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Population Pressure, Land Tenure, and Voodoo: The Economics of Haitian Peasant Ritual

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Introduction

In the following pages I will present both descriptive and quantitative information, gathered in a Haitian village during 21 months of fieldwork.¹ This information reveals the somewhat unexpected but empirically convincing and critical role which Haitian-peasant Voodoo plays in the contemporary land tenure system; specifically, this cult was found to function as a partially camouflaged resource-circulating mechanism, a role that seems to have arisen in the context of recent population growth.

Methodologically, I hope to illustrate the manner in which simple quantitative data—gathered and analyzed in a theoretical perspective sensitive to the interactions between material lifespaces and other domains of social life—can expose the operation of systems whose very existence may escape the notice of traditional descriptive ethnography. Substantively, I will argue that the discovery of these internal systemic linkages between Voodoo and aspects of the agrarian resource regime permits us to comprehend many superficially enigmatic elements that have come to characterize peasant Voodoo in recent years. We can also come to understand the persistence of the cult in the face of

¹ The fieldwork on which this chapter is based was carried out with a research grant given me by the Overseas Population Intern program at the University of Michigan, with supervisory support from the International Institute for the Study of Human Reproduction at Columbia University and the Centre d'Hygiène Familiale in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Helpful comments on earlier drafts were made by Maria Alvarez, Conrad Arensberg, Lambros Comitas, William Dalton, Marvin Harris, Ira Lowenthal, Ron McDonough, Barbara Price, Eric Ross, and Vera Rubin. Any errors contained here are, of course, my own responsibility.

what, until the past two decades, was almost unremitting opposition from the forces of church and state.

Haiti is a land whose inhabitants are mainly descendants of slaves who successfully overthrew the French and brought to a total halt a flourishing Caribbean plantation economy. After the French were ejected in 1804, the earliest Haitian leaders, following the colonial models most familiar to them, attempted to reinstate an organizationally tight plantation-like economic and social order. Their efforts failed. The newly freed slave population eventually thwarted all attempts to reinstate even the semblance of the old order. Government plans had called for a society of plantation gang laborers—not slaves, it is true, but de facto serfs who would be bound to certain plantations, who would labor under the supervision of the Haitian military, and whose reward would be a share in the produce of the plantations. What emerged instead was a society of peasant cultivators.

While few have denied Haiti credit for a uniquely successful revolt, the success of the economic and social system that subsequently emerged has frequently been questioned. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries European and American writers tended to caricature Haitian leaders as pretentious buffoons and to dismiss the Haitian peasant as a slothful savage addicted to a superstitious rural cult generally referred to as Voodoo. Earlier assessments of Haiti tended to be racial in nature; the cessation of export prosperity was taken as evidence of the incapacity of blacks to rule themselves. Such racist analyses, however, have only yielded to more recent caricatures that tend to depict Haiti as a country of macabre and fanatical rulers controlling a voodoo-infested hinterland, a sensationalistic view that has received more popular attention than competent anthropological work on rural Haitian economy and domestic organization.²

At the outset of fieldwork, I had personally resolved to resist the siren-song of Voodoo and dedicate my time to the study of local agrarian economic organization, particularly the organization of land tenure and domestic labor. Research was carried out in a lowland village on the Cul-de-Sac Plain (see Figure 10.1). This community, Kinanbwa,³ located some 3.2 km (2 miles) from the town that served as its administrative head, was inhabited by some 1200 people whose basic livelihood came from cultivation of a variety of crops, many of them destined for sale in local markets. The majority of adult females in the village were market women, whose trading activities provided substantial increments to domestic income.

The Cul-de-Sac Plain, however, turned out to be among the least appropriate settings in which to attempt analysis of an agrarian community without

² Two older examples of this genre can be found in Franklin (1828) and Prichard (1900). In similar vein, for the twentieth century we have not only Graham Greene's famous novel *The Comedians*, but also Diederich and Burt's *Papa Doc* (1969), whose front cover shows a black hand holding a burning skull impaled on a wooden stake, across which is blazoned the chilling legend "Atrocities in the Realm of a Madman."

³ Kinanbwa is a pseudonym.

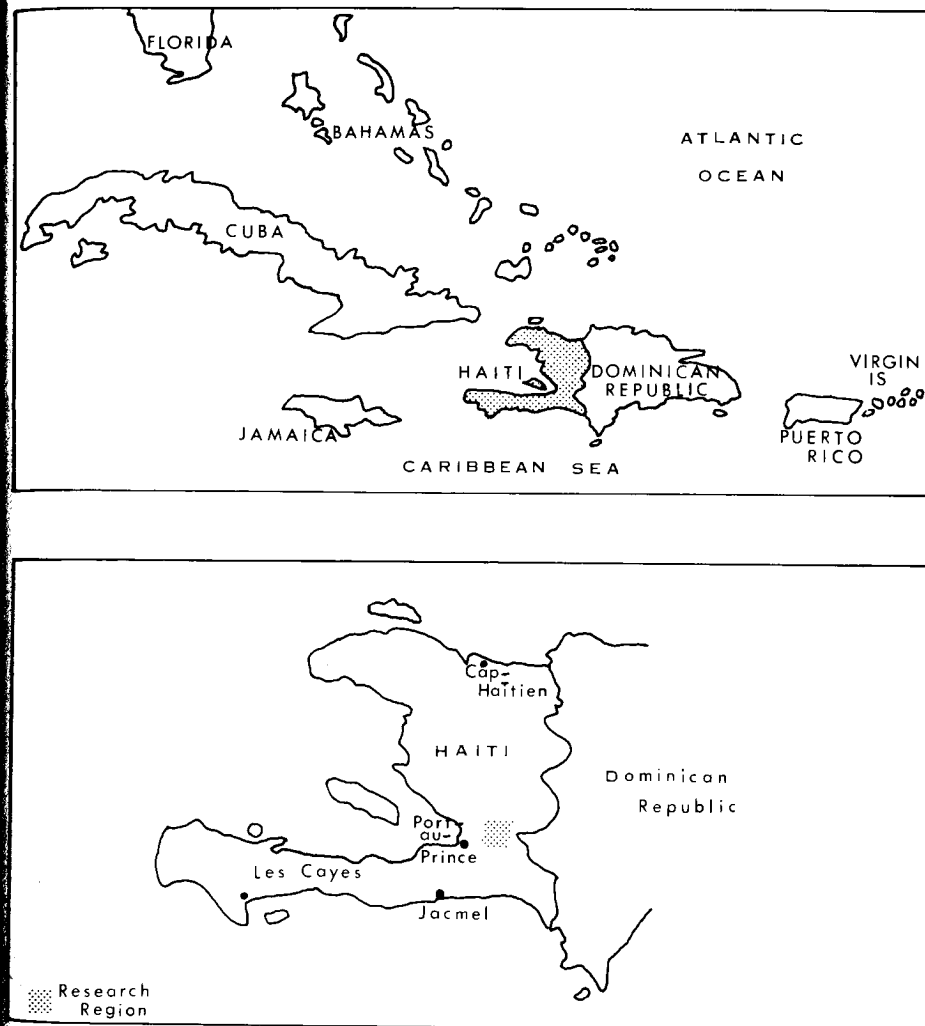


FIGURE 10.1. *Haiti and the Research Region.*

systematic attention to ritual concerns. While the vast majority of villagers among whom I lived were Catholics, more than 7 out of 10 of these Catholics openly admitted that they "served the loua," the local idiom that indicates participation in the folk cult to be described in these pages. The impressive amounts of money spent in the planning and execution of rituals gave credence to the Cul-de-Sac's popular reputation as one of the strongholds of Voodoo involvement. Capitulating to the inevitable, I adjusted my fieldwork accordingly, thus adding one more anthropologist to the long list of those who have chased after the secrets of Voodoo.

In the presentation that follows, I will first provide information on the cult

itself, reserving discussion of the agrarian economy for later sections, where interactions between the two spheres will become clear.

An Overview of Voodoo

For most English speakers, the word "voodoo" elicits the image of a doll riddled with pins. This identification of Voodoo with illness- or death-inflicting sorcery has even made its way into the anthropological literature, in which discussions of Voodoo revolve around the question of magically induced sickness or death (Cannon 1942; Lester 1972; Lex 1974).

It is true that Haitian Voodoo offers sorcery as one of its ritual options, but by no means is the cult exclusively (or even principally) an outlet for ritual violence. The rather abundant literature on Haitian Voodoo (e.g., Deren 1970; Herskovits 1937; Rigaud 1953; Métraux 1959; Murray 1976; Price-Mars 1928; Simpson 1945; Lowenthal 1978) indicates clearly that we are dealing with a folk-religion or folk-cult⁴—that is, an activity complex involving *beliefs* in a pantheon of spirits, *rituals* performed to influence and interact with these spirits, and *specialists* who are resorted to for theological consultations and certain types of ritual leadership. The contexts in which interaction among believer, specialist, and spirit occur ordinarily have little or nothing to do with the black magic of the type symbolized by the pin-riddled doll.

GENERALIZED PATTERNS OF BELIEFS, RITUALS, AND SPECIALISTS

The rural Haitian pantheon is populated by an impressive variety of spirits, ghosts, vampires, ogres, and other preternatural creatures. But the undisputed protagonists of the Haitian peasant spirit world are a group of anthropomorphic spirits referred to generically as the *loua*. Though an unknown *loua* will occasionally make an appearance at a ceremony, the majority of *loua* are well known to their followers. That is, they have not only names (e.g., Legba, Dambala, Ogoun, Bosou) but also specific personality characteristics, food and drink preferences, color and clothing preferences, songs that are sung to them, and to some degree even specific drum rhythms whose summons they are more likely to obey.

But there are larger subdivisions of the *loua* that are made by believers. In the published literature, the most frequently found distinction is the one that is made between gentler spirits and more violent spirits. The gentler spirits, gener-

⁴ Though Voodoo is frequently called the "folk religion of Haiti," the term "cult" might perhaps be technically more correct. As discussed elsewhere (Murray n.d.), participation in folk rituals, at least in Kinabwa and apparently elsewhere in Haiti, entails simultaneous adherence to several theological and ceremonial tenets of institutionalized Roman Catholicism, including worship of the Christian God (Bon-Dieu) as the Supreme Being and mandatory baptism at the hands of a Catholic priest. That is, the practitioners remain Catholics and Voodoo is a complex that does not constitute a separate religion apart from Roman Catholicism.

ally called *loua rada* in the literature, are conceived of as being "older" than the more violent band of spirits, the *loua pétro*. (In fact the Rada *loua* were generally referred to as "Guinee *loua*" by the villagers among whom I worked). There are other groups of *loua* referred to, but the tendency among many believers appears to be that of dichotomizing the pantheon. Among my own informants, this was epitomized by the frequent use of the terms "sweet *loua*" and "bitter *loua*."

The dichotomizing principle crosscuts the previously mentioned identification practices. That is, the name of a given *loua* need not be irrevocably stationed in either the bitter or the sweet sides of the pantheon. Most in fact appear to straddle. The major female *loua*, Erzulie, for example, sometimes appears as Erzulie Freda Dahomey—a gentle, generally benevolent Guinee spirit. But at other times the Erzulie who appears is Erzulie Jé Rouj (red-eyed Erzulie, a violent Pétro *loua* who is believed to kill with great frequency). Some analysts (e.g., Métraux 1959; Deren 1970) handle this by calling these different "manifestations" of the same *loua*. In contrast, the villagers among whom I worked considered them to be separate spirits (*dé nam apa*). In either case, a central feature of rural Haitian theology appears to be a tendency to dichotomize the pantheon and to allow for appearances of most *loua* in both camps. The possible linkages between this phenomenon and other features of economic and social organization will become clearer.

In addition to the *loua*, there are other spirits and preternatural creatures. Competing for second place in importance would be "the dead" on the one hand and the vampire (*lougrou*) on the other.⁵ When one's parents die, they are "owed" a number of rather costly ceremonies sometime during the life of their individual children. But in addition to making offerings of this sort, individuals in some parts of Haiti frequently interact with their parents, having them summoned back from the dead. The vampire, in contrast, though playing an active role, never converses directly with his or her victims while in the vampire state. These creatures are ordinary villagers during the day. It is at night that they turn into tiny bird-like creatures and fly from place to place sucking the blood—generally, of young (or even yet unborn) children. As will be discussed next, the importance of the dead and the *lougrou* appears to be increasing over time. As will be shown, their growing ascendancy, is closely related to structurally deeper economic and social organizational changes that have taken place. And it will be argued that the relation is more than one of simple symbolic mirroring; the dead and the *lougrou*, rather, become critical tools in the pursuit of an incalculably important community goal.

Turning to a second domain, that of ritual, it is clear that most rituals of Haitian Voodoo are oriented first and foremost toward interaction with the *loua*. These rituals have been described at length in the literature, and only some major themes will be mentioned here:

⁵ The rural Haitian *lougrou*, though lexically derived from the French *loup-garou* (werewolf), is conceptualized as a human being that turns into a bird-like animal at night and sucks the blood of children. The term "vampire" is thus probably a more appropriate gloss.

1. *Animal sacrifice.* The loup may make their followers ill or may help protect them against illnesses originating elsewhere. In return for release or protection, they want their "children" to "serve" them. The major (and most expensive) form of service generally given is the slaughter of animals to feed the loup.

2. *Possession.* The loup manifest themselves generally by possessing their followers. The loup mounts the head of the individual; the individual becomes the horse, the loup the rider. The possessed person assumes the behavior and personality of the loup who is mounting him.

3. *Drumming, dancing, and singing.* Most possessions of ordinary devotees occur in the context of chanting and dancing, to the accompaniment of percussion instruments dominated by batteries of sacred drums. Each song (*chanté loup*) is directed toward a particular spirit. There are dance styles and drum rhythms characteristic of groups of spirits—for example, there is a distinctive Pétrou rhythm for summoning the violent spirits and the dances to this rhythm are violent and jerky, as opposed to the more undulating movements characteristic of dances to the gentle Guinée loup.

4. *Calling the loup with the asson.* In the traditional Voodoo of the village, possession frequently used to be oracular. The loup would give instructions to the assembled followers via the lips of a possessed person. In certain parts of Haiti, especially in the vicinity of Port-au-Prince, it seems that possession has somewhat lost its oracular function. When instructions are sought from the loup, rather, a specialist trained in the use of a sacred gourd-rattle (*asson*) must now be called in. Working behind a closed door, the officiant summons the loup and has them talk directly from a clay jug (*govi*).

This practice underlines yet a third major feature which Haitian Voodoo shares with other folk cults: the use of various specialists. Though specialists who deal with the spirits are called by different names in different parts of Haiti, the term *houngan* is recognized in most parts of the country. (Female specialists are called *mambos*.) In the research area, the villagers tended to dichotomize specialists into two types. The defining criterion is the source of one's power. Charismatic specialists who rely only on what their own family spirits reveal to them are called *houngan Guinée*, or *houngan makout*. Another group of specialists have resorted to the purchase of secrets and of spirits. They go through a period of initiation at the hands of some well established *houngan*, at the end of which they receive the previously mentioned *asson*. The distinction between *houngan asson* and *houngan Guinée* only roughly parallels the theological distinction between Guinée loup and Pétrou loup. Though the nonfamilial loup purchased by the *houngan asson* are viewed as Pétrou loup, he can also diagnose problems caused by the Guinée loup of a client. Likewise, the *houngan Guinée* can deal with Pétrou loup if the need arises.

EMPHASES OF PEASANT VOODOO

The generalized picture of Voodoo previously drawn emphasizes the elements that the cult as observed in the village shared with the cult as described

in the literature. But the village cult took certain directions for which an examination of the literature had not prepared me. These can be briefly listed.

1. *Familialization of theology.* The spirits of the village pantheon were conceived of as family spirits. Each family, for example, inherits its own Erzulies, its own Dambalas, its own Ogouns. In the course of the evolution of peasant lifeways in Haiti and the "domestication" of this village economy into one of family based smallholdings, there has been a corresponding domestication or familialization of the pantheon (Murray and Alvarez 1973).

2. *Confinement of the loup.* If in fact theology molds itself mechanically to social organization and economy, in this village setting one would have expected a great emphasis on agricultural rituals. This in fact has not occurred. On the contrary, I found *less* involvement of the loup in agriculture than was reported even in the literature. It is God, not the loup, who makes land fertile, rain fall, crops grow. There were no rituals regularly performed on gardens, no offerings of first fruits, no invocations asking loup to help the crops grow in abundance. There was a belief that the ancestral spirits reside in the ground. But in the research community they inhabited residential ground, not the gardens. In short, the village loup have been partially banished from the domain of agriculture. This is most significant. But I will argue that their exclusion from the agricultural sector of the local economy may have occurred in the context of a critical alternative role which the loup now play in another sphere of that same economy.

3. *The cult of healing.* Though the loup are generally absent from the fields, they are quite active in the bodies (and minds) of human beings. Their principal activity at present appears to be causing different types of illness. Many rituals are oriented to the diagnosis of these problems, and healing ceremonies cost large sums of money. Even large week-long services, which are generally not staged for particular illness episodes but rather for more general reasons, nonetheless terminate with invocations to ensure good health. The principal request made to the loup is to remove "heat" and bring "coolness," concepts which the villagers themselves interpret in terms of physical illness and health. Because so many of the rituals are dominated by the theme of healing, because even those rituals in which healing may play no open part may have been financed by individuals dealing with family illness, and because the major source of income for *houngans* now is to be found in their healing role, it would not at all be metaphorical to call contemporary village Voodoo a variety of healing cult.

4. *The cult of the dead.* The literature refers to the existence of a cult of the dead—that is, rituals in which individuals interact with their dead parents and grandparents. I had not been prepared, however, for the particular form which that cult was found to take in the village. With great frequency sibling groups now speak to their dead parents in ceremonies in which a *houngan asson* is paid to call them back from the dead (*relé mò*). What is most impressive, however, is the quality of the burial monuments. The tombs where many

peasants are buried literally cost more to construct than the wattle-daub cottages in which they spent their lives.

VILLAGE VODOO IN MICROEVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVE

The brief description of the cult just presented reflects certain features that are important in contemporary village life. But the cult *today* is by no means an eternal feature of the rural Haitian landscape. Synchronic descriptions obscure the fact that the cult at a given moment is a compromise balance of elements that may individually be in a fairly rapid state of flux. The cult has been changing. Older informants agree about the more obvious changes; these changes can ultimately be linked to simultaneous changes which have been occurring in other lifespheres, thus imbuing these religious transformations with a systematic character amenable to analysis in an evolutionary framework. Summarizing the changes, older informants report that there has been:

1. With respect to ritual specialists: (a) a decrease in the role of older males in each family as vehicles of possession and recipients of healing instructions; (b) a concomitant increase in the use of extradomestic specialists as intermediaries between believers and their spirits; (c) a recent increase in dependency on formally initiated (and more expensive) specialists—the houngan asson—as being more powerful for certain rituals than the charismatic specialists—the houngan makout; (d) a redefining of the specialist career in such a way that the status of houngan makout is interpreted as merely the prelude to eventual initiation into the ritually more powerful status of houngan asson.

2. With respect to the belief system: (a) increases in the activity and general salience of the “bitter” spirits—Péto loua—whom all families are believed to inherit but who rarely acted in the past; (b) a concomitant decrease in the relative importance of the “sweet” spirits—the more gentle Guinée loua; (c) an increase in the use of nonfamilial spirits—the “purchased loua”—to achieve personal and economic objectives; (d) an increase in the activity of preternatural creatures such as the lougarou, the villager who at night turns into a vampire-like destroyer of young children; (e) a general increase in the frequency of spirit-caused illness (*maladi loua*) as opposed to naturally caused illness (*maladi Bon-Dieu*); (f) a general increase in the severity of spirit-caused illness and in the occurrence of death as a result of such illnesses.

3. With respect to rituals and ritual expenditures: (a) a general increase in the use of “péto” songs, drum rhythms, and dances, more violent in tone and content than songs, rhythms, and dances used to summon the gentler Guinée loua; (b) a restructuring of rituals in such a way that the final stages of ceremonies—be they lengthy “services” that last for several days or shorter subrituals within these services—are regularly dedicated to the invocation, entertainment, feeding, placation, and eventual dismissal of the violent Péto loua; (c) an increasing involvement in rituals involving conversations with one’s dead parents and grandparents, conversations that must be mediated by a formally initiated houngan asson; (d) dramatic increases in the number of animals that

must be slaughtered to placate the spirits; (e) visible and costly increases in the quality and style of burial monuments, with a growing insistence that it is shameful to be buried beneath the ground, that the dead prefer to be buried above ground in elaborate, expensive multichambered tombs.

This dynamic character and internal coherence of ethnographic minutiae such as the ones presented here are best exposed by a theoretical perspective attuned to the macrohistorical processes in which these minutiae unfold. The details of Haitian-peasant Voodoo take on unsuspected life and meaning when analytically juxtaposed to certain features of local economic and social life. Of particular interest are the recent ritual and theological shifts enumerated in the preceding paragraphs. These changes, I will argue, have been neither accidental nor random. They are systematically linked to other transformations that have been occurring in the social organization and agrarian economy of the village. It is to these domains that the analysis now turns.

Sharecropping, Land Purchase, and the Hidden Career

From the earliest days of fieldwork it was evident that the dynamics of land acquisition and the problems of growing land pressure were central themes in the economic life of this Haitian community. Virtually all males were gardeners, only a small minority of these gardeners supplemented their income with ancillary pursuits, and though most of the adult females in the village were heavily involved in marketing activities, the vast majority of households reported heavier reliance on the produce of the family gardens than on the profits of the woman’s trading activities as the major source of domestic income. The economic destiny of each village household was, in short, closely tied to the family’s holdings.

It was one thing to perceive the realistic importance of land, but quite another to develop reliable, step-by-step insights into the myriad subthemes of which the overall village land drama was ultimately composed. Both the literature and the more than two dozen village informants with whom I conducted open-ended interviews were helpful, however, in clarifying the outline of one of the major subplots, that of *inheritance*.

Summing up briefly, the traditional economic career of the Haitian peasant male—as generalized from accounts in the literature and from informants—begins with horticultural apprenticeship in parental gardens during boyhood and early teens. In the late teens, however, the father takes the young man to a family field and tells him that henceforth he can crop that field as though it were his own, bestowing in effect a preinheritance grant (cf. Herskovits 1937; Bastien 1951). Though it will not be fully his until the parent dies, he can use it as though it were his. This widely reported custom has been a traditional short-cut, eliminating parental death as a necessary prerequisite for ac-

cess to family land and permitting young men to get a reasonably early start on their own economic careers.

But simple reflection will suggest the havoc that internal population growth could wreak on such a system, with its reliance on voluntary parental land grants. This custom of preinheritance grants, in fact, arose and flourished in the land abundant days of the nineteenth century. But, in the Haiti of the 1970s, with its population density of some 2000 persons per arable 2.6 km² (1 square mile), the system of preinheritance grants has been threatened and in some cases undermined, although parental generosity continues as a community ideal (and is occasionally reported as a fact by outside observers who treat such a collective norm as though it were an accurate representation of collective behavior).

The theme of inheritance, with its subplot of young adult preinheritance, continued to play a critical role in Kinanbwa, not only in the general descriptions that villagers gave of their way of life, but also in more specific case studies of individual economic careers. However, it was equally clear that something else was occurring at the same time. Important transformations had been working their way into the internal machinery of local land tenure, and things were not the same as before. Villagers were keenly aware of these changes; but no convenient, consistently agreed-on community theory emerged of what was in fact happening. Widespread visions of a past golden age, when parents gave land to their children as they were supposed to, had not yet been supplemented by equally widespread agreement on what was happening today or in what direction things were moving.

To go beyond reliance on informant generalizations, I collected specific economic information on each village household. To deal with the phenomenon of holding fragmentation and to maximize even further the specificity of the data, information on land tenure was gathered on a plot-by-plot basis, rather than asking villagers to generalize about their holdings as a unit. For each plot, information was elicited that included not only approximate size and crops planted, but also tenure and length of time the cultivator had been on the plot. As I will show, it is this plot-specific data that exposes some of the critical internal workings of the local land tenure system.⁶

THE RARITY OF LANDLESSNESS

Population growth had led to a clear diminution of the amount of land a household will have under cultivation at a given moment. The mean of approximately 1.5 carreaux of land (1 carreau = 1.4 hectares) under cultivation per household falls within the range found in other communities (Zuvekas 1978) but is substantially less than what the literature (and older villagers) report for times past. Even in the absence of hard data on the holdings of times past, the

⁶ The methodological difficulty of eliciting reliable economic and demographic information in rural Haiti, and the strategies adopted to enhance the accuracy of the quantitative component of this research, are discussed at length in Murray (1977) and Chen and Murray (1976).

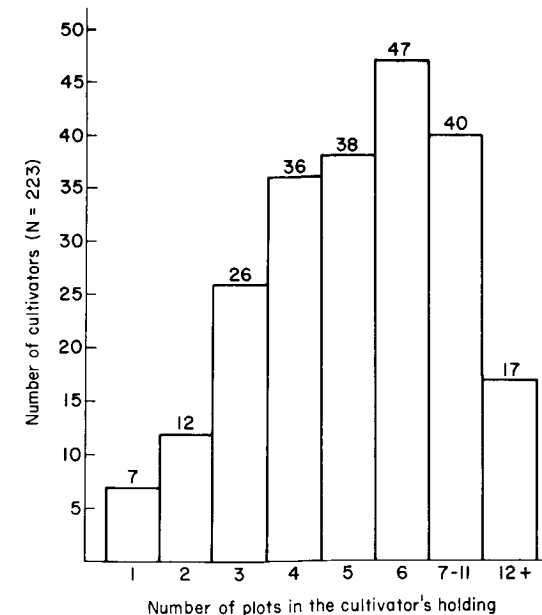


FIGURE 10.2. *Fragmentation of landholdings.*

phenomenon of average holding shrinkage leaps forth as a central theme in the dilemma of contemporary rural Haiti.

But if Kinanbwa had been losing ground in terms of average holding size, the community had nonetheless not experienced the emergence of a totally landless class of peasants relying solely on wage labor for their sustenance. All adult males in the village had access to at least some garden land, and though much of the land was being cropped under one or another of the sharecropping arrangements to be discussed, virtually every household had at least one plot that was being cropped under some form of proprietary tenure. Furthermore, as Figure 10.2 shows, the average cultivator was cropping several plots. The small size of the average plot (more than 80% of the plots are less than one-fifth of a hectare in size) maintains a small average quantity of cropped land, but the prevalence of multiplot holdings attests to a system whose protagonist continues to be the smallholding cultivator rather than the landless wage laborer.

THE ABSENCE OF DELAYED CAREERS

The rarity of absolute rural landlessness can be seen as a fairly direct product of Haiti's postcolonial history. But there is another contemporary pattern that is somewhat harder to account for, which exposes the operation of an otherwise elusive feature of the local agrarian economy. With the advent of land pressure, one would have expected a curtailment of the previously mentioned preinheritance grants. Statements from older villagers as well as data from Kinanbwa attest to the fact that dramatic curtailments have indeed taken

TABLE 10.1
Timetable for Entry into Independent Gardening

Dependent males residing with parents and cropping their own gardens	Crops own garden	Does not yet crop	Total
Under 18	6 16.7%	30 83.3%	36 100.0%
18-21	16 50.0%	16 50.0%	32 100.0%
22 +	27 81.8%	6 18.2%	33 100.0%
Total	49 48.5%	52 51.5%	101 100.0%

place, and that young men can rely much less on such preinheritance grants as the primary route to economic autonomy.

But one would then have predicted the phenomenon of disrupted or delayed careers, as young men would have to emigrate or wait for their parents to die for access to land. Young men from the village do in fact emigrate annually to the Dominican Republic to cut cane, but most come back. Emigration in Kinanbwa has not yet taken on the escape-valve dimensions so widely commented on in other parts of the Caribbean (cf. Roberts 1966; Lopez 1974)⁷ But even more significantly, *the traditional life cycle goes on as before*. That is, young men continue to crop their first garden while still living as dependents in their parents' house; these first gardens tend to be cropped in the late teens and early twenties as before. The insistence of villagers that this continues to be the case is strongly borne out by quantitative data. There were 101 young men in the village who were old enough to have begun helping their fathers on their gardens and who were still living as dependents. For each of these young men, I ascertained whether, in addition to serving as assistants on parental gardens, they were also cropping gardens of their own. The data are tabulated by age in Table 10.1 and illustrate clearly the preservation of the basic outline of the traditional economic timetable. Whereas it is rare for a child under 17 to have his own garden, it is equally rare for a young man over 22 *not* to. This will turn out to be a most significant fact, significant not only statistically but also theoretically, as a manifestation of an adaptive systemic maneuver that preserves the

⁷ Published information on rural Haitian emigration is hard to come by. There appear to be many areas where the rural exodus has taken on impressive dimensions. Informants in the Aux Cayes region of the Southern Peninsula informed me that as many as one out of three households in certain communities may be receiving regular remittances from the United States. Rawson and Berggren (1973) present data that indicate impressive emigration from the Artibonite to unspecified destinations. Rural communities in the Fond-des-Negres area are experiencing much emigration to Guyana (Ira Lowenthal, personal communication). More specific information on migration patterns has recently become available with the appearance of research by Uli Locher (1979) in Port-au-Prince and Theodore Ahlers (1979) in several parts of rural Haiti. See also the article by Buchanan (1979).

TABLE 10.2
Breakdown of Plots by Specific Tenure Arrangement

How cultivator gained access to the plot?	N	Percentage
Inherited	202	16.5
Purchased	177	14.4
Sharecrops	667	54.4
Wife's	57	4.6
Rents	78	6.4
Other	46	3.7
Total	1227	100.0

viability of one pattern by the introduction of strategic modifications in another.

THE ROLE OF SHARECROPPING

The most important modification comes in terms of the *source* of land for young gardeners. It is here that the Kinanbwa land tenure data expose a domain of internal patterning in which the actual behavior of community members appears to have made substantial departures from the traditional land tenure patterns embodied in the inheritance-preinheritance model discussed before.

The matter can best be phrased as a commonsense hypothesis. If land tenure operated as the traditional model envisions, then we would have a situation in which the vast majority of cultivators would be proprietors of the ground they are cropping. National census figures would at first glance appear to bear this out (Zuvekas 1978). Haiti's extremely low rate of landlessness makes it unique in Caribbean and Latin American context; more than 8 out of 10 cultivators describe themselves as proprietors.

General questioning had appeared to indicate that the same was true of the cultivators of Kinanbwa. In conversations villagers tended to say that they and their neighbors were proprietors. But given the multiplot nature of the typical holding, and the obvious existence of other tenure modes in the village as well, I was uneasy with the simple label of "smallholding peasant proprietor" as a characterization of the land tenure situation of the village.

To obtain somewhat more precise information, cultivators were asked to enumerate each of their currently cropped plots separately and to specify the manner in which they had gained access to the plot.⁸ In view of the previously mentioned tendency of Haitian peasants to describe themselves as proprietors, it was expected that a heavy majority of plots would be plots cultivated by owners who had inherited them. But the rather astonishing breakdown given in Table 10.2 reveals how far this expectation was from the actual systemic reality.

⁸ Information was also obtained about plots lying fallow and plots which cultivators were renting or sharing out to other cultivators. Analysis here, however, will concentrate on the "cropped holding," defined as the sum total of plots which individuals themselves are cultivating under whatever tenure arrangement.

The 1227 plots on which information is available constitutes over 95% of the plot inventory of the community. We see that more than half of these plots are being sharecropped.

This breakdown suggests the operation of a "system within a system," or—perhaps more accurately—the existence of a disparity between the model that emerges from an analysis based on simple self-labeling information and one that uses somewhat more refined breakdowns of the data. It must be pointed out: The self-labeling of the peasant as a proprietor is perfectly correct. In virtually every cropped holding, at least one plot is held under one or another proprietary mode. The labeling merely misses important aspects of the system. For though virtually every cultivator in the community is indeed an inheriting proprietor, we see that fewer than 2 out of 10 plots are being cropped by their inheritors. Rather, most of the plots are being cropped by individuals who stand in a tenancy relation to the plot. In Kinabwa, these two apparently contradictory modes—proprietorship and tenancy—are joined here within the workings of a single complex land tenure system.

STRATUM-INTERNAL CHARACTER OF HAITIAN PEASANT SHARECROPPING

The question that immediately calls out for an answer is the identity of the owners of the 667 plots that are being cropped by tenants. Fortunately, some precise data were also gathered on each of the landlords as part of the same survey. It turns out that about 80% of the sharecropped plots have owners who live either in Kinabwa or in nearby rural communities. Some 15% of the plots have owners listed as residing in the nearby town, but more than half of these are themselves cultivators residing in the periphery of the town. That is, the vast majority of landlords are themselves peasant cultivators who physically work their own plots of ground at the same time that they give land out to tenants.

Second, a substantial number of the sharecropped plots (more than 4 out of 10) are being given by one relative to another. That is, sharecropping tends not only to be intraclass, but to a large degree intrafamilial as well. The intra-class nature of Kinabwa sharecropping is further emphasized by the fact that 110 of the sharecropped plots have tenants who are sons and owners who are their fathers.

Third, and most conclusive, the "landlords" and the "tenants" do not in fact constitute two discrete groups. That is, many individuals who have tenants on some of their own land will simultaneously be tenants on the plot of someone else. Among 109 landlords on whom complete data are available, 63 are simultaneously cropping at least one plot for another individual on a tenant basis. That is, nearly 60% of our "landlords" are themselves "tenants." And the remaining 40% may not be tenants themselves, but virtually all of them continue to crop their own plots of ground with their labor and that of their children. In short, the sharecropping that our data have revealed is a *stratum-internal sharecropping*. The stratificational frameworks used to analyze the interclass sharecropping of Latin America peasants, focusing on the

maneuvers of an absentee landlord class to exact rent from totally landless tenants, would shed little light on the structural arrangements prevailing in Kinabwa, and we are thus forced to turn to a fundamentally different type of conceptual strategy.

LAND PURCHASE AND THE TRANSFORMED CAREER

The plot-specific sharecropping data begin to fall into logical array once we begin to examine them through the lens of a "life-cycle" framework. Age-specific breakdowns of the village land tenure data expose a highly ordered internal sequencing of alternative land-development strategies used by the villagers, in a systematic fashion, at different points in their economic careers. The disaggregated data permit us to posit a modal career consisting of three distinct (but in many cases overlapping) phases.

The cultivators begin their careers now principally as sharecroppers. Though preinheritance grants from parent to child are still made, the tenure mode governing most plots cropped by males in their twenties and early thirties is that of the intracommunity sharecropping discussed above.⁹ But by their mid-thirties most of the cultivators will begin to *purchase* plots of ground, entering thus into a new phase of their careers. Many continue even then to crop at least one plot on a sharecropping basis, but there is a statistically noticeable aggregate decrease in reliance on this tenure mode in the higher age groups. What is most impressive, however, is the systematic nature of the entry of older males into yet a third stage of the local agrarian career: the phase of landlord. As the cultivator acquires plots, largely through this purchase but also through inheritance at the eventual death of his parents, he will in the vast majority of cases turn over one or more of his plots to a younger person in the community to crop as a tenant. That is, age-specific breakdowns of the data expose the operation of a modal career whose final stage is the status of landlord.¹⁰

⁹ Though preinheritance grants are still made to young men, these individuals now depend more heavily on sharecropping for the first phase of their career. Of the 78 gardeners under the age of 30, 59 (76%) were working at least one sharecropped plot, whereas only 53 (68%) were working at least one preinheritance plot. That is, the two land routes coexist (even in the same holding in several cases), but sharecropping by now appears to predominate. Looking at a differently defined "young" group, of the 47 dependent gardeners still living under their parents' roofs, 38 (81%) crop at least one of their plots on a sharecropping basis.

¹⁰ In the over-35 age group ($N=127$), 2 out of 3 cultivators have purchased at least one plot of ground. The subsequent percentage of peasant *landlords* rises steadily with age, even more regularly than the percentage of land purchasers, as older men come into at least some inheritance land on their parents' death. Whereas 2 out of 3 peasants in the 35-54 age group have at least one (generally younger) tenant, 8 out of 10 of the 55-or-over group are landlords. The smoothness of the rise into peasant landlordism is impressive.

The use of age-specific breakdowns to expose subtle internal patterning has been used effectively in the Caribbean by M. G. Smith, whose analysis revealed the operation of an orderly mating system in rural Jamaica (1962). Such cohort data may of course reflect not only the contemporary career but also changes across time in the modal career, and they must therefore be interpreted judiciously. Nonetheless, the strategy of disaggregating key variables by age provides a powerful tool for detecting internal life-cycle patterning that might otherwise pass unnoticed.

With regard to this patterning of economic careers, three observations are particularly important to draw attention to the larger system level. First, the individual behaviors that constitute a life cycle, in this case simultaneously, constitute a system for allocating resources. The life-blood of the community is its land, and the intermeshing of the economic careers of different individuals—the interactions among tenants, land purchasers, and/or landlords—results in a circulation of land.¹¹ The behaviors of tenants are systematically linked to the behaviors of landlords; the behaviors of land purchasers are likewise tied to the behaviors of land sellers. An individual's choice of behavior is also systematically linked to his age.

Second, this system is the product of recent change. Elsewhere specific evidence has been presented (Murray 1977) showing the manner in which, within the context of population growth, the incidence of sharecropping and landlordism has been increasing over time. This suggests that what we are now observing is the *transformed descendant* of the traditional inheritance-preinheritance system still reflected in community ideals. The transformation has not involved mysterious evolutionary "inventions," but rather the selection and emphasis of preexisting economic alternatives—tenancy and land transaction—until they have now become the statistically dominant themes in the economic careers of the peasants. Thus the young man who began life on parentally allocated land has slowly been replaced by a young sharecropper. And the image of the old patriarch, surrounded by sons laboring for him in his gardens, is being increasingly replaced by a different success model, that of the elderly landlord who, laying down his own hoe, dons a clean, long-sleeved blue shirt, picks up his cane—symbol, not of weakness, but of authority—and calmly patrols his holdings, casting an approving eye on the work of his tenants. The actors are the same, but they are enacting a substantially revised script.

Third, it is also essential to point to the adaptive nature of the new arrangements. Where population growth had jeopardized the traditional intergenerational land flow by sabotaging preinheritance grants to dependent sons, the new arrangements constitute a systemic shift toward greater reliance on the options of tenancy and land purchase as alternatives to exclusive dependence on preinheritance grants. Because of this statistically interlinked sequencing of sharecropping, land purchasing, and landlordism, young men continue to acquire the plots they need to move into economic autonomy. Old men now have an alternative to filial labor on their holdings: They can turn part of their holding over to a tenant. These arrangements constitute in effect *alternative circuits for the flow of labor and land*. By avoiding the emergence of landless, economically dependent groups of young men, by making at least small quantities of land continually available to community members, this "rewired"

¹¹ To be more precise, it results in the circulation of *people* on to (and off of) different plots of ground. Cattle and money can literally circulate in a way that land cannot. Though I shall continue here to use the metaphor of "land circulation," the adaptive system being described here is in the last analysis basically a system of circulating human beings to and from plots of ground.

system has kept open the door to the vigorous economic maneuvering that has been a characteristic of rural Haiti, and has thus helped to preserve for at least a few generations more the viability (though certainly not the prosperity) of traditional agrarian life.¹²

The Ritual Mainspring

The model I have just presented leaves a number of unanswered questions; there is one in particular that would seem to threaten the credibility of the entire land circulating model. Recall: Land circulates to the young largely from the hands of landlords, but we have seen that these landlords rely on purchasing rather than simple inheritance as the source of the land which they share out. The entire system is made feasible by the emergence of a phase in the career of the typical cultivator, characterized by the purchase of one or more plots of ground. The entire resource-circulating system is kept moving, in other words, only because there is active movement in the local land market, movement characterized by energetic efforts on the part of peasants to save money for the eventual purchase of land.

The difficulty with the model is not that the Haitian peasant is poor—so poor as to be unable to raise money for land. Money is in fact raised. Every household in the village had some livestock, used almost entirely for purposes of rapid cash raising. And every household in the village dedicated impressively large parts of its holdings to the production of crops destined for sale.

The serious problem lies not in accounting for the cash, but rather in dealing with the embarrassing but critical question: Where does all this purchased land come from? The state is no longer selling land; there are no large landlords in the region selling off their holdings. Land is the centerpin of the economic destiny of peasant households, the critical resource whose acquisition is the central theme in the economic maneuvers of virtually all peasants. But if everybody is trying to buy land, who is doing all the selling?

As so often happens, the analytic importance of this question did not become apparent until late in fieldwork. But the data to answer the question had in fact, somewhat accidentally, been collected earlier in fieldwork. I had noticed the presence of an active land market, had been impressed at the number of people that seem to have been involved in land transactions, and had thus endeavored to get basic and specific information on as many land trans-

¹² As shown elsewhere (Murray 1977), this system evolved in the context of population growth and, by alleviating at least one of the dilemmas created by this growth (i.e., the curtailment of preinheritance grants) the entire system can with some justification be termed an "adaptation to population growth." This by no means implies that it is a final solution to the problem of land pressure; it is merely a delaying action whose effect is that of at least ensuring that the decreasing land pool keeps circulating among the community at large. Cultural evolution takes the form, not of final solutions, but of precisely the type of interim waystage arrangement as that described here.

TABLE 10.3
Reasons for Selling a Plot of Land

	N	Percentage
Bury a parent	187	31.7
Healing of a sickness	138	23.4
Poverty: General cash needs	74	12.6
Bury a child	41	7.0
Pay off debts	38	6.5
Bury a sibling	23	3.9
Bury a spouse	19	3.2
Build a tomb	15	2.6
Anniversary service for dead	11	1.9
Wedding of son or daughter	10	1.7
Buy food	6	1.0
Raise capital for trade	6	1.0
Pay for child's schooling	5	0.8
Others	16	2.7
Total	589	100.0

actions as possible. The result was a corpus of data covering nearly 600 individual land transactions.

For each transaction a list of questions was posed eliciting information such as size of the plot, type of land, identity of seller and buyer, kin relation (if any) between the two, and some dozen other questions. It was revealing to learn that *virtually all of the land was being transacted among villagers themselves*. That is, not only is sharecropping a stratum-internal phenomenon; so is land transacting.

But the most revealing insight comes from examination of the responses to the question, why had the seller sold the plot of ground. Table 10.3 collapses the responses into 14 types of reasons that villagers gave for the sale of specific plots of ground. Figure 10.4 exposes the significant internal patterning of these responses more clearly by separating sales of land which cultivators made to finance some sort of ritual from those which were made for nonritual reasons, such as debts, schooling, food purchase, and the like. What immediately leaps out from these figures is the *dramatic importance of financing rituals as the major context for the sale of land*.

These tables furnish us, I believe, with the major element that was still missing from the blueprint we have attempted to draw for this Haitian peasant land tenure system. In so doing, the figures bring us face to face again with Haitian-peasant Voodoo. Why are the peasants themselves releasing those valuable plots of ground whose purchase by others provides the mainspring for the resource sharing system which we have discussed? The answer is this: The ritual system in which they participate, mediated by expensive ritual demands from the spirits, and buttressed by strong social pressure towards compliance

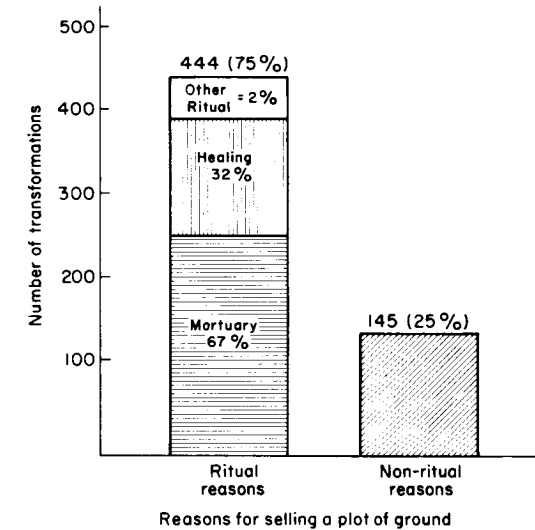


FIGURE 10.3. *The ritual context of land transactions*

with these demands by extremely interested neighbors, nudges peasants into periodically putting up part of their holding for sale. It is, in short, *the folk-religion of its members that keeps the community's land in circulation*. A heretofore hidden face of peasant Voodoo thus lies exposed. Underneath the colorful display of bizarre rituals and the clown-like shenanigans of spirit-possessed believers, a quiet and immensely serious land drama has been taking place. In colorful masquerade the spirits of the Voodoo pantheon have mesmerized both their followers and their observers with powerful drumming, colorful ritual, and a seemingly endless treasure chest of vivid folklore and secret charms. But the land tenure data presented here expose the presence of a very serious hidden agenda behind the functioning of this ritual system: the continued circulation of the peasant community's ultimate resource, its land.¹³

Discussion and Conclusions

The unexpected but empirically incontestable intrusion of ritual into the internal machinery of the land tenure system answers a number of questions but raises just as many others. Space permits discussion of only a few of the more important ones.

¹³ I am grateful to George Bond, William Dalton, and Joan Vincent for pointing out analogies among the findings here and the findings of certain British social anthropologists, especially F. G. Bailey. Though analyzed from a different perspective, Bailey's *Caste and the Economic Frontier* (1957) also provides tabular data indicating the importance of funerals and other rituals as contexts for the sale of land.

IS THIS A TRUE SYSTEM?

Anthropologists have perhaps somewhat debased the currency of the term "system" by applying it loosely and metaphorically to virtually any type of complex social pattern. But I would argue that my use of the term "system" here is quite appropriate in a literal sense of the word. That is, the quantitative data reveal a chain of statistically interlocked behaviors. To the earlier discussed behaviors of tenancy, land purchase, and landlordism, we have now added an essential fourth element: land sale. But we see that a large majority of land sales are made in order to finance rituals. The villagers' ritual behaviors have thus been empirically linked to their land transacting behaviors and we are justified in considering these ritual behaviors central elements in a system.

WHAT KEEPS THE SYSTEM IN MOTION?

A system of the type discussed here is an abstraction from concrete human behaviors. There is nothing enigmatic about most features of the system described here. The behavior of tenants who agree to crop a plot on a share basis, of land purchasers who buy a plot, and of landlords who give out a plot to a tenant, are for the most part analyzable in terms of a cost-benefit calculus that would be intelligible to most outside observers. For an outside analyst the most enigmatic link in the chain is the behavior of the land seller who releases control of a valuable plot to finance a ritual. It is well and good that this behavior has useful collective results. But we must also account for the proximate mechanisms producing and sustaining this economically enigmatic behavior.

One is quickly impressed in the village by the clear manifestations of social pressure that surround crises. At an all-night wake, for example, if the family of the deceased fails to provide enough *klérin* (a local alcoholic beverage), some of those attending may begin openly complaining or singing mock songs against the *mèt véyé*, the family member who is in charge of the wake. On one occasion, shortly after a woman died and the wailing had begun in her compound, male relatives of the deceased woman approached the bereaved husband and began openly criticizing him because of his failure to have taken the necessary steps during her illness—one of which, in their opinion, entailed the calling in of the services of a houngan. At another wake, a woman who had lost her daughter began openly reciting, as part of her public wailing, a *gourde* by *gourde* account of the money she had spent in trying to get her daughter healed, of the time she had spent traveling back and forth between the village and Port-au-Prince in search of medicines, of the nights she had lost sitting up with the girl.

All of these events give testimony to the presence of incalculably strong social pressure to make substantial, visible expenditures during crises of sickness and death. Whereas such expectations exist in most cultures, in rural Haiti failure to comply meets with immediate, vigorous, open public criticism.

In the eyes of the community, there is generally no valid excuse for not spending the money. When all other resources fail, virtually every household has at least some land that it can sell, and villagers have strong, openly stated expectations concerning the importance of vigorous action when sickness or death strikes and the disgrace that attaches to the individual who clings to his land in order to deprive his sick child of that care that is his right, or his dead father of the honorable burial that is his due.

There is no strict rule that the money must be raised via the sale of land, however. The person who has enough animals, for example, can fulfill his obligations through their sale. But there are few households who have enough livestock to do this. But in addition, there appears to be a mechanism that renders it cheaper to finance a ritual via land sale than via animal or crop sales. The neighbors are well aware of the reluctance of people to part with their land. For a serious illness in the family, or for a death (especially of a parent), there will be expectant speculations about whether the stricken household will have to sell off any of its land. If the afflicted people sell off a plot, they have proven to their neighbors that they are not skimping on their obligations. But if they try to finance the ritual by other means, the resulting ceremony would have to be very elaborate to forestall gossip or open criticism. This is especially true in the case of parental funerals. Any sibling group that tried to bury its parents without selling some of the land that the parents left, would have to stage the funeral of the century to avoid criticisms. It is possible to do this. But in most cases it would probably be cheaper to sell off a plot of ground.

In short, *social pressure* appears to be the major proximate trigger for ritual expenditure. This social pressure operates, of course, in the context of a belief system. But I doubt that either cognitive belief in the spirits or emotional fear of their retribution would suffice to sustain land-selling behavior in the absence of the clear reinforcement supplied by the pressure that the community simultaneously applies.

WHAT IN TURN SUSTAINS COMMUNITY PRESSURE FOR EXPENSIVE RITUALS?

Social pressure may be an effective intervening mechanism, but the question still remains as to why certain societies exert pressure in a given direction whereas others do not. The pattern being discussed here strikes casual observers as particularly enigmatic. More than one visitor to our community commented in wonder on the fact that the peasants' tombs appeared more elaborate than the houses in which they had lived. It would indeed be strange if the community continued to exert pressure for expenditures whose prime beneficiaries appear to be the stonemasons who are paid from \$200.00 to \$400.00 U.S. to build the tombs.

I believe the information already provided gives at least a partial answer to this particular enigma. The question of *cui bono* remains valid; but in this

particular system, the nature of the behavior-sustaining payoff is perceived by asking, not merely *what* is done with the money spent, but more importantly *how* is this money first raised. And we have seen that it is generally raised by releasing part of one's holding for sale. It is this land release that constitutes the major payoff for other members of the community and it is this land-circulating phenomenon that I believe helps place the otherwise enigmatic pressure for expensive rituals in an intelligible context.

HAS VODOO ALWAYS PLAYED THIS RESOURCE-CIRCULATING ROLE?

Discussion up to now has been largely synchronic in thrust, focusing on the internal workings of a resource-circulating system that has been found operative at one point in time. But this particular system has by no means been an eternal feature of the rural Haitian landscape. The three-phase career culminating in landlordism is the result of a historical development away from an earlier nineteenth century system in which sharecropping and stratum-internal land purchase appeared to play much less important systemic roles. If these economic features of the system have been altered over time, is the same true of Voodoo belief and ritual?

The fragmentary nature of the evidence concerning Voodoo in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries make any answer to this question tentative. But one thing is clear: It would be both theoretically and empirically unwarranted to seek the *origins* of Voodoo in terms of the twentieth-century land-circulating function. In terms of many of its constituent elements—including dancing, drumming, possession, animal sacrifices—the cult had begun to form as early as the second half of the eighteenth century, and perhaps earlier, when Haiti was still the French plantation colony of Saint-Domingue.

Furthermore, the functions of the cult—its linkages with nonritual lifeworlds of its practitioners—appear to have varied over time, adapting themselves to the specific problems of a given generation of practitioners. During the colonial period, the cult was interpreted by many slave-owners as being largely recreational in purpose, though laws restricting nocturnal dances indicated an awareness that these events could easily take on other functions. During the early stages of the final insurrection that began in 1791, the cult played a revolutionary role, providing both the symbols and the leadership around which insurgent slave groups mobilized. But, as practiced by the children and grandchildren of these insurgents, the revolutionary features of the cult receded somewhat into the background, yielding center stage to those symbols and rites that were of greater relevance to smallholding peasants. The late nineteenth century thus saw the fullblown emergence of domestic Voodoo, or peasant Voodoo, a cult whose bilaterally inherited spirits bear such a strikingly close resemblance to the patterns of bilaterally inherited land and whose functions now focused on the organization of peasant life rather than the

mobilization of insurrections.¹⁴ Throughout all of these functional transformations, the constituent elements of the cult—possession, animal sacrifice, drumming and dancing, and others—remained, if not identical, at least clearly recognizable continuations of earlier cult elements. What has most changed has rather been the nature of the integration of these constituent elements into other nonritual lifeworlds.

In short, the functions of Voodoo have changed as the society in which its practitioners have lived has itself changed. There is little evidence to support the view that Voodoo has had a perpetual resource-circulating function. My positing of that function for contemporary Voodoo is based on the evidence of the land tenure tables. In the absence of evidence for such a function in the nineteenth century, and in the presence of historical evidence that the cult's function changes over time, it is safer to assume that its current land-circulating function is the product of a recent microevolutionary shift.

HOW MIGHT THE SHIFT TO LAND CIRCULATING HAVE OCCURRED?

The following is a first approximation to a possible reconstruction of the course of events leading up to Voodoo's present function. There is solid statistical evidence (Murray 1977) that, as population pressure grew, the formerly marginal arrangements of stratum-internal tenancy and stratum-internal land transacting were gradually selected with increasing frequency and acquired over time their present status as the dominant land-circulating arrangements in the community.

But if this process were to unfold smoothly, there had to have been a simultaneous, instrumentally prerequisite selection of those community behaviors that resulted in a releasing of land for purchase, without which the other elements of the transformation would have been greatly encumbered. The major land sales in nineteenth century Haiti were those made by the government, or by military and civilian officials who received governmental land grants (Moral 1961). But by the end of the nineteenth century, such grants and interclass sales had virtually ceased.

But land pressure itself did not cease; in fact it increased, and with it the pressure to intensify the availability of land-acquisition options. Most of the land sold in the nineteenth century had been sold by the government, or by generals and officials. But, there is evidence that there were already occasional, sporadic land sales made by peasants themselves, and that these were

¹⁴ The potentialities of Voodoo in the domain of politics are never far, however, from the surface. *Caco* leaders who resisted the American marines earlier this century were reported to be Voodoo adepts, which accounts for perhaps part of the animus that the occupation forces manifested against the cult. Furthermore recent governmental policy toward the cult has been one of undisguised acceptance, in contrast to previous public sector stances, to such a degree that in certain urban neighborhoods the status of governmental militiaman (*tonton makout*) is now reported to have become a prerequisite to being a successful houngan (Laguerre 1976).

to be the object of positive selection. Bastien (1951) gives evidence that such peasant land sales were taking place, and specifically mentions funerals as a source of major expenditure in times gone by.

But as land pressure grew, the community rewards and sanctions associated with such occasional land-financed rituals intensified and the frequency of such events increased. The present day outcome of this process is the situation described in this chapter: A system emerged in which ritually motivated land sales lost their sporadic, occasional character and instead became a central component of an elaborate stratum-internal land-sharing system. In the process of this evolution, nothing radically new was created. Rather, as is true with biological evolution, cultural evolution proceeded on the basis of the gradual selection of *preexisting* arrangements and alternatives, the transformation consisting of reemphasis and rearrangement of these alternatives into a new systemic synthesis.

This evolutionary reconstruction is highly compatible with, and finds clear support from, the evidence of village ethnography. Recall: We earlier discussed the changes that older villagers recognize as having come over the cult. But if we reexamine these changes in the light of the land-circulating data, we notice immediately that the common theme underlying the changes is a shift toward *emphasis of those features that involve heavy expenditures*: the use of formally initiated rather than purely charismatic specialists; the sacrificing of larger numbers of animals; the construction of more elaborate burial monuments; and others. That is, the changes all veer in a direction that enhances the capacities of the ritual system to contribute to the escalating village land-circulating dynamic, thus indicating that the recent shifts in the former may in fact have occurred in conjunction with the evolution of the latter.

In all of these processes, we see clear analogies between biological and cultural evolution. When a structure begins to take on a new function, its subsequent development, while remaining faithful to the basic contours of the original design, will shift in directions that facilitate its new role. The domestic Voodoo of the mid-1970s is a clearly recognizable descendent of nineteenth-century peasant Voodoo. It is here being suggested that many of the features currently emphasized in the cult can be understood as products of a microevolutionary shift in community rewards and pressures toward those features of the cult which facilitate the unfolding of the now critical extradomestic land circulation.

IS THIS A "LATENT" SYSTEM?

One final matter is the question of whether villagers themselves are conscious of the operation of the system being discussed here—whether, in other words, they would agree with the thrust of this analysis. There are several features of the model for which I have no record of any supporting informant generalizations. Though villagers told me of changes that had come over the cult, these were viewed at least partially as a punishment from God for the

decline of old virtues and the rise of selfishness. Not even the more reflective of my informants related the changes to demographic pressure: No informant ever praised the folk-religion of the village as a practical way of keeping land in circulation.

The validity of the "Voodoo-as-land-circulator" model, however, rests on the cogency of the land tenure tables, not on the presence or absence of informant agreement. But to say that villagers have not explicitly identified the systemic links between different spheres of the community's behavior is not to say that the entire complex unfolds in the absence of any awareness on their part. On the contrary, one of my informants was able to give me very good advice on how to go about purchasing land: You wait till a relative or neighbor of yours has a sickness or death in his family. You approach him; you tell him how sorry you are that he has this problem. You reach in your pocket, pull out a wad of bills, and say "look, brother, here's a couple of *gourdes* I can lend you to help see you through." You tell him, "I pray to God that you don't have to sell off any of your land. But listen, brother, if God forbid you should have to sell off a tiny piece, you'll keep me in mind, won't you?"

Would-be village land purchasers are, in short, quite clearly aware of the occasions on which their own life chances are likely to take a turn for the better. The justification for referring to this as a "hidden system" is perhaps more appropriately discussed in terms of the ability of the system to escape the notice of outside analysts. And it is this final observation which brings to light the methodological implications of this entire complex.

Both Haitian and foreign researchers have been intrigued by the mysteries of Voodoo; and many of them, in their search for its secrets, will make a beeline for the nearest houngan. Those so inclined should be encouraged; there are undoubtedly many spells, charms, and secret recipes yet to be written down.

But the complex analyzed in these pages points to the existence of other important secrets that not even the most cooperative sorcerer could possibly reveal. The researcher interested in those other mysteries—in those subterranean linkages, for example, which subtly bring religion into the service of forces emanating from other lifespaces—will have to search, not only in the temples of the specialists, but also in the homes and fields of the believers. And ethnographers who approach this task without the aid of at least some simple counting operations—the data presented in these pages, for example, have entailed nothing beyond simple counting—or without the aid of a general theoretical perspective that helps them decide what it is that they should count, run the risk of missing critical systems operating under their very noses. Competent, vivid descriptions of animal sacrifices, of drum rhythms, of the bizarre behavior of spirit-possessed believers, and of the secret formulas elicited from the lips of cooperative sorcerers, may continue to be the distinguishing feature of the discipline and the most avidly read

chapters in the ethnographer's book. But by themselves they are no longer enough, at least not in the search for the even deeper Voodoo secrets of the type discussed in this chapter.

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