

# **Linguistic Barriers, Exploitation and Resistance in Haiti**

**A one-day conference at MIT on January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2024**

The conference, supported by the MIT Policy Lab, will consist of a sequence of panels, followed by a Starr Forum. Each will be video recorded and published on YouTube. In general terms, the conference aims to explore the role of language and education on the political and economic difficulties faced by Haiti. We have invited participants from diverse areas of study *and* action, and we hope that this conference will help bridge certain gaps in our knowledge and practice in and about Haiti. The panel discussions will be designed to inform participants and the general public about the variety of obstacles hindering Haiti's wellbeing and sovereignty as a nation — political, economic and educational obstacles — with special reference to the role and consequences of linguistic choices. This conference will double as a call to courageous action, inspired by Haiti's history and by current efforts on the ground — thus, the “resistance” in the title.

All the panels, and the Starr Forum, will take place in MIT Room 2-190. Refreshments will be available in Room 2-290, starting at 8:30.

## ***Welcome and opening remarks***

**Haynes Miller**

**9:00**

## ***Panel 1: Elite domination / capture / closure and linguistic occupation (Culture)***

**Panelists: Jean Casimir, Nedgine Paul Deroly, Philippe Marius**

**Moderator: Dominique Dupuy**

**9:15 – 10:30**

The lives of most Haitians are indistinguishable from lives in a state under occupation. They are excluded from power, government and medical services, and quality education, through a form of linguistic exclusion: they do not speak the language of the former colonial power — French, which is enlisted for elite closure, as “*butin de guerre*,” by a small percentage of Haitians — while the vast numerical majority speaks a minoritized national language — Kreyòl, which is the one single language spoken by all Haitians though it is excluded from the formal spheres where state power and academic knowledge are created and transmitted. This state of affairs — where most Haitians are, in effect, made second-class citizens or strangers in their own land — has a corrosive effect on the nation's self-efficacy, a result that in turn serves the purposes of the elite, the state and the international trading community.

## ***Panel 2: Educational challenges and opportunities: the long game (Education)***

**Panelists:** Bertrhude Albert, Renauld Govain, Chris Low

**Moderator:** Marc Prou

**11:00 – 12:15**

Universal education of children is a recognized human right and is guaranteed by the Haitian Constitution of 1987. Realizing this right faces great obstacles. The impoverishment of the government of Haiti results in a preponderance of private schools, often subject to exorbitant fees and exogenous demands. The perceived need to quickly train students in French has allied parents with conservative actors perpetuating the use of French as a language of instruction (“LOI”) despite strong scientific evidence demonstrating the educational advantages of the mother tongue as LOI. Eurocentric curricula and related material in French further undermine the student’s ownership of the educational process. A progressive reform movement initiated forty years ago by Minister Joseph C. Bernard is today showing encouraging signs of renewal.

## ***Lunch available in Room 2-290***

**12:15 – 1:30**

## ***Panel 3: The “Outer peripheral trap” (Economics)***

**Panelists:** Robert Fatton, Scott Freeman, Malick Ghachem

**Moderator:** Nathalie Frédéric Pierre

**1:30 – 2:45**

Haiti is “trapped in the outer periphery,” in Robert Fatton’s phrase. As explained by Erik Reinert, the Washington consensus closes off avenues for national advancement and it demands of Haiti that it find its “niche of competitive advantage,” which today is principally that of offering labor at very low wages. Haiti is locked into this situation through a series of decisions over which it has little control. These involve issues of food security, currency, tariffs, tax-free zones, and more.

## ***Panel 4: Control by the Core (Politics)***

**Panelists:** Brian Concannon, Alex Dupuy, Jake Johnston

**Moderator:** Marlene Daut

**3:15 – 4:30**

Haiti has been called “The Republic of NGOs,” but this understates the case. More broadly, many social functions normally carried out by an elected government are controlled and executed by forces other than the Government of Haiti. This domination by external institutions, resulting from, but more fundamentally causing, the weak and impoverished state of the GoH, come in great variety: Variety of origin (religious, aid, financial, and political organizations) and of sector (medical, educational, entrepreneurial, advisory).

## ***Conference Conclusion: 4:30 – 4:45***

## **Starr Forum**

**Speaker: Haiti's Ambassador to UNESCO Mrs. Dominique Dupuy**

**Moderator: Michel DeGraff**

**5:00 – 6:30**

## ***Panelists and Moderators***

### **Bertrhude Albert**

Executive Officer of [P4H Global](#)

### **Jean Casimir**

Professor, University of Haiti

### **Brian Concannon**

Executive Director of the [Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti](#)

### **Marlene Daut**

Professor of French and African Diaspora Studies

[Department of African American Studies](#), Yale University

### **Nedgine Paul Deroly**

Co-founder and CEO of [Anseye pou Ayiti](#)

### **Alex Dupuy**

Professor of Sociology, Wesleyan University

Dominique Dupuy

[Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of Haiti to UNESCO](#)

Vice-president of the Executive Board of UNESCO

### **Robert Fatton, Jr**

Professor of Government and Foreign Affairs

Department of Politics, University of Virginia

### **Scott Freeman**

Sr Professorial Lecturer

School of International Service, American University

### **Malick Ghachem**

Professor of History

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

[Renauld Govain](#)

Dean of the Faculty of Applied Linguistics  
State University of Haiti

[Jake Johnston](#)

Senior Research Associate  
[Center for Economic and Policy Research](#)

[Christine Low](#)

Executive Director of [Friends of Matènwa](#)

[Philippe-Richard Marius](#)

Adjunct Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology and Anthropology  
College of Staten Island

[Nathalie Frédéric Pierre](#)

Assistant Professor, Department of History  
Howard University

[Marc Prou](#)

Senior Researcher and Dean of Students, Université Quisqueya  
Associate Professor, University of Massachusetts Boston