CHAPTER 4

COLONIAL PAST COMES TO THE HUNT: HAITI, A FAILED STATE?

Antonio Jesús PINTO TORTOSA*

*Professor, University of Malaga, Department of Modern and Contemporary History, Malaga, Spain
E-mail: antoniojesus.pinto@uma.es

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, my goal is to address Haiti's postcolonial history and discuss its definition as a failed state from a historical and geopolitical scope. I start my analysis in the year when the country became independent from France in order to show how the negative image that the (white) West depicted of Haiti has dominated its political evolution ever since. The reason is fear of an example that no one wished to see imitated in other colonial possessions: the emancipation of African slaves. Hence, what started as an exercise of institutional propaganda to describe Haiti's former slaves as savages has turned into a negative characterization of Haiti and its people. Popular opinion in the West regards the Haitians as lazy, corrupt, and incapable of helping themselves, always dependent on external material assistance that they cannot manage, either. The most evident consequence of such attitude is what they call "Haiti's fatigue," which can be summed up in one phrase: Haitians cannot be trusted. Adopting a critical perspective, in terms of postcolonial theory and global geopolitics, to carry out my analysis, I use primary historical sources, as well as governmental reports and scholarship on the topic.

Keywords: Haiti, postcolonialism, slavery, negritude, state failure

1. Introduction: Motivations, Goals, Methodology, and Structure

The assassination of Haitian President, Jovenel Moïse, on 7 July 2021, brought Haiti to the front of the news about international politics again. The latter was the last episode in an escalation of violence and political instability that goes back to 2015, when Michel Martélly, outgoing Haitian President at the time, called for general elections, which the new head of Haitian Tèt Kale Party (HTPK), Jovenel Moïse, won. He came from the business world, and in the campaign, he had promised to foster foreign investment. At the same time, he designed some projects to encourage eco-tourism, as well as sustainable agriculture, the three pillars on which he wished to build the country's economic take-off ("Portrait: Who is Jovenel Moïse," 2021). However, his start was not an easy one, as they invalidated the result of the elections, amidst accusations of electoral fraud and corruption (Robles, 2016). Moïse was acting President for one year, until they held elections again in Haiti, which he won once more; he started his first presidential term in 2017. Only one year later, the Petrocaribe scandal exploded: as a beneficiary of the ALBA-Petrocaribe funds, Haiti had preferential access to Venezuelan oil. The scarcity of such a resource provoked an increase in prices, as well as energy shortages within the country.

Besides, the Haitian state could turn the ALBA-Petrocaribe funds into money for investing in local infrastructures, but the money was missing. The masses took the street and accused the government of taking it for its own purposes, and of doing nothing while the Haitian people starved (Antonin, 2018, online). Political tensions added to the economic crisis in 2021: opposition to Moïse claimed that the five-year term was over, considering that, as the acting president since 2016, he had already fulfilled it. Moïse argued that the year he had spent as the acting president (2016-2017) should not have been counted within the presidential term, which had actually started in 2017, the year he was sworn in. By early 2021, the Haitian Congress and Senate broke institutional relations with Moïse, who decided to govern by decree. Moreover, he announced a referendum, aimed at letting Haitian presidents stay in office for two consecutive terms (now, the Constitution establishes a limit of two non-consecutive terms). In the middle of the institutional and political crisis, Moïse was killed. When I write these lines, in June 2024, almost three years have passed and the country has no elected president yet. Ariel Henry assumed acting President after Moïse's assassination, but he has been recently removed and substituted by a Presidential Council, which will decide about the country's future (Pinto Tortosa, 2024, online).

The reason for choosing Haiti as a case study of a failed state is the need to pay attention to the country's current development, underlining global silence around it, except for the times when chaos and violence reach limits that exceed human imagination. My goal is to address Haiti's postcolonial history and discuss its definition as a failed state, from a historical and geopolitical scope. In the methodological field, I assume the view of dependency theory, a postcolonial approach, and the perspective of critical geopolitics. The theoretical framework, together with a debate on the concept of "failed state," appears in the first section after the introduction. In the second section, I analyze the Haitian slave revolution, and the country's independence from France, in order to show how the negative image that the (white) West depicted of Haiti has dominated its political evolution ever since. The reason is fear of an example that no one wished to see imitated in other colonial possessions: the emancipation of African slaves. After that, I study Haiti's history in the 19th century, to underline the role played by the Dominican Republic, and the United States, in shaping the country as the representation of "all things black," understood as "all things which we must refuse." I pay attention to the definition of Dominican national identity, and to US demands in exchange for assistance to the Dominican Republic against "the Haitian threat." In the fourth section, I examine the foreign intervention in Haiti in the 20th century as an essential matter to understanding the international perception of the country, with special attention to the United States and the Dominican Republic, again. In the final section, I sum up and briefly discuss my conclusions.

2. Failed States: What Are They? Why Do They Fail?

Since I will use the concept of "failed state," when applied to Haiti by others, it is required that I clarify my scope on the subject. Following the arguments of the so-called critical scholars (Zapata Callejas, 2014, pp. 87-110), I am persuaded that such a controversial term needs to be confronted by current researchers on the topic. The reason is simple: born in the United States at the end of the Cold War, the category "failed state" has been traditionally used to define, from a Western perspective, states that do not adhere to the liberal democratic model (Call, 2008, pp. 1491-1507). Moreover, it aims at identifying countries that might correspond to such definition, in order to justify foreign intervention in them, either in the shape of economic and financial assistance, or as a military occupation, or both. The latter has become a frequent solution, especially after the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center. Since then, scholars and intellectuals operating for the US government started to regard the supposedly failed states as a threat to international security, which had to be stopped at once (Flórez Ruiz, 2011, pp. 193-234). In some cases, international organizations and military missions have even admitted that democracy is not the real goal of assistance towards the states that

"must be saved": instead, order and security become absolute priorities. Nevertheless, as I suggest in this research, it is time to realize that "failed states" are not a failure per se: they are nations whom the West has failed, in the sense that it has denied their people the possibility to overcome the crisis by themselves. Therefore, in the Haitian case, as in many others, alternative conceptual categories are needed: for example, the term "collapsed state," which Call suggested (2010, pp. 303-326). Likewise, international aid needs to focus more not on what it can provide these states, but on what the latter and their people actually require, in order to take off and continue development by their own means.

Considering the aforementioned elements, foreign intervention to save so-called "failed states" answers to the dynamics of the "dependency theory," defined within the third theoretical debate in the field of International Relations, in the 1980s and 1990s. Within a clear Marxist scope, the dependency theory argues that in the Postwar order (1945-present) many countries regarded as independent states in political terms, are not economically independent. Theorists linked to this school, such as Prebisch (1949, pp. 3-89) and Cardoso (Cardoso & Faletto, 1969), among others, distinguish between "core countries," "periphery countries," and "semi-periphery countries"; this is the reason why the dependency theory is also defined as the "theory of concentric circles." Periphery countries are former Western colonies in America, Africa, and Asia, whereas core countries are the main Western powers. In a process that has accelerated since 1945, but goes back to the late 18th century and early 19th century, the former have become independent states, often poor ones, with natural resources or an economic structure profitable for the latter, that is, the rich countries willing to benefit from their underdeveloped situation. What usually happens is that governments in core countries perform a wide range of political, economic, cultural, and social strategies to have exclusive access to the resources or economic production of poor countries, either for themselves or for international corporations. A very common way of economic subjection from the rich on the poor is the latter's specialization in what they call export crops: sugar, tobacco, cocoa, cotton, etc. As the poor country specializes in producing only one commodity, it becomes highly dependent on foreign assistance: firstly, because transnational companies are usually the ones who perform the exploitation and commercialization of those export crops; secondly, because local prosperity depends on high demand by the international market: unless rich countries buy those commodities, local economy will starve; finally, because extreme economic specialization makes the country dependent on foreign trade to get all the commodities it does not produce (Gunder Frank, 1967; Willis, ed. 2014, pp. 297-311).

These circumstances normally imply not only economic control from the core on the periphery, but also the latter's political subjection to the former: more often than not, core countries and international corporations demand that local governments do not threaten foreign business, and in many cases, they even interfere in poor countries' home policy to guarantee that new governments will never harm their profit (Pérez, 1986). In some instances, as I will describe in Haiti, that implies controlling and often invading poor countries apparently to finish chaos and support a new government that restores order. Nevertheless, what actually happens is that foreign investors, and normally foreign troops, stay in the country occupied to back a "puppet government" whose home policy takes care of not damaging foreign investors, and whose foreign policy actually copies that of the occupying (or, broadly speaking, dominating) country. Unluckily for local interest, puppet governments' strength lasts as long as foreign mediation in the country: when intervention finishes, those governments fall and a power vacuum happens. On the one hand, years of political mediation, and in some cases military occupation, leave the poor country without local alternatives to elect a new government; on the other hand, elites who take power once invaders are gone change foreign oligarchy for a local one, generating popular discontent that is commonly expressed through mass demonstrations, protests, and violent episodes that the new government hardly controls. Hence, after a process that has taken years, even decades, international politics have given birth to another failed state, though the causes for its failure must be looked for outside the country, as well as inside it.

Defense of the rights of the states whom they call "failed" leads to postcolonial theory, too. More than ever, it is required that political leaders, academics, and common citizens claim the right of these countries to full independence, and also the right not to be regarded as underaged countries that need external supervision. Postcolonial approaches to the analysis of failed states imply a critical attitude towards a neocolonial order that wishes to justify the exploitation of these regions. The reason that rich countries give is their inability to govern themselves. It hides the actual explanation for rich states' greed to control poor states: there is a direct link between the former's strength and how much countries depend on them. Therefore, keeping poor countries poor, and failed states failed, makes superpowers more influential, as they defend their "mission" to control and save the others. Franz Fanon and Edward Said argued that domination dialectics, especially in the cultural field, have usually permeated the local population: imitating the dominator's culture has become the best example of how colonization has different shapes (Fanon, 1967; Said, 1978). In the end, Fanon continued in *Wretched of the Earth* (1961), these are ways of domination that imply violence, physical or

not, against "the other." Hence, he argued, the wretched of the earth, that is, the poor, bound to become citizens of failed states, need to respond to violence with violence: postcolonial emancipatory violence.

To conclude this section, I add a critical geopolitical approach to the analysis of failed states in general, and of Haiti in particular. It implies that classic and contemporary geopolitics have shaped our view of the countries referred to. Ours is a Western perspective of failed states that regards them as "bizarre" examples of state organization: the mere definition of them as "failed" means a very precise view of what is a rightful, consolidated state, say, one which looks like ourselves, on the one hand; and, on the other hand, of what a failed state is: either one that does not represent democratic, Western values at all, or one that tries to imitate them, but unsuccessfully. Apart from reflecting a Western mentality that draws an imaginary "security frontier" that keeps "us" at this side of the border, safe, and "them," at the other side of the border, in danger, this approach ignores cultural peculiarity and personality of those regions (Kirsch, 2014, pp. 542-555; Tuathail, 1996). By ignoring their exclusive nature, we pay no attention to their needs and concerns when trying to assist them, providing them the help that we think they need, without actually asking them what they demand. It is not difficult to foresee that the aid provided to people without asking about their needs would be ineffective.

3. From Revolution to Independence, 1791-1804

On the night of August 23, 1791, African slaves from the North Province of Saint-Domingue, the French colony known at the time as *la perle des Antilles*, rebelled against the white colonial administration and against the plantation economy. The Haitian Revolution was the consequence of the combination of two factors. On the one hand, news from the storming of the Bastille had reached the colony in September 1789. Regardless of the efforts that the colonial elite and French politicians made to prevent African slaves in the French Caribbean from knowing about events in the metropolis, they ended up knowing (Deive, 2007, p. 127; Linebaugh & Rediker, 2007, p. 4). The conservative attitude of the French bourgeoisie that had supported and led the revolution is easy to explain: when they waved the flag of liberty, fraternity, and equality, they were only thinking about liberal revolution, aimed at destroying the privileges of aristocracy and clergy, creating the context for social mobility. However, most bourgeois who supported such social change had made a fortune either from the slave trade or Caribbean sugar plantations (or both). Therefore, they knew that revolutionary contagion to the colonies would bring the end of the established order that had made them rich. That is why they denied civil rights to the colored people of the Caribbean.

The danger that their attitude implied, given the impossibility of stopping revolutionary ideas from crossing the Atlantic Ocean, was underlined by the Marquis of Mirabeau, spokesman at the French National Assembly, who told his colleagues, as soon as the summer of 1789: "citoyens des Antilles, vous habitez sous le Vesuve" (Dabeaunneau, 1799, p. 12).[1]

On the other hand, though the French Revolution triggered the slave uprising in Saint-Domingue, the event had deeper roots, which one must search back to the 18th century, when the plantation economy started there, after recognition of French sovereignty over the Western side of Hispaniola in the peace Treaty of Ryswick (1697). The hilly landscape of Saint-Domingue, later Haiti (a Taino word that means "with mountains"), made it difficult for colonists to grow anything but such tropical commodities as coffee, and especially sugar. The birth of sugar plantations in the territory happened at the same time that sugar demand grew in the global market: that is why many French bourgeois, who looked for a fast and profitable business, invested their money in it. In fact, Saint-Domingue's colonial elite, which they called at the time *grands blancs*, was made of colonial authorities, plus (mostly absentee) planters. In order to meet the growing sugar demand, planters had two choices: either they used a free labor force, combined with creole slaves, born within the plantations from African parents, or they increased slave imports from Africa. The latter was the commoner choice, and African slaves were made to work and live under miserable conditions until they died, of stagnation, exhaustion, victims of work accidents, or all of them, being then replaced by new slaves (Patterson, 2000, pp. 33-41). By 1790, there were around 450,000 slaves in Saint-Domingue, and only 30,000 whites (Grafenstein & Muñoz, 2011, pp. 27-28). Hence, what Saint-Domingue's slaves did in the summer of 1791 was to take advantage of the international context, and to adopt the principles for which the French masses fought, adapting them to their own needs and circumstances, in an exercise of what Ada Ferrer defined as "black sovereignty" (Ferrer, 2014).

Consequently, the first reason to distrust Saint-Domingue in the international scenario was that it represented the example that no one, especially Great Britain, Spain, the United States, and France itself, wished to spread to other colonial possessions: a slave uprising, which would ruin world colonial plantations and free market economy. Nick Nesbitt has explained that, in the sense that the slave rebels in Saint-Domingue wished to take enlightened and French revolutionary principles to the extreme, without restrictions, they incarnated the "real" revolution, or as he calls it, the "radical enlightenment" (Nesbitt, 2008). The revolution lasted thirteen years, during which the former slaves fought against colonial order, benefitting from

1 "Citizens of the Antilles, you live at the foot of the Vesuvius." Translated by the author.

foreign interests in the territory to get external support and fulfill their final goal: the abolition of slavery and the independence of Haiti, which they achieved on January 1, 1804, under the lead of Jean-Jacques Dessalines. For thirteen years, too, the aforementioned foreign powers participated in the revolution, and in the subsequent war: in the French case, to recover control of its own colony; in the British, North American, and Spanish case, to take advantage of the chaos in Saint-Domingue and seize that part of Hispaniola, which had once belonged to the Spanish crown, too (Ott, 1973). It was only unlucky that the main leader of the slave rebels, Toussaint Louverture, did not live to see the triumph of the revolution: betrayed by his own people, the French army seized him by late 1803, taking him to the Fort-de-Joux prison, in the Franco-Swiss border, where he died a few weeks later (Girard, 2011, pp. 224-247).

The international interest that was focused on defeating the rebels, and/or on taking control of the colony, making great efforts to prevent the revolutionary wave from spreading to other colonies during the Haitian war of independence (1791-1804) transformed in January 1804. The situation that everyone in the (white) West had feared most, the birth of the first black independent republic in world history, had just happened. The new strategy consisted of isolating Haiti in terms of international connections, so the country could count on no one's support, and basically starved to death. Refusal to trade with Haiti was commonplace in the first years after independence, as was Western countries' opposition to Haiti's official recognition, together with France's and Spain's plans to regain control of that side of Hispaniola. In a moment when illiteracy rates were high, and there was no public opinion as such in most of the Western world, the only way to persuade everyone that Haiti must be isolated, if not destroyed, was to underline the allegedly "extravagant" behavior of Haitian political elite. For example, they made fun of Jean-Jacques Dessalines when he proclaimed himself Haitian Emperor in 1804, under the name Jacques 1st: they saw Dessalines as an obscene imitator of Napoleon Bonaparte, a historical character that at the time had put Europe under threat, but with whom they shared a common goal, Haiti's destruction (Geggus, 2002, p. 199). Haitian elite answered back to such attitudes by reinforcing its position; for instance, the 1805 Haitian Constitution established that all Haitian residents were "black," and that all foreigners were "white." Thus, Dessalines and his collaborators turned negritude, the reason given by the West to distrust Haiti, into Haiti's major strength, applying racial discrimination the other way around. In addition, according to the Constitution whites could have no properties in Haiti (Trouillot, 1990, pp. 59-82).

Despite Haitian attempts to reinforce the state against foreign attacks, the latter continued in the following years. One of the most repeated arguments insisted on Haiti's doomed fate

as a nation: according to Western diplomats, it would always be a failed state, as it had been born out of violence, it exercised violence against its own citizens, and against foreigners, and it would one day be eaten up by that same violence. In this sense, the plot that had Dessalines killed in 1806 was, as far as they knew, the best example of Haiti's supposedly cursed fate.[2] His own collaborators, namely Alexandre Pétion, Jean-Pierre Boyer, André Rigaud, Bruno Blanchet, and Henri Christophe, organized the conspiracy, which started a civil war that split Haiti into two independent states: to the South, Alexandre Pétion led a so-called "mulatto" republic of former free-colored people, owners of plots of land which they administered according to liberal principles, with capital city in Port-au-Prince; to the North, Henri Christophe championed the cause of the so-called "blacks," and organised a regime based on the distribution of lands among the poor, mostly former slaves, around the city of Le Cap. I have written down "mulatto" and "black" between quotation marks because they are not two concepts that reflect Haiti's ethnic reality: as Michel-Rolph Trouillot pointed out, most Haitian people come from African slaves, and, in this sense, they are all black. One could think that the term "mulatto" refers to the sons of former landowners and slave women; yet, frequent as this reality was, "mulattoes" were a minority in a territory that had 450,000 slaves around 1790. Therefore, the concept is a cultural construction to refer to people of African ancestry who had prospered, due to different reasons, and had "whitened" their lifestyle, meaning that they had adopted habits similar to those of the "whites," again a term that can be translated as "foreign elites" (Fanon, 1967; Trouillot, 1990, pp. 59-82).

A good example of Haiti's depiction as a corrupt, failed state, which confronted Western "natural" order of things, happened when Henri Christophe proclaimed himself king in the North in 1811. Henri 1st's coronation came at the same time that the Spanish Cortes de Cádiz debated about slavery in the Americas,[3] and it provoked unrest in Puerto Rico, where the authorities warned: "There are many slaves in the island who have learned from events in Santo Domingo, I mean the catastrophe in the Guarico; […] and the coronation in Haiti of the black man Christophe, who has white servants, could have fatal consequences in the

2 The National Archives (TNA), Colonial Office (CO) 137/117/4, pp. 14-21. Feroe's letter describing the reasons for Dessalines' assassination. Jérémie, 20 October 1806.

3 In the first weeks of 1808 French troops invaded Spain, taking king Fernando 7th to exile in Bayonne, and starting the Peninsular War (1808-1814). In order to fill the power vacuum left by the exiled king, liberal deputies from all Spanish territories, in Europe and overseas, inaugurated the Spanish Cortes in September 1810 in the city of Cádiz, one of the places still not occupied by the French. Their goal was to provide the country with a Constitution inspired by liberal principles; the abolition of slavery was among the aspects that they debated during the Cortes sessions.

Antilles."[4] Not only does the testimony tell how slaves in American plantations had heard about Henri 1st's coronation and wished to imitate the example of Haiti's former slaves, but it also shows the unrest among colonial powers because Christophe incarnated the greatest glory ever achieved by a black person. A complex made-up mythology surrounded him; for instance, rumors said that in 1812 he had decreed the freedom of all slaves in the Americas (Childs, 2006, p. 163). Initially, Western travelers made fun of Henri 1st and his attempts to imitate Western royal courts (Moya Pons, 1985, pp. 248-250). Yet Western contempt and amusement for Christophe turned into fear, as the man indeed had white servants, thus representing, together with the members of his government, "the world turned upside down." The West calmed down and breathed when a popular uprising finished Henri 1st's reign, and he committed suicide, but the annexation of the North by the new southern president, Jean-Pierre Boyer, and Boyer's invasion of Santo Domingo in 1822, starting a twenty-two-year domination over the whole island awoke Western fear of the black again. Likewise, it resurrected the idea that Haiti was a failed state, no matter how many victories it achieved in the following years (Trouillot, ed. 2015).

4. The Alien Part in the Play of Haiti's History: the Controverted 19th Century

Haiti's administration of Santo Domingo (1822-1844), which turned the country into the owner of the island, is the departure point to highlight a necessary element for its characterization as a failed state: fear. According to the Peloponnesian dilemma, also known as Thucydides' trap, most wars start because of fear (Thucydides, ed. 1952, pp. 35-48), as do most international tensions. When it comes to Haiti's history, the territory that best exemplifies what Caribbean historiography has defined as Haitian syndrome», or "Haiti's rumor," is Santo Domingo, current Dominican Republic (Howard, 2001; González-Ripoll et al., 2004). As I have already pointed out, Hispaniola was a Spanish possession until the peace Treaty of Ryswick, in 1697, which gave France official control over the Western side of the island, which it had occupied since the early 17th century. The French had been encouraged by Spanish governor Antonio de Osorio's order to move the inhabitants of the West to the East, accusing them of smuggling commodities to and from Dutch merchants operating in the area, which harmed the Spanish crown's finances. When the so-called *Devastaciones de*

4 Archivo Histórico Nacional (AHN), box (b.) 1071, expedient (e.) 1, document (doc.) 4. Report by Puerto Rico's governor, Salvador Melendez Bruna, to the Secretary of State and Justice. San Juan, 30 January 1812: "Hay muchos esclavos en la Ysla que están maestrados en la de Santo Domingo en la catástfofe del Guarico; […] y es un mal de mucha trascendencia en las Antillas haber visto erigirse rey de Haytí (sic) al negro Cristóbal con servidumbre blanca». Translated by the author. The word "Guarico" is the name given to the city of Le Cap, in Haiti's North Province.

Osorio (1605-1606) happened, French privateers operating in Tortuga Island, to the North West of Hispaniola, moved to the lands just abandoned by the Spaniards, where they hunted cattle to smoke the meat in tents, *boucans*, for consuming and exporting it later (Exquemelin, ed. 2017).

French buccaneers decided to settle permanently in Hispaniola's Western hemisphere, and they aimed at expanding their area of control to the East, thus entering a conflict with the Dominican Spaniards, who now claimed that France had illegally taken that territory from Spain. Franco-Hispanic confrontations around the borderline, which shifted constantly for one century, were frequent until the Treaty of Nijmegen in 1678 drew the frontier between both sides along the Rebouc River. Two decades later, the Treaty of Ryswick gave birth to Saint-Domingue. Conflicts between the East and the West did not stop, though, as they reflected territorial rivalry between both nations in Europe (Nolan, 2008; Kuethe & Andrien, 2014; Ponce Vázquez, 2014, pp. 300-318). Moreover, Santo Domingo was Spain's first colonial settlement in the Americas, so its settlers saw themselves as defenders of Spain's interests and values in the continent, especially in Spain's long struggle against France, which went back to the 16th century. Initially, Santo Domingo's reason for distrusting Saint-Domingue was territorial: the Western side of the island represented Spain's main enemy in international politics, so Hispanic Dominican people had the obligation to defend their territory against potential future attacks by French "usurpers." When the French Revolution exploded on 14 July 1789, the Spanish authorities reacted quickly, creating a *cordon sanitaire* along the frontier with France, in order to prevent revolutionary ideas and leaders from penetrating Spanish territory (Anes, 1981, pp. 186). Santo Domingo would play a special role in the contention of the revolution, as it shared a border with Saint-Domingue. The colony's governor, Joaquín García, received the crown's instructions to stay "perfectly neutral" against events in the Western side of the island, taking all the necessary steps to protect Santo Domingo's frontier.[5]

Consequently, Hispanic Dominicans added a new element to territorial rivalry against France: ideological rivalry. France incarnated revolution, republicanism, struggle against the *ancien régime*, abolition of privileges, and attacks against Catholicism, that is, it rejected everything that Spain represented. Tensions between both colonies would escalate even more two years later: when Saint-Domingue's slaves rebelled against the white elite, threatening the plantation economy and colonial order there, a third and last element added to the confrontation between that territory and Santo Domingo: race. From the Hispanic Dominican

5 Archivo General de Simancas (AGS), Secretaría del Despacho de Guerra (SGU), b. 6846, e. 79, d. 376. The crown's instructions to governor Joaquín García. San Lorenzo de El Escorial, 23 November 1791.

scope, not only was Saint-Domingue a French possession that had always threatened to take control of the East, but now it was also a revolutionary cell in the Caribbean, where slaves had taken weapons against their masters, setting a precedent that could not spread to other colonies with African slaves. In the case of the Spanish Caribbean, the greatest fear of revolutionary contagion happened in Cuba, which was also starting to develop a plantation economy based on sugarcane fields, worked by African slave labor. Nevertheless, Santo Domingo's position was even more dangerous: maybe African people were not that relevant there, but the fact that it shared a border with Saint-Domingue made Hispanic Dominican people fear a black invasion. The problem is that the inhabitants of the East were not that different from Saint-Domingue's former slaves.

In fact, according to the population figures that José Luciano Franco provided, there were 35,000 whites, 38,000 free-colored people, and 30,000 slaves in Santo Domingo by the late 18th century (Franco, 1971, p. 72; Nessler, 2016, p. 12). In the 17th century, Spanish settlers in Santo Domingo had started producing sugar with African slaves, but the product's demand in the global market was still very low, so Dominican first experiments of sugar plantations stopped abruptly (Cassá & Rodríguez Morel, 1993, pp. 101-131). More or less at the same time, Peninsular migration to Santo Domingo decayed, as Spaniards preferred to go to the mainland, especially current Mexico and Peru, looking for large plots of land, and for the promise of wealth in the exploitation of gold and silver mines. Hence, in order to keep Santo Domingo's population figures high, miscegenation between the whites and the colored people, often in the shape of sexual abuse of the former against the latter, became frequent. The result was a majority of the population of mixed-race, who needed to be incorporated into the army and the colony's administration as time went by, given the lack of Peninsular potential settlers in the territory. Appointing free-colored people to relevant colonial positions was controverted, especially after the start of Saint-Domingue's slave revolution, which apparently showed the world what "the blacks" were capable of. The Spanish crown, and its colonial administrators, found a curious solution in the redefinition of the ethnic identity of Santo Domingo's inhabitants. From that moment on, the latter would all be integrated under the same identity: Dominican Spaniards. Being a Dominican Spaniard meant, basically, not being like the slave rebels from the West, the only ones who in the future would be defined as "black." Therefore, Dominican Spaniards could not be seen as black, regardless of their skin color, and they needed to erase any trace of African ancestry from their memory, as well as from any official document (Moya Pons, 2003, pp. 133-157).

Dominican Spaniards played a crucial role in the negative depiction of Saint-Domingue, later Haiti, as a failed colony first, and as a doomed country later. Nevertheless, disdain for the Western neighbors hid Santo Domingo's actual fear of a black invasion. A fear that Dominican Spaniards saw materialized on three occasions: in 1801, when Toussaint Louverture occupied Santo Domingo for one year, until the French expedition commanded by General Victor-Emmanuel Leclerc threw him out of the territory; in 1805, when Emperor Jacques 1st crossed the Haitian-Dominican border and ransacked the villages next to it, leaving tens of corpses behind; and in 1822, when Jean-Pierre Boyer saw the independence of Spanish Haiti, proclaimed by José Núñez de Cáceres, as an occasion to invade the new-born weak country (Rodríguez Demorizi, 1955). At this point, I find it necessary to highlight the fact that not all Dominican Spaniards shared the same feeling towards Haiti: as described at the beginning of this section, the frontier between the Western and the eastern hemispheres of Hispaniola had shifted a lot for one century, so people in villages by the borderline, who in the 19th century belonged to different countries, had once lived under the same flag. Collaboration between them was frequent, as they found themselves closer to their neighbors at the other side than to faraway colonial, or state, administrations. That is why, for example, the new concept of "Dominican Spaniard" did not penetrate all the people on the Dominican side equally; and that is also the reason why there is a controversy about the supposedly welcoming attitude of the Dominican people by the frontier to Boyer's expedition (Rodríguez Demorizi, 1955; Pinto Tortosa, 2015, pp. 41-60).

Haitian domination over Santo Domingo reinforced Dominican hatred towards Haiti: when people in the East took advantage of Haiti's internal crisis in 1843 to proclaim the independence of the Dominican Republic on 28 February 1844, Dominican politicians and intellectuals devoted their efforts to defend their people, in the military and in the ideological field, against the West. At the same time that Dominican identity insisted on the need to highlight the total lack of African blood in the people from the East, which was scientifically impossible, but politically required, Dominican governors sought international alliances that protected the country against the prospect of future Haitian invasions. Proof that foreign assistance was urgent came soon: in 1848 Haitian president Faustin Soulouque tried to invade the Dominican Republic but failed. Right after Soulouque's attempt, Dominicans asked for Great Britain's mediation between themselves and Haiti: in exchange for preferential access to the Samana Bay (1850), the British negotiated a bilateral peace in the island between 1851 and 1855 (Moya Pons, 1991, pp. 124-154). Even more interesting was the support of the US, whom the Dominican Republic saw as the strongest ally in the region against Haiti. The US

was also ready to help the Dominicans against the Haitian threat, but there was one major problem: US politicians knew that a big proportion of Dominican people had African ancestry, at a moment when the North American neighbor was still a slave-owning country.

In order to make possible US official support to the Dominican Republic, also in exchange for privileged access to the Samana Bay, the government in Washington demanded something from the Dominicans: they could never admit to having African blood. The argument appeared in the Evening Post on September 2, 1854:

> It is pretended, we know, by those who are most directly interested in securing an American protectorate for the Dominican government, that the revolters (sic), and their rulers are mostly white people; but that is an error too easily exploded to prevail long. We doubt if any unprejudiced witness can be produced who will testify that there are five hundred whites in all Dominica (sic). In the public service there is not a single White man or an individual who would have been recognised as a citizen under the rules laid down by Messrs. Clayton and Webster during their respective administrations of the State Department ("Foreign Policy in St. Domingo," 1854).

As I have said, the US arguments are crucial to understanding the international roots of Haiti's isolation and oblivion in the international scenario. Likewise, it works as an introduction to the next section, in which I explore the consolidation of Haiti's image as a failed state, which has been made possible, among other factors, by the exploitation of Haitian resources by countries that have traditionally pretended to help Haiti, namely the United States.

5. Haiti: a Failed State, or a State Failed? The 20th Century

In the title of the section, I speculate on the need to change the Western perspective about Haiti, in order to consider it not as a failed state, but as a state that everyone has failed throughout history, compromising its chances of becoming a fully independent nation. In order to understand the country's reality, it is essential to pay attention to foreign intervention in its territory, which started in the first years of the 20th century. In 1915, recently elected president Guillaume Sam was overthrown by a rebellion of the people of Port-au-Prince. Sam had presented himself as the defender of the interests of the "black masses," that is, Haitian poor people. From the start, his administration did not get the support of the "mulatto" elite in Port-au-Prince, ready to back another president who preserved and protected their businesses, as well as their socially privileged situation. Fearing an uprising by them, and trying to keep them loyal to him, Sam took the unlucky decision to kidnap young boys and girls from the

mulatto families in Port-au-Prince, at the same time that he arrested and ordered the execution of well-known mulatto leaders. When the rebellion started, in September 1915, he fled to the French embassy, but the rebels broke into the building, seized him, and beat him to death in the street, ripping his body into parts (Girard, 2010, pp. 81-96).

For two weeks, the country was in chaos, and the US, led by Woodrow Wilson, decided to occupy it. The alleged reason for the military occupation was that Haiti, in its condition as a clearly failed state, was a threat to the safety of the Caribbean region. But the actual reason that made Wilson take that decision was that, in the context of the First World War, the US was concerned about the leading role that German merchants had been playing in the country for decades. After the independence, but especially at the beginning of the 20th century, Haiti had oriented its economy towards export crops, especially coffee: on the one hand, merchants were needed to carry Haitian coffee to the international market; on the other hand, the same merchants were necessary to provide the country with the basic commodities its people required, as Haiti was not economically self-sufficient (Trouillot, 1990, pp. 59-82). In the middle of the Great War, in which the US was not still involved, Wilson and his advisors were terrified by the prospect that German merchants operating in Haiti, as well as in the Dominican Republic, enabled the establishment of a German military base in Hispaniola, next to the North American coast. So, the armed expedition in 1915 was not motivated at all by concern about Haiti and the safety of the Caribbean, but by the US' own safety. The best proof that the US occupation of Haiti was part of a broader plan to take control of the whole Caribbean region, especially of Hispaniola, came one year later, when Wilson also ordered the invasion of the Dominican Republic (Nicholls, ed. 1996, pp. 142-164).

Whereas the North American administration stayed in Dominican territory only for six years, between 1916 and 1924, it lasted up to 19 years in Haiti, covering the 1915-1934 period, until Franklin D. Roosevelt declared it finished in the context of the Great Depression. For the Dominicans, US intervention meant the fostering of a plantation economy, based on sugar and bananas, among other commodities, which made it possible for the country's take-off. Unluckily, in the Haitian case the military occupation by the North American neighbor had three major consequences: firstly, convinced that the Haitians, as subjects to a failed state, were incapable of providing for their own living, US investors and companies promoted industrial activity, as well as the building of new infrastructures, mainly exploited by North American hands that took the profit back to Washington. Therefore, when US troops left Haiti, the country had no instruments to promote grassroots development and became even more dependent on foreign help, which only underlined Haiti's supposed condition as a failed

nation (Gunder Frank, 1967). Secondly, the US occupation triggered the "race question" in Haiti, as US investors, administrators, and workers had brought their racial prejudices with them. When they departed, the identity gap between "black" and "mulatto," which again was completely artificial, widened. Right at the beginning of the US presence in the territory, Péralte had led the *Cacos* rebellion (1918-1920), which must be interpreted as a "black" opposition movement to the invaders, and to their puppet man, Haitian president Dartiguenave (Girard, 2010, pp. 81-96). In that context, the *Noiriste* movement was born, as a demand for the rights of the black poor people of Haiti (Trouillot, 1990, pp. 109-136).

Thirdly, as a consequence of the different economic roles that the US played in the Dominican and Haitian territories, the departure of foreign troops shifted the former balance of power on the island: up until then, Haiti had been stronger and richer than its eastern neighbor, who had always regarded it as dangerous. But the country's absolute economic backwardness since 1934 left it at the mercy of the others. In the Dominican case, a new trend started, which intensified under François and Jean-Claude Duvalier: The Dominican administration was happy to provide Haiti with all the commodities and the basic products that it required, but exchanges between the countries would be unbalanced. To make up for Dominican economic assistance, Haiti compromised to send the East Haitian cheap labor, meant to work in sugar and banana plantations next to the frontier, in unfree conditions (Ceara Hatton, Marsteintredet & Sorlye Yri, 2014, pp. 23-45; Pinto Tortosa, 2022, online). In years to come, Dominican authorities would exploit traditional popular mistrust against Haitians to warn about a supposed "silent invasion" from the West. From the perspective of certain governments, Rafael Trujillo's dictatorship as an example, justified the slaughter of Haitians in the Dominican frontier, known as the Parsley Massacre, in October 1937 (Pinto Tortosa, 2020, pp. 131-155).

Paradoxically, during the Duvalier era, first under Papa Doc, François Duvalier (1957-1971), and later under Baby Doc, Jean-Claude Duvalier (1971-1986), Haiti's image as a failed state faded out. Only in the first year of François Duvalier's administration did the US, sponsored by President John F. Kennedy, plot to overthrow him and provide a transition to democracy in the country (Abbott, 1991, pp. 108-111).[6] Kennedy's plan must be framed within his "New Frontier" strategy to defend democracy and stability in the American continent. Yet, his assassination in Dallas on 22 November 1963 brought Lyndon B. Johnson to power, and later Richard Nixon, whose strategy in international relations was inspired by a very simple

6 National Archives and Record Administration (NARA), Interagency Security Classification Appeals Panel (ISCAP), E.O. 13256, Section 5.3(b)(3). 'Haitians Who Might Contribute Effectively to a Post-Duvalier Regime'. Annex. Summary reports on referenced individuals. 1962-1963

realist principle: Haiti, regardless of the nature of its regime, was a potential ally against communism, in the Cold War context. Such a role was especially relevant after the triumph of the Cuban revolution (1959), which threatened to spread "the communist ghost" in America. In other words, Duvalier's dictatorship violated human rights via the persecution, arrest, and torture of supposed dissidents by the feared *tontons macoûtes*, Duvalier's personal guard, and political police. But the US turned its back on these events and went with the saying: "my enemy's enemy is my friend" (Trouillot, 1990, pp. 163-185).

Besides, under the Duvaliers, Haiti's economic dependence on foreign help, namely from the US, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank (WB), grew. In exchange for such economic assistance, François Duvalier became more tolerant toward the Haitian mulatto elite. The entrance of US capitals to invest in the country turned the said elite friendlier towards the dictator, too. When Papa Doc died, Jean-Claude Duvalier devoted his efforts to perform what he called an "economic revolution" in the country, which translated into growing dependence on external financial assistance. Baby Doc tried to reduce the country's subjection to foreign money by fostering its energetic self-sufficiency, but even electricity was produced via subcontracts with US companies that increased Haiti's external debt. The effects of such economic underdevelopment were only felt by the Haitian masses, who experienced the growth in prices of commodities, as a consequence of inflation, economic recession, etc. All this happened at a moment when the working class had no tools for organizing and presenting its demands, as trade unions and workers' organizations had been prohibited and destroyed by both Duvaliers. Meanwhile, Baby Doc and his government were ever richer. However, the dramatic circumstances of the country did not inspire any external action to restore democracy and finish a dictatorship that only favored the elite. It was only in the late 1980s, when the end of the Cold War approached, and Jean-Claude Duvalier became an uncomfortable friend to the US, that international pressure made him resign and flee the country in 1986 (Trouillot, 1990, pp. 186-216).

The coming of democracy to Haiti did not bring the end of its depiction as a failed state, among other reasons because the main representative of the Haitian "democratic wave," Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was controversial in the sense that he claimed full independence for his country. To begin, the US government financed the campaign of his opponents in 1990, as President George Bush knew that Aristide would lose the ties that bound Haiti to its northern neighbor (Hallward, 2007, pp. 1-38). In the next fifteen years different foreign actors, led by the US, kept a close eye on Aristide's government and did whatever they could to limit its action. It was US support that allowed for Raoul Cédras' coup to succeed in 1991 and

start a three-year dictatorship in the country, in order to stop Aristide's project to suppress Haiti's external debt. At that moment, Aristide's political program was seen as a catastrophe for Haiti, whose failure, they pretended, would be graver if it tried to achieve full economic independence. When Aristide returned in 1994, surprisingly sponsored by the US, who now felt remorse about backing Cédras' dictatorship, Washington made him compromise to limited economic reforms if he wanted his country to benefit from US investment. That was the price to help the country leave behind its condition as a failed state, that the US again sustained. Finally, in 2004 international and media pressure against Aristide ended up with the plot that overthrew him, reinforcing the country's dependence on others (Hallward, 2007, pp. 39-174; Girard, 2010, pp. 207-215).

Once Aristide was made to leave the country, and after almost two years of provisional government and political unrest, René Préval, President in the years 1996-2001, was reelected. Préval is believed to have inaugurated a period of stability and economic growth (Girard, 2010, pp. 207-2015). Among other reasons for explaining the "new hope" that he seemed to represent, was his disposition to accept the IMF's, the WB's, and other foreign investors' conditions to get financial help from the outside. Considering the country's need for money, Préval's government implemented austerity measures known as Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs), linked to the neoliberal economic model defined by the Chicago School of Economics (Willis, ed. 2014, pp. 297-311; Palda, 2016). Nevertheless, peace would not last long, as two circumstances destroyed the President's plan to foster Haiti's take-off: firstly, the 2008 global economic recession had a dramatic impact on Haiti, one of the poorest countries in the global South, and the masses, who had supported Préval, demonstrated to demand fair prices and an improvement of their condition; they even stormed the Presidential palace ("Haitian president calls for calm," 2008). Secondly, on January 12, 2010, the country suffered a terrible earthquake that severely harmed its infrastructures and left 310,000 corpses, 350,000 injured, and 1,500,000 homeless people behind (Kolbe, 2010, pp. 281-297). The earthquake annihilated the chance to carry out Préval's economic program, and Haiti fell to position 177 in the Human Development Index (HDI) ranking for 2010 (it fell down twenty positions; Índice de Desarrollo Humano. Datosmacro.com, *Expansión*, 2010, online). One year later, it was in position 157 (Índice de Desarrollo Humano. Datosmacro.com, *Expansión*, 2011, online).

The earthquake fostered social inequality within the country. International aid came through transnational organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that prioritized security and weapons, most from the US, over humanitarian assistance. Likewise,

the latter usually came through foreign companies and NGOs under the control of Haitian elites, so most Haitian people never saw the effects of such international assistance, nor did the government have access to those funds, in order to orient them toward grassroots development projects. Thus, Western international organizations and governments again started to develop the conviction that trying to help Haiti was useless: not only were the Haitians incapable of managing their own fate, or foreign financial assistance, but they also seemed to be cursed by destiny. This feeling is what P. Girard defined as "Haiti's fatigue" (Girard, 2010, pp. 207-215). In the end, the 2010 earthquake, together with subsequent humanitarian crises, such as the ones provoked by the 2016 and 2023 hurricanes, or the 2021 earthquake, have given birth to a new elite of Haitian (and foreign) business people, who have benefitted from these catastrophes participating in the reconstruction of the country. Haitian masses, on the other hand, have become poorer, to the point that some scholars talk about a transition from poverty to misery (Hallward, 2007, pp. 317-344). To prove this, according to the 2024 HDI ranking, Haiti is in position 158 (Human Development Index, Human Development Reports, *United Nations*, 2024, online). In this context, Haitians have developed tools for self-management and mutual support, which I will analyze in the next section.

6. Conclusion: Current Haiti, or How the Worst is Always Possible

As mentioned in the introduction, almost three years have passed since Moyse's assassination and Haiti's internal situation seems almost impossible to solve. In the years between 2021 and 2023, international media and governments, namely the US, expressed their concern about Haiti's future. Yet, none of them seemed ready to play an active role in the country's resurrection; in fact, in July 2023, rumors about a potential US armed intervention "to restore peace" again, with all the historical and moral implications that such interventions have had, started to circulate. Meanwhile, an internal debate happened within the Haitian political elite around a crucial question: was Ariel Henry, acting Haitian President, the country's rightful ruler? The circumstances in which he became President are controverted: Moïse appointed him Prime Minister in the place of Claude Joseph, a few days before his assassination. When Moïse was killed, Henry had not been sworn in yet, and his opponents argued that his appointment had no effect. Surrounded by intrigue and critical voices, Henry resolved not to call for general elections, stating that the country's internal situation was too unsafe to carry out the process (Pinto Tortosa, 2024, online).

Henry's unpopular image among the Haitian masses fostered protests and demonstrations against him, which favored a violent atmosphere in which gangs linked to organized crime operated freely. The US, a country with a long tradition of intervention in Haitian affairs,

has done nothing to pacify Haitian civic society and favor the celebration of new elections. Maybe Henry's past history as a member of *Convergence Démocratique*, an opposition force to Aristide with US backing, helps understand the wait-and-see approach of the North American neighbor. As time went by, though, levels of violence increased and gangs actually seized control of key sectors of the country. One of the most relevant gangs is "G9," led by Jimmy Chérizier, "Barbecue." Chief of police under Moïse, and suspected of leading some kind of "personal guard" for the President (Mirkinson & Donnelly, 2024, online), Chérizier lost Moïse's favor, was thrown out of the police force in 2019, and created his own criminal gang. Initially, he confronted Moïse, but after the latter was killed, he claimed to be the only defender of Moïse's memory and legacy (Olmo, 2021, online). Chérizier and his gang took control of the police station in Port-au-Prince and the airport by early March 2024, during President Henry's visit to Kenia, to ask for military support against Haitian organized crime. When Henry came back from Nairobi, his plane was not allowed to land back in Haiti (Pinto Tortosa, 2024, online).

On March 11, 2024, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) called for an urgent meeting in Jamaica. Representatives from the US, France, Canada, and Brazil attended and decided to ask for Henry's resignation, which happened on March 12. A Presidential Council was appointed right after, and it will be responsible for governing Haiti until circumstances allow for the celebration of general elections. At the same time, Antony Blinken, US Secretary of State, announced a 100-million-dollar loan for the creation of a multi-national force, and an additional 33-million-dollar loan for humanitarian help. It seems that Haiti's internal peace is around the corner, but considering the country's recent past it is difficult to be optimistic: neither leaders of criminal gangs, as Chérizier, nor a majority of Haitian people admit a government appointed by foreign agents: all of them claim for general elections, so the newly chosen government reflects the people's will. Besides, most Haitians see the Presidential Council as another example of foreign intervention that opens the door to private external businesses, greedy for profit, and not that much concerned about Haiti's economic restoration (Pinto Tortosa, 2024, online). In the present circumstances, Haitian people have oriented their efforts towards self-management, organizing in small cooperative communities aimed at encouraging mutual assistance, taking it for granted that no central government, and no foreign actor, will take care of their demands and necessities. Thus, they show their ability to solve their problems by themselves, despite general assumptions in the opposite direction for more than two centuries.

Given the evidence and the information analyzed in this chapter, instead of considering Haiti as a failed state, it seems more accurate to talk about a state that global political and economic powers have caused to fail, in the sense that they do not seem interested in its recovery at all. Moreover, the alleged actors involved in Moïse's killing (opposition leaders, Colombian mercenaries, Venezuelan business-linked money, and Dominican personalities), seem to point out that too many influential people want Haiti to stay unstable and chaotic. Maybe its geographical position, at the crossroads of (illegal/drug/smuggling) trade between South America, the Caribbean, and North America, suggests that the more unstable its institutions are, the less control over global transactions of dubious, but very likely illicit, nature that happen in Haitian territory and ports, among other scenarios. That is why I insist on the idea that Haiti's failure cannot be explained only by its own responsibility, but mainly by everyone's attempt to benefit from a nation in the Caribbean epicenter, which started its life as a "cursed country," but has become so attractive in geostrategic terms that global powers wish it to remain in chaos and uncontrolled.

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