

SOCIAL REALITIES IN HAITI: THE DRAMA OF SURVIVAL

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Abstract: Generally, the Caribbean are perceived as a unique touristic Paradise, but the reality of Haiti, known as the pearl of the Antilles, is nowadays far from this ideal image, synthetically maintained by the tourist-only resort of Labadee, private port leased to Royal Caribbean Cruises and completely fenced, so protected from the reality of the country.

Beyond the fences unfolds the panorama of the lands mastered by the first independent nation in the region...and one of the poorest in the Western hemisphere. Earthquakes (natural and social ones), diseases and dictatorships as the one of François Duvalier (Papa Doc) and his son, Jean-Claude Duvalier (Baby Doc) plunged the country in a social, political, economical and humanitarian disaster which seems impossible to be managed by the central Haitian authorities, but also by the too many international organizations that invaded the country.

We focused our research on the analysis of the proved incapacity of this former French colony to self-govern, despite the billions of dollars injected in its economy and of the expertise of international organizations' employees or volunteers, located in Haiti.

The reasons are multiple and demand special discussions, centered on the local mentalities and expectations of a population which seems to surrender and accept...the unacceptable. The lack of political cohesion, the poor social education and the huge gap between the rich class and the extremely pauper one (with an almost inexistent middle economic group) are just a few of the problems which seem to be eternal in this corner of the world. The UN mission's long lasting presence did not change the situation and, in 2016, the presidential elections are postponed sine die, because of the internal incapacity to administrate this process.

In this context, we try to x-ray the field situation in order to synthesize the possible explanations for the hopeless slide of Haiti towards a long and lethal social agony.

Key words: Republic of Haiti, United Nations, colonization, Caribbean, Dominican Republic, social stratification

Referring to the general situation of the territories which have been under the rule of the colonial powers' empire, E. Luttwak notes that "even if the colonial domination was criminal, an even greater crime was committed when this system was dismantled everywhere, and local fragile cultures, modern developing societies and minoritarian populations unable to fend for themselves were left at the mercy of political leaders that had at their disposal the powerful machinery that is the modern state." [Luttwak, 2013 p.17] Without specifically discussing the situation from Haiti, Luttwak, through his considerations, manages to broach the sensitive issues regarding the socio-political, cultural and economic configuration of this state – unique in the geopolitical landscape – so rich, yet paradoxically so poor at the same time.

Haiti, the first Black Republic, is part of the Great Antilles Islands or the Caribbean ones; it is located in the western part of the Hispaniola Island, taking up approximately one third of its territory. The eastern part of the island is the Dominican Republic's territory.

The island was discovered by Christopher Columbus, in December 1492. The year 1508 marks the beginning of the African slave trade, the first such ships anchoring on the shores of the Hispaniola Island. Two centuries later, in 1763, Spain officially recognizes France's supremacy, in the western part of the island, through the Treaty of Ryswick. In 1790 Port-au-Prince will have become the capital, as determined by the French settlers.

The former colony is mostly populated by the descendants of the slaves brought from Africa, since the native Indian population was virtually decimated through forced labor and harsh living conditions on plantations and in the mines run by the Spaniards, then by the French. Consequently, the required labor force was ensured by bringing tens of thousands of African slaves that carried with them a common cultural heritage, deeply rooted in the spiritual soil of their homeland.

Given the need for cheap labor, in a short time, the number for displaced African slaves surpasses that of the French settlers on the island. At the end of the eighteenth century, just in Haiti, without counting those that landed along the North American Atlantic coastline, over half a million Africans had had increased the wealth of the European empires, through their work. [Pamphile, 2001, pp. ix, 2]

The hope for freedom and the desperation of a life lived in shackles led to an outburst of social energies following which, on 01.01.1814, after the slave-led revolution, Haiti gained independence. The leaders of the emancipated slaves were Toussaint Louverture, Jean-Jaques Dessalines, Henri Christophe and Alexandre Petion; they led the revolt against the army sent in response, on the shores of Hispaniola, by Napoleon Bonaparte. [Fleurimond, 2015, p. 9]

Jean-Jacques Dessalines was in power, leading the country, from 01.01.1804 till 17.10.1806, followed by Henri Christophe between 17.02.1807 and 08.10.1820.

Alexandre Petion comes to power in the young republic, between 1807 and 1818. He is chronologically followed by Jean Pierre Boyer's mandate, one of the longest in the history of the new state, namely in the period 30.03.1818 - 03.13.1843.

In terms of longevity in ruling the country, the family of the Duvalier dictators marked a significant and socially catastrophic period. "The reign" of the two was probably the darkest period in the history of Haiti, leaving deep scars, some of which are still bleeding to this day. François Duvalier ("Papa Doc") was in office between 22.10.1957 and 21.04.1971 while his son, Jean Claude Duvalier ("Baby Doc"), from 04.22.1971 to 07.02.1986. [http://haiticulture.ch/haiti_presidents_liste.htm / 05.05.2016]

During the rule of "Baby Doc", Haiti received so many foreign aids from countries such as the USA, China, France, Israel, Canada, Germany, that they exceeded the national budget revenues. [di Chiara, 1988, p.367] According to the information from the specialized literature, in December 1980, he misappropriates about 20 million dollars of the 22 million prepared by the IMF for Haiti's budget. It seems that part of this money was used to fund the "Tontons Macoutes" gangs. [di Chiara, 1988, p.376] These "Tonton Macoutes" or "Bogeymen" were easily recognizable because of the equipment and sunglasses that wore almost all the time. [Greenville, 2000, p. 736]. They formed a kind of paramilitary force serving the interests of the President, consisting of several thousand people. The name refers to the character in the popular mythologies that frightened children and punished them in case of disobedience.

Their acts constituted grave violations of human rights, torture having become a routine for them. The Haitian landscape was dominated by violence, terror, corruption, malnutrition, diseases and illiteracy; all these generated the premises for a critically alarming social instability.

When conducting an in-depth analysis, the country's situation may seem strange, at the very least, taking into consideration both its potential, determined by the natural riches, the obvious tourist resource and by the privileged position in the Caribbean, as well as the financial and logistic commitment of so many international organizations and states which were interested strategically, financially or culturally by Haiti. The WFP (World Food Program), UNICEF (United Nations Children's Emergency Fund), the European Economic Community and countries like the USA or Canada supported Haiti by sending grains, milk, medicines etc. The exploitation of the natural deposits of copper, gold, silver, molybdenum (a metal discovered in 1778, used as an alloy in the steel used for armor plating) seemed to be one of the solutions for the fast development of the country and the restabilization of its economy.

Given that the heavily increased deforestation triggered another grave environmental problem, namely soil erosion, the involvement of FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) is notable, in this respect. With its support, irrigation canal networks were built and trees, such as oaks, cedars and mahoganies were planted. On the central plateau, near the town of Hinche, a Haitian created the community garden to experiment new culture techniques. UNICEF took action in the area of nutrition programs. UNESCO (The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) tried to implement an educational radio system in the rural areas. The WHO (World Health Organization) has focused on the vital importance of eradicating malaria.

Due to the fact that, in Haiti, the French imprint is crucial – naturally, alongside the Amerindian, African, substrates and the Spanish influence – France, being sensitive in this regard, has contributed in several areas, for the social and economic recovery of its former colony. Obviously, the most visible mark is the language. Haiti has two official languages, French and Creole. In many other respects, the African substrate is the dominant one. Even though it is spoken by the educated classes and used in central and local administrative structures, the French language from Haiti differs from the one spoken by the French natives, being influenced by Creole, Spanish and American English. Creole, on the other hand, which is spoken by the entire population, is a language born out of the necessity for mutual understanding of the

indigenous people, of the slaves hailing from different parts of Africa, of the settlers, poachers and pirates.

The notable achievements that were completed with France's support also include "the friendship road", stretching over a distance of 44 km, sinuating through the mountains toward the beautiful city town of Jacmel, in the southern part of the country. France also supported the development of the Haitian civil aviation by opening a direct Air France line to Port-au-Prince.

The training of teachers began in 1976, in the National Pedagogical Institute, with the support of France as well as with the support of other international entities. We can say that France would have a cultural interest, and that during this period, the French cars were selling very well in Haiti; the United States' interest would have been for Haiti not to "Cubanize" itself. [di Chiara, p. 366-377 passim].

America has also sent aid. They elaborated irrigation projects for approximately 70 points in the country. The Americans participate in maintaining the main and secondary roads.

Agriculture was also supported by HACHO (Harmonisation de l'Action des Communautés Haïtiennes Organisées), financed by the USA through the International Development Agency, CARE (Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere) and Germany.

Catherine Eve di Chiara notes the likely strategic interest of the United States in the area. From a geopolitical perspective, the north-west could serve as a valve, if necessary, to evacuate the military base at Guantanamo to the Môle Saint Nicolas port. [di Chiara, 1988, p. 369]. Moreover, the American interest in the area of the Sea Caraibilornu is neither surprising nor recent. One of the reasons is the protection of trade routes, namely control of the Panama Canal in order to protect financial and economic interests: "They (the United States, A.N.) occupy Cuba from 1906 to 1909 and then again in 1912, Haiti from 1915 to 1934, Nicaragua from 1912 to 1933 ... This is the Big Stick's policy. But Roosevelt, the United States' president from 1933 decides the disengagement of his country, and therefore the American troops withdraw." [Carol, 2000, p. 17]

Although, in the 70s, Haiti was helped with hundreds of millions of dollars, in 1981 the World Bank stated that the country's great needs are not covered. At this time, about 75% of the population lived below the poverty line. Malnutrition and hunger were becoming widespread in an increasing number of regions. The Canadians suggested an integrated development program on three levels: agriculture,

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education and healthcare. Germany suggested the taxation of large incomes and, simultaneously, tax exemption for all investors, over a period of 25 years ... with no real success or any progress made by the country.

Specialized research point to a report of the World Bank, from September 1975, showing that about 45 million US dollars are embezzled, which is half of Haiti's annual revenue. It is obvious that, in this context, President Jean-Claude Duvalier used the public money, at his own discretion, rewarding those close to him and financing extravagant acquisitions: million dollars villas in Luxembourg, Paris, Miami or Monaco, sports cars, motorcycles or boats, a castle in the Val D'Oise – Théméricourt area [di Chiara, 1988, p. 366-377 passim].

After the forced departure from the country's leadership of Jean-Claude Duvalier – the self-proclaimed “president for life” – on April the 1st, 1954 [Pamphile, 2001, p. xvii], Haiti's temporary government asked the UN to send observers throughout the elections of that very year. As a result, ONUVEH (The United Nations Observer Group for the Verification of the Elections in Haiti) assisted both the preparations as well as the actual election process, at the end of which Jean-Bertrand Aristide emerged victorious. [Milancovici, Daniel, 2015, p. 153]

In 1990, four years after Duvalier's exile, Jean-Baptiste Aristide takes over an economically withered country, in which poverty entrenches even more the corruption and anarchy that have already so profoundly taken root during Duvalier's dictatorship. The social situation had gotten considerably worse [Duroselle, Kaspi, 2006, p. 398]. His overthrow, by a coup lead to a long, delayed involvement of the US in the conflict resolution; Aristide resumed his attributions only after the imminent landing of the American troops on the island, once the military force had been set in motion. In other words, the agreement the former American president, Jimmy Carter, had made for the departure from power of general Raul Cedras and the restoration of democracy, only worked once president Bill Clinton, under pressure from the public opinion and human rights defenders, obtained a resolution from the UN Security Council which authorized the use of force to restore democracy in Haiti.

Regarding the overwhelming afflux of Haitian refugees that flocked to the American shores, in 1991, Joshua Goldstein legitimately wonders if they were driven north by the fear instilled in them by the regime of general Cedras or by economic considerations. Aside from the speeches (or actual reactions) of

the American presidents Carter and Clinton, the only way of managing the Haitian problem is to look for political solutions in Haiti, not by involving the neighboring countries. [Goldstein, 2001, 564]

As expected, the US intervention has drawn criticism and continues to do so, because of the way they acted in the Caribbean area. In his work concerning the history of the twentieth century, J.A.S. Grenville notes, with an obvious hint of irony, that “The United States intervened on their own continent, sending troops in the weaker, neighboring countries, in Mexico, Haiti, Santo Domingo and Nicaragua in order to establish the American supremacy and the naval bases in the Caribbean. But this was not at all perceived as European imperialism was once. The United States’ purpose was pure: to teach their poorly governed neighbors the benefits of American democracy.”[Grenville, 2000, p. 99].

In order to better see what opportunities or hindrances Haiti faced in its development, it is necessary to discuss the demographic issue, which is a determining factor in this regard.

According to the information provided by the Haitian Institute of Statistics and Informatics, the total population numbered 10.911.819 inhabitants, in 2015. [http://www.ihsi.ht/produit_demo_soc.htm / 23.04.2016]. The figure is relatively close to the one marked as official in 2012, namely 10.413.211 inhabitants, with the specification – correctly emphasized by Wiener Kerns Fleurimond – according to which these numbers do not include the approximately three million Haitians forming the Diaspora or the so-called “eleventh district”. [Fleurimond, 2015, p. 9]

However, a clarification is required: the devastating earthquake from 2010, with over 50 aftershocks, destroyed the country’s precarious infrastructure and drastically changed the data of the problem, regarding the accuracy of such statistics. The collapsing of a significant part of the civilian buildings into rubble has changed the balance between the rural and urban population. In addition, as a result of the disaster, a part of the population has left the country, preferring to be a refugee instead. We also note the fact that in a country where the poverty level is as pronounced as in Haiti, the census data are rather indicative, than anything else.

We cannot ignore, from this point of view, the infant mortality rates, whose rates are well above the global average, namely out of 1000 healthy newborns, 60 die in the first year of their life. [Gritzner, 2011, p.65]

Other demographic factors, such as the birth rate, mortality, migration or fertility rate say more about a country and the quality of life; they are not just mere statistics.

A comparison with the single neighboring country, which is on the same island, is equally illustrative of the discrepancy between resources/ potential and the actual reality in Haiti. If, throughout its relatively brief history, this country has benefited from a remarkable advance in comparison to the Dominican Republic, including from the point of view of international support and the amounts of aid received, currently, the decline and chaos characterizing all sectors of the social, economic and political life are visible to the naked eye; they are even more grave since the country seems to be heading on a downward, decaying spiral, with no real chance of rehabilitation.

For example, we are referring to the local public transport network serving the capital. The famous “Tap-Tap”- a type of jeep that has two benches, displayed longitudinally, in the back of the car, on which passengers sit – is both a national emblem as well as a fascinating tourist attraction. The risk associated with using this means of transportation is significant, because of the chaotic traffic in Port-au-Prince and, especially, because of the unpredictability of routes and the lack of pre-established stations or a travel timetable. Incredible for some, fascinating for others, the reality of the Haitian metropolis makes any foolhardy tourist to get lost in a capital of our century.

There are no trains crossing over the country ... while the more fortunate neighbors in the East even enjoy the subway, in the capital Santo Domingo. Even now, in 2016, the passenger transports between the two capitals, on the same island, are the prerogative of a Dominican company (Caribe Tours); there is no passenger transport company with Haitian capital, to ensure the flow of passengers on the territory of Hispaniola.

The tourism potential is undoubtedly in Haiti. The paradise-like nature has not prevented the small republic in gaining a bad name for itself, which is plastically put into words by Louis Joseph Janvier, one of the great Haitian intellectuals, a famous diplomat and politician, who referred to Haiti as a “small country which even the dogs would leave, if they could” (Fleurimond, 2015, p.18). The lack of security and psychological comfort, the exaggerated prices (at least double for services similar to those in the Dominican Republic) and the lack of any attractive tourist offers results in the absence of the tourists’ interest for this country, whose potentialities are still just the delight of experienced and seasoned travelers.

Perhaps, the saddest reality, in terms of the collective outlook, is that the Haitian society, except for a few families who own most of the wealth of the country and, therefore, the decisional power (the disproportion in gaining incomes and inadequately taxing them are problematic issues of the Haitian fiscal system), the mass of the population is not aware of the deplorable state of the country, having grown complacent, which has become a *modus vivendi*. The leaders seem disconnected from reality, living in a virtual world and seeming to completely ignore the population's needs and the reality of the country whose destiny they hold in their hands.

The last president, Michel Martelly – leader of the Sweet Micky band – failed, as was expected, to change the country's political or economic configuration. With no drinking water, electricity or a decent sanitation system, economically dependent on its eastern neighbor (“From toilet paper to a simple lemon, everything is <<Made in the Dominican Republic>>”) [Fleurimond, 2015, p. 18], Haiti seems impossible to recover. “Nearly 10 million Haitians are powerless witnesses to the comedy of powers”, W.K. Fleurimond notes, in his analysis on the state of the nation. However, the researcher suggestively points out in the discussion that exclusively blaming the geopolitical factors for the situation in Haiti is an essential error. The degradation of the society began before 2010. The life quality of all social classes had degraded before the earthquake, by excessive, irresponsible pollution of the environment, deforestations, failure to maintain the already precarious infrastructure, the administrative mismanagement, generalized corruption and the blatant carelessness of the leaders. [Fleurimond, 2015, p. 19]

Therefore, it is not surprising that, in 2016, Haiti is still among the poorest countries in the world. However, despite a seemingly beautiful façade, the neighboring republic is not doing very well either, in this respect: “The neighbor of Haiti is the Dominican Republic, whose independence dates back to 1844. In the twentieth century, its history was dominated by the dictatorial leadership of the general Rafael Trujillo, who won the elections in 1930 and was assassinated in 1961. Corrupt and violent, he suppressed any opposition. Though not as poor as Haiti, the Dominican Republic is one of the poorest countries in the western hemisphere. [Greenville, 2000, p. 736]

Probably one of the weakest points in the governing paradigm that the Haitian political leaders have sought to perpetuate, for which the people of this country are currently paying, is that they did not know how to find ways of cooperating over long period of time, namely to make an ally of the United States, one of the giants of world powers, unlike the Dominican Republic, “the sister country”, as Henry

Kissinger notes, in analyzing the situation in the area: “In 1902, America had forced Haiti to liquidate its debts to the European banks. In 1903, unrest had sparked in Panama, which led to a revolution. With American support, the local population won their independence from Colombia...in 1905, the United States established a financial protectorate over the Dominican Republic and in 1906 American troops occupied Cuba”, [Kissinger, 2013, p. 33].

Despite numerous, worldwide aid, the life quality is far from having recovered in Haiti, one of the causes being the lack of coordination and cooperation between the central administrative structures, the basic institutions, the civil society representatives and the international organizations’ representatives. The population does not have the exercise of democracy; it was replaced by anarchy. In the spirit of the ideas enunciated by E. Luttwak, the liberation from French tutelage left the Haitian population naked, from an organizational culture perspective, incapable of forming dynamic leaders, anchored in the now and a coherent system of decision-making administrative resorts. The ruling class is dominated by improvised personalities, with no genuine intellectual training and without a well-defined political profile, which gives way to a slippery slope leading to a generalized chaos that has gradually replaced natural paradigm of social life in this country. After reviewing the situation on the ground and taking into account the uncontrollable factors that led to the accelerated degradation of all the aspects of Haitian social life, we conclude that the situation is out of control, not only because of the negligence or indifference of its leaders, but more seriously, with their aid.

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