HAITI – THE BLACK SHEEP OF THE CARIBBEAN: HISTORICAL ROOTS AND CONSTRUCTIVIST PERSPECTIVES ON STATE FRAGILITY

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Abstract. This paper explores Haiti's contemporary political and economic challenges through the lens of its historical development and constructivist theory in international relations. Rather than attributing Haiti's persistent marginalization solely to material shortcomings or governance failures, the study emphasizes the importance of socially constructed perceptions and historical narratives that have shaped both Haiti's domestic institutions and its position in the international system. It argues that international norms, colonial legacies, and discursive practices have consistently portrayed Haiti as an anomaly within the Caribbean and global order. The paper analyzes how the Haitian Revolution, post-independence isolation, and repeated foreign interventions have contributed to a collective international perception of Haiti as politically unstable and economically fragile. Drawing on constructivist insights, the study underscores the significance of ideational forces—such as identity, reputation, and legitimacy—in understanding how Haiti is governed internally and perceived externally. Ultimately, the paper calls for a reevaluation of international engagement with Haiti that takes into account not only structural reforms but also the transformation of embedded global narratives.

Key words: constructivist theory, state fragility, Haiti, Human Rights Issues, security, CARICOM, "black sheep" of the Caribbean, Caribbean region

Introduction

In international relations discourse, Haiti is frequently positioned as a political and economic anomaly within the Caribbean region. While its neighbors have generally achieved varying degrees of political stability and regional integration, Haiti remains marked by governance crises, humanitarian emergencies, and endemic violence. This paper examines the underlying causes of Haiti's exceptional status through a constructivist lens, emphasizing the role of historical memory, identity construction, and international socialization in shaping state behavior and global perceptions. Constructivist theory, as articulated by Alexander Wendt (1992), posits that international realities are not fixed by material capabilities alone but are co-constituted through shared understandings,

norms, and discourses. In this context, Haiti's identity as the "black sheep" of the Caribbean is not merely descriptive but performative, reinforced through historical marginalization, diplomatic isolation, and normative judgments embedded in global governance practices. This paper seeks to analyze how such ideational structures, in tandem with material constraints, have reproduced Haiti's fragility and limited its agency in the international system.

Materials and Methods

This paper employs a constructivist theoretical framework within the field of International Relations (IR) to examine Haiti's political history and its persistent marginalization within the international system. Constructivism challenges the materialist assumptions of dominant IR theories such as realism and liberalism by emphasizing the importance of socially constructed meanings, collective identities, and normative structures [2, p.890-892]. From a constructivist perspective, state behavior and global outcomes are not simply the result of material capabilities or institutional configurations but are shaped by inter-subjective understandings – the shared beliefs and expectations that govern how states perceive themselves and others [3, p.223-228]. Central to constructivist thought is the idea that sovereignty, legitimacy, and statehood are not fixed entities, but are continuously constructed and contested through discourse, norms, and interactions [4, p.133-140]. States do not exist in a vacuum; their identities are formed and re-formed through historical processes, symbolic narratives, and the normative judgments of powerful international actors. As Wendt famously argued, "anarchy is what states make of it," meaning that the structure of the international system is not given but made through social practice [1, p.398-402].

This framework is especially pertinent to the Haitian context, where the state's international identity has been shaped by a complex history of racialized exclusion, revolutionary defiance, and normative disqualification from the Euro-American liberal order. Haiti's post-revolutionary isolation, its recurring portrayal as a "failed state," and its dependence on international aid and interventions are not merely material conditions, but also products of enduring ideational constructs [5, p.224-228]. These constructs are maintained and reproduced by international organizations, donor states, and NGOs, which often impose normative models of governance, development, and legitimacy rooted in Western epistemologies [6, p.301-304]. This process reflects what Finnemore and Sikkink describe as norm diffusion – the transmission of specific standards of appropriate behavior by powerful actors to weaker states.

In this context, Haiti's marginalization can be understood as a constructed identity – a role assigned and reinforced through repeated interactions with external actors. These interactions often assume and reproduce notions of Haitian incapacity, fragility, and dependence, thereby undermining both internal legitimacy and external sovereignty. The constructivist lens thus provides a

critical analytical tool for interrogating not only Haiti's material vulnerabilities, but also the symbolic and normative hierarchies that define its place in the global order. By focusing on the interplay of ideas, norms, and identity, this approach sheds light on how Haiti came to be seen – and to see itself – as the "black sheep of the Caribbean".

In analyzing Haiti's complex political and social landscape, it is useful to engage with several key concepts from International Relations and social theory. First, norm diffusion refers to the process through which ideas, values, and behavioral expectations spread across states and societies, shaping their actions and policies [2, p.98-104]. In Haiti's case, global norms related to governance, development, and human rights have been introduced through international organizations and foreign actors, often influencing domestic reforms and international perceptions, sometimes contentiously.

Second, the concept of performative identity helps explain how Haiti's international and domestic identity—as the "Black Sheep of the Caribbean" or a "failed state" – is not merely a static label but an ongoing social performance. This identity is continuously constructed and reinforced through discourse, media representations, and political practices which in turn affect how Haiti is treated by others and how it views itself [7, p.618-620].

Lastly, tutelary sovereignty captures the constrained nature of Haitian sovereignty, whereby external powers, under the justification of protection or aid, exert considerable influence over its internal affairs. Historical and contemporary interventions exemplify this condition, revealing how Haiti's autonomy is limited by the tutelage of international actors. Together, these concepts illuminate the layered dynamics shaping Haiti's position in the international system and its enduring challenges [8, p.110-119].

Results

Historical Context. The historical development of Haiti is essential to understanding the structural foundations of its present-day political instability, economic underdevelopment, and constrained sovereignty. Unlike other post-colonial states in the Caribbean, Haiti emerged not through negotiated independence but through revolutionary violence against one of the most brutal plantation systems in the colonial world. The legacy of this rupture-both symbolic and material-has had enduring consequences for Haiti's position in the international system and for the internal coherence of the Haitian state.

The Colonial Economy and Social Hierarchy. As the French colony of Saint-Domingue, Haiti was once the most lucrative plantation economy in the world, producing vast quantities of sugar, coffee, and indigo through the brutal exploitation of enslaved Africans. By the late 18th century, enslaved Africans constituted over 90% of the population. The colony's wealth was built on extreme social stratification and racialized violence, laying the foundations for enduring

social divisions. This economic model created an extractive, unsustainable structure that benefited a narrow elite and left no infrastructure for inclusive development or governance.

The Haitian Revolution and Its Aftermath (1791–1804). From a constructivist perspective in International Relations, the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804) was not only a material rupture in colonial power but a profound challenge to the dominant ideational structures of the 18th and early 19th centuries. It contested prevailing norms of racial hierarchy, colonial legitimacy, and the presumed incompatibility of black sovereignty with "civilized" statehood. Saint-Domingue, then the most profitable colony in the French empire, was sustained by a racialized system of exploitation that normalized slavery as both economically necessary and morally justified [5, p.220-226]. The Revolution—initiated by the enslaved population—disrupted this hegemonic social order. Inspired by the Enlightenment and the French Revolution's ideals of liberty and equality, the Haitian insurgents reinterpreted these universalist principles through their own lived realities, thereby reconstructing the meaning of freedom, citizenship, and human rights. The leadership of Toussaint Louverture exemplifies the constructivist notion that actors are shaped by, but also shape, the social structures around them. Louverture navigated complex identities-as a former slave, military leader, and quasi-statesman-to articulate a new vision of a post-slavery society that retained ties to France while asserting local autonomy. The eventual declaration of independence by Jean-Jacques Dessalines in 1804 marked a symbolic and normative rupture: Haiti was the first modern state to explicitly construct its national identity around blackness, anti-slavery, and anti-colonialism. However, the revolutionary redefinition of sovereignty and equality was not readily accepted by the international community. Prevailing norms of racial superiority and Eurocentric conceptions of legitimacy led to Haiti's isolation. The refusal of recognition by major powers-particularly the United States and France-was not merely a matter of strategic interest but reflected deep-seated normative resistance to a black republic. France's imposition of the 1825 indemnity for the "loss" of slave property further illustrates how material practices were embedded in ideational frameworks that denied full legitimacy to non-European states.

In constructivist terms, Haiti's emergence posed an existential threat to the international normative order. The Revolution forced states to confront the contradictions in their professed liberal values and exposed the racial and imperial biases underpinning the "standard of civilization" used to determine state legitimacy. The global response to Haiti was thus not simply a product of material calculation but a defensive reaction to a normative shift that threatened entrenched identities and power structures.

Ultimately, the Haitian Revolution illustrates how ideas and identities can transform international politics, and how marginalized actors, by asserting

alternative norms, can provoke structural change-even if that change is met with long-term resistance.

Nineteenth-Century Fragmentation and Weak State Formation. The post-revolutionary period in 19th-century Haiti was marked by intense internal fragmentation and chronic weak state formation—a condition often interpreted through materialist lenses such as economic underdevelopment, institutional decay, or foreign isolation. However, from a constructivist perspective in International Relations, these dynamics are better understood as consequences of contested national identity, legitimacy, and the social construction of authority within a revolutionary state rejected by the dominant international order [9, p.130-140].

Following independence in 1804, Haiti confronted not just the task of nation-building but the more complex challenge of defining what kind of nation it could become in a world that denied its normative legitimacy. The revolution had inverted colonial racial hierarchies and declared the black republic a sovereign equal to European states, but this ideological rupture remained largely unrecognized abroad and unsettled at home. Haiti was, in effect, a state without normative anchoring in the global system-a pariah in an international society premised on Eurocentric ideals of civilization, whiteness, and property.

Domestically, this uncertainty materialized in the disintegration of a coherent national identity. Competing visions of governance emerged: the north under Henri Christophe pursued monarchical centralization with quasi-feudal labor policies, while the south under Alexandre Potion embraced republicanism and land redistribution. These contrasting political models reflected competing constructions of what post-colonial sovereignty should entail, shaped by different understandings of legitimacy, authority, and the role of race and class in the new republic.

This internal ideological fragmentation prevented the emergence of stable national institutions. Instead of consolidating a unified political community, Haiti became a contested social space where multiple elites vied to define the meaning of statehood. Leaders were not merely competing for power—they were competing for normative legitimacy, attempting to bind the population to a particular vision of order and belonging. Frequent coups, assassinations, and regime changes were not solely power struggles; they signaled the absence of a shared social contract rooted in a widely accepted national identity.

Constructivism also draws attention to how Haiti's perceived deviance from international norms reinforced internal instability. Lacking recognition from major powers and burdened by the French indemnity, Haitian leaders were caught between asserting a proud anti-colonial identity and seeking external validation by mimicking European forms of governance. This identity tension inhibited the formation of an autonomous, confident state. Instead, Haitian governance became reactive and unstable, shaped by a persistent crisis of legitimacy both internally and externally.

Moreover, the international system during the 19th century did not operate as a neutral arena but actively socialized new states into a Eurocentric order. Haiti's marginalization functioned as a powerful normative signal to other postcolonial movements: that black sovereignty was aberrant and punishable. This reinforced a cycle in which Haiti's attempts at asserting legitimacy were met with rejection, deepening the state's fragility and isolation.

In sum, a constructivist reading of 19th-century Haiti reveals that its fragmentation and weak state formation were not merely outcomes of material constraints but were rooted in deep ontological insecurity-a failure to solidify a cohesive identity in a world that denied its very right to exist on equal terms. Understanding Haiti's historical trajectory thus requires attention to the social meanings, ideational conflicts, and constructed boundaries of legitimacy that shaped both its domestic politics and its place in the international system [9, p.140-146].

U.S. Occupation and the Reconfiguration of Sovereignty (1915–1934). The U.S. occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934 is often interpreted through realist or liberal paradigms, emphasizing strategic interests, economic motivations, or institutional development. However, a constructivist approach foregrounds the normative reconstruction of Haitian sovereignty during this period—how ideas of race, civilization, and state legitimacy were contested and reshaped through international and domestic interactions.

The occupation was justified by the United States as a civilizing mission aimed at stabilizing a "failed state". But from a constructivist lens, this intervention reveals how sovereignty is not a fixed legal status, but a socially constructed institution defined by dominant norms and identities. The U.S. acted not merely to protect economic assets or geopolitical interests, but to reassert a Euro-American model of governance that racialized Haitians as incapable of modern self-rule. Thus, the occupation functioned as a normative imposition of Western standards of order, discipline, and development-redefining what constituted a "legitimate" Haitian state.

Haiti's internal political instability prior to 1915 was framed by American officials as evidence of inherent incapacity rather than as a legacy of foreign-imposed isolation and structural injustice. This framing enabled a normative reclassification of Haiti from a sovereign equal to a "protectorate-like" entity subject to external tutelage. The 1915 U.S.-Haiti treaty, which granted the U.S. control over Haitian finances and police, was not simply a legal arrangement but a symbolic reconfiguration of Haitian identity in the global order-from revolutionary black republic to dependent ward of the West.

Domestically, the occupation profoundly shaped Haitian political culture. The U.S. imposed a new constitution in 1918 that, among other things, reversed Haiti's historic prohibition against land ownership by foreigners-a cornerstone of its post-independence identity. This shift signified more than just

a legal reform; it represented a discursive rupture in the foundational values of Haitian sovereignty, which had been constructed in direct opposition to foreign domination and exploitation. Resistance to the occupation, particularly the Caco insurgency reflected not only a material struggle against foreign troops but a normative defense of Haitian self-definition.

Constructivist analysis also highlights how the occupation altered Haiti's social hierarchies and national identity narratives. The U.S. administration privileged the lighter-skinned urban elite and imported segregationist attitudes that reinforced existing racial and class divisions. In doing so, its re-inscribed colonial patterns of legitimacy, where proximity to whiteness and Western norms became the benchmark for political authority and social worth. These ideational legacies endured beyond the occupation, shaping elite nationalism and further alienating the rural black majority from the state.

Importantly, the occupation's end in 1934 did not signify the restoration of sovereignty in any complete sense. The long-term internalization of externally imposed norms left Haiti with a state apparatus that was Western in form but alienated from its social base. From a constructivist viewpoint, this produced a kind of "hollow sovereignty" – formal independence without the normative coherence or internal legitimacy that true self-rule requires.

In essence, the U.S. occupation of Haiti illustrates how international interventions are not just about control of territory or resources, but about control over meaning – about who is deemed fit to govern, which political forms are considered legitimate, and whose norms define the structure of the international system. Haiti's experience during 1915–1934 underscores the power of ideational hierarchies in global politics and the lasting effects of normative subjugation on state identity and sovereignty [9, p.147-152].

Political Landscape and Governance. Following the collapse of the Duvalier dictatorship in 1986, Haiti embarked on a turbulent path toward democratization. Despite initial enthusiasm, the post-authoritarian era has been defined by persistent political instability, including repeated electoral crises, fragile institutions, and the recurrence of extralegal governance. The rise and fall of populist leaders, such as Jean-Bertrand Aristide, have highlighted the tension between popular mobilization and elite resistance, often exacerbated by international interventions. As Finnemore and Sikkink suggest, norm diffusion does not occur in a vacuum but is mediated through local institutional and cultural filters. Haiti's institutions, historically weakened and externally shaped, have lacked the normative coherence and autonomy to internalize democratic norms fully [2, p.198-201].

Clientelism and corruption have further undermined public trust and governance capacity. The performative aspect of elections, often supported by international donors, has led to what Charles Tilly might characterize as "regimes of limited capacity," where the formal trappings of democracy mask the absence of

substantive state-society relations. In the absence of effective institutionalization, Haiti has oscillated between fragile civilian governments and unaccountable power centers, including armed gangs and economic elites [10, p.399-404].

International Influence and Aid Dependency. Haiti's persistent aid dependency and exposure to international influence cannot be fully understood through materialist explanations alone. While poverty, weak institutions, and external shocks are undeniable factors, a constructivist approach in International Relations reveals how norms, identities, and discourses shape the structure and consequences of Haiti's dependency. Aid is not merely a transaction of resources-it is a normative practice that reflects and reinforces ideational hierarchies within the international system.

Drawing on the work of constructivists such as Martha Finnemore and Michael Barnett aid is seen as a form of norm diffusion where donors act as norm entrepreneurs, promoting models of "good governance," "democratic consolidation," and "institutional rationality" based on Western standards [6, p.133-136]. In Haiti, these models have been repeatedly imposed with limited local consultation, reflecting an underlying assumption that Haitian actors are either incapable or untrustworthy. This reveals what Alexander Wendt would describe as a socially constructed identity of inferiority—a role Haiti is assigned and expected to perform [1, p.394-396].

The response to the 2010 earthquake exemplifies this dynamic. Although over $13 billion in aid was pledged, the Haitian government received only a fraction-less than 1% of direct relief funding in the early stages-while most was funneled through international NGOs and foreign agencies. This by-passing of state structures was rationalized by discourses of state fragility and corruption but had the normative effect of delegitimizing the Haitian state in the eyes of its own citizens. The international community reproduced a narrative in which sovereignty was conditional, not inherent-echoing the broader pattern of "tutelary sovereignty" identified by Finnemore and Barnett in their critique of international organizations [6, p.136-139].

Similarly, the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), active from 2004 to 2017, operated as both a security presence and a normative agent. While it sought to maintain peace and rebuild institutions, its very existence signaled that Haitian self-rule was suspect. Moreover, the cholera outbreak caused by UN peacekeepers and the UN's initial denial of responsibility sparked widespread public resentment, revealing a disconnect between international authority and local legitimacy. This incident demonstrates what constructivist theorists would call a failure of norm internalization-the international presence was not perceived as legitimate because it lacked moral congruence with Haitian social expectations.

Haiti's aid dependency thus functions within a broader system of ideational control. The labels applied to Haiti- "fragile state," "failed state," "aid-dependent nation"-are not just descriptions; they are socially constructed categories that define Haiti's role in the international hierarchy. These labels also shape behavior:

Haitian officials often perform dependency to remain legible to donors, reinforcing a cycle of external reliance and internal disempowerment. This is consistent with Wendt's insight that "anarchy is what states make of it"; Haiti's marginalization is not a natural condition but a socially constructed one, sustained by a web of expectations and practices that continually undermine its sovereignty.

From a constructivist standpoint, Haiti's interactions with international donors, organizations, and states are shaped less by objective needs and more by contested understandings of legitimacy, identity, and order. The international aid regime becomes a mechanism of normative reproduction, in which the Haitian state is consistently denied full recognition as an equal and autonomous actor. This persistent denial reinforces Haiti's symbolic status as the "black sheep of the Caribbean" – an identity not rooted in geography or culture, but in the historical and ideational legacy of a black republic that defied colonial modernity and has since been normatively excluded from the global mainstream.

Discussion

Socio-Economic Challenges. Haiti's economic underdevelopment, environmental degradation, and humanitarian crises are deeply intertwined with its political fragility. Chronic poverty, widespread unemployment, and inadequate social services persist despite decades of foreign aid and development initiatives. The 2010 earthquake, which killed over 200,000 people, further exposed the inadequacies of both state capacity and international responses. From a constructivist standpoint, the global response to Haiti's socio-economic crises has often been shaped by implicit normative hierarchies. As Hopf argues, identity constructions in international politics shape the behavior of actors. Haiti has been framed as a perpetual victim and a site of humanitarian emergency, which legitimizes exceptional measures such as direct foreign governance, while sidelining long-term structural reform and local agency [11, p.103-106].

From a constructivist perspective, Haiti's socio-economic difficulties cannot be solely explained by material deprivation or institutional failures; rather, they are deeply intertwined with the social construction of Haiti's identity and status within the international community. The persistent characterization of Haiti as a "failed state" or "basket case" is not an objective descriptor but a powerful normative narrative that shapes both international responses and internal self-perceptions. These narratives, rooted in historical legacies of colonialism, racialization, and revolutionary stigma, construct Haiti as inherently fragile, dependent, and incapable of sustainable development. This identity influences the behavior of international actors, who frame economic aid and development projects through a lens of paternalism and conditionality, prescribing solutions that often prioritize donor interests and Western developmental norms over local agency and knowledge.

Moreover, constructivism highlights how socio-economic policies and interventions are not merely technical fixes but sites of norm negotiation and identity (re)production. For example, structural adjustment programs imposed in

the 1980s and 1990s reflected global neoliberal ideas about market efficiency and governance, which clashed with Haiti's social realities and contributed to social dislocation. Such policies reproduced the notion that Haiti's socio-economic problems were a result of internal mismanagement, overshadowing the role of international economic structures and historical injustices.

At the societal level, this externally imposed identity influences how Haitians perceive their own potential and challenges. As constructivists argue, identities are performative and constitutive: Haitians, navigating both local realities and global expectations, may internalize or resist these imposed narratives, which in turn shapes social cohesion, political mobilization, and economic behavior. This has led to what Escobar calls the "development apparatus" – a system that depoliticizes poverty and recasts it as a technical problem solvable through external expertise. In doing so, it forecloses alternative pathways to development rooted in local knowledge, sovereignty, and political empowerment [12, p.140-146].

The Crisis of the 2020s. The assassination of President Jovenel Moise in 2021 marked a turning point in Haiti's descent into political and security collapse. With no functioning parliament, a judiciary in disarray, and an executive branch operating without electoral legitimacy, Haiti has entered a phase of profound governance void. Armed gangs now exert de facto control over large parts of the capital, and the state's monopoly on violence has effectively disintegrated. Constructivist IR theory helps to illuminate how the global response to this crisis continues to be filtered through ideational frames that emphasize instability, fragility, and incapacity. These discursive constructs shape not only how states respond to Haiti but also how Haitians are permitted to participate in international forums. The repeated exclusion of Haitian civil society from negotiations concerning their own political future underscores the marginalization of local agency within global governance frameworks.

Human Rights Issues. Over the last decade several human rights issues have been identified in Haiti including the wanton use of violence and illegal firearms, sexual violence against women including children, gang activity and corruption at all levels of society. According to the Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights –Situation of Human Rights in Haiti, otherwise referred to as the Report the use of firearms and ammunitions in Haiti, a country that does not manufacture such weapons, has bolstered and empowered criminal gangs, enabling them to commit severe human rights abuses. These gangs have become more united and coordinated, often out-powering national security forces. This situation has dramatically worsened the nation's security, human rights, and humanitarian crises, while also presenting significant ripple effects for the broader region. As clashes between rival gangs declined throughout 2024, gang members increasingly turned their violence against the populations, brutally punishing those who defied their rules or were suspected of collaborating

with the police or self-defense groups, instilling fear within the population [13, p.13-16].

Since July 2024, armed violence has remained alarmingly high, fueled by gang attacks on the population, police operations targeting gangs, and "vigilante justice". Human rights violations and abuses documented by OHCHR have included numerous killings, including targeted killings, kidnappings for ransom, rape and sexual exploitation, destruction of property, and severe restrictions on access to essential services, particularly healthcare and education.

Violence and firearms. What was once fragmented gang violence has become a coordinated assault on Haitian society. The Viv Ansanm (Living Together) gang coalition has seized key areas of Port-au-Prince, expanded from marginalized areas into downtown core and middle-class neighborhoods, and attacked institutions. Between July 2024 and February 2025, UN Human Rights documented 4,239 killings and 1,356 injuries. In one massacre alone, 207 people were executed over five days in Cite Soleil. Armed gangs use increasingly powerful weapons, some trafficked from United States of America ports in containers of frozen food or electronics.

"These weapons, which are increasingly sophisticated, are not manufactured in Haiti, but consistently flow in from elsewhere," said UN Human Rights Chief Volker Turk. Firearms are central not only to killings, but also kidnappings, sexual assaults, and extortion. Checkpoints set up by gangs on major roads demand "circulation taxes" from anyone trying to pass through. Victims who resist are often shot.

Curbing the flood of illegal firearms is critical to stem gang violence. This would entail enforcing the UN arms embargo, including tightening port and border controls, and dismantling trafficking networks. Voluntary disarmament and buy-back schemes are also recommended. According to the Report, security firms, some of which have been linked to arms diversion, must face scrutiny and regulation.

Restoring security in Haiti, would also entail urgently equipping and providing adequate resources to the Haitian National Police, while ensuring accountability for officers involved in human rights violations. The Report also calls for the full deployment of the Multinational Security Support (MSS) Mission to help reclaim gang-held areas and support national efforts.

Sexual violence and children in conflict. Women and girls are exposed to widespread sexual violence perpetrated by gangs. The report details cases of gang members abducting women from their homes or public transport, raping them in public, and in some cases, killing them afterwards. Others are held in exploitative 'relationships' under constant threat of violence. The sexual violence is mostly underreported, due to fear of retaliation, social stigma, and a lack of trust in public institutions.

The impact of gang violence on children is also staggering. Thousands cannot attend school, many have witnessed the most horrific acts of violence, including killings, and some are trafficked and exploited by gangs, and provided with firearms. Millions of them have witnessed violence that no child should ever have to see. According to the Report, young girls who have survived sexual violence have spoken of the horrors they suffered at the hands of gangs. However, like many Haitians, they have not been broken.

To start overcoming this grave situation a comprehensive support system for victims needs to be created, including immediate and long-term medical care; psychological counselling; legal assistance; and social reintegration programs, the report states. In March 2025, with the support of UN Human Rights, the authorities announced the creation of two specialized task forces that will enable a more rigorous and expedited handling of mass killings, including sexual violence [13, p.18-20].

Internal displacement and humanitarian crisis. Gangs control essential roads, disrupting commerce and humanitarian aid, and armed attacks on facilities such as hospitals and schools have deepened the crisis. The Report states that more than 1 million people have been displaced in Haiti, many multiple times, 40,000 of whom have been forced to move in the past few weeks alone. One in every two Haitians – 5.5 million people – face acute food insecurity. Two million people face emergency levels of hunger. Nearly 6,000 displaced people are living in famine-like conditions. The Report also advocates that internally displaced people should be relocated to safe and appropriate facilities, where the enjoyment of essential rights such as food, education and healthcare is ensured, even in gang-controlled areas. Health workers and humanitarian personnel face frequent attacks and need support [13, p.21-24].

Corruption, impunity and law enforcement failures. Impunity for human rights violations and abuses prevails. Courts remain underfunded and are frequently targeted by gangs. Judges are under threat or have fled the country, and major cases linked to massacres have made little progress. The Report recommends that financial and political backers of the gangs must pay a price for their crimes, including the freezing of bank accounts, assets and visas. Internal accountability is weak. Only three out of 23 cases of police abuse were referred to the justice system. While the Haitian National Police have carried out operations to confront gangs in very challenging conditions, the report raises concerns about the lack of measures to prevent and protect from an unnecessary or disproportionate use of lethal force.

Over the last three years, more than 2,000 people were killed or injured in law enforcement operations against gangs, a 60 per cent increase compared to the last six months of 2022. At least one third of those killed were hit when they were not involved in acts of violence, often struck by stray bullets while in the streets or at home [13, p.23-26].

Regional and global calls for urgent action. Despite it all, the Haitian people continue to hope and resist. In some areas, the deployment of the UN-backed MSS has allowed schools and clinics to reopen. But needs remain immense. The solutions are straightforward and well known. The nations of the world must provide the Multinational Security Support mission led by Kenya what it needs to succeed. If there is too much procrastination, there could be precious little left of Haiti to save. The United Nations Security Council must see the Haitian situation as urgent and confront it head on. Recently, the Twenty-Eighth Meeting of the Council for Foreign and Community Relations (COFCOR) of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) was held in Basseterre, Federation of Saint Kitts and Nevis from 8 to 9 May 2025, under the chairmanship of the Right Honorable Dr. Denzil Douglas, Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Trade, Industry, Commerce and Consumer Affairs, Economic Development and Investment of Saint Kitts and Nevis.

At that meeting, Foreign Ministers received a report on the situation in Haiti and expressed deep concern about the worsening of the security crisis, the growing mistrust of the Transitional Presidential Council amongst Haitians and the insufficiency of international support, including for humanitarian relief. Ministers reaffirmed the importance of the Community's Good Offices role through the efforts of the Eminent Persons Group (EPG), in engaging with key Haitian stakeholders and supporting peace and stability in Haiti; and called for greater international attention and support.

There was agreement that CARICOM would continue to advocate within the halls of power and in upcoming multilateral fora to mobilize critical humanitarian, financial and human resource aid for Haiti, in addition to the urgency of long-term support for the country, in light of the flagging support for the funding of the Multinational Security Support Mission (MSSM) and deep concern over the delay of the United Nations Security Council in responding to the proposal of the UN Secretary-General to deploy a hybrid mission to Haiti to address the insecurity situation.

Amidst grave concern regarding the conditions for the effective holding of the referendum and its delay, and the implication of this delay for the general elections later this year, Ministers underlined the importance of integrity, effectiveness and good governance in facilitating the progress of the transition process in attaining its major objectives. These objectives focused on security, the referendum and elections, and retaining the necessary confidence of the international community (caricom.org).

It must be noted though that Haiti's membership in CARICOM and participation in COFCOR illustrate the tension between formal regional inclusion and substantive marginalization. While constructivist theory suggests that regional organizations can foster identity convergence and norm internalization, Haiti's experience has often been one of conditional belonging. Through COFCOR,

CARICOM states coordinate foreign policy and present a unified regional voice. Yet, Haiti is often the object, rather than the author, of regional diplomacy. This reflects deeper assumptions about who embodies Caribbean norms, and who deviates from them. Haiti's recurring crises become not just political failures, but discursive tools used to reinforce its outsider status within the regional order.

Comparative and Regional Analysis. Compared to other Caribbean nations, Haiti's experience is distinct in both its revolutionary origins and its sustained exclusion from regional political and economic frameworks. While countries such as Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, and Trinidad and Tobago have managed to integrate into global and regional institutions with varying degrees of success, Haiti remains peripheral.

Constructivism posits that such differentiation is not merely the result of material capacity but also of social labeling and normative differentiation [14, p.320-322]. Haiti's identity as a failed or fragile state has become internalized within the international community, shaping its interactions and opportunities. Regional bodies like CARICOM have historically struggled to integrate Haiti fully, reflecting both linguistic and cultural divides and deeper normative hesitations.

A constructivist perspective on Haiti's position within the Caribbean and broader Latin American region emphasizes the role of shared and divergent identities, historical narratives, and normative frameworks in shaping inter-state relations and regional dynamics. Rather than focusing solely on material indicators such as GDP or military capacity, constructivism directs attention to how regional identities and collective meanings influence how states perceive themselves and each other, and how these perceptions affect cooperation, conflict, and hierarchies.

Haiti's unique history-as the first Black republic born out of a successful slave revolt-has led to its construction as an "other" within the Caribbean and Latin American communities. This identity, embedded in racialized and postcolonial discourses, has contributed to Haiti's social and political marginalization within regional institutions and forums. While other Caribbean states have aligned with Western liberal norms and market-based development models, Haiti has often been cast as a normative outlier, a symbol of instability or failure, which affects its ability to forge regional partnerships on equal footing.

One key example is Haiti's integration into the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). Although Haiti became a full member in 2002, decades of political instability, economic hardship, and differences in language and culture meant its inclusion was met with ambivalence. Many CARICOM states framed Haiti's membership through a discourse of conditional inclusion, emphasizing governance reforms and economic development as prerequisites for meaningful participation [15, p.13-16]. This reflects what constructivists describe as a normative gatekeeping process, where collective identity is maintained by

defining who fits the regional "in-group" and who remains marginal [16, p.133-136].

Additionally, regional responses to crises such as the 2010 earthquake reveal how normative constructions affect solidarity. While there was an outpouring of humanitarian support, some regional actors maintained a distance based on perceptions of Haiti's "fragility" and governance issues, limiting longer-term regional integration efforts. The earthquake also catalyzed debates within the region about the role of shared Black identity and historical solidarity versus pragmatic concerns about state capacity and political stability.

Diplomatic relations between Haiti and its neighbors further illustrate this dynamic. For instance, the historically tense relationship with the Dominican Republic is partly rooted in mutually constructed national identities shaped by race, colonial histories, and border politics. These identities influence cross-border cooperation, migration policies, and security practices, reflecting broader regional patterns of inclusion and exclusion.

From a constructivist standpoint, such examples show that Haiti's regional marginalization is not predetermined by material factors alone but is continuously constructed through shared norms, identities, and historical narratives. The regional community's social practices reproduce Haiti's status as an outsider, while Haiti's own identity narratives respond to, resist, or sometimes reinforce this marginalization. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for fostering more inclusive regional cooperation and reframing Haiti's place in the Caribbean and Latin America.

Toward a Way Forward. A constructivist approach to Haiti's persistent challenges reveals that sustainable progress hinges not only on addressing material deficiencies but also on transforming the social constructions, identities, and normative frameworks that shape Haiti's domestic governance and international relations [17, p.30-46]**.** Moving beyond narratives of fragility and failure requires a concerted effort to redefine Haiti's identity in ways that empower both Haitians and their partners in the international system.

Changing International Norms and Narratives: International actors—states, multilateral organizations, and donors-must critically examine the discourses and assumptions that inform their policies toward Haiti [18, p.23-26]. Development frameworks often embed Western-centric ideas about governance, stability, and economic models that may clash with Haitian realities and values, reinforcing dependency and exclusion [19, p.47-56]. By adopting more reflexive and culturally sensitive approaches, international stakeholders can move from paternalistic interventions toward partnerships based on mutual respect and dialogue (Price & Reus-Smit 1998). This includes recognizing Haiti's historical contributions, cultural strengths, and agency as a sovereign actor, rather than solely viewing it through a deficit lens [5, p.13-16]. Fostering Regional Solidarity and Inclusion: At the regional level, Caribbean institutions such as CARICOM must reconfigure

regional norms to explicitly include Haiti as an equal partner [16, p.23-25]. This means dismantling exclusionary practices and discourses that frame Haiti as an outsider or exception, often rooted in racialized and postcolonial legacies [20, p.35-36]. A constructivist approach encourages regional actors to embrace shared histories of anti-colonial struggle and Black solidarity, reinforcing a collective Caribbean identity that values diversity and resilience [21, p.55-59]. Regional initiatives could prioritize capacity-building and cultural exchange programs that elevate Haitian voices and experiences within the Caribbean community.

Empowering Domestic Identity Reconstruction: Within Haiti, leaders, civil society, and cultural institutions should actively engage in reclaiming and reshaping national identity to counter externally imposed labels of instability or backwardness. Constructivist theory highlights how identities are performative and dynamic; thus, promoting narratives centered on Haiti's revolutionary legacy, creativity, and resilience can strengthen social cohesion and political legitimacy [3, p.213-216]. Encouraging inclusive dialogue across Haiti's diverse social groups can foster a sense of shared purpose and collective ownership of development paths.

Policy Recommendations:

International Actors:

- Implement development programs that prioritize local knowledge and participatory decision-making, ensuring Haitian stakeholders shape policy design and implementation.

- Support initiatives that challenge negative stereotypes of Haiti through media, education, and diplomatic channels, emphasizing its cultural richness and historical significance

Regional Institutions:

- Facilitate regular forums for Haitian participation in regional policy-making beyond economic issues, including culture, security, and migration

- Promote regional identity-building campaigns that celebrate Haitian contributions to Caribbean heritage and history

Haitian Government and Civil Society:

- Invest in education and cultural programs that foster national pride and inclusive historical narratives

- Encourage inclusive governance practices that engage marginalized communities in political processes, strengthening democratic legitimacy

Undoubtedly, addressing Haiti's socio-political and economic challenges requires transforming the ideational structures that shape perceptions and interactions at multiple levels. By shifting the narratives and norms that have long framed Haiti's position in the Caribbean and the world, there is an opportunity to build a future grounded in mutual respect, equity, and genuine partnership-paving the way for sustainable development and regional integration.

Conclusion

Haiti's reputation as the "black sheep" of the Caribbean is not an inevitable outcome of its internal conditions, but a socially constructed identity shaped by centuries of colonial trauma, racialized international norms, and exclusionary regional politics. A constructivist lens reveals that these perceptions are maintained not only through material inequalities but also through the repeated performance of normative judgments that deny Haiti full political subject-hood.

To alter this trajectory, international and regional actors must commit to both policy reform and ideational change. CARICOM, as the Caribbean's principal regional body, must do more than offer rhetorical solidarity. It should foster integrative diplomacy that meaningfully includes Haiti in regional decision-making processes, not merely as a beneficiary of assistance but as a co-equal partner. COFCOR, as CARICOM's foreign policy engine, has a critical role to play in reshaping how Haiti is represented on the global stage-advocating for language and strategies that support Haitian sovereignty and counteract the narratives of perpetual crisis. The United Nations, long involved in Haiti through peacekeeping and development missions, must also reflect critically on its practices. A constructivist policy shift would require the UN to prioritize Haitian-led governance reforms, avoid reinforcing tutelary sovereignty, and support discursive spaces in which Haiti can redefine its own identity within the international community.

Ultimately, changing Haiti's fortunes requires more than external aid or technical fixes-it demands a transformation in the norms, narratives, and power relations that govern Haiti's place in the world. Constructivist-informed policymaking, rooted in mutual respect and discursive inclusion, offers a pathway toward recasting Haiti not as a problem to be solved, but as a sovereign actor with agency, history, and voice.

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ENDNOTES

Haiti, officially the Republic of Haiti, is a country on the island of Hispaniola in the Caribbean Sea, east of Cuba and Jamaica, and south of the Bahamas. It occupies the western three-eighths of the island, which it shares with the Dominican Republic Haiti is the third largest country in the Caribbean, and with an estimated population of 11.4 million, is the most populous Caribbean country. The capital and largest city is Port-au-Prince. Haiti became the Caribbean Community's (CARICOM) newest member on 2 July 2002 some four years after provisional membership had been granted.

The **Caco Insurgency** was a series of rural rebellions in Haiti during the early 20th century, notably opposing the U.S. occupation from 1915 to 1934. The Cacos were peasant militias drawn mainly from impoverished rural communities who resisted foreign military presence and the central government's attempts to consolidate control. Employing guerrilla tactics such as ambushes and hit-and-run attacks, the Cacos utilized Haiti's rugged terrain to challenge U.S. forces and their allied Haitian troops. Despite being ultimately suppressed, the insurgency became a powerful symbol of Haitian nationalism and popular resistance to foreign intervention, reflecting deeper social and political tensions between rural populations and central authorities. The legacy of the Caco insurgency highlights Haiti's enduring struggle for sovereignty and the resilience of grassroots movements against external domination.

CARICOM and COFCOR are both key regional institutions in the Caribbean CARICOM (Caribbean Community) -CARICOM is a regional organization founded in 1973 through the Treaty of Chaguaramas. It brings together 15 member states and 5 associate members in the Caribbean to promote economic integration, coordinate foreign policy, and support cooperation in various areas such as education, health, security, and culture.

Key goals of CARICOM include:

Creating a single economic space (the CARICOM Single Market and Economy – CSME)

Coordinating foreign policy among member states

Promoting human and social development

Enhancing regional resilience and security

Members include countries like Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, and Haiti (which joined in 2002).

COFCOR is one of the principal organs of CARICOM. It is made up of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of CARICOM member states. COFCOR is responsible for:

- Coordinating the foreign policies of CARICOM countries
- Establishing common positions in international forums
- Managing CARICOM's external relations with countries and organizations outside the region
- Overseeing diplomatic initiatives and foreign service training

Essentially, COFCOR operationalizes CARICOM's foreign policy and represents the region's interests on the global stage.

ГАИТИ – КАРИБ АЙМАҒЫНЫҢ МАРГИНАЛ МЕМЛЕКЕТІ: МЕМЛЕКЕТТІҢ ӘЛСІЗДІГІНІҢ ТАРИХИ ТАМЫРЛАРЫ МЕН КОНСТРУКТИВИСТІК КӨЗҚАРАСТАРЫ

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Аңдатпа. Бұл мақалада Гаитидің қазіргі саяси және экономикалық мәселелері тарихи даму жолы мен халықаралық қатынастардағы конструктивизм теориясы тұрғысынан қарастырылады. Авторлар Гаитидің Кариб бассейніндегі және жаһандық жүйедегі шеттетілген жағдайын тек материалдық жетіспеушілікпен немесе басқару кемшіліктерімен түсіндіру жеткіліксіз екенін, бұл құбылыстың әлеуметтік тұрғыда қалыптасқан түсініктер мен тарихи нарративтер арқылы пайда болғанын алға тартады. Мақалада халықаралық нормалар, отаршыл мұралар және дискурстық тәжірибелер Гаитиді ерекше және жүйеден тыс мемлекет ретінде қалыптастыруға қалай әсер еткені талданады. Гаити революциясы, тәуелсіздік алғаннан кейінгі оқшаулау және шетелдік араласулар елдің ішкі тұрақсыздығы мен экономикалық әлсіздігі жөніндегі халықаралық көзқарасты күшейтті. Конструктивистік көзқарас негізінде бұл зерттеу идеялды күштердің – ұлттық болмыс, бедел мен легитимдіктің – Гаитидің ішкі басқару жүйесі мен халықаралық имиджін қалыптастырудағы рөлін ашады. Зерттеу нәтижесі халықаралық қауымдастықтың Гаитиге деген қатынасын қайта қарауды ұсынады, тек құрылымдық реформаларды емес, сонымен бірге қалыптасқан ғаламдық нарративтерді өзгерту қажеттігін атап көрсетеді.

Тірек сөздер: конструктивистік теория, мемлекеттің нәзіктігі, Гаити, адам құқықтары мәселелері, қауіпсіздік, КАРИКОМ, Кариб Теңізінің маргинал мемлекеті, Кариб теңізі аймағы

ГАИТИ – СТРАНА МАРГИНАЛ КАРИБСКОГО БАССЕЙНА: ИСТОРИЧЕСКИЕ КОРНИ И КОНСТРУКТИВИСТСКИЕ ВЗГЛЯДЫ НА ХРУПКОСТЬ ГОСУДАРСТВА

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Аннотация. В данной статье рассматриваются современные политические и экономические проблемы Гаити через призму исторического развития и конструктивистской теории в международных отношениях. Авторы утверждают, что маргинализация Гаити в Карибском регионе и в мировой системе объясняется не только материальной бедностью или неэффективным управлением, но и социально сконструированными нормами, историческими нарративами и международной практикой, которые последовательно формировали образ Гаити как «исключения». Анализируя Гаитянскую революцию, изоляцию после обретения независимости и многочисленные иностранные интервенции, статья показывает, как эти факторы способствовали формированию устойчивого представления о Гаити как о нестабильной и экономически уязвимой стране. Используя конструктивистский подход, авторы подчеркивают значение идеальных факторов — идентичности, репутации и легитимности — в понимании как внутреннего управления страной, так и её внешнего восприятия. В заключение статья призывает к переосмыслению международного подхода к Гаити, который должен учитывать не только институциональные реформы, но и необходимость изменения укоренившихся глобальных нарративов.

Ключевые слова: конструктивистская теория, хрупкость государства, Гаити, проблемы прав человека, безопасность, КАРИКОМ, страна маргинал Карибского бассейна, Карибский регион

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