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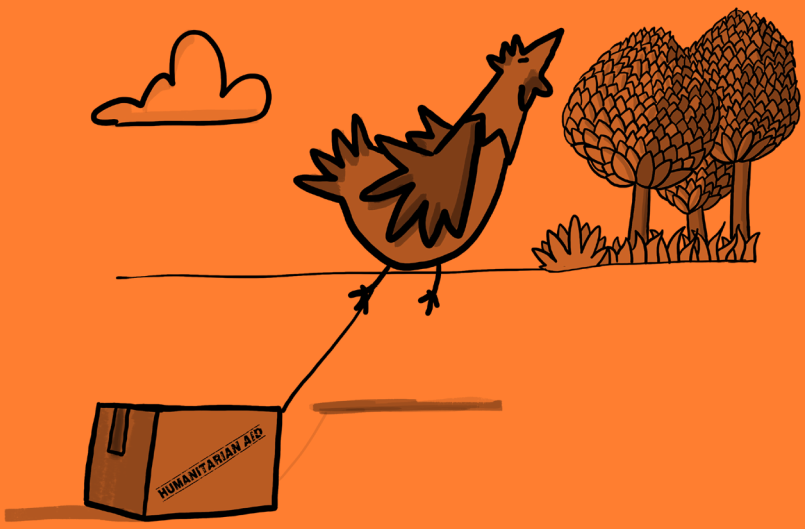
Why Haiti?

Pau Farràs



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Publisher: Cristianisme i Justícia
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08010 Barcelona (Spain)
Tel. +34 93 317 23 38
E-mail: info@fespinal.com
www.cristianismeijusticia.net

ISSN: 2014-6574
Editor: Santi Torres i Rocaginé
Translated by Joseph Owens
Cover drawing: Roger Torres
Layout: Pilar Rubio Tugas
May 2021

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PROLOGUE

"C'est une tristesse...." So begin some fragments of an editorial in *Le Nouvelliste* (October 2019), one of the Haitian periodicals I read every night before going to bed. And it is the truth: Haiti is still submerged in a crisis of state, and nobody knows how it will end. That crisis is perhaps even more serious than the earthquake, which I personally experienced on 12 January 2010.

At that time there was strong international solidarity for Haiti, especially on the part of the Dominican Republic: every day enormous trucks arrived with food and other necessities for the people. I remember well how we organized human chains in order to unload the boxes from the trailer trucks. There were promises of millions of dollars of assistance, but few of these ever arrived. Ten years have passed, and nothing of that solidarity can be seen. The booklet that follows this prologue describes very well the reality of the country where I lived for four years.

For me the earthquake was certainly a shocking experience. I was returning from my work in the offices of "Fe y Alegría"—in Haitian, "Foi ak Ker Contant," literally "Faith and Happy Heart"—when, as I got off the *tap tap* (a pick-up truck that provides urban transport in Port-au-Prince), the earth beneath my feet began to move. It was 4:25 in the afternoon. The news reports said the quake lasted 36 seconds. Instinctively, I stood in the middle of the street in order to avoid being hit by the pieces of cement that began to fall from buildings on both sides. Two men came running desperately out of a small building that was collapsing: one was covered with blood, and the other stretched out his arms, giving thanks to God that he was still alive. From that moment on, my work was distributing disinfectant, bandages, and medicine to the people who came to our house, thinking that we were able to cure them. Some of them were suffering from gangrene but refused to go to the hospital even though we insisted they should.

I was shaken when I saw dead bodies piled up in the streets, but the most moving experience for me in those days, one that is firmly fixed in my memory, was helping a family that had lost their mother. She was lying in a coffin in the middle of the street, and they were waiting for some priest to give her a blessing. After I had said a prayer over her, a Mexican firefighter came up behind me quietly; he was wearing a red uniform and a helmet like that of a Roman soldier, and he whispered in my ear: "Father, bless me!" Immediately after receiving my blessing, he plunged into the heap of rubble created by all the little gray houses that had collapsed onto one another.

I think that the earthquake was simply the most dramatic manifestation of a reality that was already grievously wounded. Most of the building did not meet even the minimal requirements for sound construction: the steel rods were much

too thin, roughness coefficients for reinforced cement were absent, mud and dirt were used instead of sand to make mortar, and flimsy foundations supported the houses.

The present reality of Haiti continues to be tragic.They are a people with a great sensibility for painting, for music, for dance, and for poetry, but now they are totally disheartened as they wait for a political solution that their president, Jovenel Moïse, seems incapable of offering them. Demonstrations demanding his resignation multiplied in most of Haiti's cities during the past year. There were several deaths. Despite the protests, Jovenel Moïse seems to have weathered the onslaught, and he continues to govern by force of decrees since the senate for the moment is non-existent. He has created a new Provisional Electoral Committee to control the elections scheduled for February 2021, but the political parties have rejected it. At the same time, he has dedicated millions of gourdes to electrifying the country.

The Pearl of the Antilles is struggling to find a way to govern itself; efforts are being made to elaborate a new Constitution, which hopefully will pave the way to a less precarious future. Meanwhile, as a recent editorial of *Le Nouvelliste* stated, "the death of the poor in Haiti continues to be too silent."

Ramiro Pàmpols, sj.
October 2020

1. THE ORIGINS OF THE MISERY

"Why Haití?" Those were the words spoken by Hillary Clinton on 12 January 2010, when she heard about the earthquake that had devastated Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti. What she should have thought was: "Once again they have been crushed." Clinton, who was then Secretary of State, seemed to be wondering why such calamities always strike the same people.

But her question "Why Haiti?" was not the fruit of innocence or ignorance. Hillary certainly knew that Haiti's problems extended far beyond natural disasters. Surely she knew also that the people responsible for Haiti's problems have names and faces. Hers, for example.

Hillary knew that in 1995 her husband, who was then president, had pressured the Haitian government to lower tariffs that were protecting its domestically produced rice so that other countries could sell their own rice in Haiti. The tariffs were reduced from 35% to 3%. That was the condition for receiving $24.6 million from the International Monetary Fund. In this way, Haitian rice was immediately replaced in the markets by rice from the U.S., which was cheaper thanks to the subsidies paid by the U.S. government to U.S. producers. Most of the rice arriving in Haitian markets came from Arkansas, the state in which Bill Clinton was born and in which he was for 11 years governor.

"Perhaps it was good for some of my farmers in Arkansas, but it didn't work. It was an error, and I had a share in it. Every day I live with the consequences of Haiti's loss of its rice-producing capacity." That was how Bill Clinton excused himself before the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee.[1] Meanwhile, Haitian farmers, left with nothing to cultivate or sell, moved en masse to the capital, packing the

already crowded slums with self-constructed houses, the same ones that collapsed by the thousands during the earthquake.

Despite chronic political violence, the country had long been self-sufficient in foodstuffs. In the course of a few years, however, it became the fifth largest buyer of rice in the world. Famine and malnutrition were endemic, and the lack of employment opportunities in the rural areas forced hundreds of thousands of onetime farmers to move to the cities, where they survived by becoming street vendors. Haiti was going from bad to worse. But the reduced tariffs, the rice imported from Arkansas, and the wooden shacks supply only a small part of the long answer to the question posed by the future presidential candidate of the U.S. and examined now in this booklet: "Why Haiti?"

1.1. The First Latin American Nation

Why Haiti? Well first, because it achieved what nobody else could: Haiti is the only country that was ever born from a slave revolt. This happened in 1804, when the Haitians defeated the fifty boatloads of French soldiers that Napoleon had sent to smother the rebellion that started in 1791. Before that, Haiti had been France's most productive colony, thanks to the quality and the quantity of sugar and coffee grown there and thanks above all to the enslaved Africans who were forcefully transported there during the previous century. They arrived by the thousands only to work and to die. But then they said "Enough" and revolted, taking advantage of the wars in Europe which were distracting France from its colonies.

In 1788, a year before the French Revolution, the island of Saint-Domingue, also known as Hispaniola, was the most important colony of the French empire. Having no rival in the exportation of sugar, Saint-Domingue generated 77% of all the colonial commerce of France, which was then the largest producer of colonial commodities. The value of Saint-Domingue's production was 461 million pounds annually, while that of the whole English empire was 355 million.[2] In other words, what is today Haiti was producing as much value as all the British colonies together.

How could so much wealth, both natural and created, have resulted in today's appalling misery?

Haiti experienced the same trials as so many other countries. As Eduardo Galeano recounts in *The Open Veins of Latin America,* every country and every commodity went through the same process as global integration advanced. First there was expansion, but later came exhaustion, decadence, and underdevelopment. Galeano comments: "The more desired a product was by the world market, the greater was the misfortune it brought upon the Latin American people who by their sacrifice created it." It happened to Haiti with sugar, but it happened also, a century and half later, to Bolivia with sugar, to the Brazilian Amazon with rubber, to Colombia and Central America with bananas, to Venezuela with coffee, and to Paraguay and Argentina with hardwood trees. The same can be said today of the coltan extracted from the

center of Africa, of the petroleum that has brought so much death to the Middle East, or of the palm oil plantations that have leveled the tropic forests of Malaysia and Indonesia.

But among all the colonial and neocolonial wounds, perhaps the bloodiest has been the Haitian. The inequality in colonial Haiti was unsustainable. In no other place was there a greater proportion of slaves: a half million enslaved Africans generated all the production, but the resulting wealth remained in the hands of 40,000 planters and merchants, all of them white. The situation was more extreme in Haiti than it was even on the other islands of the French and British Antilles. There has never been in history another example of a society in which the enslaved constituted between 80 and 90% of the population.

The possibility of a revolt was evident. It finally erupted in August 1791, after an uprising of fugitive slaves, called cimarrons. Neither the emissaries sent by France nor the soldiers sent by Napoleon could do anything to prevent Haiti from becoming independent after thirteen years of war.

1.2. The Colonial Heritage

August 2019 marked the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the first boatload of enslaved Africans to a port in what is now the United States. Taking advantage of that anniversary, *The New York Times* launched an ambitious educational endeavor, *The 1619 Project*, which sought to analyze the present situation of the United States in light of its long history of slavery. The essays and articles produced for the project cover all aspects of the country: they include reports on racial segregation of neighborhoods, excessive consumption of sugar, the high proportion of Blacks in the prisons, and the lack of universal health coverage as a result of the Civil War. The project demonstrates brilliantly the value of studying history, especially when the history makes us uncomfortable.

One of the essays in the project examines the present-day labor market in the U.S. and traces the line connecting its precarious nature to slavery. "In order to understand the brutality of American capitalism, you have to start on the plantation," writes Matthew Desmond, sociology professor at the University of Princeton and winner of a Pulitzer prize in 2017 for his essay "Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City." That quotation of Desmond is referring to the cotton plantations of the United States, but it can be generalized: the capitalism of the whole hemisphere, from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego, as well as its terrible consequences, can be understood only in terms of the power relations that were established over centuries between owners and slaves.

The arrival of Europeans in the Americas marked the beginning of horrendous abuse of indigenous peoples and enslaved Africans.[3] Vincent Brown, a scholar of slavery in the Caribbean, has calculated[4] that the life expectancy of slaves in Jamaica was only seven years from the time they set foot on the plantation. Like Haiti, Jamaica also specialized in sugar production.

Thomas Piketty's monumental work, *Capital and Ideology* (2019),

offers a history of economic inequality. His second chapter, which treats of the colonial slave-owning societies, cites the latest studies on the distribution of wealth in Saint-Domingue. His conclusion is clear: the inequality on the island "could not have been greater when one takes into account the demands of survival." He asserts that the richest 10 percent of the population owned between 85 and 90 percent of the colony's wealth. What was left over hardly sufficed to nourish (poorly) and clothe (even worse) the destitute 90 percent of the population.

Of course, economic misery is only the quantifiable part of inequality. The other parts would include the restrictions of basic rights (of expression, of movement, of dignity, not to mention of property ownership) and the countless instances of violence (physical beatings, forced labor, racism, rape, separation of families, etc.).

Given these conditions, when fresh new ideas of equality, fraternity, and liberty arrived from France, they inspired hope among the enslaved Africans. The problem was that these ideas were not interpreted the same way by everybody: the whites believed that the island would at last be autonomous, the mulattos thought they would be equal to the whites, and the slaves hoped that they would cease to be enslaved. When nothing happened, the slaves took matters into their own hands. They fled from the plantations in massive numbers, thus becoming cimarrons, and they organized themselves into independent societies. For that reason, the voodoo traditions are still preserved in Haiti, and the creole variant of French is still spoken.

So great was the desertion from the plantations that the price of Haitian goods skyrocketed since production fell sharply. Then came the violence. The liberated Africans burned the fields and the dwellings of the French proprietors.

Jean-Jacques Dessalines was the first person to declare Haiti independent of France. He was the father of the first Constitution of 1805 and became the first Black head of state, even though he did not know how to write his name., Originally from Guinea, Dessalines had been bought by a free Black man named Des Salines, whose name he took after killing him. He was an especially cruel type. After the war he ordered the slaughter of between a thousand and five thousand French citizens when he discovered that some of them were conspiring against the new state.

At the same time, the other side was no less cruel. In 1802 General Leclerc, Napoleon's brother-in-law and commander of the French troops in Saint-Domingue, made this recommendation to the emperor: "We must suppress all the Blacks in the mountains, men and women, keeping only the children under age twelve, and not leave a single mulatto wearing epaulettes."[5]

The Haitian revolution coincided with the fall of the Bastille and the guillotine, as well as with the attacks of the Spanish peasants on the castles of their lords, but it is has never received the same attention in the history books. The structural racism of the West is largely to blame, along with geopolitical factors.

But the lack of publicity does not mean that the lessons were not well

learned by others: the slave owners in the south of the U.S. realized how much they stood to lose from slave revolts and how much violence the system could generate. In 1847 a slave owner in Virginia warned of the danger of putting slaves in charge of opening and closing the gates of the farms.[6] There were also frequent reports of slaves possessing axes and other tools that could be used to attack the owners.

The conservative monarchies in Europe were also frightened by the French Revolution, so that a restoration of absolutism followed on the Vienna Congress of 1815. In the same way, fascism and Nazism can viewed as reactions to the Russian Revolution. Following the "rule of three," we can see that the last sixty years of aggressive U.S. intervention in Latin America resulted from the trauma of having a Castro-run Cuba just a stone's throw from its coasts.

1.3. The Punishment Imposed by the Powers

Never before or since in history have slaves been so forceful and dynamic as they were in Haiti: they freed themselves and their country without the help of the bourgeoisie. But they paid a great price. A third of the population was killed in the war, the crops were burned to the ground, and the livestock was devoured by both sides. To make things worse, the great powers imposed a commercial blockade on the country and then refused to recognize it diplomatically. The U.S. and Brazil, for example, recognized the new state only after they themselves had abolished slavery, in 1865 and 1888 respectively. That delay is not surprising since many French plantation owners who had fled from Haiti in 1791 settled in Louisiana, where slavery still flourished. The banks of that territory's largest city, New Orleans, had more capital than the banks of New York, and it came principally from the plantations.

France, for its part, demanded that Haiti pay compensation to the former slave owners who had returned to Europe.

It is important to stress the strange logic that prevailed at that time. France did not indemnify the ex-slaves who had made it obscenely wealthy and who had received no recompense themselves. Rather, the newly liberated Haitians were obliged to pay for their freedom.

No one questioned the justice of the "compensation" to be paid to the owners—not the France of the Declaration of Rights of Man ("Men are born and remain free and equal in rights"), nor the United States of the Declaration of Virginia ("All men are by nature free and independent"), nor the United Kingdom, which did not abolish slavery until 1833.[7]

France required Saint-Domingue to pay 150 million francs, which was between three and ten times the annual gross product of the country. Haiti did not finish paying off the debt until 1947. During all that time, as mentioned above, Haiti was able to trade neither with the major powers, which placed an embargo on it, nor with its neighbors, since they were still colonies of the powers.

The isolation burdened Haiti economically. The war had left much red

blood on the fields and much red ink in the account books. The men and women who had fought for their freedom did not want to return to work on the plantations where they had been enslaved. At the same time, they were not certain how best to proceed because none of them had experience managing land. None of their leaders had ever studied laws, economics, or politics, not even the brutal Dessalines. A subsistence economy developed, but the country never had a government that was willing and able to educate the public and provide the necessary infrastructure.

Between 1834 and 1915 there was a succession of wars, coups, and revolutions; 21 of Haiti's 22 presidents were deposed or assassinated, victims of a particularly violent political culture. When the last of them was lynched in 1915, the country was occupied by U.S. Marines, who controlled the economy and the banking system until 1934. In this way the U.S. banks recovered the loans they claimed they had extended to the Haitian government. As part of their strategy to control the Caribbean, the Americans sold the best Haitian lands to foreign investors and deposited the reserves of gold in New York. They had done the same, of course, in the neighboring Dominican Republic, which was occupied by U.S. troops between 1916 and 1924 under the pretext of preserving order. Being president on the island of Hispaniola has always been a dangerous business; the Dominicans also have had a high tally of presidents shot to death: eleven.

Between the First World War and the crash of 1929, U.S. investment in Haiti multiplied sixfold, replacing European investment. Haiti was *re-colonized* both financially and militarily—and of course politically as well. The result was renewed extraction of resources: by 1948 coffee presented 62.1% of Haitian exports, a figure that rivaled the coffee exports of El Salvador (89.2%), Guatemala (70.2%), and Colombia (58.4%). Something similar happened with bananas in Honduras (82%) and Panama (73.6%), with sugar in Cuba (71.7%) and the Dominican Republic (59.8%), with oil in Venezuela 89%), and with zinc in Bolivia (71.4%).

1.4. The Cold War Was Hell

Despite its many problems, Haiti could have been different. In the 1950s, before Fidel Castro took power in Cuba, the two Caribbean countries had similar dependency on monocultures and similar rates of educational deprivation. Today illiteracy in Haiti is 53% while in Cuba it is negligible, as it is in the world's more developed countries. Haiti has been subject to constant interventions; Cuba experienced none after its revolution.

If the Marines killed 15,000 Haitians while the U.S. controlled the country, the repression was even worse when the Duvaliers came to power in 1956: the regime murdered 60,000 persons during the next thirty years, first under the father, François, and then under the son, Jean-Claude. Both of them were protected by the United States, which specialized in backing anti-communist tyrants in Latin America after the triumph of the Cuban revolution.

These years were the hardest ones for all the countries south of the Rio

Grande: there was a proliferation of U.S. invasions and homegrown dictatorships. Duvalier's massacres coincided with the 20,000 executions carried out in Videla's Argentina and the 11,000 persons disappeared in Pinochet's Chile. Similar atrocities occurred in Somoza's Nicaragua, Stroessner's Paraguay, Banzer's Bolivia, and Bordaberry's Uruguay. All this widespread slaughter happily coincided with the interests of the United States. Duvalier's Haiti saw U.S. investment increase at the same pace that it saw Haitian salaries decrease; in like manner, Videla's dictatorship prohibited all strikes and removed tariffs on U.S. automobiles.

If the younger Duvalier was mentally deficient, as Ryszard Kapuściński claims, then François Duvalier was a dangerous nutcase. He imposed a revolutionary catechism that included a creed that began: "I believe in our Doc, all-powerful leader, creator of the new Haiti." When the government found itself without funds at the beginning of the 1960s, he paid the functionaries with copies of his *Essential Works*. Knowing the people's lack of education and their tendency to be superstitious, he spread the rumor that, thanks to his powers as a voodoo wizard, the Devil allowed him to read the thoughts of all Haitians.

He received two great affronts: the first from John F. Kennedy, president of the United States, and the second from Mohammed Fayed, father of the future lover of Lady Di and owner of Harrod's in London and the Ritz in Paris.

Kennedy always knew that Papa Doc was a murderer, but in 1962 he needed Duvalier's vote in order to expel Cuba from the Organization of American States (OAS). The price Duvalier placed on his vote was the construction of a new airport in Port-au-Prince. Kennedy agreed and Haiti voted accordingly, but in the days and months that followed, the money never arrived, and there was no more talk of an airport. In *The Open Veins of Latin America,* Galeano recounts that Papa Doc subsequently celebrated a voodoo ritual in which he signed a pact with the Devil. When JFK was assassinated in Dallas in 1963, Duvalier was convinced that his curse had worked, and he smiled to have seen his revenge accomplished.

But Kennedy was not the only figure who played dirty with Papa Doc. Mohammed Fayed became friends with François during his first years in office and promised to bring investment to the country, which at the time was nearly bankrupt. As soon as Fayed was paid a multi-million dollar advance for his services of mediation, he disappeared. That was the start of Fayed's fortune. Later on, when Jean-Claude, "Baby Doc," son and heir of the defrauded François, fled from Haiti in 1986, Fayed, perhaps out of mixed feelings of guilt and gratitude, received him in his Hotel Ritz in Paris.

After the flight of Baby Doc (a baby weighing 140 kilos), four years passed before democratic elections were held. They were won by Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who had been a Salesian priest. He captured 67% of the votes in an election that no international observer disputed. Despite his victory, the Vatican decided not to recognize it since Aristide was a proponent of Liberation Theology.[8] Moreover, because he had spoken out against U.S. imperialism, the U.S. em-

bassy supported the military coup of Raoul Cedras eight months after Aristide took office. The Holy See recognized the new government, seemingly unbothered by the fact that Cedras and his militias were filling the capital with the bodies of Aristide's followers.

Fifteen years previously, Kapuściński had explained the situation better than anybody. In 1975 the Polish reporter wrote: "Any more or less organized political opposition is systematically annihilated by the regime through political assassinations. … Whenever the dictatorship totters and there is the possibility of a democratic—or simply human—government taking power, Washington reacts."[9] It had happened so many times previously that "Kapu" writes of it in the present tense in his book, *Christ with a Rifle on His Shoulder.* It happened again in 1993, and it has continued happening to the present day.

Aristide was given another opportunity when he again won the elections in 2001. This time his term in office lasted a little longer than the first one, but not much longer. In 2004 Guy Philippe, a paramilitary leader who had been trained by U.S. Special Forces, staged a revolt that ended with a new intervention of the Marines, the second deposition of Aristide, and the sending of 7,500 U.N. troops to maintain order. The ex-Salesian had handily won two elections, and twice he was ousted by force.

Paul Christian, a former political activist who now works for the Haitian government, knows that the assassins of that epoch have never paid for their crimes and still are seeking power: "I remember what happened in 2004. They were looking for an Aristide supporter near the border with the Dominican Republic, but he wasn't at home. To send him a message, they led six of his family members out into the street and shot every one of them in the back. Miraculously the youngest boy, a four year old, was not killed, and he was ingenious enough to play dead. Today he is paralyzed from the chest down. He has always remembered who was in charge: Guy Philippe."

In January 2017 the murderous putschist Guy Philippe was elected senator for the southwestern region of Grand Anse, but soon after that the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency arrested him on charges of trafficking drugs; he was extradited from Haiti before taking his seat in the senate. His followers came out into the streets to protest, and the region was in turmoil for two weeks. As a result, the NGOs and international agencies evacuated their white collaborators from the region, fearing that the people's anger would turn against them.

The violence that has marked the last two centuries continues to throb throughout the country because gross injustice still reigns. In a country as radically divided as Haiti, even a sociopath and proven criminal like Philippe has followers who saw his arrest as an imperialist intervention.

2. WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A FAILED STATE

Along Haiti's rural roads one frequently sees people carrying buckets or large jugs of water. Only 50% of Haitian households have access to clean drinking water, and the proportion is even lower in the countryside.

"The people leave their homes in the country and move to the cities thinking that they'll find opportunities, but there is nothing," recounts Jean Mance, a 38-year-old Marist brother born in the southeast and serving today in the capital. "There's no work, and so they rob, they become prostitutes, they sell anything on the street. They survive but they don't thrive." He means that word "anything" literally. Walking down any street in the center of Port-au-Prince, one can see shelves of second-hand books, used mobile phones (sometimes scratched or even broken), items of furniture, and all kinds of food, from packages of gum to plates of chicken and rice, cooked right there over a grill on the sidewalk. Despite a 70% unemployment rate,[10] there are very few beggars in the capital—no more than in Barcelona—perhaps because, since people are already on the streets, they do better by selling than by begging. Movement is the norm (it is not a country of idlers), but no amount of effort guarantees that they'll return home with any cash because, as much as they want to sell, nobody's buying.

Bernard Edymé sells paintings and handiwork in the Bel-Air neighborhood, but the items he has on display in front of his house are the same ones that were there five months ago. Georges Dieu Junior, who prefers to be called Reggy, sells rice and cooking oil wholesale in the Delmas 13 neighborhood, but he does not consider it work. In fact, Haitians speak of work

only when they're paid wages, so that selling goods on the street or driving a moto-taxi doesn't count as work. Reggie obtained a $500 loan from a bank to buy his merchandise, but he could not sell it before it spoiled, and now he has no way to repay the loan. He has been evicted from his home, and his possessions have been embargoed. His only hope is to sneak into the Dominican Republic and find work there.

Marie is fifty years old, and she has spent half her life cooking on the same street corner outside the Iron Market. Some time ago she decided that she wouldn't ask for money from the children who came to her asking for a piece of chicken and a spoonful of garnish. They are street kids, part of the Haitian landscape, especially in Port-au-Prince; most are orphans or abandoned children, but some are simply escaping the violence of their homes. There are many stories of children who flee because their mother marries a man who maltreats them. Others are afraid of their own father, who rejects them, preferring the children he has had with his new wife. Whatever the causes, there are thousands of vagabond children in the city, and a few of them are blessed by the heart of Marie. "I can't even tell you how many there are," she says. One of her regular customers, overhearing our conversation and knowing that Marie out of modesty wouldn't tell me, confided to me a secret: Marie did not stop feeding the children even after her house collapsed in the 2010 earthquake. She lost everything, but she still had something for others. "I've borne two children," she told me with a smile, "but I have a great many children." Why does she do it, asks the journalist. "Because they are hungry" is Marie's simple response.

Marie is one of hundreds of Haitians who do business around the Iron Market. Emmanuel Zamoyz, known as "Manie," thinks that the excessive number of vendors around the market have robbed it of its charm. Rosie Jean, who helps him sell carved wooden figures in the market, is convinced that the earthquake is the reason. A great many people were killed in the old market, they say, and many of those who survived were afraid to take up posts in the new market that was built alongside the old one.

Bernard, Dieu Junior, Marie, Emmanuel, and Rosie are a sampling of the four million inhabitants of a city that wakes up with the roosters' crows and goes to bed by the light of the sidewalk grills cooking food. Pigs and goats are part of the landscape, paved streets are rare, and for years the city's streams have been literally buried under layers of garbage. Neverthless, people arrive empty-handed by the hundred every week. No community development programs exist outside the capital, and the initiatives geared to the needs of the country folk are few. As a result, many fantasize that in the city everything will be easier.

2.1. The Price of Having No Rights

At a ten-minute walk from the market is the city prison. Every day scores of women line up at its gates, bringing food for their imprisoned relatives. They know that a lunch-box means life for those inside. For months the

prison functionaries have receive nothing to fill their larders, according to the National Network for the Defense of Human Rights, and the prison, which was built for 800 inmates, now houses more than 4,200. After visiting the prison and speaking with the director, activists from the rights organization issued a statement denouncing that, in just the first nineteen days of 2017, fourteen prisoners had died of hunger, cholera, or tuberculosis. The denunciation did no good.

The mother of Shal David, who writes to her son daily and brings him food, confirms the situation: "Every day someone dies." Shal, who is 20 years old and dumb since birth, was arrested after a fight three years ago, and he has not left the prison since. The 32-year-old girlfriend of Sismith Saturné has spent five years in prison for driving without a license. Both the husband and the brother of Fabienne Saint Preux have spent six years imprisoned for stealing bananas. None of these inmates has ever seen a judge. Nor has John Gideon, about whom his brother Wil has had no news for three months: "I have a hard time keeping up hope. Maybe he has been sick."

How not to despair? Human rights activist Livia Bouvier relates that when the police wanted to stage a raid in the prison last autumn, the dogs that were trained to search for drugs refused to enter the prison. Later on, after returning to the police station, the officers spent the whole afternoon drained: they had been totally stressed out by the overcrowded cells and the odors that emanated from all the corners that served as latrines. Bouvier was told even by the prison director: "If you want to find a place on earth that resembles hell, come to the city prison of Port-au-Prince." Bouvier's organization has a thankless task. It has been labeled terrorist by the last two governments (Martelly and Moïse), and in the autumn of 2016 it received a letter with a bullet inside.

On the same street, just 300 meters from the queues of the prisoners' relatives, is found the office of *Le Nouvelliste,* the country's principal newspaper. Reports of conditions in the prison, however, have never appeared in its pages. Radio Caraibe did report the shortage of food, but it claimed that the prisoners were staging a hunger strike in order to spend a night or two in the hospital since there were no beds in the cells.

Given the poor reputation of the Haitian press, in February 2017 a gray-haired man insisted on speaking with the present writer, but privately. He explained that his granddaughter had been infected with HIV by the Red Cross. When only nine days old, she had received a blood transfusion and soon became sick; blood analysis revealed that she was seropositive. The parents were given tests to see if they were the transmitters, and they both came out negative; the blood from the Red Cross must have been the cause of the infection. A judge reached the same conclusion and ordered the NGO to pay $300,000 in 2015.

However, the child's father, Jean-Gardel Edymé, has not seen a dollar or a *gourde* since then. He showed the journalist the judge's sentence, as well as the Red Cross's acknowledgment of receipt. "They won't pay because they say we are not the child's

parents." But they are. And they suffer as if they were. The mother has lost several kilos and doesn't leave the house. They are financially ruined because they have spent the equivalent of $1800 on retroviral medicines and they don't know how much more on lawyers, even though the per capita GDP of the country is $840 and their furniture business is failing. Five different schools rejected the little girl when they learned that she was HIV-positive; now the parents tell no one about it. But they still are threatened: "A guy shouted out my name when he was leaving the police station right after making a complaint. He showed me a photo of myself and indicated the pistol he had in his jacket. I'm afraid; my life has been threatened. In this country you can die, and your death won't be related to anything. People will think it was a kidnapping."

No one can help Jean-Gardel insure that the law is obeyed. The state does not exist, and that is almost literally true. The Salesians and other religious orders reach out to the street children and educate them in their schools. They defend human rights and denounce the degrading conditions of the prison. Moreover, some 3000 NGOs are operating in the country, but that is a problem because these entities have created a sort of parallel government. That is the view of a high-ranking official of the World Health Organization in Haiti, who asked to remain anonymous. How can the government be asked to invest in hospitals if the NGOs establish them gratis? How can the government be asked to build water drainage systems if they have been traditionally paid for by U.N. agencies?

2.2. Chaos Once Again

Still another concern was added to the country's difficulties in the fall of 2019. Haitians have been demonstrating against the president, Jovenel Moïse, almost since his election in 2017 because he has done nothing to solve any of the nation's chronic problems. Inflation keeps increasing, unemployment becomes more widespread, there are countless cases of corruption, and fuel is often scarce both in the capital and in the countryside. All those problems are longstanding, but an investigation into the senate showed that in June 2019 Moïse and the previous president, Michel Martelly, were responsible for the diversion of $3.8 million. The money came from Petro Caribe and was supposed to be used to build a highway. Agritrans, a company owned by Moïse, was awarded the project and received funds in 2008, but eight years later there was still no sign of the highway in question.

The protests have intensified every since then, and they are often quite violent. Their objetive is clear: getting rid of Jovenel Moïse,[11] but there is little clarity about what to do after he is gone. Meanwhile, the country's main highways are blockaded, causing serious supply problems everywhere. Some hospitals, such as the one in Sainte Croix, lacked oxygen machines, so they were forced to choose between attending to children born prematurely and patients suffering heart attacks or cardiorespiratory problems. The schools were closed in September and have not opened for months. And violence has taken over the streets. "You can't leave your house," confesses by

text message Junior Dieu, a young man of Port-au-Prince. “The country is closed down, literally. I cannot do anything.” And what are the people eating? How are they living? “We’re surviving,” he replies.

A comparison might help the reader understand the dimensions of the conflict. During the autumn of 2019 the news media reported that the police were using real bullets against the protesters in Chile and Hong Kong. In Haiti the use of firearms by the security forces is not so newsworthy. Police agents displayed automatic weapons and sawed-off shotguns from the first day of the protests, and the U.N. reports that the police were responsible for nineteen of the persons killed during the confrontations at the end of the year.

In Haiti the assassination of political opponents has been frequent. In December the cameras of France 24, which was covering the demonstrations, showed how the police stopped an armed man who was about to shoot one of the leaders of the protests; he was identified as the bodyguard of a high government official. Previously, in September, a senator of the party in power shot at the demonstrators and wounded a photo journalist.

Aristide understood well this violence-prone political culture, and that is what most saddens him about his enemies—and sometimes makes him despair. He suffered the violence personally, which perhaps explains why he contemplated martyrdom as a way of giving life through one’s own death.

Thus did he express his thoughts shortly before being evacuated from the country following the coup d’état in September 1991; he was quite certain that the military officials had been debating about whether or not he should be executed. “Perhaps my life was supposed to have ended at the airport or the National Palace—an accident, an attempt to resist, a shoot-out, a stray bullet… For two days I felt death drawing closer, hesitating, then caressing me and passing on. Maybe after nine attempts a person ends up immunized? I’m not going to imagine that I’m made of iron or that I can resist a bullet; it is just that I can stay calm. … If killing the first democratically elected president means being condemned by the rest of the world, not killing him leads to a constitutional impasse.”[12] He spoke these words on the plane that carried him to Caracas and later expressed his mixed sentiments from his exile in Venezuela.

Aristide’s words remind us of those of Bishop Casaldáliga. The idea of martyrdom, and even the desire for it, permeate his thought in his book *Barefoot on Red Soil.* Francesc Escribano has written on the life and the work of the emeritus bishop of Sao Félix de Araguaia (Brazil). In one of their conversations Casaldàliga told Escribano that he had stopped fearing death: “I am at peace, after all, because I find myself surrounded by many people who are also threatened. … I know perfectly well why they threaten me, and I know that the causes I support are more important than any death that may come my way. I have always believed that it would be a worthy death, and that kind of death does honor to life.”[13]

Casaldáliga adorned his statement with one of the poems he wrote shortly after witnessing the death of João Bosco at the hands of a police officer.

I will die standing up, just like the tree.
They will kill me standing up.
A greater witness, the sun, will
[impress its seal
on my body anointed once more….
All of a sudden, with death,
my life will become reality.
I will, at last, have loved!

2.3. Sexual Violence

But there are other, much clearer causes for anger. In April 2017 the Associated Press (AP) denounced and provided proof for what was common knowledge among Haitians: the Blue Helmets sent by the U.N. in 2004 had sexually abused women and girls in Port-au-Prince and its surroundings.

AP exhibited 2000 denunciations of rape and sexual abuse, 300 of them involving minors and 150 involving sexual infections or unrecognized paternity. All the soldiers responsible belonged to the MINUSTAH, the mission that was sent to Haiti by the U.N. after the deposition of Aristide but that stayed on in the country even though there was no risk of war.

A recent investigation of Lee and Susan Bartels, financed by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, sought to learn more about what Haitians thought of the presence of the Blue Helmets in the country. Of the 2500 citizens consulted, 265 told of cases of women who had had children with soldiers of the U.N. mission. A man from Port Salut, for instance, revealed that "many women have children of the MINUSTAH soldiers."

The situation is problematic at many levels: first, being a single mother in Haiti means serious economic problems; most of the women made pregnant were already living in extreme poverty. One Haitian woman who had sexual relations with the U.N. soldiers for money became pregnant, and once she bore the child, she had to continue to prostitute herself in order to feed him.

Second, a baby born outside matrimony is stigmatized and suffers discrimination. Moreover, the conditions of conception were what they were. Even though the relations were said to be between equals, most of them were not : they ranged from offering sex in exchange for money to cases of multiple rape.

What is horrible and unjustifiable is that such behavior was nothing new. For decades the U.N. has been collecting accusations of rape and sexual abuse committed by the Blue Helmets. In 2005 there was a definite repercussion in the Democratic Republic of the Congo when it was reported that 14-year-old girls were exchanging sex for food. Despite the public scandal, little changed. The reports of sexual exploitation have continued, and in 2015 sixteen cases were acknowledged in that country.

That same year, 2015, there were also 22 reports of sexual exploitation committed by soldiers deployed in the Central African Republic, even though they had arrived hardly a year earlier. Previous denunciations of sexual abuse committed by the Blue Helments had been reported in Kosovo in 2001; in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea in 2002; and in Cambodia in the early 1990s.

The code of conduct of the Blue Helmets leaves little room for doubt:

they are prohibited from having sexual relations with persons under the age of eighteen, even if they give consent, and they are also prohibited from offering any goods, services, or money in exchange for sex. The code also states explicitly that it is not an extenuating circumstance if the minors lie about their age or appear to be older.

The relationship between the objectification of women and capitalism has been sufficiently researched and is not the subject of the present booklet, but perhaps the conduct of the MINUSTAH soldiers deserves to be understood in that context. The image is forceful because it concentrates too many privileges. The soldiers (rich, white, armed) take advantage of the women (poor, Black, defenseless, and sometimes minors besides).

Part of the problem is that only 12% of the personnel on the U.N. missions are women.

In any case, the denunciations ended up destroying the mission's reputation, which was already at rock bottom after it was learned that its soldiers had introduced cholera into the country after the 2010 earthquake. The Nepalese contingents evidently spread the disease, which was aggravated by the lack of hygiene in the mission installations.

Since then cholera has killed 10,000 Haitians and infected 800,000 more. Ten years later it is still not under control, especially in rural areas, where it is more difficult to purify water and educate communities. The then-secretary general of the U.N., Ban Ki-moon, promised to compensate the victims, but that has not happened. Nor has there been any punishment for those who committed rape or those who brought cholera back to the country 150 years after it had been eradicated. The U.N. has legal immunity, and its soldiers can be prosecuted only by their countries of origin, never by the U.N. itself.

Even those working with the NGOs have added to the record of sexual abuse of Haitian women. In 2017 it was revealed that executives of the Oxfam delegation in the country had celebrated orgies with prostitutes and victims of the earthquake.

A 36-page report of the U.K.'s Welfare Commission made clear what had happened: "Oxfam is reponsible for providing a safe environment for its beneficiaries, its team, and other humanitarian workers. It has not always done so. This is evident in what happened in Haiti in 2011. During that time there was a culture of tolerance for bad behavior in Haiti. In 2010 there were early warning signs; some persons took advantage of both their humanitarian presence in Haiti and the poor culture of accountability."[14]

The report should be read within the framework of Brexit, when there is criticism of overseas spending, especially on development aid. Nevertheless, the example of Oxfam reveals the power relations that can exist in a country when it is clear who is helping and who is being helped, who has and who does not have.[15] The case has led to improved mechanisms of accountability.

2.4. Not Only Human Lives Suffer

Haiti has a tropical climate. It rains 30% more than in any other territory with an oceanic climate, such as Nor-

mandy, Scotland, or Galicia. It could be a country as verdant as its Caribbean sisters. In fact, it once was: Columbus remarked on "the trees of different classes that seem to reach to the sky." Now, however, the landscape has been stripped of its trees. A virtual visit to the island via Google Earth gives one an idea of the dimensions of the problem. The border between Haiti and the neighboring Dominican Republic is marked by a chromatic divide: dark green to the east, light brown to the west. A recent investigation[16] done by the University of California reveals that the virgin forest of Haiti has been reduced to 0.32% of the country's land surface. Attempts at protection have been no use: three-quarters of the forests in its natural parks have disappeared since they were established in 1982. Why?

First, because the French had cut down huge swathes of forest in order to plant sugar cane, a crop that robbed the soil's nutrients and left it unfertile.

Second, because after independence the Haitians were forced to send tons of wood to France to pay off the huge debt imposed on them. That same wood is found today in many European mansions.

Third, because wood is the main fuel of Haitians, especially since the price of oil shot up in the mid-nineties. According to the World Bank, some 76% of the country's energy needs are covered by charcoal and wood. Most households cook with these fuels, even in the capital. The planting of rapidly growing trees came too late, so that on most of the mountains there are no longer any trees. Because there are no roots to keep the earth compacted, every new rainfall washes away a bit more of the topsoil. The water is no longer absorbed but simply runs off the soil, leaving it barren.

As a result, Haiti has lost all its native species of both flora and fauna. According to a study of Blair Hedges, the country is heading inexorably toward a massive extinction of its biodiversity.

2.5. The Earthquake, Ten Years Later

Then there is the earthquake. It is impossible to separate the inhabitants of Port-au-Prince from the quake, which left people mourning for 313,000 lost lives. It is estimated that a million children became instantly orphans.

Marcus Saint-Louis earns his living driving "tap-taps," colorful enclosed pick-ups that provide what there is of public transportation. He asks the same question that Hillary Clinton did: "Why Haiti?" The earthquake was of 7.0 magnitude on the Richter scale; it lasted 35 seconds and had 52 aftershocks; it destroyed the houses of 1,500,000 persons.

For comparison, look at Chile. A month and half after Haiti's earthquake, Chile suffered an earthquake of 8.8 magnitude, and it lasted 5 minutes. That means it exerted 500 times more power than the one in Port-au-Prince. Even though its radius of action affected a zone that contained 80% of the Chilean population, only 525 persons died.

The 2011 earthquake in Japan was of 9.0 magnitude, it last 6 minutes, and it produced 1235 aftershocks.

One person died, though the subsequent tsunami killed 15,000. In Haiti the earthquake killed 20 times more. "Why 300,000 dead?" asks Saint-Louis. "Why so many?"

It was a natural disaster, but it was aggravated by an engineering disaster. All the organizations that inspected the ruins stated that the cause of the tragedy was the precarious nature of the construction.

Not only the shanties of Carrefour collapsed, but so did the presidential palace, the century-old cathedral, and the offices of the United Nations. There were also tragedies of great symbolic import: the collapse of a teachers' college killed 50 students, and that of a nursing academy buried 300 students. They were the future nurses and teachers who had responded to the call to set in motion those "virtuous circles" in which foreign cooperators and the Haitians themselves have so much faith.

Haiti ranks third in the worldwide ranking of countries most at risk from extreme natural events; it follows only Honduras and Myanmar. It is located above a faultline between tectonic plates and in the heart of a hurricane zone. But earthquakes and hurricanes are minor disasters in comparison to its history.

Bernard Edymé, the painter, survived the earthquake because it occurred to him just to jump out the window. He broke his arm, but the eleven friends who were in the house with him never left it. Stephane is another man who saved his life but suffered in other ways: "It did not hurt me physically, but it did emotionally. A good friend died, and many people I know lost their houses or their businesses." Today Stephane has a degree in IT and wears a suit to work, but he uses candles to light his home after dark. In 2010 he had moved from his hometown, Les Cayes, to the capital to study. He will never forget the quake, which in creole is called *Goudou:* "It was very traumatic." Marcus Saint-Louis, the driver, says that everyone in the capital lost someone they loved, but still he reflects: "There is no talk of psychology. The people keep going, but no one has talked of trauma."

Some people definitely need to talk about what happened, and they do. Icavis Celné lost his leg when he was trapped between his motorcyle and a piece of the cathedral that fell after the first shock. His is one among five million stories. All the capital's inhabitants have their own stories, and many of them include the name of one of the 300,000 who perished on that day.

Icavis never learned how long he was unconscious, but he does remember the three days he endured with a severely twisted leg, suffering and sleeping in the middle of the street among corpses. "The government didn't take the bodies away. The international forces did; they were the ones who had money." Icavis had made his living driving a moto-taxi, but he had to leave that work after losing his leg. Later on he was abandoned by the woman who was mother to his three children; one day she just left without saying a word. The two older children went to live with their uncle outside the city, but the youngest remained with him. He is still living in a tent, but he has managed to enrol his son in a school, and that makes him happy. "My friends give me money each

week, so my son will have opportunities." Referring to the help promised by the U.N., the government, and the NGOs, he lamented: "No help ever arrived for me; the promises they made us were not kept. But I stay strong."

2.6. Small Victories in the Countryside

Perhaps misfortunes produce callouses, and that explains why Haitian culture knows how to adapt to losses. Any conversation with farmers from the south leaves that sensation. They know that often they will experience a tropical storm or a hurricane that destroys their crops, or kills the livestock they were fattening, or flattens their houses. They are resigned to that, and their lives keep proving them right. The most recent example was hurricane Matthew in the autumn of 2016. The storm killed hundreds of pigs and cattle, left 174,000 persons homeless, and ripped through banana plantations that provided employment and income to 20,000 Haitians. It lasted only a few hours, but its consequences would last for years. For example, Alexi Jeavoir is a boy who, six months after the hurricane, is still living in a shack made of cane stalks because the winds carried away the house of his parents, who are farmers. Natasha Samedi, who sells foodstuffs in Camp-Perrin, saved her life by crawling under a table when the roof of her house collapsed. She calmly explains what the region needs: "The farmers need to be able to work the land again so that they can buy products from the city and start up the cycle of money again."

The international agencies and NGOs helped, of course. The Salesians gave seeds and materials to farmers and provided drinking water to whoever asked for it. Oxfam paid wages to entire communities so that they would clear away the earth and fallen trees that had made many roads impassable. Oxfam also allied with farmers' communities that were refusing to accept the delivery of 550 tons of peanuts from the U.S. as a form of aid.[17] Haiti is a formidable producer of peanuts; it is a business that provides sustenance for the cultivators as well as for the many people who roast and package the peanuts and then sell them on the street and outside schools. There is also a thriving peanut butter industry. Consequently, importing tons of free peanuts into the country would have caused ruin for thousands, just as the importation of rice from Arkansas had done. These protests against ill-named "donations" are nothing new.

Since 1985 the country's small-farmer movement has had several symbolic victories, such as the burning of the seeds that Monsanto sent to Haiti shortly after the 2010 earthquake. As happened with the peanuts, the donation had a hook to it: the Monsanto seeds were transgenic and so needed to be treated with herbicides, fertilizers, and pesticides in order to flourish in a tropical climate. Those chemicals were all produced by Monsanto itself and were totally unfamiliar to the ordinary farmer of Mirebalais, Papaye, or Hinche. Using the chemicals would have meant the end of their independence, and it might even have done harm to their health. When they burned the seeds, the farmers' collectives published a manifesto in which they de-

clared that Monsanto's pesticides could cause increased risk of allergies, diabetes, cancer, congenital deformations, and resistance to antibiotics, not only for those who cultivate the crops but also for those who consume them.

But life in the countryside means waging one battle after another. Winning a victory over "the world's worst company"[18] is not enough—there is always more to do. Johnny Guillaume, a 24-year-old farmer of Camp-Perrin, complains that "the seeds the government gives us can be used only once; they don't produce new seed for the next crop." This hinders the goal of food sovereignty, one of the priorities of the Haitian Platform for Alternative Development, which supports the exchange of native seeds among farmers of different places as a way of avoiding dependency on the "Terminator" seeds that do not reproduce themselves.

But seeds are not the worst problem faced by the farmers. Some 90% of the crops depend on rain rather than irrigation, for which there is scant infrastructure.

Most Haitian farmers live on and cultivate portions of land that have belonged to their families for generations. Usually they have no titles or contracts to prove ownership, though no one seems to make that a priority. The property register is chaotic, and the only attempt to carry out a proper survey ended with a fire that destroyed all the collected data. Historically farmers settled on the lands that suited them; they became owners and cultivated what they needed to live. Even today the system remains the same; the FAO calculates that 95% of the parcels sold in Haiti lack legal documentation.

2.7. When Imperialism Disguises Itself As Solidarity

This endemic disorder in land ownership becomes generalized in other dimensions of Haitian society; it may be a typical feature of Caribbean culture, or it may be a psychological avoidance mechanism. At times it is difficult to confront the realities: the poorest fifth of Haitians possess one percent of the country's wealth, while the richest fifth possess 65 percent. Two and a half million Haitians experience extreme poverty, and two-thirds of Haitians survive on less than two dollars a day.

But it is not only these numbers that reveal a failed state. Power outages are a nearly daily occurrence in the capital, but they never affect Pétionville, the richest neighborhood, home to diplomatic personnel, functionaries of international agencies, and high officials of the NGOs.

The cliché is that Haiti is the "poorest country in the western hemisphere," but little is said about the fact that it is also the most unequal country. In Pétionville there are many restaurants that charge $50 a meal, but just down the road are tens of thousands of persons who have been living under leaky roofs of canvas or corrugated zinc since they lost their homes. The foundation of Bill and Hillary Clinton signed dozens of reconstruction contracts after the earthquake, but it awarded all of them to companies owned by their donors. One of contracts was for the five-star Marriott hotel in Pétionville, built by the Irish magnate Denis O'Brien. Even though Haitians were promised employment in the hotel, only a dozen are currently working there.

The Marriott can be seen from various points in the capital, but even more prominent is the edifice of the mobile phone company Digicel, also owned by O'Brien. After the earthquake, the Clinton Foundation gave away hundreds of thousands of mobile phones, but all of them were part of the Digicel network. The phones were paid for by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), a dependency of the U.S. Deparment of State, which at that time was headed by Hillary Clinton. Digicel suddenly advanced from being an insignificant carrier in Haiti to having 75% of the market, and even today, whenever Haitians make a call or send money through mobile phone, Digicel charges for the service. It does so, to be sure, from its headquarters in the fiscal paradise of Bermuda.

But besides mobile phones, Haitians needed emergency dwellings. The Clinton Foundation ordered them from Clayton Homes, part of Berkshire Hathaway, a conglomerate owned by Warren Buffett, one of most generous donors to the foundation and to the campaigns of Bill and Hillary. Clayton also received federal funds to help build the houses. Today the houses are empty because the Haitians do not want to live in them, even if they are free. They resemble containers, and their very poor ventilation makes them hot and moldy, causing those living in them to get sick.

The foundation, breaking the promises Hillary publicly made to President Obama when she became Secretary of State, has never presented detailed budgets, nor has it submitted to any outside auditing. Nevertheless, O'Brien published on his website that he had donated between $10 and $25 million to the foundation in 2011-12, and the *Washington Post* reported that he had organized three conferences for the couple in Ireland, charging $200,000 per head. When the Clintons are mentioned in Haiti, the general reaction is disgust.[19] Many people suspect that they have robbed the country. Ten years later, the situation is still as critical as it was right after the earthquake. But since the country is so poor and the state so corrupt and dysfunctional, few people blame anybody except Moïse.

The peanuts and the Monsanto seeds. The Marriott and Digicel. The literally shit-filled houses of Warren Buffett. The list could go on and on because only 2.3% of the money that the USAID sent to Haiti ended up going to Haitian companies and organizations.

In contrast, 55.5% of the USAID funds[20] went to companies and agencing based in Washington and its surroundings. In other words, $1.27 billion was awarded to companies that had close relations with the Obama administration. A sixth of the awards went to Chemonics International, a private consulting firm dedicated to development; in 2019 the company reported profits of $1.5 billion. The Gospel of Matthew helps us to understand the problem with the USAID: "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt 6,21).

The most basic principle of development cooperation is establishing close bonds with the local people. This is done first of all by dialogue: asking good questions and above all listening to the answers. The next step is discovering and agreeing on what each par-

ty can contribute in order to achieve the desired objectives. If one party provides money, it should be used to provide work and wages for the local people, not to employ foreigners, even if they are volunteers. None of that was taken into account by the Department of State.

3. HOW TO MOVE FORWARD

Haiti has had a painful history. It is heir to a long colonial past, and it was wounded by war at its birth. It was punished by France with heavy debt and by the U.S. with occupation. It suffered under Duvalier, who killed 60,000 Haitians. It was subject to the interventions against Aristide. Unalleviated corruption and inequality have been added to the colossal fraud committed with earthquake relief funds. It continues to suffer from lack of education, epidemics like HIV, and miserable infrastructure, not just for communicating with people but for supplying clean drinking water.

Commercial treaties dictated by the IMF have forced Haiti, which once exported foods, to import most of the goods it consumes. Desert conditions are worsening. Dissidents and other innocent people are killed. Women are abused, and children live in the streets. Contamination fouls both rivers and soils.

In such a situation, the first part of the Lacandona Forest Declaration, issued by the Zapatista Army in January 1994, is perfectly relevant: "Poor people that we are, we have been denied the most elemental preparation, so they can use us as cannon fodder and pillage the wealth of our country. They don't care that we have nothing, absolutely nothing, not even a roof over our heads, no land, no work, no health care, no food or education. Nor are we able to freely and democratically elect our political representatives, nor is there independence from foreigners, nor is there peace or justice for ourselves and our children."

Is there some magic recipe for Haiti? A certain consensus exists among analysts on one point: ending dependency on external aid must be a priority.

Some 10,000 organizations arrived after the earthquake. Today foreign

aid supplies about 35% of the government's budget, most of it coming from World Bank and IMF loans and from contributions of the U.S., Canada, and the European Union. Given the many conditioning factors, the autonomy of any politician is limited.

But even within its limitations, the political class of Haiti does not help the situation either. Right now 5.8% of government spending goes to the Senate and the House of Representatives, while hardly 4.4% is devoted to health care. It has not always been so; in 2004 the portion of government spending on health was 16.6%.

The private donations do not reach very far either. We have already seen the workings of shady foundations like the Clintons'. There had never been a greater desire in the world to help Haiti than after the earthquake. A Pew Research survey taken a few days after the catastrophe showed that one-half of U.S. citizens had donated or were planning to do so. *The New York Times* dedicated two front-page stories to Fabienne, a bailarina who had lost a leg during the quake. The first story was in February 2010, and it quickly prompted a campaign to help her; she was able to buy a prosthesis and was given a scholarship at a dance academy in Haiti. She later appeared on television, happily dancing on her new leg. A year later, on the first anniversary of the quake, the *Times* again featured her on its front page. In 2012, just a year after the second story, Jason Kushner, a Haiti specialist, returned to Port-au-Prince to look for her and see how she was doing. As he recently reported, "she was living in a dirty apartment with her moribund mother and a young daughter, Christine, who was full of energy." In a word, the donations had dried up, and she ended up depending on the charity and kindness of her Haitian neighbors. Fabienne died shortly before the tenth anniversary of the quake, a victim of the constant epileptic attacks that afflicted her as a consequence of her trials. She was a tragic symbol of what the donations represented: they arrived to repair the body of Fabienne, but her worst wounds were the ones that remained hidden.

A country cannot live on foreign solidarity. One reason is that it creates dependencies. This can be seen in the lack of public investment in education and health; the amount budgeted by successive governments keeps decreasing because they know that the NGOs will help in those areas. Another reason is that solidarity eventually comes to an end, and the world turns to other matters, as Kushner wrote in his piece.

Where will the money come from to teach everyone to read and write? How will roadways and canals be built? Who will help prevent the death of 48 of every 1000 young babies?

In an ideally just world, solving the first part of such a problem would be easy. To finance whatever is needed, France would return the debt payments with which it punished Haiti during its first 150 years of life. In 2003 Aristide estimated that such a reimbursement would come to 25.7 billion Euros in today's currency. If Haiti's GDP was 7.6 billion Euros in 2017, then the repayment would come to 350% of the country's current annual output. From that point on everything would

be extremely simple. Needless to say, there will be no discussion of that debt, much less of repaying it. When French President Hollande visited Haiti in 2015, the only debt he recognized was France's "moral" debt to its former colony.

"Moral," he says. Does he know nothing about the source of France's wealth? Is he not aware that the accumulation of capital in Europe was the result of centuries of slavery? Does he not know that the very ideas of modernity and development would have been incomprehensible without the colonial system? The wound of Haiti (and of Latin America by extension)[21] comes from this Euro-centrism, from knowing that that its underdevelopment is a result of pillage and that Europe's enrichment can be explained only by the looting of its colonies.

Another priority today would certainly be the same as in 1990: ensuring that the Haitian armed forces are subject to the Constitution and adhere to a clear idea of justice. That would provide a certain degree of order in the country, but there is still the problem of presidents like Moïse and Martelly and the Duvaliers before them. Such leaders are corrupt and incompetent, but they are not idiots. They are smart enough to dedicate 40% of the national budget to the armed forces, who protect the ruling class and punish dissidents.

It will not be easy. If it were easy, it would already have happened.

"After a few years here, it is easy to become cynical," confesses one of those in charge of the World Health Organization in the country. But one hears a different tone when the natives voice their complaints; resilience is without doubt one of the salient qualities of Haitians. Others are the creativity and richness of their artistic and spiritual culture. Oxford professor David Nicholls[22] relates how he saw this resilient spirit captured in a mural that appeared in the capital after the flight of Jean-Claude Duvalier. The painting portrayed a Guinea fowl, the national symbol, with these words written on its breast: "Fok nou volé piwo," a Haitian creole expression that means, "We must fly higher."

NOTES

1. 10 March 2010, Senate Foreign Relations Committee.
2. Lucena, Manuel (2007). *Breve historia de Latinoamérica. De la independencia de Haití a los caminos de la socialdemocracia*. Madrid: Cátedra.
3. We would like also to speak in this booklet of the Taíno peoples who inhabited the island before the arrival of Columbus, but they were eliminated centuries ago. So brutal and traumatic was that foundational colonial conquest on the island of Hispaniola that it has not left even a scar.
4. Brown, Vincent (2010). *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
5. James, C. L. R. (1938). *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint l'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. London: Secker & Warburg Ltd. The epaulettes are the gold or silver decorations that soldiers wear on their shoulders, with fringes hanging over the upper arm; they indicate some type of distinction.
6. Desmond, Matthew (2019). "In order to understand the brutality of American capitalism, you have to start on the plantation." It is part of the "1619 Project" of *The New York Times*.
7. It should be emphasized that the abolition of slavery was not due to the goodness of British politicians; it was a response to the bloody revolt of Jamaican slaves in 1831.
8. Never were liberation theology and the Good News ("He has sent me to free the oppressed," Luke 4,18) so necessary as they were in Haiti during the time of the Duvaliers, but the Vatican was never so complicit with injustice as it was in those days. As the Gospel of Matthew states, "They had not understood about the loaves" (Mark 6,52). Aristide himself expresses his dismay in his memoirs: "If only the Church had wholeheartedly walked alongside its people, joining dignity and democracy! … The problem was that the hierarchy did not even think to condemn the coup. … Worse still, it wasted no occasion to position itself as its defender. … Many Christians around the world are astounded and indignant when they see that the Vatican has not condemned the coup, but this is certainly not surprising for those who know the Pope and the majority of the Haitian bishops."
9. Kapuściński, Ryszard (2010). *Cristo con un fusil al hombro*. Barcelona: Anagrama.
10. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government of Spain. Updated in December 2018.
11. This is the conclusion of the Haitian writer Edwidge Danticat, who has written various columns about the situation in *The New Yorker*.
12. Aristide, Jean-Bertrand (1995). *Dignidad*. Madrid: Iepala, p. 63 and 64.
13. Escribano, Francesc. (1999). *Descalç sobre la terra vermella. Vida del bisbe Pere Casaldàliga*. Barcelona: Edicions 62, p. 148.
14. Charity Commission for England and Wales. Inquiry report: Oxfam. Registry number 202918. June 2019.
15. I hope the reader will excuse me for offering a personal anecdote in this regard. During my trip to Haiti in January/February 2017, I stayed in several private houses thanks to "Couchsurfing," a social network that allows one to find free lodging. My host one night was a high official of a U.N. agency. He was earning $8000 a month, but never in his seven years of service had he left his house except in his chauffeur-driven SUV, and never had he walked through the streets of the capital outside the wealthy neighborhood of Pétionville. The night I spent in his house, he received the visit of an 18-year-old girl after supper; a few days later we had supper at a restaurant, and he came accompanied by another woman just as young.
16. Blair Hedges, S; Cohen, W.; Timydon, J.; Yang, Z. (2018). *Haiti's Biodiversity Threatened by Nearly Complete loss of Primary Forest*. PNAS 13, 13 November 2018. University of California.
17. Stocks-for-Food is a U.S. government program that exports agricultural surplus products

as part of international cooperation. The U.S. farmers receive subsidies to plant and produce their crops, regardless of demand. As a result, excess production is the norm. This program was designed to resolve a domestic problem, but it is camouflaged as foreign aid.

18. For more information about the company's practices, read chapter 3 of "La agroindustria bajo sospecha," a booklet in this collection authored by Gustavo Duch and Fernando Fernández (#171, October 2011).
19. Hillary has bad press among Haitian emigrants as well. In January, March, and May of 2015, groups of Haitians resident in New York demonstrated at the headquarters of the Clinton Foundation, where they shouted "Where is the money?" and "Bill and Hillary, guilty of crimes in Haiti."
20. Center for Economic and Politic Research. "Haiti by the Numbers." Haiti Relief and Reconstruction Watch.
21. Mignolo, Walter D. (2007). *La idea de América Latina. La herida colonial y la opción decolonial*. Barcelona: Gedisa Editorial, p. 39.
22. Nicholls, David (2001). *Historia del Caribe*. Madrid: Crítica.

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