann and Keith Hart (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 78.

¹³ Polanyi, *The great transformation*, 35.

how could there be social catastrophe where there was undoubtedly economic improvement?”¹⁴ The social dislocation of the nineteenth century did of course not go unnoticed, but was made sense of predominantly through a moral prism, to be remedied by the propagation of liberal values and paternalistic charity rather than through addressing the market economy’s social consequences.¹⁵ According to the dominant liberal position,

*“No more had happened than a gradual unfolding of the forces of technological progress that transformed the lives of the people; undoubtedly many had suffered in the course of the change but on the whole the story was one of continuous improvement. This happy outcome was the result of the almost unconscious working of economic forces which did their beneficial work in spite of the interference of impatient parties who exaggerated the unavoidable difficulties of the time.”*¹⁶

Starkly reminiscent of the 1980s and Structural Adjustment Programmes, this ‘happy outcome’, in the liberal narrative, did not happen *because of*, but *despite of* interferences into the self-regulating market. “In order to fix safely the blame [for social dislocation, if acknowledged] on the alleged collectivist conspiracy [i.e. those forces or attitudes working against the self-regulating market], economic liberals must ultimately deny that any need for the protection of society had arisen”.¹⁷ Illiberal practices, the *lack of* a fully free market, and other protectionist interventions are then seen as the cause of the problem; to be combatted by the further entrenchment of the

¹⁴ Ibid., 163, 164.

¹⁵ Mitchell Dean, *The Constitution of Poverty : Towards a Genealogy of Liberal Governance* (London: Routledge, 1991).

¹⁶ Polanyi, *The great transformation*, 169.

¹⁷ Ibid., 163.

self-regulating market together with the promotion of liberal attitudes like entrepreneurship, individual responsibility, frugality and self-constraint.

In short, liberal economic thought has largely failed to link the great social upheavals of the nineteenth century with the subordination of society to the needs of the allegedly self-regulating economy. As all faith was put into the (utopian vision of an) ‘invisible hand’ of the market, the need for the protection of society from full exposure to market forces was denied. To the extent that social dislocation was acknowledged, it was attributed to a lack of liberal virtues or to forces trying to undermine the proper working of the market.

Coming back to the two concepts linking the politics of international development and natural disasters, namely vulnerability as embedded in larger socio-economic structures and the politics of public disaster interpretation, we can now see what Polanyi can contribute to their understanding in the context of market economies. First, for Polanyi the creation of vulnerabilities is embedded in the (global) social order, particularly if the latter is undergoing large-scale transformation towards the market economy. The impact of the market economy however is not predetermined, but is contingent on the circumstances under which traditional institutions are replaced by market-based mechanisms. Productivity increases can spur general welfare and thus reduce undue exposure to natural hazards, but can also lead to widespread social dislocation and a corresponding increase of disaster vulnerability. Specifically, Polanyi points towards the issue of livelihood re-adjustment and the implication that economic change needs to be undertaken at a ‘socially bearable’ pace so that those who have lost their traditional pre-capitalist livelihood are given enough time and/or support to be integrated into the new

economy as wage labourers. Second, with respects to the politics of public disaster interpretation, Polanyi offers the insight that a too dogmatic belief in the efficacy of market mechanisms can lead to the denial of society's need for protection from unmitigated market forces. With a biased vision that does not consider market forces as being implicated in the creation of social dislocation and subsequent disaster vulnerabilities, the interpretation of disasters and the determination of policy responses is likely to proceed within the narrow and apolitical confines as criticised in chapter one.

The crucial point in Polanyi's argument is that he allows us to link both the socio-economic dimension (i.e. vulnerability) as well as the interpretive dimension (i.e. politics of disaster interpretation) of the disaster-development link to the liberal, market-centred politics of international development and in particular the liberal economic belief in and unyielding pursuit of a self-regulating market. This belief in and pursuit of the self-regulating market, which is at the same time a material as well as interpretive practice, is at the core of the double link between natural disaster and international development. Polanyi's work can thus powerfully explicate the complex interaction between the material and ideational correlates of the liberal marker-centred politics of international development and its link with increases or decreases in disaster vulnerability.

Interestingly, Polanyi himself has also pointed out this double-correlation between liberal policies and disaster vulnerability. As he argued, the material and interpretive consequences of a too dogmatically pursued policy of marketisation can turn into widespread social dislocation, suffering and ultimately mass mortality. Writing about a series of famines in British-ruled India in the late nineteenth century, Polanyi argued that the famine was

*“neither a consequence of the elements, nor of exploitation, but of the new market organisation of labour and land which broke up the old order of the village without actually solving its problems. While under the regime of feudalism and of the village community noblesse oblige, clan solidarity, and regulation of the corn market checked famines, under the rule of the market the people could not be prevented from starving according to the rules of the game”.*¹⁸

With the stroke of a pen, Polanyi rules out both a technocratic as well as too narrowly economic exploitation-based interpretations of the famines. Instead, he draws the link between the dogmatic belief in market forces and the consequent failing to address the vulnerabilities that the rapid marketisation of Indian society has created. We can thus clearly see the double-connection of the politics of (in this case colonial) economic development policies and natural disaster. Nineteenth century famines under the watch of the British Empire provide a well-documented case for the implication of liberal economic thought into millions of deaths as a result of the interplay between increased vulnerability to natural disasters due to the rapid marketisation of societies and the policymaking axiom that the free market itself was the solution to these vulnerabilities.¹⁹ In the next chapter, we will return to the case of the Haitian earthquake evaluate to which extent Polanyi’s arguments still hold true in

¹⁸ Ibid., 168.

¹⁹ Mike Davis, *Late Victorian holocausts: El Niño famines and the making of the third world* (London: Verso, 2001); Christine Kinealy, *A death-dealing famine* (Chicago Ill.: Pluto Press, 1997); David Nally, “That Coming Storm: The Irish Poor Law, Colonial Biopolitics, and the Great Famine,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 98, no. 3 (2008): 714-741; Colm Regan, “Underdevelopment and hazard in historical perspective: an Irish case study,” in *Interpretations of Calamity: From the Viewpoint of Human Ecology*, ed. Kenneth Hewitt (Boston MA: Allen and Unwin, 1983), 98-118; Cormac Ó Gráda, “Famines and Markets” (Working Paper Series University College Dublin, 2007), <http://www.ucd.ie/economics/research/papers/2007/WP07.20.pdf>; Amartya Sen, *Poverty and famines: an essay on entitlement and deprivation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Michael Barnett, *Empire of humanity: a history of humanitarianism* (Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2011), 62-64.

the twenty-first century and specifically with respect to liberal development interventions in Haiti.

4) The Politics of International Development in Haiti

The previous chapter has introduced some key elements of Karl Polanyi's argument in the *Great Transformation* and elaborated the relevance of his writings for understanding natural disasters in the context of liberal economic development ideas and practices. This chapter will accordingly focus on the effects of development choices inspired by this classic economic or neo-liberal thought in Haiti.

Development Policies in Haiti since the 1980s

The Washington Consensus approach to development that has been employed in Haiti since the 1980s differs greatly to the preceding strategies of state-led industrialisation and modernisation. As the World Bank made it clear in 1981, there was a choice of “paramount importance” to be made between the out-dated model of import substitution and the new model of production for export embedded in a ‘sound macroeconomic framework’.¹ This included the by now well-known policies of macro-economic stabilisation, privatisation, de-regulation, trade liberalisation, the attraction of foreign direct investment and general reliance on the private sector.² The underlying reasoning was firmly embedded in a reinvigorated belief in classical liberal political economy, most importantly David Ricardo's notion of the comparative advantage. Haiti, it was argued, was too small and too impoverished to

¹ *Aiding migration : the impact of international development assistance on Haiti* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988), 61; Lisa McGowan, “Democracy Undermined, Economic Justice Denied: Structural Adjustment and the Aid Juggernaut in Haiti” (The Development Group for Alternative Policies, 1997), 1,

http://www.developmentgap.org/foreign_aid/Democracy_Undermined_Economic_Justice_Denied_Structural_Adjustment_%26_Aid_Juggernaut_in_Haiti.html.

² Yasmine Shamsie, “Haiti: Appraising Two Rounds of Peacebuilding Using a Poverty Reduction Lens,” *Civil Wars* 10, no. 4 (2008): 417.

develop a domestic market large enough to fuel economic growth. Therefore, Haiti was to “re-orient its productive resources from catering for the domestic market toward producing export goods”, most importantly for the giant American market situated right next to Haiti.³ This in turn required Haiti to concentrate on its ‘comparative advantages’; that is those areas where it was endowed with assets that were able to out-compete other countries. Being a resource-poor country with a large and impoverished peasantry, its comparative advantages were established to be commercial agriculture but most importantly the potential for growth in labour intensive export processing industry, or put differently, an abundance of cheap workers.⁴

Export processing essentially refers to the outsourcing of low-skilled manufacturing work from the developed countries into the global South where labour costs are considerably cheaper. Export processing industry means hard, low-waged work that does often not contribute much towards overall economic development as all it needs is low-skilled and low-cost labour.⁵ However, there are nevertheless examples where the establishment of export processing zones represented a first step towards economic development. Mauritius for example, despite its unfavourable geographic location, managed to achieve a level of public welfare significantly higher than the average country of sub-Saharan Africa by jump-starting its development with export processing industry.⁶ Even more impressive examples are the ‘Asian Tiger’

³ DeWind and Kinley, *Aiding migration*, 35.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁵ “Export Processing Zones: The Purported Glimmer in Haiti’s Development Murk,” *Review of International Political Economy* 16, no. 4 (2009): 649-672; DeWind and Kinley, *Aiding migration*, 103-135; UNCTAD, “Trade and Development Report 2010” (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2010.), http://www.unctad.org/en/docs/tdr2010_en.pdf.

⁶ Yasmine Shamsie, “Time for a ‘High-Road’ Approach to EPZ Development in Haiti” (Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum (CPPF) Social Science Research Council January 24, 2010, 2010), 16, http://webarchive.ssrc.org/pdfs/Yasmine_Shamsie_Economic_Processing_Zones_CPPF_Briefing_Paper_on_Haiti_Jan_2011_f.pdf.

NICs, with Taiwan being explicitly mentioned as a role model for Haiti.⁷ According to a Polanyian logic (leaving aside the argument that there is an element of zero-sum competition in export-processing industrialisation⁸), the overall benefits of export-led development – similar to our earlier example of the enclosures movement - can lead to an increase of economic productivity and societal welfare even if it takes place in a socially considerate fashion that allows for the re-adjustments of livelihoods. This however, as will be argued, was not the case in Haiti, where the results have been catastrophic by any measure. Of course, Washington Consensus policies did not start from zero, but encountered an already-impooverished country with a deteriorating environment, a “habitus [in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu] of authoritarianism”⁹ and on-going political instability. However, rather than recognising the vulnerability of the Haitian population, the liberal ‘great transformation’ of Haiti - informed by an unyielding belief in the laws of the self-regulating market - stretched many of these preceding issues past their breaking point. While neoliberal policies in this sense did not create most of Haiti’s pre-existing problems, they are nevertheless liable for aggravating rather than carefully addressing them. In what follows, this process will be documented in some detail.

As already mentioned, the neo-liberal plan for the transformation of Haiti into a successful export-led economy was based on the idea of concentrating on the country’s comparative advantages, these being commercial agriculture but most importantly the possibility for low-cost manufacturing plants in export processing zones. Peasant agriculture, although still accounting for between 70-80% of all livelihood strategies in the early 1980s, was essentially written off as uncompetitive.

⁷ DeWind and Kinley, *Aiding migration*, 61.

⁸ UNCTAD, “Trade and Development Report 2010,” 189; I. Wallerstein, “Development: Lodestar or Illusion?,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 23, no. 39 (1988): 2017-2023.

⁹ Robert Fatton, “Haiti in the Aftermath of the Earthquake: The Politics of Catastrophe,” *Journal of Black Studies* 42, no. 2 (2011): 159.

The solution to the impoverishment of Haitian farmers and a worsening environmental situation was to encourage the already substantial stream of rural-urban migration. As a 1983 World Bank document explicates, “although prospects for agricultural growth exist, they are not of the magnitude required to sustain even the existing rural population ... rural emigration will be needed to alleviate pressure on the land”.¹⁰ This migration in turn, further according to the World Bank, “will sustain the development of assembly industries, cottage industries and other urban labour-intensive activities consistent with an export-led growth”.¹¹

This policy is often demonised by critical commentators who argue that the core of this strategy was to create surplus labour to be exploited in sweatshops.¹² While there is perhaps some measure of truth in this argument, what these criticisms often ignore is the critically advanced process of soil erosion in the Haitian countryside,¹³ posing significant difficulties especially for the poorest peasants who have to work the most marginal lands. Further to this, demographic research has shown that taking up employment is actually significantly correlated to a higher household income in Haiti; “the rural labour market in other words is a mechanism for escaping poverty, not for creating it”.¹⁴ In keeping with Polanyi, a strategy of urban industrialisation or rural employment creation, given it happens within a supportive framework, is not necessarily a social regression for impoverished and exploited small-scale farmers having to make a living off marginal land. In Haiti however, the move towards livelihoods outside of peasant agriculture was a regressive rather than

¹⁰ DeWind and Kinley, *Aiding migration*, 59.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹² Patrick Bellegarde-Smith, “A Man-Made Disaster: The Earthquake of January 12, 2010— A Haitian Perspective,” *Journal of Black Studies* 42, no. 2 (2011): 272.

¹³ Lundahl, *Poverty in Haiti*, 244; John Mazzeo, “Lavichè: Haiti’s Vulnerability to the Global Food Crisis,” *National Association for the Practice of Anthropology Bulletin* 32, no. 1 (2009): 122.

¹⁴ Pål Sletten and Willy Egset, “Poverty in Haiti” (Forskningstiftelsen Fafo, 2004), 20, <http://www.fafo.no/pub/rapp/755/index.htm>.

progressive development. Although USAID predicted a “massive displacement of peasant farmers and migration to urban centres”,¹⁵ nothing was done to support this process or to mitigate its negative side-effects. It was simply assumed that manufacturing jobs will materialise given the oversupply of cheap labour.

Worse than this, in line with the neo-classical suspicion of the state, public services and subsidies were slashed. Programmes supporting small farmers as well as education and public health spending were singled out as “examples of misdirected social objectives” by the World Bank and greatly cut back.¹⁶ The scaling back of state support to domestic industries and peasant agriculture was also reflected in the near-abolishment of import duties on foodstuff in the 1990s. Tariffs on rice, sugar, wheat, pork and chicken all amounted to between 40 and 50% until 1995, but were reduced to between 0 and 5% thereafter. Despite chronic malnourishment in Haiti, the virtually unmitigated exposition of Haitian peasants to global competition was rationalised as increasing food security in Haiti. Given that food crop production was not thought to be among the competitive advantages of Haiti, it was argued that encouraging Haitian peasants either to grow cash crops or to find work in manufacturing and then utilising their earnings for buying imported foodstuff would increase the food security of Haitians.¹⁷

The result of these policies was a dramatic decrease in domestic food crop production, paralleled by a massive increase of food imports from the United States. Domestic production of rice for example amounted to 163’296 metric tons in 1985, supplemented by only 7’337 tons of imported US rice.¹⁸ Two decades later, these proportions were as good as inverted. In 2004, Haiti was importing 270’000 metric

¹⁵ DeWind and Kinley, *Aiding migration*, 58.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹⁸ Mazzeo, “Lavichè,” 120.

tons of US rice – a 17-fold increase, displacing domestic production not only of rice but also traditional domestic food crops like corn or millet for which Haitians had increasingly lost their taste.¹⁹

As a 1995 USAID document explicates market-centred re-structuring of Haiti's peasant agriculture, "the [Haitian] domestic farmer will be forced to adapt [to global competition] or (s)he will disappear".²⁰ Given the unmitigated direct competition with mechanised as well as often subsidised agricultural production in the US, few Haitian peasants managed to adapt. Considering *only* rice, sugar and intensive chicken farming, Christian Aid estimates that nearly 140'000 Haitians have lost their livelihood following liberalisation policies in the 1990s.²¹ Extending the count to subsidiary industries as well as family members of affected peasants or workers, they argue that "there are likely to be well over a million people directly affected by trade policy reforms".²²

As USAID and World Bank documents quoted earlier in this chapter indicate, the shrinking of the peasant population and the disintegration of globally uncompetitive domestic industry in Haiti was anticipated rather than accidental, and should thus not have taken development agencies by surprise. To re-iterate this from a 1982 USAID document, it was clearly stated that "USAID expects that a significant portion of the rural population will be displaced from their lands and begin to migrate".²³ Rural-urban migration did indeed take place, as the growth figures for Port-au-Prince indicate. While the UN estimates that the capital's population amounted to about 701'000 people when Washington Consensus development

¹⁹ Richardson, "Feeding Dependency," ii, viii.

²⁰ McGowan, "Democracy Undermined," 29.

²¹ McGuigan, "Agricultural Liberalisation in Haiti," 29.

²² Alex Dupuy, "Commentary Beyond the Earthquake," *Latin American Perspectives* 37, no. 3 (2010): 30.

²³ DeWind and Kinley, *Aiding migration*, 101.

policies began in 1980, this figure had tripled to over 2.1 million inhabitants by 2005.²⁴

The plan of the international development agencies was that those parts of the population who lost their livelihood due to exposure to global competition would find employment in the export processing industry, ostensibly Haiti's area of competitive advantage. At the same time, a 1985 World Bank report conceded that this strategy was a risky one, for "if Haiti does not export more, the economy will continue to stagnate and urban employment will not grow rapidly enough to absorb the influx from the countryside, with potentially serious social consequences".²⁵ Despite this warning, there was a general sense of optimism that the extraordinarily cheap labour costs in Haiti as well as the island's strategic location off the US coast would create a massive boom in export processing plants. According to this scenario, 'surplus labour' freed up in the countryside or from uncompetitive businesses or parastatals would be absorbed by a growing manufacturing industry located around the capital city of Port-au-Prince. Foreign investors were enticed to outsource manufacturing to Haiti with "generous tax holidays of ten years, complete repatriation of profits and a guaranteed non-unionised workforce".²⁶ Although there was some growth of manufacturing jobs in Port-au-Prince, the magnitude of work created was little more than a drop on the hot stone of joblessness in Haiti. Employment in the export manufacturing industry peaked at 60'000 workers before economic sanctions were imposed on Haiti following the first overthrow of Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 1991. Before the earthquake in 2010, 26'000 Haitians worked in the export processing

²⁴ UN, "World Urbanization Prospects: The 2005 Revision" (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2005), 149, http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/WUP2005/2005WUPHighlights_Final_Report.pdf.

²⁵ DeWind and Kinley, *Aiding migration*, 143.

²⁶ Shamsie, "Export Processing Zones," 656.

industry.²⁷ Even at its peak of 60'000 employees, this amounted to no more than 1.5% of the overall labour force in Haiti, or 8% of the urban labour force.²⁸ Given 100'00 new job seekers in Port-au-Prince *per year*,²⁹ many of them rural migrants, the spectacular failure of a development strategy whose success essentially relied on the creation of hundreds of thousands of jobs in export manufacturing becomes clear.

What is more, the constant inflow of willing workers into an industry that capitalises on low wages even lowered the living standards of those lucky enough to find employment in export processing industries. Intense competition for work, monetary reforms as well as the general deterioration of the Haitian economy together resulted in a 70% decrease of the real value (i.e. purchasing power) of the minimum wage between 1981 and 2003.³⁰ Given these figures, Christian Aid concludes that the “rural exodus has had extremely negative effects on urban areas: the slum population is growing while urban living conditions are deteriorating”.³¹ Rural areas are often even worse off, with 77% of peasants classified as “extremely poor” in 2006.³² Given this extreme figure of extreme poverty, the continuing influx of former peasants into the capital city can be expected to continue. Yet despite the lack of urban jobs and the conditions that Port-au-Prince’s slum dwellers have to endure, development policies based on bringing out Haiti’s competitive advantage “simply leave no role for the peasant”, even if almost two thirds of Haitians still depend on small-scale agriculture for their livelihood.³³

²⁷ Shamsie, “Time for a ‘High-Road’ Approach to EPZ Development in Haiti,” 7.

²⁸ McGowan, “Democracy Undermined,” 33; Dupuy, “Commentary Beyond the Earthquake,” 197.

²⁹ World Bank, “Social Resilience and State Fragility in Haiti: A Country Social Analysis”, 2006, iii, http://siteresources.worldbank.org/SOCIALANALYSIS/1104894-1115795935771/20938696/Haiti_CSA.pdf.

³⁰ McGuigan, “Agricultural Liberalisation in Haiti,” 30.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

³² Sletten and Egset, “Poverty in Haiti,” 10.

³³ McGowan, “Democracy Undermined,” 28; Richardson, “Feeding Dependency,” i.

Of course, the situation is not as easy as critics of US policies or ‘neo-liberal’ development agencies would have it. Haiti was already in a complex social, economic and political crisis when international development agencies virtually took over economic policymaking in 1981. Two coup d’états by the military threw back many development efforts and most foreign manufacturing companies left Haiti after the overthrow of Aristide in 1991. Further to this, environmental data does point to the need of reducing the pressure on marginal lands prone to erosion, and demographic data suggests that wage workers are usually better off than their ‘self-employed’ counterparts in the agricultural or informal sector despite the very low salaries they get.

A strategy of urbanisation and industrialisation was therefore not necessarily a regressive plan for the welfare of most Haitians. What has to be sharply criticised however is the way this was attempted. As outlined above, there simply prevailed a faith in the capacity of the free market to automatically lead to the desired outcomes. While peasants, that is up to 80% of the Haitian population in the early 1980s, were exposed to unsustainable global competition, all protective trade barriers or state support were virtually eliminated. Despite being fully aware of the risks of this strategy, it was simply assumed that the free market will provide a new livelihood to displaced peasants by itself. “With regards to agriculture, USAID simply assumed that “there is a latent Haitian agri-business sector simply waiting to explode”.³⁴ Attitudes towards urban manufacturing jobs were of a similar stance, characterised by a belief that jobs will automatically materialise as a result of there being a large supply of cheap labour. As Joseph Stiglitz writes about ‘neoliberal’ development policies more generally, “believers in a self-regulating market implicitly believed in a

³⁴ DeWind and Kinley, *Aiding migration*, 78.

kind of Say's law that the supply of labour would create its own demand."³⁵ Similarly, with regards to the neoliberal model of achieving food security, "against all evidence to the contrary, donors simply stated that export earnings would eventually reach a high enough level to pay for the import of foods."³⁶ Today, Haiti is ranked the 7th most food insecure country of the world.³⁷ Driven by an unyielding belief in the efficacy of the self-regulating market, Haiti was fully exposed to unmitigated global competition which undermined livelihood of hundreds of thousands of peasant farmer. Polanyi's warning about liberal economic thinking's "mythical acceptance of the social consequences of economic development, whatever they might be", resonate eerily in the air with respect to the politics of development in Haiti.

In sum, the politics of international development in Haiti bear strong resemblance to the great transformation in nineteenth century English society as described by Polanyi. The analogy is even stronger with respect to more peripheral countries like nineteenth century Ireland however, which lacked the benefits associated with being at the centre of a global Empire, yet were exposed to the full force of unmitigated global competition and domestic agricultural modernisation. Following rapid marketisation and the loss of the traditional cottier style small-scale agricultural livelihood on which large parts of the population had relied before, Ireland's population halved as a consequences of famine and emigration.³⁸ While famine has mostly been avoided in Haiti thanks to international food aid, mass emigration is no longer an option to compensate for the mass loss of livelihoods. The transformation of Haiti by development policies based around global completion and

³⁵ Stiglitz, "Foreword," x.

³⁶ McGowan, "Democracy Undermined," 7.

³⁷ Guardian, "Food is the ultimate security need, new map shows | Damian Carrington | Environment | guardian.co.uk", August 31, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/damian-carrington-blog/2011/aug/31/food-security-prices-conflict#zoomed-picture>.

³⁸ Kinealy, *A death-dealing famine*; Regan, "Underdevelopment and hazard in historical perspective: an Irish case study"; Nally, "That Coming Storm."

comparative advantage has turned the potentially beneficial processes of urbanisation and increased international into a degenerative one; amounting to what Polanyi has called socio-economic change at a socially unbearable rate. Haiti's peasant population has been exposed the deleterious effects of global competition with mechanised agriculture; yet there does simply not exist an alternative livelihood for them inside Haiti. Yet, the need for the protection of society from unmitigated market forces has been consistently denied, attributing social problems instead to domestic political and cultural ills and/or the lack of a fully developed free market. Tellingly, the IMF has blamed the lack of benefits Haiti has reaped from its liberalisation process to not enough emphasis on other reforms such as privatisation;³⁹ this although Christian Aid describes Haiti as a "liberalisation poster child" that has gone through several rounds of structural adjustment programmes and has done "everything asked of it in terms of trade policy."⁴⁰

The 2010 Earthquake

From the above summary of the politics of neo-liberal development in Haiti, the link to disaster vulnerability in Port-au-Prince is not a farfetched one. While development policies knowingly undermined the livelihood of peasants, the hoped-for alternative livelihoods in urban manufacturing jobs never materialised. Even if political instability is part of the explanation why foreign direct investment has failed to give rise to the projected hundreds of thousands of jobs; in a country with a history of coup d'états, political instability should have been factored in as a risk factor.

³⁹ McGuigan, "Agricultural Liberalisation in Haiti," 35.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 5.

Instead, what happened was the deliberate intensification of the rural exodus into the capital city based on an unyielding belief in the global market and its capacity for the rational allocation of jobs into places where labour costs are the cheapest. The actual impact of economic liberalisation was far removed from the world of economic theory and the capacity of the free market to automatically react to the comparative advantages of Haiti. Port-au-Prince kept on swelling and densifying; “crowding more residents per acre into low-rise housing than Manhattan or central Tokyo”⁴¹ but offering employment to less than a tenth of its workforce. The resulting mixture of poverty and the complete abdication of the Haitian state in regulatory matters, all taking place in a city built on top of a seismic fault line, was not far from asking for a major disaster to happen. Earthquakes, as Mike Davis has unfortunately been proven right in Haiti, “make precise audits of the urban housing crisis.”⁴² The interpretive key that a socio-political perspective on natural disasters and a Polanyian framework on the politics of development provide is the necessity to link these latter phenomena to larger and deeper aspects of the domestic as well as the global social order. As the next paragraph will outline however, this interpretive move was not undertaken in the aftermath of the earthquake.

Following the earthquake in January 2010, two key documents have dealt with the earthquake itself as well as the reconstruction strategy, namely the *Post Disaster Needs Assessment* (PDNA) and the *Action Plan for National Recovery and Development of Haiti* (Action Plan).⁴³ Both documents are relatively sensitive to the fact that the earthquake did not occur in a socio-economic vacuum, but affected an already highly vulnerable population. The PDNA for example states that “in addition

⁴¹ Mike Davis, *Planet of slums* (London: Verso, 2006), 92.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 126.

⁴³ Government of Haiti, “Action Plan”; Government of Haiti, “PDNA.”

to environmental vulnerability, certain social factors like poverty, political instability, rapid urbanisation and the fragile nature of the Haitian state exacerbate the damaging effects of natural events”.⁴⁴ Similarly, the Action Plan explains that causes of Haiti’s vulnerability to the earthquake are rooted in “an excessively dense population, a lack of adequate building standards, the disastrous state of the environment, disorganised land use, and an unbalanced division of economic activity.”⁴⁵ The Action Plan thus recognises the need for what it calls “structural change” if disaster vulnerability is to be reduced, with the PDNA even specifying that “Haiti’s vulnerability to disaster risks will grow unless the problems associated with the means of basic subsistence are dealt with”.⁴⁶

The identification of a basic subsistence crisis as the principal reason for Haiti’s vulnerability to the earthquake is an important step that could potentially serve to open up space to fundamentally question some of the processes that have left Port-au-Princes residents so greatly exposed to natural disaster. However, for reasons that will be examined in the remainder of this chapter, the policy documents published so far contain no suggestions for any major policy changes or even just re-evaluations of past development policies. As the Action Plan states it quite clearly, “the priorities [of economic development], identified before the earthquake, have not been altered by the disaster”.⁴⁷ Even though these policies have “failed to generate sustainable development, reduce unemployment or improve the standard of living of the majority of Haitians, the major power and the international financial institutions continue to advocate them as the solutions to Haiti’s chronic underdevelopment and poverty.”⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Government of Haiti, “PDNA,” 25.

⁴⁵ Government of Haiti, “Action Plan,” 5.

⁴⁶ Government of Haiti, “PDNA,” 26.

⁴⁷ Government of Haiti, “Action Plan,” 26.

⁴⁸ Dupuy, “Commentary Beyond the Earthquake,” 8.

One of the main reasons why a real change of development policies after the earthquake has not only failed to materialise, but was not even considered or discussed, is the “exclusive focus on the microphysics of disaster and individual and collective choices”.⁴⁹ Vulnerability factors such as unsafe housing conditions, high population density or rapid urbanisation are “on the surface, obvious explanation for the scale of the disaster that ensued [in Haiti].”⁵⁰ Simply taking these factors at face-value however fails to acknowledge that disaster vulnerability is embedded in the overall social order. Thus, re-invoking our earlier definition of vulnerability as “the intersection between of the physical process of a hazard agent with the local characteristics of everyday life in a place and *larger social and economic social forces that structure that realm*”⁵¹, it becomes clear how the global structural and ‘ideological’ forces that have shaped and constrained Haiti’s development have not been part of the discussion on Haiti’s vulnerability to the earthquake.

What a Polanyian perspective adds to this critique is an additional explanatory layer by specifying, as set out above, how and why vulnerability came about through the liberal market-led politics of international development. More importantly, a Polanyian framework also helps to explicate how and why the very same liberal economic ethos of the self-regulating market that has been deeply implicated in Haiti’s earthquake vulnerability has also at the same time worked to deny the need of society to be protected from unmitigated exposure to market forces. This market ethos precludes the conclusion that the market economy itself might have been implicated in the creation or at least reproduction of patterns of disaster vulnerability; as proxy causes are summoned to account for the devastating toll of the Haitian earthquake. These more immediate causes are of course not false as such, but need, as argued

⁴⁹ Mowat, “The Haiti Earthquake: A Disaster Set Apart from Others?,” 5.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵¹ Bolin and Stanford, *The Northridge earthquake*, 27.

throughout this dissertation, to be situated in larger context if the Haitian earthquake is to be fully understood in its empirical as well as political complexity.

In sum, then Polanyi's core argument of the detrimental effects of the liberal free market ethos, made relevant to natural disaster through the concepts of socially contingent patterns of disaster vulnerability and the notion interpretive politics of the public explanation of disasters, has provided us with a critical yet pragmatic angle on the relation between the liberal politics of development and the 2010 earthquake in Haiti. As the next chapter will argue, the relevance of this argument extends beyond the spatial border of Haiti and the temporal event of the 2010 earthquake.

5) The Globalisation of Disaster Vulnerability

So far, we have established the relevance of Polanyi's work for a better understanding of the link between natural disasters and the wider social order in an indirect way. That is, it has been argued that liberal economic politics have led to social dislocation in nineteenth century England in a similar way as they have aggravated disaster vulnerability yet at the same time disassociated this process from the free market in ethos in Haiti. Additionally to this indirect analogy, there is also a more direct dimension to Polanyi's relevance for understanding contemporary Haiti. In relates to the arguments of several scholars who have suggested that the great transformation Polanyi has written about is far from over, and has indeed taken on a worldwide dimension in the age of globalisation. As Breman suggests,

“The exodus of rural labour began in Europe in the early decades of the nineteenth century. In the wake of decolonization in the second half of the twentieth century, a similar expansion spread to what came to be called the Third World.”¹

Especially since the dawn of neo-liberal trade and development policies as documented in Haiti, the process of “de-peasantisation” in developing countries has been gaining ever greater momentum.² In nineteenth and twentieth Europe, the dissolution of the peasant class has ended with the integration of former peasants into

¹ Breman, “The Great Transformation in the Setting of Asia,” 3.

² Deborah Bryceson, “Peasant Theories and Smallholder Policies. Past and Present,” in *Disappearing peasantries? : rural labour in Africa, Asia and Latin America*, ed. Jos Mooij, Cristobal Kay, and Deborah Bryceson (London: Intermediate Technology Publications, 2000), 29; Deborah Bryceson, “Disappearing Peasantries? Rural Labour Redundancy in the Neo-Liberal Era,” in *Disappearing peasantries? : rural labour in Africa, Asia and Latin America*, ed. Jos Mooij, Cristobal Kay, and Deborah Bryceson (London: Intermediate Technology Publications, 2000), 319.

the urban industrial world and/or waves of emigration into the 'new world'. Although this was by no means a smooth process and involved different extents of social dislocation according to the social policies of different countries; overall, Western countries have materially benefited from the 'great transformation'.

With respect to the on-going great transformation in the developing world however, Breman stresses that "although the pace of urbanisation has accelerated, it is generally not accompanied by a rapid expansion in industrial employment."³ Only in East Asia has peasant labour redundancy been more or less successfully absorbed by industrial employment.⁴ In other parts of the world, we witness the rise of informal employment (making up 90% of the workforce in India for example⁵) and the build-up of slums. As Mike Davis argues, urbanisation in the developing world "has been radically decoupled from industrialisation and development *per se*."⁶ In the poorest countries (Davis mentions Sub-Saharan Africa but Haiti is another case in point), rural-urban migration was not even accompanied "by what is supposed to be the *sin qua non* of urbanisation, rising agricultural productivity."⁷ As slums are growing, agricultural deregulation policies "continue to generate an exodus of surplus rural labour to urban slums even as cities ceased to be job machines."⁸

While Davis is a scholar well known for courting controversy, the links he draws between peasant labour redundancy and the rise of precarious living conditions in Third World slums are based to a large extent on a UN report on the subject. As the UN-HABITAT report puts it in no mild terms,

³ Breman, "The Great Transformation in the Setting of Asia," 4.

⁴ Bryceson, "Peasant Theories and Smallholder Policies. Past and Present," 28.

⁵ UNDP, "Global Financial Crisis and India's Informal Economy: Review of Key Sectors", 2009, 5, http://www.undp.org.in/sites/default/files/reports_publication/sewaWebFinal.pdf.

⁶ Davis, *Planet of slums*, 13.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 15.

*“The surplus rural population moves to the cities to find work. Instead of being a focus for growth and prosperity, the cities have become a dumping ground for a surplus population working in unskilled, unprotected and low-wage informal service industries and trade. The slums of the developing world swell.”*⁹

As much as these descriptions of de-peasantisation and urbanisation without job creation are reminiscent of the case of Haiti, they are all written with a much more global focus, incorporating case studies from all continents. They document a Polanyian great global transformation, driven by the “political project of globally imposed marketisation”¹⁰ without adequate consideration for the need of accompanying measures of social protection. In this sense, disaster vulnerability in Haiti has not been an exception, but is instead sadly the norm for millions of slum dwellers in the precarious urban living conditions in the growing slums of the developing world.¹¹ The ‘socio-economic’ dimension of a devastating Haiti-style earthquake is already there in many other cities of the developing world, just waiting for disaster vulnerability to be turned into mass mortality once nature provides the external input factor. In this sense, the Haitian earthquake is being repeated on a daily basis throughout the world, save for the seismic element of the disaster.

Although the trend of declining peasant populations and precarious urban livelihoods have shown to be global rather than specifically Haitian phenomena, post-earthquake reports in Haiti have consistently failed to establish any links to the politics of market-driven and export-led development that have greatly contributed to

⁹ UN-HABITAT, “The Challenge of Slums - Global Report on Human Settlements” (United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2003), 46, <http://www.unhabitat.org/pmss/listItemDetails.aspx?publicationID=1156>.

¹⁰ Kalb, “From flows to violence,” 177.

¹¹ Davis, *Planet of slums*, 121-151.

the deterioration of both rural livelihoods and urban housing conditions which have ultimately left Haitians so vulnerable to the earthquake. This is perhaps no surprise given that even one of the most self-critical and ‘pro-poor’ UN reports on natural disasters fails to express any policy implications other than those that can be safely confined to a domestic level.

The UNDP report *Reducing Disaster Risk: Challenges for Development* puts forward an almost Polanyian perspective on the politics of development, arguing that “the process of development itself has a huge impact — both positive and negative — on disaster risk.”¹² Directly applicable to the case of Haiti, the report states that

*“The growth of informal settlements and inner city slums, whether fuelled by international migration or internal migration from smaller urban settlements or the countryside, has led to the growth of unstable living environments”.*¹³

Going significantly further than post-disaster assessments of Haiti, the UNDP establishes that economic globalisation itself is not unrelated to the loss of rural livelihoods that fuel internal migration. As the UNDP writes,

*“Coping capacity for some people has been undermined by the need to compete in a globalising economy, which at present rewards productive specialisation and intensification over diversity and sustainability”.*¹⁴

Heeding attention to this observation, the UNDP report concludes that “the roots of much disaster risk can be traced to historical development decisions”.¹⁵

¹² UNDP, “Reducing Disaster Risk,” Foreword.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

Structural Adjustment Policies are specifically identified as flawed strategies “which often led to high levels of social dislocation and exacerbated inequality and poverty”,¹⁶ thereby (as seen in Haiti) aggravating the natural hazard vulnerability of marginalised sections of the population.

Although having thus laid the fundament for a radical rethinking of the politics of development and natural disasters, the UNDP report falls short of representing any fundamental change in international development policies. Even though arguing that past ‘neo-liberal’ development policies have often increased the vulnerability of the poor to natural disasters, the policy recommendations of the UNDP report stay clear of any ‘ideological’ or global questions and return to a domestic and micro-level. For the UNDP, ‘good governance’ is how international development can overcome the issues of inequality and vulnerability of populations. Even though the good governance approach to development certainly an improvement when compared to the side-lining of the state by earlier more militantly market-centred policies, good governance is advocated complementarily to rather than instead of the export-oriented development strategies based on neo-classical economic thinking.¹⁷ What is more, the focus on good governance works as a filter that sieves out any global policy implications, attributing all shortcomings of development to not good enough governance instead. Consider uncontrolled urbanisation, which the UNDP had earlier at least partly linked to neo-liberal globalisation. Seen through the lens of good governance, any implications that liberal economic development policies themselves

¹⁶ Ibid., 65.

¹⁷ see for example Rita Abrahamsen, “Review: Review Essay: Poverty Reduction or Adjustment by Another Name?,” *Review of African Political Economy* 31, no. 99 (2004): 184-187, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4006958>; Paul Cammack, “What the World Bank means by poverty reduction, and why it matters,” *New Political Economy* 9, no. 2 (2004): 189-211; Doug Porter and David Craig, “The third way and the third world: poverty reduction and social inclusion in the rise of ‘inclusive’ liberalism,” *Review of International Political Economy* 11, no. 2 (2004): 387-423; Niheer Dasandi, “Poverty Reductionism: The Exclusion of History, Politics, and Global Factors from Mainstream Poverty Analysis” (IPEG papers in Global Political Economy, 2009), http://www.bisa-ipeg.org/papers/39_dasandi.pdf.

might be the source of the problem are gone. As the report puts it, successful disaster risk reduction, *at all levels* [emphasis added], will depend on governance innovation.”¹⁸

The Post-Washington Consensus to development into which the response to the Haitian earthquake has been embedded is thus far from being in opposition to the politics of international development that has allowed and contributed to, even if not single-handedly caused, the vulnerability of Haitians to natural disasters. Although poverty and its derivative effects are recognised as factors contributing to disaster vulnerability; in a similar fashion as classic economic thought has done during the Industrial Revolution, poverty is attributed to society’s lack of adjustment to the needs of the market rather than the market’s lack of adjustment to the needs of society. This fundamental affinity of UNDP’s good governance paradigm with classical political economy is demonstrated further by the striking resemblance between the good governance paradigm and the writing of David Ricardo, the intellectual father of the ‘comparative advantage’ argument on which export-led and market-centred development strategies have been based. As Ricardo wrote a century and half ago,

*“In those countries where there is an abundance of fertile land, but where, from ignorance, indolence, and barbarism of the inhabitants, they are exposed to all the evils of want and famine ... the evil proceeds from bad government, from the insecurity of property, and from the want of education in all ranks of people. To be made happier they require only to be better governed and instructed, as the augmentation of capital, beyond the augmentation of the people, would be the inevitable result.”*¹⁹

¹⁸ UNDP, “Reducing Disaster Risk,” 76.

¹⁹ David Ricardo in Bryceson, “Peasant Theories and Smallholder Policies. Past and Present,” 8.

Given this stark resemblance with classic nineteenth century classic political economy, today's liberal politics of international development, even if (or perhaps exactly because of) being embedded in the language of good governance and pro-poor development, do not essentially break with the liberal dogmas of free trade, economic liberalisation and the assumption that a natural balance beneficial to all is only waiting to be uncovered with the help of better governance. Even though genuine steps towards 'pro-poor' development have been taken on a micro and domestic level in recent years, self-reflexivity is still lacking when it comes to global and 'ideological' dimensions of the politics of development. The liberal economic thought still appears to be unable to consider its own implication in the creation of vulnerabilities in a manner that would question the pre-dominance of what Polanyi has called the 'myth' or utopian dream of the self-regulating market.

Perhaps, this is related to the overly benign narrative of the great transformation in Europe itself to which, as Polanyi has argued, liberal economic thinkers prescribe. There are not many other explanations why Haiti for example was subjected to a free market gamble of giant proportions although, as Stiglitz writes, "there was ample evidence that such liberalisation could impose enormous risks on a country, while the evidence that such liberalisation promoted growth was scanty at best".²⁰ Without denying all the material benefits that market economies have conferred on many countries, the underbelly of the pursuit of a global self-regulating market can no longer be ignored in development policies if fatal disaster vulnerabilities like in Haiti are to be addressed in a comprehensive way.

As Polanyi writes with reference to the breakdown of the free market-based world order in the 1930s, but not without relevance for the unduly high levels of

²⁰ Stiglitz, "Foreword."

disaster vulnerability faced by people in Third World cities like Port-au-Prince, “the [liberal] democratic countries were the last to realise the true nature of the catastrophe ... the failure of the market economy itself escaped them”.²¹

This resonates with Michael Dillon’s argument that the serial policy failures of ‘liberal governance’ are “rooted in ontological and epistemological assumptions”.²² In other words, the problem is the *a priori* exclusion of the possibility that the “inescapable ontological and epistemological assumptions” that go into the formulation of policies might themselves be the main obstacles to finding lasting solutions to the problems they address unsuccessfully. As argued in this dissertation, the myth of the self-regulating market and the social dislocation its pursuit causes is the very ontological problem at the heart of the failed politics of development that left so millions of people vulnerable to natural disasters in Haiti as well as throughout the ‘global South’. In his foreword to *The Great Transformation*, Stiglitz has argued that this “myth of the self-regulating economy is, today, virtually dead”.²³ Given that no major rethinking of development policies has followed the earthquake in Haiti despite the death of 220’000 people, Stiglitz might have been too optimistic in his obituary of the myth of the self-regulating market. Failing to follow Polanyi in the ontological prioritising of society over the elusive ideal of a self-regulating market, the liberal economic politics development have remained the same as before the earthquake.

²¹ Polanyi, *The great transformation*, 21.

²² Michael Dillon and Julian Reid, “Global Governance, Liberal Peace, and Complex Emergency,” *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 25, no. 1 (2000): 133.

²³ Stiglitz, “Foreword,” x.

Conclusion

This dissertation sought to challenge the dominant equation of disaster proneness with underdevelopment. To this end, the question was raised whether or not international development policies themselves are implicated in patterns of disaster vulnerability. This question was answered by two distinct, yet interrelated arguments; a narrower one relating to natural disaster and a broader one that addressed issues pertaining to the global market economy which *qua* the politics of development plays an important role in shaping the socio-economic and political dimensions of natural disaster. In a preliminary argument, it has been argued that there is a double link between natural disasters and international development. The link is socio-economic insofar as politically contingent development policies cannot be disassociated from patterns of disaster vulnerability, and ideational or interpretive in the sense that natural disasters have to be publicly interpreted and explained in their aftermath, thereby situating past development policies in certain ways *vis-à-vis* the disaster.

Since the nature of the link between natural disasters and development policies is not separable from one's standpoint on the liberal market economy; the dissertation has had to engage with the question of how the global market economy relates to international development. Rather than choosing between established economic theories, the dissertation has drawn on the work of Karl Polanyi and argued for the ontological prioritisation of society over a separate category of 'the economy', irrespective of whether the latter is approached from a liberal or Marxist perspective. With the help of Polanyi, the double link between natural disasters and a liberal economic politics of development could be explicated. With respect to the socio-

economic connotation of disaster vulnerability, it has been argued that the marketisation of societies has the potential to both benefit and harm society; depending on whether the transformation happens in a context where social dislocation is minimised and compensated for. With respect to the politics of disaster interpretation however, it has been argued that the unyielding pursuit of a self-regulating market ideal leads to the denial of society's need for protection from unmitigated exposure to free market forces, thereby accelerating the pace of capitalist transformation beyond a socially bearable pace. Polanyi thus makes both the material socio-economic and interpretive political dimensions of the natural disaster-development link dependent on one key characteristic of liberal market economies: the unyielding pursuit of what he calls the utopian and ultimately impossible idea of the self-regulating market. Where the free market dream was dogmatically pursued, argues Polanyi, millions have suffered and died in the process of 'economic improvement', even if the economy itself might have gained in efficiency or productivity. On the other hand, where the market has been subordinated to the needs of society, it has generated public welfare and by implication less exposure to natural hazards. These two different relations between natural disasters and 'modernising' capitalist development are of course the opposed poles of continuum of scenarios rather exhaustive of all possible cases.

Applied to the case of Haiti, the dissertation has shown that liberal economic development policies in the three decades preceding the earthquakes have increased rather than decreased already existing patterns of disaster vulnerability. Despite the enormous risks associated with an export-led development strategy, Haiti was subjected to several rounds of economic liberalisation. The liberalisation strategy was undergirded by the idea of the 'comparative advantage' of nations, a central tenet in

the pursuit of a self-regulating world market. It was argued that given Haiti's low agricultural productivity, peasant farmers should seek a new livelihood in urban export-processing manufacturing rather than in small-scale agriculture. As has been documented, economic liberalisation was 'successful' in exposing Haitian peasant farmers to unsustainable levels of competition with more productive agricultural producers abroad, thereby forcing them to seek of a new urban existence. However, the second side of the equation in export-led development strategies –foreign direct investment leading to hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs – never materialised. Haiti's capital city of Port-au-Prince thus kept on swelling and densifying without additional employment opportunities for its residents, ultimately leading to the patterns of disaster vulnerability that has claimed so many lives when the city was struck by an earthquake in January 2010. The liberal economic model of export-led development that has shaped Haiti's social landscape the last three decades can therefore not be disassociated from Haiti's vulnerability to the January 2010 earthquake.

The simple equation of underdevelopment with more and development with less disaster vulnerability is thus a problematic one. As has been shown in the dissertation, it has been the Polanyian notion of an unyielding belief in the self-regulating market that has led to the ultimately fatal export-led development gamble in Haiti. Although more recent Post-Washington Consensus development strategies have shown some degree of self-criticism and advocate a 'pro-poor' approach to development, the essential mental leap of questioning the efficacy and indeed possibility of the free market utopia has not taken place. Instead, a good governance paradigm has emerged which, as some scholars argue, is more about the efficient organisation of society around the market rather than vice versa. This has been the

case with official policy responses to the Haitian earthquake, where no major policy changes or critical appraisal of past development policies have emerged.

The same is also true on a more global dimension where the fundamental challenges of the marketisation of the developing world - a Polanyian great transformation of which Haiti is but one case – has not been grasped in its entirety and complexity. Mark Schuller has argued that the ongoing social crisis Haiti should be seen as an example and early warning of what might happen to other countries in the global South if significant changes are not made to the way the global economy works.¹ With respect to what has been argued about the link between natural disasters and the currently dominant liberal economic politics of development based on the pursuit of a self-regulating world market; a natural disaster somewhere else in the global South with a similarly catastrophic impact as the earthquake in Haiti would be a sad, but not entirely surprising occurrence. After all, to repeat an argument from the beginning of the dissertation with the hindsight of having examined the case of Haiti, natural disasters are “episodic, foreseeable manifestations of the broader social forces that shape societies”², or in other words “part of a set of negative externalities that occur as a consequence of larger socio-economic trends”.³

By laying bare the vulnerabilities embedded in these broader social forces, major natural disasters are critical moments with the potential for a radical delegitimisation of past development policies, but also offer grounds for their re-invigorated continuation. In Haiti, although several local patterns of vulnerabilities have been identified in the aftermath of the earthquake, the ‘broader social forces’ or ‘larger socio-economic trends’ that have undergirded them have not been questioned.

¹ Schuller, “‘Haiti is Finished!’: Haiti’s End Meets the Ends of Capitalism,” 211.

² Tierney, “From the Margins to the Mainstream?,” 509.

³ *Ibid.*, 510.

As has been argued in dissertation, so long as the mental leap of questioning the idea of a self-regulating market and its detrimental effects on the ongoing global great transformation of the livelihoods of millions of people does not take place, a more comprehensive understanding of natural disasters is precluded.

Before concluding the dissertation with a very brief note on Haiti's future, several omissions, limitations and shortcomings of the dissertation need to be made more explicit. First of all, there is the dependence of the dissertation's argument on the cogency of Karl Polanyi's work. By placing himself outside of most established sociological schools of thought, certainly the influential liberal and Marxist varieties, Polanyi's argument – and by extension the argument advanced by the dissertation - is bound to draw ample criticism from a variety of perspectives. In terms of supportive arguments, Polanyi's thought is perhaps closest to the work of Durkheim and his former student Marcel Mauss.⁴ As has been implicitly rather than explicitly assumed throughout this dissertation, Polanyi's work also shares a certain (unintended) affinity with some Foucauldian 'governmentality' scholars who also emphasise the crucial importance of a liberal 'market mentality';⁵ even if Polanyi's 'substantivist' anthropological work would not sit very comfortably with post-structuralist thought more generally.

There are definitely several shortcomings in Polanyi's work, as could be articulated from all the 'non-Polanyian' positions mentioned above. Perhaps most

⁴ Philippe Steiner, "The critique of the economic point of view: Karl Polanyi and the Durkheimians," in *Market and Society: The Great Transformation Today*, ed. Chris Hann and Keith Hart (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 56-72.

⁵ Mitchell Dean, *Governmentality: power and rule in modern society*. (London: Sage, 1999); Mitchell Dean, *Critical and effective histories: Foucault's methods and historical sociology* (London: Routledge, 1994); Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller, eds., *The Foucault effect: studies in governmentality: with two lectures by and an interview with Michel Foucault* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); see for example Michel Foucault, *Security, territory and population* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) etc.

debilitating is his lack of engagement with different conceptions of power, whether coercive, institutional, structural or productive.⁶ Polanyi also fails to ask the question whether the amount of market-generated wealth enjoyed in developed countries might be causally related to poverty elsewhere. Despite these and other omissions, arising perhaps out of his historical rather than theoretical engagement with the great transformation, his work remains highly relevant for our times and is flexible enough for adaptation or incorporation into more theoretically informed analytic frameworks.

Other than the inevitable strengths and weaknesses of any work that relies on a particular scholarly perspective, the single largest limitation of this dissertation is its rather narrow focus on the liberal development policies of the past thirty years. Haiti is an overwhelmingly complex country, and the dissertation could have been augmented by including many more problematic issues and topics. Haiti's colonial past and the continuing importance of race,⁷ a 'habitus' of authoritarianism,⁸ critically advanced soil erosion⁹, Haiti's 'republic of NGOs' with over 10'000 aid organisations active in the country,¹⁰ the MINUSTAH United Nations military stabilisation mission,¹¹ the politics and debates surrounding the rise and fall of Jean-Bertrand Aristide¹² and most importantly the role and collective agency of the silenced majority of the 'ordinary Haitian'¹³, to name just a few examples, could and should ideally all have been included into the analysis of the Haitian earthquake. As the scope of the

⁶ Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall, *Power in global governance* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁷ Girard, *Haiti*; Hallward, "Our role in Haiti's plight | Peter Hallward | Comment is free | The Guardian."

⁸ Fatton, "Haiti in the Aftermath of the Earthquake," 159.

⁹ Lundahl, *Poverty in Haiti*.

¹⁰ Laura Zanotti, "Cacophonies of Aid, Failed State Building and NGOs in Haiti: setting the stage for disaster, envisioning the future," *Third World Quarterly* 31, no. 5 (2010): 755-771.

¹¹ Shamsie, "Haiti: Appraising Two Rounds of Peacebuilding."

¹² Peter Hallward, *Damming the Flood: Haiti Aristide and the Politics of Containment: Haiti and the Politics of Containment* (London: Verso, 2007).

¹³ Schuller, "Haiti's 200-Year Ménage-à-Trois"; Tim Di Muzio, "Silencing the Sovereignty of the Poor in Haiti," in *Silencing Human Rights: Critical Engagements with a Contested Project*, ed. Robbie Shilliam and Gurminder Bhambra (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 205-222.

argument has been a limited one, analytical choices had to be made. The focus on less tangible factors and issues such as the globalised ‘great transformation’ or the liberal pursuit of the self-regulating market ideal can be justified however. In the case of a developing country like Haiti with limited political and even less economic sovereignty, local factors are to a significant extent co-determined by global structures, processes and actors and can therefore not be approached without situating them in a larger context, even if they should of course be given their due weight.¹⁴

The final question to be asked about the argument advanced in this dissertation is quite frankly about its relevance and usefulness. As development economist Mats Lundahl remarked with reference to the Haitian earthquake,

“No Marxist, post-modern or post-developmental rhetoric is of any help. There is no reason to question the fundamental Western humanistic values.”¹⁵

Lundahl’s argument could be replied to in several ways. First, it could be argued the positions he attacks as ‘use-less’ rhetoric (he would probably include the argument advanced in this dissertation) only appear rhetoric because they question the status quo that Lundahl takes as the starting point for his own work. Both Lundahl’s work and the positions he attack are politically loaded, with the difference that a position that works within the status quo can afford to be more practical and policy-oriented; however, this comes at the price of disregarding larger structural and ideological causes and effects.

¹⁴ Kalb, “From flows to violence.”

¹⁵ Lundahl, *Poverty in Haiti*, 226.

In this sense, Lundahl's shielding of past development policies in Haiti from critical scrutiny by virtue of placing them under the protective umbrella of 'humanistic values' reveals a lot about his own preconceptions and perspective on development. The in itself rhetorical argument Lundahl makes about 'humanistic Western values' being challenged by the rhetoric of critical approaches to development has to be firmly dismissed. The central humanistic value of emancipation, defined by Booth as "the securing of people from those oppressions that stop them from carrying out what they would freely choose to do, compatible with the freedom of others."¹⁶ Since Port-au-Prince's residents are unlikely to have freely and consciously chosen to live in disaster-prone urban squalor, the questioning of those oppressions that have ultimately led to their fatal and involuntary vulnerability to the 2010 earthquake can hardly said to be against the spirit of what Lundahl calls 'fundamental humanistic values'.

Far from enjoying the Western Enlightenment values Lundahl celebrates, Haiti has been controlled by a succession of authoritarian and liberal regimes, but hardly ever by its politically silenced and impoverished majority. In this sense, rather than (or more accurately additionally to) the crafting of 'use-ful' and detailed development policies aimed to reduce disaster vulnerability, an emancipatory type of international development would be about allowing Haitians to achieve a "form of sovereignty that not only secures their political and civil rights, but their most basic right to life itself".¹⁷

This very basic right to life itself however is inseparable from the global economy.¹⁸ As Haiti's former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide has put it:

¹⁶ Ken Booth, *Theory of world security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 112.

¹⁷ Di Muzio, "Silencing the Sovereignty of the Poor in Haiti," 221.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

“[Haiti’s] dilemma is, I think, the classic dilemma of the poor; a choice between death and death. Either we enter a global economic system in which we cannot survive, or we refuse and we face death by slow starvation.”¹⁹

The ‘death’ Haiti faces by economic integration depends on the nature of the global economy. As Polanyi has argued in *The Great Transformation*, long-distance international trade has historically existed without the elevation of the market logic to a predominant position. A global economy ‘embedded into’ humanity’s needs would allow Haiti to similarly embed its own national economy into the needs of its population without having to face the consequence of ‘death’ by international isolation.

The meaning of the embeddedness of the economy into society, even more so on a global level, is of course an essentially contested political question that cannot be answered in categorical terms. The extent to which a ‘basic right to life itself’ is guaranteed even for the most disadvantaged members of society is certainly a good indicator however. This basic right to life itself includes the right not to be unduly exposed to natural hazards – a right grossly violated in Haiti. The argument advanced in this dissertation hopes to be of some pertinence– even if only in the sense of an academic exercise and even then only in a cursory manner – to the question of how the right not to be unduly exposed to natural disaster could be more fully realised both in Haiti and globally.

¹⁹ Girard, *Haiti*, 124.

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