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# The West in front of the mirror

Liberalism's contradictions in (post)colonial terms.  
The Haitian case (1791-present)

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## **Abstract**

The history of Haiti underlines the major contradictions of western liberalism since its inception in the eighteenth century. Those contradictions have lasted up to the present and have become evident in four historical contexts: firstly, the start of the Haitian revolution in August 1791 showed the actual limits of the liberty, equality, and fraternity that French bourgeoisie proclaimed in Paris. Secondly, when the Dominican Republic became independent in February 1844, to get Dominican friendship and control of the area, the United States promised the Dominicans protection against the Haitians, as long as they denied their own African ancestry. Thirdly, the United States continued to interfere in Haitian internal affairs throughout the twentieth century, determining the miserable fate of the country in the following decades. Finally, western intervention in Haiti since the 1980s, ostensibly inspired by the wish to guarantee political, economic, and social freedom, has turned the country into a puppet of foreign interests. The Haitian case underlines the contradictions of liberalism, especially in connection to its postcolonial legacies in the Third World.

**Key words:** liberalism, contradictions, postcolonial studies, Haiti, United States, intervention

The fourteenth of July 1789 marks the end of modern history and the start of contemporary times. It led to unprecedented changes: the end of absolute monarchy; the birth of liberalism; an end to caste privileges; and the dawn of social classes, in which the bourgeoisie would play a crucial role. The French revolution claimed its inspiration in the Enlightenment, though

enlightened thinkers like Immanuel Kant, Voltaire, or Montesquieu, would not have approved of a movement based on the rebellion of the mob, the *sans-culottes*. However, the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity did come from the Enlightenment, as did the concept of the 'citizen', as opposed to the subject or serf. These were the values that Parisian masses brandished when they stormed the Bastille, convinced that the new society to be born after the fall of the *ancien régime* would grant them everything they lacked: land, political participation, better working conditions, etc. But the true leading group of the revolution, the French bourgeoisie, had other plans: it wanted the abolition of traditional society to make way for a new society permitting social mobility based on personal merit. In this way, they would take advantage of their economic strength to become the new ruling class and would also do whatever was required to send the masses back home, preventing them from participating in national politics. Ultimately, although, the French revolution began as a popular movement, it ended up as a transformation to exchange one political elite for another.<sup>1</sup>

Though the changes that the French revolution brought were limited in scope, they transformed French, and European, society: not only did they originate a liberal regime in French territory, but they also provoked the downfall of traditional monarchy across Europe in the following decades. The 1820s saw revolutionary attempts in such places as Spain, Greece, and Portugal, and the 1830s witnessed the triumph of liberal political regimes, including in France and Spain. It is important, though, to highlight that European liberal politicians and intellectuals saw liberty, equality, and fraternity as three principles that should never be exported beyond the continent. The reason was clear: several European countries were colonial powers, and they risked losing their colonies if they were to apply the same ideas that had triumphed in the metropolis. This fear that the contagion of liberal revolutionary principles might spread overseas goes back to the early days of the French revolution: in 1789 the Marquis of Mirabeau, member of the French National Assembly, when discussing the limits of the three concepts, warned his fellow deputies: '*citoyens des Antilles, vous habitez sous le Vesuve*'.<sup>2</sup> The message was clear: in the French colonies, especially in Saint-Domingue (current Haiti), there were large numbers of coloured people who were better kept aside from the initiatives applied in France.

C.L.R. James quoted another phrase by Mirabeau that illustrates the French elite's conviction that the colonies could not take part in the revolution:

You claim representation proportionate to the number of the inhabitants. The free blacks are proprietors and taxpayers, and yet they have not been allowed to vote. And as for the slaves, either they are men or they are not; if the colonists consider them to be men, let them free them and make them electors and eligible for seats; if the contrary is the case, have we, in apportioning deputies according to the population of France, taken into consideration the number of our horses and mules?<sup>3</sup>

The reason for keeping the African people in the colonies, both the slaves and the free-coloured, apart from revolutionary principles was simple: a majority of the French bourgeois supporting the revolution in continental France were either merchants, slave traders, or absentee planters, who benefited from the exploitation of African slaves in the French Caribbean. If they applied liberty, equality, and fraternity to their colonial possessions, the Africans would become citizens and the plantation economy would break down, jeopardising the main source of income for the representatives of the revolutionary government. Saint-Domingue was the best example of the aforementioned colonial regime: taken from the Spanish crown in the peace treaty of Ryswick (1697), its French administrators had devoted their efforts to the promotion of sugar plantations, one of the few crops possible in such a mountainous territory (*Haiti*, in the *taino* language, means ‘with mountains’). Sugar cane became Saint-Domingue’s tropical crop while demand for sugar grew in the world market. The planters, most of them absentees who spent long periods of time in France, took this chance to increase production using African slaves, whom they made to work for endless hours in miserable conditions, till many of them died.<sup>4</sup> The rate of import of African slaves was so high that, by the 1790s, there were 450,000 coloured people in Saint-Domingue, and only 40,000 whites.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, when the deputies in the French National Assembly discussed the right of representation, to decide how the colonial white elite would choose its representatives in the metropolis, the ‘colour question’ was an issue: if the free-coloured were granted the right of representation, their deputies would outnumber the whites. And, of course, if they granted the slaves political rights, that is, if they freed them, such colonies as Saint-Domingue would explode in a black revolutionary wave.

In May 1790 the National Assembly denied political representation to free-coloured people in the colonies, evidencing the first major contradiction of liberalism: ‘liberalism’ meant ‘limited liberty’, and made distinctions based, for example, on skin colour. In October, a free-coloured man

from Saint-Domingue, Vincent Ogé, with the support of Jean-Baptiste Chavanne, started a rebellion that the colonial army quickly crushed. Ogé and Chavanne fled to the Spanish side of the island, but the Spaniards handed them back to the French authorities, who executed them in Le Cap Français, the capital of Saint-Domingue's North Province, on 25 February 1791. Nevertheless, news of the events in the metropolis had already arrived in Saint-Domingue and was known to all the slaves, who rose up in rebellion against the French white elite in the night of the 23 August 1791. Saint-Domingue's revolution, also known as the Haitian revolution, had started. For thirteen years, former slaves fought the French administration, as well as the armies of foreign powers, namely Britain and Spain, which wished to take advantage of the situation to seize that part of the island of Hispaniola. First under the leadership of Jean-François Papillon and Georges Biassou, and later under the command of Toussaint Louverture, Saint-Domingue's rebels defeated Bonaparte's army in November 1803.<sup>6</sup>

Unfortunately, Louverture himself did not live to see the triumph of the revolution: his men had betrayed him and handed him over to the French, who held him in Fort-de-Joux prison, on the Franco-Swiss border, where he died in late 1803. His lieutenant, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, proclaimed the independence of Haiti, the first black independent republic in world history, on 1 January 1804. Following Nick Nesbitt's interpretation of the historical process, it is necessary to highlight two features of the Haitian revolution. Firstly, as mentioned above, it reflected the contradictions of liberal thinking, as French revolutionary principles were never supposed to reach the colonies, especially Saint-Domingue. Secondly, in the sense that the Haitian revolution realised the revolutionary programme without limits, it must be judged as the only true example of the victory of what he calls 'the radical enlightenment'.<sup>7</sup> Nesbitt's thesis reinforces the case made by the Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot, expressed in his essay *Silencing the past*, which argues that, since 1791, but especially after Haiti's independence in 1804, the West was so shaken that colonial powers did whatever was needed to silence what had just happened in France's former colony. Moreover, a global propaganda campaign started to frame Haiti as a country that represented a total inversion of 'the natural order of things'. Hence, Haiti's example was not to be followed anywhere, and the country itself had to remain isolated from the rest of the world.<sup>8</sup>

As we can see, liberal political doctrine applied to Haiti did not mean 'liberty, equality, and fraternity' at all, but discrimination, isolation, and oblivion.

### **The shaping of national identities: the Dominican Republic vs 'the other'**

In this section, I cross the Haitian-Dominican border to explore how the definition of Dominican national identity fostered Haiti's international isolation, providing another example of how supposedly liberal principles, such as 'nation', in the modern sense, had illiberal consequences on Haitian soil. One needs to understand that interaction between both sides of Hispaniola was always complicated. The rulers in the east and the west normally expressed the relationship in terms of confrontation, a feeling that they transmitted onto both peoples. Initially, the struggle between the French West, Saint-Domingue, and the Spanish East, Santo Domingo, had been a merely political and strategic struggle that reflected the rivalries between France and Spain. The French ambition to push the frontier to the East, and the Spanish claim to recover the western side of the island, were the source of Franco-Hispanic conflicts in Hispaniola in the eighteenth century. However, with the outbreak of the French revolution 1789, ideological rivalry was added to the struggle between France and Spain, both in Europe and in the Caribbean. Hispaniola became the arena where the confrontation would be more violent, as the Spanish authorities hurried to prevent revolutionary ideas from crossing the border and spreading on Dominican soil.<sup>9</sup>

Then, on the night of 23 August 1791, the slaves from Saint-Domingue's North Province rebelled, setting fire to plantations and starting a movement to kill the colony's white elite and seize power. This introduced a new element into Hispanic-Dominican hatred towards the West of the island: race. Saint-Domingue's slave revolution was an example that all the powers wished to stop at once, before it reverberated in other colonies with abundant African descendants, most of them slaves. Consequently, Hispanic Dominican identity was anti-French, in the territorial sense, anti-revolutionary, and anti-black. But there was a problem with this last element that defined it: in the 1790s, Spanish Santo Domingo had around 35,000 white people, 38,000 free-coloured inhabitants, and 30,000 slaves.<sup>10</sup> The reason was that by the early seventeenth century Santo Domingo had stopped receiving Spanish migrants, as colonists preferred to go to Spain's other American possessions, where the exploitation of gold and silver mines, together with the promise of large plots of land, would make it easier for them to prosper. To keep Hispanic-Dominican population growing, miscegenation between colonists and African slaves, often in the shape of sexual

abuse by the former against the latter, became commonplace, resulting in a majority of mixed-race people.

In their physical appearance, Hispanic Dominican people were not very different from the rebels in Saint-Domingue, but a distinction had to be made, as many free-coloured Dominicans were being incorporated in the army, and in the colony's administration. According to Dominican historian Frank Moya Pons, the way to underline the distinction between the people in the East and the rebels in the West was to invent a new concept: Dominican Spaniard. Conceived as a proto-national identity in Santo Domingo, the term 'Dominican Spaniard' was relevant not because of what it implied, but due to the elements that it excluded. In other words, being a Dominican Spaniard meant not being French, or revolutionary, or a slave and (potential) rebel, as these three concepts were linked to Saint-Domingue, later Haiti – a territory whose example no one should follow in the future.<sup>11</sup> That is how the concept of 'liberal nation', consolidated in Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century, landed in Hispaniola to highlight the supposedly 'pure' nature of Dominican Spaniards, as well as the supposed 'corrupted' condition of Saint-Domingue's rebels, later Haitians. The whole process illustrates to which extent Benedict Anderson's concept of nations as 'imagined communities' became true here.<sup>12</sup>

Hispanic Dominican antipathy towards Haiti increased as years went by, among other reasons because the western ex-slaves invaded the eastern side three times. In 1801, Toussaint Louverture started a one-year domination over the whole island, defying Napoleon Bonaparte's authority, but the French expedition that Admiral Victor Leclerc commanded pushed him back to Saint-Domingue, marking the start of Louverture's decay. In 1805, Haitian emperor Jean-Jacques Dessalines, known as Jacques I, father of Haitian independence the year before, attacked Dominican villages next to the frontier, to avenge previous Dominican expeditions against Haiti; and in 1822, Haitian president Jean-Pierre Boyer took advantage of the independence of Spanish Haiti, a very weak state born in November 1821 on the initiative of José Núñez de Cáceres, to invade the East and start a twenty-two year Haitian domination of the island. The fact that Dominican independence, and the birth of the Dominican Republic, took place on 28 February 1844 against Haiti, encouraged anti-Haitian feelings in the Dominican intellectual elite that chose the defining elements of Dominican national identity. This identity, again, consisted basically of denying African ancestry and exploiting the ever-present potential danger of another invasion from the west. Thus, following Eric Hobsbawm's

argument, the Dominican nation joined five basic elements together, some of them invented: the same language (Spanish); the same territory, which had to be defended against Haiti; the same religion (Catholicism) and cultural values; common physical characteristics (non-blackness); and the disposition to defend the latter even at the cost of one's life.<sup>13</sup>

These values, above all the (supposed) ethnic ones, became reinforced thanks to the intervention of foreign powers – especially the United States – on Dominican soil. When Dominican independence was proclaimed, the US was already a consolidated liberal regime which held elections and defended (white) people's basic rights. However, it was also a slave-owning country, in which enslaved Africans and their descendants worked on plantations in the southern states. Looking to spread its area of influence in the Americas, the United States had a great interest in Dominican Bay of Samana, in the southern part of the island. At the same time, Dominicans were looking for foreign protection against future Haitian aggressions. The US Government was ready to offer them assistance, in exchange for preferential access to the Bay of Samana. This started a debate in North American society because it seemed contradictory to offer help to a country of mostly African descendants, while many people in the US were still slave owners. The solution to this conundrum was explained in the *Evening Post* in September 1854:

It is pretended, we know, by those who are most directly interested in securing an American protectorate for the Dominican government, that the revolters (sic), and their rulers are mostly white people; but that is an error too easily exploded to prevail long. We doubt if any unprejudiced witness can be produced who will testify that there are five hundred whites in all Dominica (sic). In the public service there is not a single White man or an individual who would have been recognised as a citizen under the rules laid down by Messrs. Clayton and Webster during their respective administration of the State Department.<sup>14</sup>

In other words, if Dominicans wished to continue to get US support against Haiti, they would need to hide their African ancestry and pretend that they were not black at all.<sup>15</sup> Such attitudes have prevailed in Dominican popular culture right up to the present moment, influencing political campaigns by parties and leaders of different ideologies, as I shall analyse in the following sections.

### Armed intervention in Haiti

The United States has repeatedly intervened in Haiti from the nineteenth century onwards, and it is both an expression of US ambition to control the American space, as well as the perfect example of the contradictions of liberal policy with regard to Haitian territory. To understand the phenomenon, we need to go back to 1915, the year of the first US invasion of Haiti. The Washington government's pretext for invading was the need to put an end to the violence in Haiti: a popular outburst in Port-au-Prince, which reflected the antagonism between blacks and so-called 'mulattoes',<sup>16</sup> concluded with the capture, slaughter and quartering of President Guillaume Sam by the rebels.<sup>17</sup> It is true that President Sam, who had won the elections in 1915 claiming to represent the black masses, had kidnapped some young boys and girls from the Port-au-Prince mulatto elite to prevent this social group from trying to overthrow him. It might seem that events in Port-au-Prince would have worried the North American neighbour, which sought to restore peace in Haiti to stabilise the Caribbean region around the start of the First World War.

Yet, what triggered US armed intervention in Haiti, though connected to the context of the Great War, was a matter of a totally different nature. One of the most influential elite groups in Haitian domestic politics was the German merchants. They were crucial for importing most of the manufactured goods Haiti needed, as well as the other necessary commodities that the country, focused as it was on tropical crops like coffee, did not produce domestically.<sup>18</sup> These merchants played the same role in Dominican territory as well. In invading Haiti in 1915, the US was not so worried about the preservation of social peace in the country, as it was concerned about the prospect of Germany taking control of Hispaniola Island. Although at that time the United States had not yet entered the war, the chance that Hispaniola might be a base for German operations next to US territory, in contravention of the Monroe Doctrine, scared US foreign policy experts. In the event, just one year after the US had occupied Haiti, it also invaded the Dominican Republic.<sup>19</sup>

US administration in Dominican territory lasted only eight years (1916-1924). Among other things, it meant the consolidation of sugar economy and the spread of banana plantations in that country, which contributed to the Dominican Republic's take-off. In contrast, US occupation of Haiti lasted until 1934, when President Roosevelt ended the North American military presence there. During its nineteen-year occupation of Haiti, the United States fostered the development of local infrastructures and



economy, but, unlike in the Dominican Republic, it never created the conditions for a self-sustainable, grassroots development once US investors had left. There were three major consequences of the US occupation of Haiti, which at the same time demonstrate how liberalism failed to create the conditions for Haiti's fully independent existence.

Firstly, liberalism only operated in the economic sense, and always favoured US economic interests. The North American companies and investors that became involved with the Haitian economy between 1915 and 1934 did not reinvest their profit in Haiti, so the country had to rely upon its own resources to be capable of achieving economic independence. We can conclude that the only winner in Haiti's modest economic take-off under the occupation was the United States itself. On the one hand, most of the profits from the new Haitian economic sectors and companies were repatriated to the US. On the other hand, Haiti's dependence on US capital consolidated for almost two decades, which increased US influence not only over Haiti, but over the Caribbean region in general, raising doubts about how far Haiti could be regarded as a fully independent, self-governing country.<sup>20</sup> Thus, North American liberalism put into practice the principles that Andre Gunder Frank summed up in his theory of development – that core countries, that is, rich global powers, pretend to help poor, periphery countries, while exploiting their natural resources. In doing so, they foster the specialisation of periphery countries' economy in one single economic activity, thereby making them dependent on core, rich countries, to get everything else they need for their people to survive. This renders the periphery countries incapable of developing on their own, which further strengthens the position of the rich countries. At the same time, core countries prevent political regimes in periphery countries from taking initiatives that jeopardise their source of income.<sup>21</sup>

Secondly, the US departure from Hispaniola meant that the balance of power on the island shifted: up to that point, Haiti had been the stronger and richer state. The Dominican Republic had constantly felt threatened by the possibility of another Haitian invasion, given Haiti's stronger armed forces and richer treasury. The end of US occupation, though, left the Dominican nation as the stronger one, in economic and in political terms, while Haiti remained at the mercy of the United States and of its neighbour to the East. The US would offer Haiti economic support, either directly, or through transnational organisations, like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Bank (WB), NGOs, etc., but, in line with the neoliberal doctrine of the 'Chicago School' of economists, in order to get funding from these organisations, and other foreign powers,

the Haitian government had to demonstrate that it could return the money it had borrowed, plus interest.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, in the future Haiti was obliged to strengthen commercial links to the Dominican Republic to obtain the basic products that it lacked. The only way that Haiti could pay for its imports from the Dominican Republic was by exporting cheap labour to its neighbour. Workers from Haiti would be compelled to work in the Dominican Republic in the years to come.<sup>23</sup>

Thirdly, the two decades of US occupation of Haiti triggered the 'race issue' in the country: though it was half a century since slavery had been abolished in North America, strong prejudices remained against equal civil rights between blacks and whites. This was a problem that US administration transferred to Haiti: in the shape of the *cacos* rebellion in 1918-1920, led by former officer, and now nationalist rebel, Charlemagne Péralte, who opposed President Dartiguenave, the puppet President supported by the US. Péralte defended the rights of the black masses from the North, opposing the new tax system that fell on the poor, mostly 'black' or 'African descendants', which allowed them to avoid paying taxes in exchange for performing unpaid labour on public works projects.<sup>24</sup> And, as a cultural movement, *noirisme* advocated for the rights and the pride of black people, who had been excluded from Dartiguenave's administration, and suffered racial discrimination from the representatives of the US, who barely had any contact with local black people.<sup>25</sup>

All in all, the involvement of the US, the incarnation of liberal economics and liberal democracy in the world, in Haiti's domestic affairs ruined the country. Haiti was turned into a non-free nation that would continue to depend on the 'help' of those who would take advantage of its weak situation.

### Duvalierism

Just as the US invasion of Haiti in 1915 was motivated by US security concerns during the First World War, the same point applies when we consider the nature of the regime led by the Duvalier clan in Haiti (1957-1986). To understand the circumstances that favoured François Duvalier's victory in 1957, and the continuation of his regime under his son, Jean-Claude, we must take into consideration the Cold War context. The electoral campaign that made 'Papa Doc' (François Duvalier) President in 1957 was marked by violence on the side of both candidates: Duvalier himself, who claimed to represent the interest of the black masses, and who promised to lead a black revolution; and Louis Déjoie, a representative of the so-called

mulatto elite. Violence by the supporters of both candidates became so crude that other potential Presidential candidates withdrew from the campaign, fearing for their own lives.<sup>26</sup>

Duvalier's triumph was due to two main factors: firstly, he had been a well-respected family doctor in the Haitian countryside, helping the poor fight the *pian* disease (yaws), among others.<sup>27</sup> His years as a doctor earned him popular affection, as well as the appointment as Minister of Public Health by the government of Léon Dumarsais Estimé (1946-1950).<sup>28</sup> Secondly, Papa Doc proclaimed himself the leader of the *noiriste* cause, which meant that his government would be openly anti-mulatto, that is, anti-elite. In the campaign to win the Haitian presidency he already had shown the main features of his future regime: the identification of the 'national cause' with himself, so that everyone opposing him was anti-patriotic, and therefore had to be eliminated.<sup>29</sup> Once in office, in order to carry out these 'anti-patriotic' cleansing, Duvalier created the *tontons macoûtes*, the regime's secret police that operated as a *de facto* personal guard for the President. The *tontons macoûtes* consisted of two groups of people. There were the pro-Duvalier fanatics, and there were those who simply needed money, and were ready to commit as many human rights violations as Duvalier required, to make a living. Whatever their motives, they engaged in indiscriminate persecution, imprisonment, torture, and execution of alleged 'enemies' of the President, and consequently 'enemies of the nation'.

During the first years of Duvalier's presidency, which coincided with the end of Dwight Eisenhower's term and the start of J.F. Kennedy's era in the US, Haiti's North American neighbour faced a difficult dilemma. It had watched as rebellion spread in Cuba from 1956, until on 1 January 1959 the revolution triumphed, and the island thereafter moved inexorably into the orbit of the Soviet Union, in a period of high tensions in the Cold War. Duvalier in Haiti could be regarded by the US as a potential ally against communism. Yet, Kennedy and his New Frontier politics made great play of the need to preserve liberal democracy in the continent. Seen from that perspective, Duvalier was less an ally and more of an impediment to the US crusade against communism, and other forms of totalitarianism. In fact, the abuses that Papa Doc committed against so-called dissidents provoked such a scandal in the United Nations, the Organisation of American States, and the US itself, that President Kennedy sponsored a plot to overthrow Duvalier and bring a new regime to power in Haiti.<sup>30</sup>

Kennedy's assassination on 22 November 1963 marked a change in US foreign policy: under the administrations of Lyndon B. Johnson and then of Richard Nixon, America's global priority was not the defence of liberal

democracy. Instead, its major concern was to fight communism around the world, as relations between the Soviet and the capitalist blocs deteriorated with the overthrow of Nikita Khrushchev in Moscow and the start of Leonid Brezhnev's era in October 1964. In this international context, with the US war in Vietnam gathering momentum, ideas like the struggle for global democracy gave way to a more practical, realist principle:<sup>31</sup> 'my enemy's enemy is my friend'. In the Caribbean, Duvalier suddenly looked like one anti-communist ally who could be very useful for the US. This accounts for Washington's economic assistance to Papa Doc's regime, but even more so to Jean-Claude Duvalier ('Baby Doc'), who took over as Haitian President after his father's death in 1971.

Haiti's role as an exporter of tropical commodities, particularly coffee, consolidated under both Duvaliers, and consequently the country's dependence on imports for all the other products that the Haitian people needed grew. Once again, economic liberalism meant unfreedom for Haiti, which would never become a fully independent country as long as it had to rely on other countries for both basic necessities and economic aid. In exchange for financial assistance, François Duvalier relaxed his attitude towards the mulatto elite, with whom he developed a friendly relationship along the 1960s. Initially, that elite was not keen to collaborate with the regime, but, linked to Haitian business as it was, its position changed when it saw the influx of US dollars into the country, thanks to the mediation of US businessmen, including Nelson Rockefeller, vice-president under Gerald Ford's administration. Under Baby Doc, Haiti's economic dependence on external financial assistance increased, during a period that the President himself defined as an 'economic revolution'. Even Jean-Claude Duvalier's attempts to generate electricity in Haiti only served to increase the country's dependence, as the contracts he signed made Haiti's external debt even greater.

Overall, the consequences of liberal politics towards Haiti during the Cold War were: the country's growing indebtedness; increasing inflation and a rising cost of living; economic recession; and deteriorating living standards while, thanks to the Duvaliers' repression, the working class lacked trade unions to organise and present their demands to the state. Meanwhile, the regime and its acolytes became richer.<sup>32</sup>

## Conclusion

The contradictions of liberalism in Haiti have only got sharper over the past forty years. The fall of the Duvaliers led to political instability in the

country, and the governments that came after Baby Doc were no more democratic than his. There was hope in December 1990, when Father Jean-Bertrand Aristide, at the time a Salesian priest, was elected in the first democratic, and peaceful, elections in Haitian recent history. Aristide had been one of the leading characters in opposition to the Duvaliers, and later to Henri Namphy's dictatorship (1986-1988): in fact, on 11 September 1988 his parish suffered an attack by Namphy's supporters that led to several casualties among the worshippers. In the 1990 campaign, Aristide underlined his role as defender of the interests of the black masses, and presented a social programme that included, among other measures, a tax increase on the rich, and an end to economic dependence on the US. His victory was unexpected, especially considering that Washington had financed the campaign of his opponents.<sup>33</sup>

For fifteen years, US liberal politicians and diplomats, who claimed to believe in free democratic elections and in respecting the people's choice, handicapped Aristide's *Lavalas* government.<sup>34</sup> In September 1991 they supported the coup by Raoul Cédras, who restored military dictatorship in the country, but then the US withheld its support to Cédras and sponsored Aristide's return to the Presidency in 1994, while limiting his ability to make decisions by exercising economic violence against his government, which still needed international, but particularly US, financial support. Finally, the US supported the plot that led to a soft coup in 2004 that terminated Aristide's presidency in Haiti forever. Economic and financial pressure, together with the war waged by conservative media, and by US-sponsored NGOs against the regime, ensured that Haiti remained a highly dependent country. The state was incapable of mobilising its own resources to deal with the consequences of the major earthquake of 12 January 2010. This helplessness provoked a hypocritical reaction from the same institutions and countries that had sentenced it to political death. 'Haiti fatigue', as the historian Philippe Girard has called it, denotes the general assumption that, no matter how much help is devoted to them, Haitians will never be capable of taking control of their own country.<sup>35</sup>

Maybe the best expression of liberal hypocrisy about Haiti can be found in the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse on 7 July 2021. Up until the present moment (July 2023), nobody has been charged with the murder, and what is more important, the (neo) liberal West seems unconcerned that the country has had even less political stability ever since. There have been no new Presidential elections, while the media reports increasing violence on the streets of Port-au-Prince. As for the situation in other parts of the country, which the media do not report, one

can only wonder. Why is it that ‘democratic’ countries turn their backs on Haiti, leaving it to its cursed destiny? Assuming a postcolonial perspective, I can only find two complementary explanations. In practical terms, Haiti’s position in the Caribbean makes it a useful intermediate communication point between South America and North America, and those who wish to conduct shady business without official interference can take advantage of the power vacuum. In theoretical terms, and assuming a postcolonial historical, as well as critical, scope, western indifference towards Haiti – ‘Haiti fatigue’ – is heir to the historical characterisation of the country after independence: a place that represented something that no one wished to see imitated anywhere else, and so had to be ignored and isolated internationally.

## Notes

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- 14 *Evening Post*, 2 September 1854.
- 15 Joseph Arthur Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, Paris, 1853-1855; Silvio Torres Saillant, 'El anti-haitianismo como ideología occidental', *Cuadernos Inter-c-a-ambio*, 9, 10 (2012): 15-48.
- 16 I use the expression 'so-called "mulattoes"' because there was no ethnic or physical difference between 'blacks' and 'mulattoes' in Haiti. Following Michel-Rolph Trouillot's thesis, on the one hand, Haitian blacks considered themselves descendants of the former slaves, and representatives of 'the masses', understood as Haitian 'working class'. On the other hand, mulattoes were the blacks who earned better positions, either due to their job, or to their links to power, so they climbed up the social ladder and 'whitened' their lifestyle, imitating the habits of the whites. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Haiti, State against nation: The origins & legacy of Duvalierism*, New York, 1990, pp109-136.
- 17 Philippe Girard, *Haiti. The Tumultuous History – From Pearl of the Caribbean to Broken Nation*, New York, 2010, pp81-96.
- 18 Trouillot, *Haiti*, pp59-82.
- 19 David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour and National Independence in Haiti*, Warwick, 1996, pp142-164.
- 20 Miguel Ceara Hatton, Leiv Marsteintredet & Jorgen Sorlye Yri, 'Introducción', *Iberoamericana. Nordic Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, 44, 1-2 (2014): 23-45.
- 21 Andre Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America: Historical Studies of Chile and Brazil*, London, 1967.
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- 23 Antonio Jesús Pinto Tortosa, 'Non-Free Labor. Definition, Sectors, and Public Policies Around the World', in Rajendra Baikady et al. (eds), *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Social Problems* London, 2022, online, DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-68127-2\\_211-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-68127-2_211-1)
- 24 Girard, *Haiti*, pp81-96.
- 25 Trouillot, *Haiti*, pp109-136.
- 26 *Ibid.*, pp139-162.
- 27 In English, yaws: a tropical infection that affects the skin, bones, and joints.
- 28 A coup overthrew Estimé in 1950 and a new dictatorship led by Paul Magloire took power in the country. Not only did Duvalier identify with opposition to Magloire, but he also presented himself as the continuer of Estimé's legacy, Girard, *Haiti*, pp97-114.
- 29 Trouillot, *Haiti*, pp163-185.

- 30 National Archives and Record Administration (NARA), Interagency Security Classification Appeals Panel (ISCAP), E.O. 13256, Section 5.3(b) (3), 'Haitians Who Might Contribute Effectively to a Post-Duvalier Regime', Annex, Summary reports on referenced individuals, 1962-1963; Elizabeth Abbott, *Haiti: The Duvaliers and their legacy*, London, 1991, pp108-111.
- 31 Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, New York, 1948.
- 32 Trouillot, *Haiti*, pp186-216.
- 33 Peter Hallward, *Damming the Flood: Haiti and the Politics of Containment*, London and New York, 2007, pp1-38.
- 34 *Lavalas* was the creole term used to define the political formation that Aristide led. It means 'the flood', which tells about Aristide's conviction that he aimed at transforming the country. The title of Peter Hallward's book *Damming the Flood*, plays on the English translation of the party's name, referencing US efforts to contain Aristide's movement.
- 35 Hallward, *Damming*, pp39-174; Girard, *Haiti*, pp207-215.